

Teaching Matters

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Welcome to Teaching Matters, the newsletter for LSE's teaching staff produced by the Teaching and Learning Centre. In this edition, we're highlighting good practice drawn from the 2009/10 TLAC review submissions from the departments of International History, Philosophy and Economics, and the 2008/09 submission from Accounting, on the TLAC themes of: feedback and assessment, support for GTAs, tutorial and supervisory practice. There is also a reminder about funding available to teaching staff through the Teaching and Learning Development Fund and an introduction to new staff in the Teaching and Learning Centre.

Feedback and assessment

As part of the drive to improve student satisfaction with feedback and assessment, many departments have been testing out new ideas and practices

In response to the request in 2008/09 for departments to gather information from students about feedback, **International History** conducted two surveys. The first was to all its final year undergraduates, and gave a useful 'advanced indication' of

their likely response to the National Student Survey. The second focused entirely on student response to feedback on their work. From this, two of the clearest points to emerge were, first, student appreciation of face-to-face feedback and, second, their

desire for concrete/specific guidance and examples on how to improve their work.

During the year class teachers in the department worked actively on this second finding. Two courses piloted a system of

'...the department is committed to exposing students to a diverse range of formative work during their time at LSE'



- providing additional office hours in the weeks after essays had been handed back so as to make it easier for students to come and talk about their essays. Interestingly, student take-up of this offering was limited. However, it did lead to a more formalised approach last year, much appreciated by students, where tutors timetabled meetings with students to hand back essays and discuss feedback one to one.

Both formative and summative assessment methods are encouraged in the department. For example, one course uses a group presentation in lieu of a fourth essay. Several others use individual presentations and give feedback and a grade for them. Two courses include a book review as one of the assignments, many third year courses use gobbet exercises (both in class and in the final examination), and yet other classes are experimenting with Moodle quizzes or asking students to act as discussion leaders (rather than presenters). In this way, the department is committed to exposing students to a diverse range of formative work during their time at LSE.

The one area in which they have standardised procedure is for the submission of work. All students are expected to submit work both electronically and in hard copy to a drop-box outside the departmental office. Deadlines have also been harmonised, with Wednesday midday being the hand-in time used by the majority of courses.

On two of the biggest undergraduate **Economics** courses (EC102 and EC201) the weekly assignment is in the form of a Moodle quiz, which has the additional benefit of providing teachers with feedback on the students' understanding before they run classes on those questions.

The department is also experimenting with the use of Personal Response System (PRS) 'clickers' on EC201. This allows students to respond using an electronic keypad to questions at key points in the lectures, giving the lecturer an instant view of the students' understanding.

