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# Teaching Matters

Teaching and Learning Development Office

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Issue 6, September 2001

## What we do

The Teaching and Learning Development Office supports individuals and departments wishing to develop the quality of teaching and learning in the School. In practical terms, we:

- Co-ordinate an in-house programme of events and the initial teaching induction for both full-time and part-time staff.
- Offer one-to-one educational consultancy tailored to your particular needs and interests, including teaching observation.
- Alert staff to external events, providing funding as appropriate.
- Support departments facing internal and external teaching quality assessment.
- Keep the School up-to-date on developments in teaching and learning in HE nationally and internationally – through departmental links, the Teaching Matters news sheet, and our website.
- Co-ordinate student study support across the School. Work in this area has developed recently with Jill Ramsay taking on the role of the School's Adviser to Students with Disabilities and with the appointment of Jean Jameson as Dyslexia Support Tutor.

**For further details**, see the TLDO website:  
<http://teaching.lse.ac.uk>

### Contact:

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## Welcome to new staff

By now, new staff who have joined the School in recent months should have received an invitation to the various new staff induction events. These are scheduled for the 18-24 September. If by any chance, you have missed out, please contact us. If the dates have already passed, still get in touch, and we will arrange special briefings as necessary.

## Congratulations to Major Review Teaching Prize winners.

The following staff were recently awarded teaching prizes at Major Review in recognition of their special contributions to teaching:

Dr Nigel Ashton, International History  
Dr Jean-Pau Rubies, International History  
Dr Jacqueline Coyle-Shapiro, Industrial Relations  
Dr Karen Smith, International Relations  
Dr Katherine Rake, Social Policy

## Congratulations to LSE's National Teaching Fellow

Congratulations to Nick Byrne, Director of the Language Centre, who was one of twenty people selected from 83 institutional nominations across the UK HE sector to receive a HEFCE National Teaching Fellowship. Nick is using the fellowship funding of £50,000 to enable all Language Centre staff to make good use of digital technology in their teaching.

## A major boost to supporting the use of technology in teaching at LSE

For the past two years there has been a small team of staff supporting teaching in technology projects in the School (the Learning and Teaching Technology Group LTTG). Following proposals developed by a working group for the Pro-Directors, and followed up by a working group of Council, the School Secretary Dr Christine Challis has secured a major investment of funding to expand work in this area over the next three years. The library is making further funds available for electronic course packs, and ITS continues to focus on infrastructure support. Over the coming year the LTTG work will be reviewed and developed further to form a strong central resource working in partnership with academic departments and MIS/Website Services. Academic departments will have access to much needed project and recurrent funding required to make a success of teaching technology to enhance traditional course delivery. Any individual academic or department

interested in exploring options and support available should contact Liz Barnett in the first instance.

## Teaching Development Funding

Anyone interested in applying for funding to support innovative teaching projects is encouraged to contact the Teaching and Learning Development Office to explore funding options. Small grants (of up to £500) are available for staff pre-major review to support their teaching development (up to 10 grants available per year, allocated on a first come, first served basis); Teaching Development Fund grants of up to £4,000 are available to individuals/course teams who wish to make more substantial changes to given programmes. Bids for TDF need to be with the TLDO by 9 October 2001. For full details see our website or contact the TLDO. In the last issue of Teaching Matters, there was a short section on the Learning and Teaching Subject Network (<http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/>). Several of these subject centres are offering small grants for teaching development. Check the appropriate subject centre for information.

Finally, this autumn HEFCE will be advertising the next round of the Fund for Development of Teaching and Learning - awards of up to £250,000 for teaching development projects. Departments that have been through recent QAA visits will be eligible for these awards. Anyone wishing to explore options and ideas is welcome to contact the TLDO for advice and assistance.