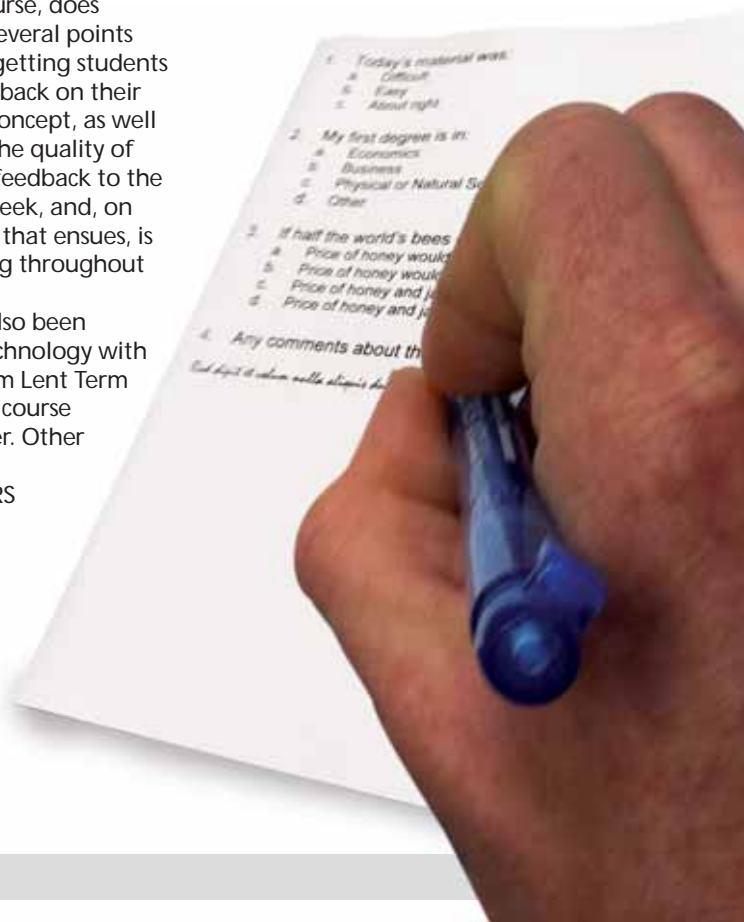


A 'low-tech' version of this 'instant feedback' approach is in use elsewhere in the department. Dr Guy Michaels, who runs a large MSc course, does 'one-minute surveys' at several points throughout his course – getting students to provide him with feedback on their understanding of a key concept, as well as giving their views on the quality of the lecture. He provides feedback to the students the following week, and, on the basis of the dialogue that ensues, is able to adapt his lecturing throughout the term.

LSE100 lecturers have also been testing the PRS clicker technology with considerable success. From Lent Term 2011, all students on this course will have their own clicker. Other departments interested in experimenting with PRS can contact the Centre for Learning Technology (020 7849 4697 or clt-support@lse.ac.uk).

The technology can be used in most of LSE's teaching spaces, and combines effectively with PowerPoint.

'...a Moodle quiz...has the additional benefit of providing teachers with feedback on the students' understanding'



New: Feedback series

The Teaching and Learning Centre has just launched a new series of publications on feedback. The two titles pictured are available now and forthcoming ones will focus on:

- Using pro-forma for feedback on problem sets
- Giving feedback on presentations
- Facilitating self- and peer-to-peer feedback
- Using 'feed forward' for exams

All members of staff should have received a hard-copy edition of the two launch titles already. Please email tlc@lse.ac.uk if you have not received them, or if

'Feedback is fundamental to learning, and best seen as a process of dialogue'

you need additional copies. And remember that all Teaching and Learning publications, including our handbooks for departmental tutors, academic advisers and GTAs, are available in either PDF or web-page form on the website: www.lse.ac.uk/tlc



Supporting GTAs

Guidance on marking, mentoring schemes and tailored departmental handbooks

The **Philosophy Department** organised an 'awayday' at the University of Kent in September for its GTAs to discuss pedagogical questions in the teaching of philosophy and to foster a stronger team spirit. The GTAs found this event rewarding and have now instituted an official mentoring scheme, in which PhD students from earlier cohorts function as mentors for students from later cohorts.

The department has also been active in giving GTAs very specific support with marking in the following ways:

- Clear marking criteria are made available through the departmental handbook
 - The teachers responsible for courses give guidance on what they are looking for in essays in their particular subject
 - Academic staff will mark any essays about which GTAs are worried/unsure
 - Sometimes, lecturers will carry out spot checks on the marking standards of their GTAs.
- In addition, the department uses a standard feedback form which guides GTAs to comment on specific aspects of essay writing.

The **Economics Department** has for several years been actively involved in the initial training of its GTAs. Dr Margaret Bray runs the first of a series of compulsory events, together with a member of the Teaching and Learning Centre team – a joint approach that provides a 'rich mix' for participants.

The department is also active in addressing

any early concerns about class teachers' English language proficiency, and makes use of the Language Centre's English for Teaching Purposes programme which addresses:

- pronunciation – accuracy, pausing, stress timing, intonation
- use of voice – pace, speech projection, volume
- classroom language – register, appropriacy, phrasing
- teaching-focused language – adaptability, interrogative strategies, student-centred language, task-related language and persuasive argumentation.

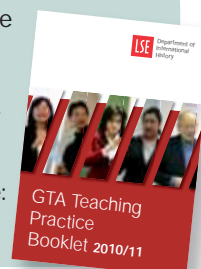
Any department interested in knowing more about language support for teachers can contact Chris New in the Language Centre: c.new@lse.ac.uk

In **International History**, particular support and guidance is given to new GTAs on essay marking and feedback. Marking is discussed in a departmental start-of-year event which GTAs both old and new are expected (and paid) to attend, and at which the departmental marking scheme is introduced. GTAs then in many cases have course-specific meetings or briefings. Many of the teachers responsible for courses check marking standards of new GTAs on their first set of marking, and an experienced GTA runs a 'marking and feedback' exercise using real student essays in Week three of term.

The active involvement of experienced GTAs is being taken a step further with the department exploring a mentoring scheme which seeks to pair them with those who have much less experience.