## Developments to LSE teaching facilities by Craig Hickson, Services Office

Many staff will be familiar with the new equipment in many of the teaching rooms. Following user feedback on the new data projection and Large Screen TV systems last session, the following work has been completed over the summer:

- All rooms (55 of them) with TV or data projector now have an input added to the desk to allow quick connection to laptops if you did not want to use the under desk PC.
- There are an additional 10 large screen TV video set ups in classrooms, all capable of playing videos AND outputting images from the desk PC or a laptop
- All data projectors have been fitted with additional security devices as we have lost four in the last two months.
- The control for the AV kit has been modified so that the sounds can't get switched off
- The location of the video players has been changed to improve access.
- We hope to produce a web based help sheet for each and every room so that if you get stuck, go to the web site and a whole range of FAQ,s and what to do help items will be available to you .

Please do contact us if you need training in the use of the equipment, or have any comments/suggestions for improvements. Contact: [Craig.Hickson@lse.ac.uk](mailto:Craig.Hickson@lse.ac.uk)

## Staff Development

### Occasional teacher induction sessions

All occasional teachers are expected to attend the Dean's Induction session:

**Deans' Induction**                      **Tuesday 9 October**

In addition, they can now choose an appropriate introductory workshop from the following three options:

**Option 1**  
**Introduction to Teaching and Learning workshop**  
Either: 25 & 26 September  
or 10 & 11 October

**Option 2**  
**Teaching Circle**  
One day on 12 October, and two further half days later in the year.

**Option 3** (for those teaching quantitative subjects):  
**Introductory workshop in teaching quantitative subjects**  
Either: 5 October  
or 15 October  
These one-day sessions on teaching quantitative subjects are followed by two further half days later in the term - see our full programme for details.

Please note these sessions (or agreed equivalent) are compulsory for occasional teachers who are also registered as students at LSE. Because they are compulsory, those attending will now be paid for attendance for a maximum of five half day sessions.

### Funding for external training/ development

The TLDO has some funds available for staff wishing to undertake training and development activities relevant to their work, and not otherwise supported. This may include: funding for language training, specialist IT/research methods training, attendance at subject-specific teaching development workshops, or other teaching-related training offered externally. The funding is not available for academic conferences. You are required to complete a funding application form, supported by your Convenor/Institute Director. The fund is limited - and available on a "first come first served" basis, throughout the year. Funding cannot be made retrospectively. Please contact the TLDO to check availability.

### Staff training for running oral examinations

As many staff will know, the School has agreed to institute the option of oral examinations for students who, through no fault of their own, faced problems during the examination period which would seriously compromise their results and/or progression. The TLDO agreed to provide training on the conduct of oral exams, and planned to do this on a needs basis - given that the

possible number of cases, and likely departments involved per year is very small (this year, only 3 candidates have been proposed for oral examinations). At the request of International History, TLDO organised a one-hour session in June 2001. Sincere apologies to those who attended - the TLDO did not realise that International History already had departmental procedures in place, and so pitched the session at too basic a level. However, as a result of this session there is now available: (a) a basic briefing pack for any department wishing to sort out its own procedures and (b) the opportunity for other departments to consider the practice proposed by International History, which has laid down a basic policy statement for examiners and for students as to how oral examinations will be conducted. The briefing session was attended by two staff from other departments both of whom noted that the International History procedures might well need some adaptation for use in their subject areas. Any staff seeking advice/training on running oral examinations for undergraduates are asked to contact the TLDO directly. Note that the TLDO will also run one-to-one training sessions for students who are faced with oral exams, on request, in October 2001. Students should email Liz Barnett (l.barnett@lse.ac.uk) in the first instance.

## LSE Assessment Practices

One issue that concentrates students minds more than many others is their assessment work and exams. The TLDO is currently undertaking a review of assessment practices across the School with a view to producing some guidance notes on good practice. The guide should be available towards the end of the Michaelmas term. In the meantime, there are already two digests ready, which may be of interest to staff. The first is a table summarising the variety of assessment methods used across the School, picking out all those courses which do not use the traditional 3hr or 2hr sit down examination. The second is a collection of examples of marking feedback sheets which different departments are using to give students feedback on course work and grading descriptions/ marking criteria used by departments to give students a clearer understanding of what tutors expect in different types of assessed work. Anyone working on assessment procedures in departments is welcome to contact the TLDO for copies of these documents.