The **Accounting Department** has a rigorous process of selection, assessment and monitoring of all its GTAs. This includes interviews prior to appointment (either by the programme directors or head of department), taking up references, and mentoring provided by the departmental tutor. Course leaders have regular meetings with their GTAs, and the department holds two meetings annually (one at the start of the year and another at the end) where information is shared and good practice highlighted. Observation and survey-results analysis are also key features, with all new GTAs having their teaching observed in their first term by a member of the Teaching and Learning Centre (experienced GTAs are thereafter observed annually by a member of departmental faculty) and the TOARO-led Teaching Survey results scrutinised for student feedback to the department's teaching.

Several departments have started to develop their own guides for class teachers in their departments. In a few cases, the Teaching and Learning Centre has supported the development of these guides, funding current GTAs to put the guidance together, based on their own experience and that of other colleagues. Examples are available on the Teaching and Learning Centre website: www.lse.ac.uk/tlc



Academic advising

The AC100 success story, making effective use of LSE Fellows and a trial at involving faculty in undergraduate class teaching

The Economics Department has in recent years employed LSE Fellows to act as academic advisers.

They now support around 300 of the department's 470 undergraduates. In addition to academic advising, several also act as managers on the very large undergraduate courses, giving important additional support to the teacher responsible as well as providing guidance to class teachers. All fellows attend the Teaching and Learning Centre's new academic induction training, particularly the session on academic advising.

The department produces a useful information guide for academic advisers. This points them to key departmental and School documentation, suggests an agenda for the first meeting with students, provides guidance on how to advise second and third year students on course choice, and outlines the essential elements of ongoing advice.

In the **Anthropology Department**, students are generally tutored in groups of three or four during their first year by LSE Fellows, who work specifically on improving the students' ability to construct coherent essays and draft concise, accurate summaries of ethnographic information and scholarly debates. Students write essays based on their first year course work which are then discussed in hour-long tutorial meetings, normally three per term. Similar procedures occur in the second and third years, although groups are smaller (two or three students) and focus more on substantive content than on writing/exam preparation. This approach to academic advising is also used with MSc students, though here meetings are always in groups of two and there are generally four meetings per term. A major advantage of this very intensive approach (which is not common elsewhere in the School) is the depth of discussion possible as well as the opportunity it provides for tutors to gain



an holistic view of their tutees.

The **Accounting Department** has put considerable effort and resource into its student support systems. There is a Student Information Centre, a comprehensive induction programme, printed study packs, detailed handbooks and year books, a subsidised, high-quality residential weekend for MSc/ PhD students, good-quality study space and a very active Accounting Society. Through 2008/09 and 2009/10 the department made excellent use of the Annual Fund-supported Teaching Development Grant to put in place particularly detailed support for AC100. This included employing an LSE Fellow who worked closely with the teacher responsible and had important advisory duties related to both the students and class teachers on the course. There was customised training of class teachers, extensive Moodle development, a high level of one-to-one support available to students, and the development of a student peer tutoring scheme organised in conjunction with the Accounting Society. In combination, this had led to considerable improvements in the student response to the course as well as external

'Through 2008/09 and 2009/10 the department made excellent use of the Annual Fund-supported Teaching Development Grant'

recognition. For example the London Metropolitan Business School heard about the project and is considering similar changes to its own courses.

The department has also experimented with employing experienced GTAs and experienced guest teachers as academic advisers. The main impetus for this is to ensure a reasonable tutorial load – reducing the number of students allocated to individuals from around 60 to a much more workable 25-30 students. These new advisers are carefully briefed by the departmental tutor and provided with regular ongoing support, and have also been encouraged to attend central training for academic advisers.

Bucking the trend in many other parts of the School, the **Philosophy Department** is experimenting with involving faculty in class teaching at the undergraduate level. The Department's hope is that this will lead to strengthened relationships and genuine intellectual rapport between advisers and their students.

Dissertation supervision

Effective use of Moodle to showcase exemplary work and tightened monitoring and feedback processes

In **International History**, arrangements for the undergraduate dissertation have been tightened. Students work on their dissertations from around April of Year 2 through to April of Year 3. In order to monitor students' progress, the department has produced a specially designed Rules, Timetable and Progress Sheet document, as well as an extensive Moodle site which includes exemplar dissertations. The teacher responsible runs dissertation workshops, provides clear guidance on the timeline for dissertation work and also checks that the student/supervisor relationships are working effectively. The results of this focused support are clear – high levels of distinction-level work and feedback from external examiners noting that some of the best work was of 'near-publishable' standard.

At MSc level, the department has also been offering support for student dissertations. Three seminars are now used throughout the process. One of these is designed to address problems identified in previous years – particularly weak introductions and inadequate assessment of historiography. Students also receive detailed written guidance on footnoting and formatting requirements. Like the undergraduates, they have access to a sample of outstanding dissertations written by previous students.

The **Philosophy Department** has done some careful structuring to student work on MSc dissertations. Students are paced through the year, with a series of deadlines starting early in the Michaelmas Term, and there is considerable input from teaching staff throughout, including one-to-one time in the Michaelmas Term, giving feedback on a 10-page draft at the start of the Summer Term and commenting on a complete draft which has an optional but strict deadline of 31 July.

'I work for about three days [on complete drafts] and then return the drafts over email (since many students are out of the country). ... It's not a big deal and it really improves student satisfaction.' (Luc Bovens)

The department has also appointed a Research Fellow to provide additional remedial help to its weakest students (defined rigorously on the basis of the marks in their unassessed work), both in preparation for exams and for thesis writing.



Fostering the research culture at undergraduate level

LSE representation at leading undergraduate research conference and extended essays provide opportunities for research

Judith Shapiro in the **Economics Department** has in recent years spearheaded Wednesday Workshops for Economics undergraduates, at which professors, PhD researchers and junior faculty present their work in progress to undergraduates, as a way of encouraging engagement in and enthusiasm for research. Some students then undertake independent research projects, usually in teams. Two undergraduates, Markus Gstoettner and Anders Jensen, who met at the Wednesday Workshop, went on to write a paper on aid and public finance, which won them the ultimate prize in the 2009 International Economic Association's Best Undergraduate Paper Competition, bringing with it publication in the *Atlantic Economic Journal*. They had already been awarded one of the three Distinguished Participant Awards at Georgetown University's prestigious undergraduate research conference, the Carroll Round. In October 2010 Anders Jensen remarkably repeated the win of IEA Best Undergraduate Paper for his paper on 'the resource curse' which continues his focus on public finances. LSE continued winning places at the Carroll Round this year with Siddharth George and Xing Cong Ong (a joint

degree student) attending on behalf of the School, financed by the Economics Department. Their successful paper had its start at a special summer full-time version of the Wednesday Workshop, funded by the Teaching and Learning Centre, where the participants (many of whom subsequently decided to continue to graduate economics programmes) also received advice in research strategy and econometrics from two advanced PhD students.

The **Philosophy Department** gives final year undergraduates on one of its courses the opportunity to do some research of their own through the writing of an extended essay (equivalent to a BSc dissertation). As well as individual supervision, students have a course teacher who provides a series of workshops, ensures that the supervisory relationship is working, organises a seminar where students do presentations of the work in front of peers and provides feedback on a complete draft (this is in addition to feedback on a complete draft provided by the individual supervisor). This work is particularly helpful for those aiming to continue to postgraduate level as it provides an ideal writing sample for programme applications.

Student orientation

Peer involvement, games and good food help to engage newcomers

Following on from central developments to student orientation, last year the Teaching and Learning Centre and the Student Services Centre ran a workshop for academic departments on introducing more student-centred activities to departmental orientations. Three departments, Economics, Geography and Environment and Government, were invited to attend the workshop, and were asked to bring along a team comprising the departmental tutor, key administrators involved in UG orientation, some GTAs and some first year undergraduates. Each team was then encouraged to plan new activities for the 2010/11 orientation. The following section describes the new initiatives arising from this workshop.

Several second- and third-year students in the **Geography Department** were recruited by Giordano Mion to help with extra induction meetings. Sporting special Geography Illuminati t-shirts, they ran their own one-hour slot for each programme and then went with Giordano and the freshers for a buy-your-own lunch at the Garrick. The department also put up friendly posters for the first couple of weeks of term, directing new students to the administration offices for help.



In response to student requests for more social interaction with their peers, the **Economics Department** worked with the Higher Education Academy's Economics Network to review its ice-breaker event for first-year undergraduates. In the past students were invited to a party with introductions from faculty. This year the

'The difference the event made to the reception (later in the week) was quite remarkable in terms of student interaction'

party continued, but was made more interesting and active with the introduction of the International Trade Game. Students were split into worlds which were then divided into countries, and each country had to try and make as much money as possible. With differing levels of resources, people and corruption, the winning country earned over \$20,000 while the losing country made only \$100.

The event was a success. After the game students stayed to chat to each other, swapped mobile numbers and made friends – one country even organised a meeting two days afterwards to discuss the 'lessons learnt'!