## Teaching Technology

### Student reaction to web based teaching materials

by Kris Roger, LTTG

In the last issue of Teaching Matters we detailed a number of TLDO funded experimental web based teaching projects that ran during the 2000-2001 academic year. Courses in Anthropology, Government and Media@LSE were web supported using a virtual learning environment (VLE) called WebCT, providing additional on-line learning resources for students. These comprised on-line lecture notes and associated materials such as reading lists, but also direct links to full-text online articles, journals and relevant web sites. In addition to these resources there were also on-line

discussion areas and one course had student home pages and a student presentations section.

As a follow up to these projects we carried out a simple survey of student reaction to these new developments. We asked questions such as how useful they found the various 'additional' features of their courses; whether they had web access away from the main school campus; 'was the use of a VLE a valuable supplement to their course?', 'was there enough training and encouragement?' and whether they felt that more courses should have an online component. We also encouraged additional comments.

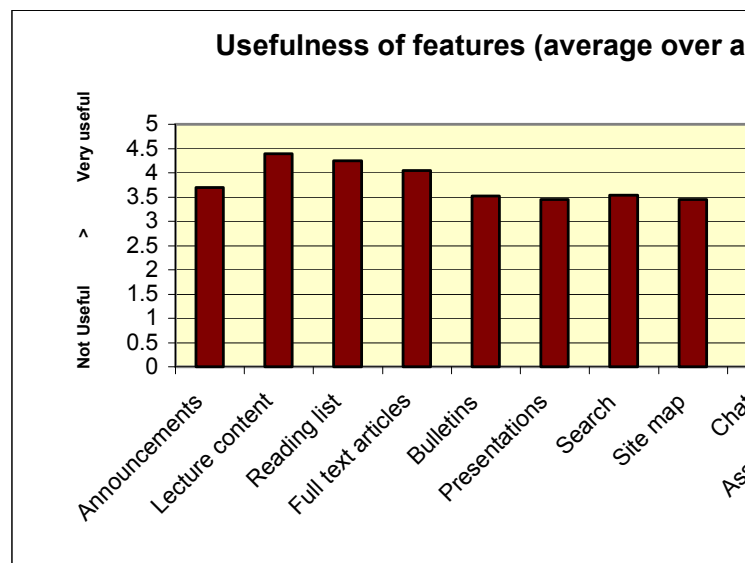
We e-mailed 181 students that were registered on four WebCT supported courses and 62 of those proceeded to complete our web based survey. 77% of the students that responded have off-campus web access. There were significant variations between subjects, on one course 47% had no access compared to 4% on another course. Of those accessing WebCT from outside the School, usage was split fairly evenly between those accessing via their Halls of Residence connection and those using a dial-up connection from private accommodation.

### Usefulness of WebCT course features

We asked students to rate the usefulness of various features of the online component of their course. Table 1 summarises their response, and the following comment gives a good feel of a key benefit for students using WebCT.

"Having access to WebCT has really made things easier this year. Things like access to scanned articles and journals as well as slides and presentations made studying easier and more organized"

Table 1



One area that needs delicate handling and careful management is the discussions (or bulletins) tool. This provides a number of forums for student-to-student and student-to-teacher discussion, similar to many public

discussion/bulletin boards found on the web. There appears to be a fine line between providing a slight push to initiate online discussion and being too insistent;