'The difference the event made to the reception (later in the week) was quite remarkable in terms of student interaction. Up to 10pm groups of students were standing around talking outside after it (the weather was kind) and some were completely fired up about economics games and this in particular, as well as in all sorts of economics and other issues.' (Judith Shapiro)

The **Government Department** turned its BSc induction meeting into a Q&A



'I think it was tremendously useful and I really believe we gave the students invaluable information which I wish I was given when I first started'

session between new and final year students. Undergraduate programme administrator Hannah Wood had briefed the four final year students, and, having introduced them at the start of the meeting, left them to run the Q&A session themselves. Feedback from the first year students showed they appreciated being able to ask very frank questions that they may have felt embarrassed asking staff. And feedback from the final year students was equally positive:

'I thought it went really well – they had a lot of questions once they got going and still had more when they had to finish – we stayed behind too and some came up individually. Have to say I think it's a good addition and I think they appreciated our honesty and realism. So yeah – definitely keep it and I don't think it needs changing.'

'I think it was tremendously useful and I really believe we gave the students

invaluable information which I wish I was given when I first started. I really enjoyed myself and thank you for the opportunity.'

First year students were also given the opportunity to meet fellow students during group meetings with academic advisers and their tutees at the start of term – a practice that the department plans to continue in the future. And they were reportedly very pleasantly surprised with the food and drink provided, and the fact that so many staff members gave up their evening to chat to them, at the department's orientation reception in Clement House.



These successes have encouraged the department to reinstate social events for undergraduate students this year, after a break of some four years, and to make use of the Politics Society to generate interest among students.

Congratulations! Teaching award winners

Judith Shapiro of the Economics Department has won the Student Nominated Teaching Award 2010, from the Economics Network of the Higher Education Academy. This is the latest of several HEA awards the department has won in recent years: Alwyn Young and Iain Long were joint winners of the Outstanding Teaching Award in 2008, and Manuel Palazuelos-Martinez was a joint winner of the same award in 2007, while Kosuke Aoki and Sanchari Roy were awarded a Student Nominated Teaching Award nomination in 2008.



The Teaching and Learning Development Fund

Don't forget that you can apply at any time to the Teaching and Learning Centre for funding to support teaching and/or learning development. Grants of between £500 and £4,000 are available to cover the costs of a wide variety of activities. Recent grants have been used for:

- taking students on field trips associated with particular courses
- the development of case studies
- production of a guide to academic reading and writing skills for first-year Criminology students
- development of a virtual alumni network for students in Enterprise Development.

Read more about these activities at the Teaching and Learning Centre website (www.lse.ac.uk/tlc) and contact the Teaching and Learning Centre Director Liz Barnett, at l.barnett@lse.ac.uk, for more information about making an application to the Fund.

New staff join the Teaching and Learning Centre

As a result of the Teaching Task Force recommendations, the Teaching and Learning Centre now has a team of staff who are providing direct support to individuals and departments on their teaching. The Educational Development team is headed by Neil McLean. As many of you know, Neil has for several years been the Director on the Teaching and Learning Centre Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education (PGCertHE), which now enrolls some 150 class teachers and new full-time faculty annually. Neil is now also a key contributor to the development of LSE100. Other members of the Education Development team are:

- Lynne Roberts and Tony Whelan. Lynne and Tony have both worked as study advisers in the Teaching and

Learning Centre for several years, and are both now also contributing to teacher education.

- Simon Atkinson and Jane Pritchard, who are both new to LSE. Simon recently returned from New Zealand where he was the Director of Teaching and Learning at Massey University's College of Education. Jane joined us from Bath where she was Director of Studies for the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic and Professional Practice.
- Claire Gordon, who divides her time between the Teaching and Learning Centre and the European Institute. Claire has also contributed to LSE work in Moscow with ICEF.

In addition to working with staff at LSE, the Educational Development team has been exploring various external income-

generation projects supporting teaching staff in other institutions, for example the European University Institute in Florence and MGIMO, Moscow, where participants successfully completed the PGCertHE on a distance-learning basis.

The Teaching and Learning Centre has made a number of new appointments in other areas too: Paul Glynn and Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena are new counsellors in the Student Counselling Service. Paul is also leading the development of the Staff Counselling Service and Steph Hackney has joined us as a part-time Mental Health and Well-being Adviser. Sarabajaya Kumar is the new Academic and Professional Development Adviser to PhD and postdoctoral researchers. Jane Hindle is our new Communications and Publishing Adviser.

Contributions please!

We want Teaching Matters to be both useful and enjoyable, so please let us know if you have any suggestions, comments or contributions.

We're particularly keen to hear about:

- innovative practice, especially in student-staff interaction
- ideas for improving feedback and assessment
- successful events.

We're very happy to come and interview staff and/or students, or to take written write-ups.

Please contact the editor, Jane Hindle, at j.hindle@lse.ac.uk