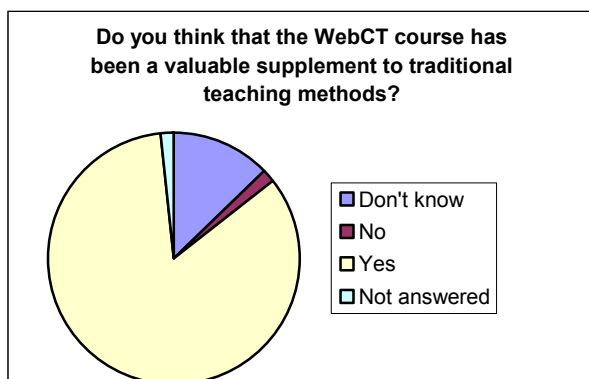
"The online course should not be used to replace classes, but only to supplement them. Valuable face-to-face discussions cannot be held on the net!"

This also reflects a fear among some students that online tools may be used to reduce face-to-face teacher to student contact time. Another student recognised the need for discussions to be carefully planned:

"I found the discussions to be good only when they were clearly organized. Not due to lack of familiarity with WebCT, but lack of organization in the class."

There was a fairly significant difference in the ratings for the different features between courses – Table 1 only shows an average across all of the courses. The courses that had the highest ratings more fully integrated the web based resources into their traditional face to face teaching programme, whilst those that received lower scores were those that tried to add a completely 'virtual' element to their courses. This will need further investigation across a greater number and variety of courses.

#### *A valuable supplement?*



Over all of the courses we found that 84% of the students found resources provided via WebCT were a valuable supplement to the 'traditional' components of their course.

One student appreciated the choice of learning style that a VLE provides:

"It proved to be a very valuable source of information, as it covered the course in a way that would not have really been possible, had we used traditional hand-outs!"

Another student appreciated it as an organisational aid:

"it has help[ed] me to focus more my studies. It is like having always with you your study materials. It helps you a lot with your

organisation. It allows to share or exchange opinions, which is clear advantage over traditional approaches [sic]. It is an excellent tool."

#### **Training and Encouragement**

Training provided for the students was in the form of group PC classroom sessions. 82% thought that they had received sufficient training. The 10% that thought that they hadn't received enough training were nearly all from one course, which was also the most technically demanding as the students were asked to upload online presentations. For the coming academic year we will not be able to provide as much face-to-face WebCT introductory training for students, due to a significant increase in class numbers using WebCT. Instead, this basic training will become part of the normal IT Help Desk support function. We will however provide more focused training on the more advanced aspects of student use of WebCT to the small number of courses ready to make use of them. Students have already highlighted some specific areas that they need more help with – or that we might want to explore in more detail to see if there are easier ways of doing them. For example:

"essay submission processes were complicated and the problem was compounded by the fact that there was no acknowledgement receipt when essays were submitted."

#### **More online course materials?**

Overall, 74% would like more courses to have an online component. Quite a large group appear to be reserving judgement by saying that they 'don't know' (12%) and the same numbers were opposed. The course that had the largest group opposed to more courses having an online component were coincidentally also asked to do more additional work online than on any other course. This perception is illustrated below:

"This is a neat use of the technology in principle, but this is what added the most extra work and pressure for me"

Students on another course felt that they had a higher than average workload, but there didn't appear to be any evidence that they thought that this was caused by having an online part to the course. In fact the contrary view was expressed

"An incredible amount of work! But the webct has made it much easier, in terms of organization."

Finally, a very positive response!

"I think that the ideal would be to have all our courses like this WebCT one. It is much more compact and pushes you to keep under control all your materials."

The challenge for the coming academic year is to apply the lessons we have learnt from the differing



experiences of each of the courses, and improve the experience for the student while keeping the workload manageable for all. We will continue to investigate innovative ways of providing alternative delivery mechanisms, such as audio lecture summaries, student self-tests and possibly more interactive materials. A number of courses are embarking on the use not only of WebCT but also other technology applications for the 2001-2002 academic year, in line with how they want courses to develop both to add value/improve quality and to improve efficiency in delivery and course management. New projects include courses in Law, Economics, Economic History, Geography, International Relations, Industrial Relations, Social Policy and the Language Centre. If you would like to find out more about using some of these tools then contact the TLDO.

## Quality Assurance

### Quality Assurance: for once there is good news ....

by Simeon Underwood

Teaching Quality Assurance and Review Office

Over the summer there have been two highly positive developments in the area of teaching quality assurance. The Continuation Audit of the School's policies and practices in this area, which was scheduled for this November, has been cancelled, by mutual consent between us and the QAA. Also, HEFCE has published a consultation paper holding out the possibility of major changes in national quality assurance arrangements. At worst, it will mean that the full pomp and circumstance of the Academic Review process the QAA had been developing will be much diminished. At best it may mean that the inspections of individual departments may become a thing of the past.

This all gives us a chance, perhaps even a responsibility, to take control of our quality assurance arrangements for ourselves, reviewing what has been done in the past and considering the requirements in the future.

It is important that what we do in this area is informed by evidence. To this end three discussion documents have been prepared:

1. In the Summer Term Liz Barnett and I put a discussion paper to the curricular committees and the Academic Board. Its working title had been 'Credimus' – a plural Credo, or what we in the School collectively believe. It tried to give a preliminary answer to the question "If the QAA didn't exist, what kind of quality assurance system would the LSE have for itself?". The first draft received broad support, and we will be working it up as the year progresses.

2. Even though we all have had various reservations about the quality of the QAA's subject review visits, they do offer some School-wide messages, which Liz and I have pulled together into a briefing paper.

3. Even though the Continuation Audit will not now be taking place, I have been working away on the

Analytical Account which we would have had to produce for it – 70 pages of prose on the School's approach to teaching quality assurance past, present and future.

All of these documents are open for discussion and debate. If you would like a copy of any or all of them please let me know.

The national developments give us the chance to work closely with individual departments. Over the coming year TQARO has a number of plans afoot:

- Our website recently went live, at ....
- We are working on preparing simple statistical reports for departments.
- We have been liaising with departments on preparations for the internal TQAC reviews.
- We will be streamlining the processes for handling external examiners reports within the School.
- We will be putting the School survey of student opinion on line (see the separate article below).

Our hope is that at the end of this period of transition we will have devised a simple and obtrusive structure which will help departments to assure and improve the quality of what they are doing.

It is a curious irony that now we have the QAA off our backs, for a year at least, we can set about doing some useful things, of a kind we could not undertake if we also had to prepare for a Continuation Audit and several subject reviews. For those of you interested in the politics of public accountability this must be a very interesting test case ...

### Student feedback session goes on-line

by Simeon Underwood

Teaching Quality Assurance and Review Office

In the coming year the School survey of student opinion will be moving over to an on-line format. Our hope is that this exciting (if slightly risky) device will provide departments with a better quality of information about their own teaching quality.

We would not want to claim that within the School there is widespread love of, or confidence in, the Survey as it is run at present. At recent meetings of TQAC, for example, the student members have been particularly vocal about its intrusion into class time.

TQAC and its student questionnaire working group have given a lot of their time over the past two years to considering the idea that the Survey should go on-line. There are many obvious advantages, for departments in particular:

- class time will be saved for teaching;
- the results of the Survey can be made available more quickly than at present;
- the Survey will become more flexible, in the sense that we will be able to adapt it to explore the issues departments want to explore.

There should also be considerable savings, especially in paper.

**picture to go here, with caption:**

*Part of the annual TQAC paper mountain – which will disappear with the introduction of the on-line survey*

There is, however, one major disadvantage, which is where the risk comes in. Our own trials and evidence from other institutions suggest that the response rate will be considerably lower than it has been possible to achieve with the paper surveys handed out and completed in class. The view TQAC has taken is that this should be outweighed by an improvement in the quality of the returns from students.

The other articles on this page describe the transition in operational terms. If you have any questions or observations please get back to us.

### **Why the move to on-line?** by Paul Gee TQARO

The two major things we want to achieve by moving to an on-line format are to reduce the turn around time in processing results, and to increase the usefulness of the survey to the people who make most use of the results - the departments and course proprietors.

To this end we are implementing an on-line survey application in two stages. First, in the 2001/02 academic year we will conduct our largest surveys electronically using the same questions as in previous years. Starting in Lent term 2001/02 we will be seeking views on a revised (and smaller) 'core' of questions that all students in the School will be asked. We will also implement a system that will allow departments and course proprietors to include their own questions that will be asked only of students in specific departments or on specific courses. These supplementary questions will be 'owned' by these departments or course proprietors. It will be left to department to decide how "public" to make these findings – though on the whole it is recommended that results are at least fed back to the students, along with information on any actions arising. The privacy of the students filling in the questionnaire is also being taken seriously, it will not be possible for a teacher to identify a student unless that student so desires.

The survey will be delivered to students by email, in which they will be given access to the appropriate website. The 'core' of the on-line survey application is a Java servlet that collects responses to questions that have been posted from a web based HTML form of questions. On the basis of these responses the servlet decides whether any questions need to be followed up on (i.e. 'was there a specific reason you gave that answer to that question'), or presents the student on that course the next set of questions prescribed for that course.

### **Arrangements for the 2001/2 surveys** by Alison Taylor TQARO

There will be a phased implementation of the on-line survey, as described below:

#### Michaelmas Term

The Survey of Students' Opinions of Teaching by Part-time Class Teachers will be conducted on-line. The survey will be 'live' in weeks 6-8 and may be extended into week 9 if the response rate is low. The format will be the same as for the paper version except that there will be no separate 'Form B'; the open-ended questions will be incorporated into the main questionnaire. There will be random prizes allocated to respondents to encourage response. Teachers will receive some publicity materials to show/hand out to students in classes. It is intended that results from this survey will be available to conveners and teachers before the Christmas break. Results will be sent out on paper in the usual way.

The Survey of Students' Opinions of Course Teaching (for courses only offered in the Michaelmas term) will be conducted **on paper** in week 8. There will be no change to the format this year and questionnaires will be sent to teachers for issue to students in the usual way. Results will be available in February and will be sent out on paper in the usual way.

An additional survey will take place in weeks 9 and 10. This survey will be aimed at part-time class teachers and will replace the 'Teacher's Comments Form' which was previously sent to teachers with the student survey materials. It will be conducted on-line and a report will be produced in January. The precise format and content of the survey is still under discussion.

#### Lent Term

The main Survey of Students' Opinions of Course Teaching, covering all on-going teaching, will be conducted on-line in weeks 6-9. There will again be the opportunity for respondents to win prizes and publicity materials will be sent to teachers to show/hand out to students. There will be no changes to the content of the survey other than the incorporation of the open-ended ('Form B') questions into the main questionnaire. It is hoped that results will be available shortly after Easter. Results will be sent out on paper.

During the Michaelmas and Lent terms there will be a number of consultations with departments with a view

to creating a more flexible survey which takes into account different data needs.

## Student support

### Training for undergraduates taking oral examinations

As noted above, this year the School is giving a limited number of students the option of taking oral examinations, rather than waiting for resists next summer. Given that students will have little or no experience of doing an oral examination, the Teaching and Learning Development Office is offering one-to-one advice/practice sessions to them on request. If you are a tutor to such a student, you may wish to encourage them to contact us for an appointment (contact Liz Barnett in the first instance ext. 6623 or l.barnett@lse.ac.uk).

### Developing student oral communication skills

In the past year there have been a number of requests from students through both TQAC and QAA reviews for more feedback on and preparation for making presentations in class, along with development of their more general public speaking skills. There are various developments on this, including a range of excellent handouts produced by departments. Two particularly good examples are:

- International History: ..... **need to find**
- Gender Institute: :.....

Both are happy for other staff to view/adapt their materials. For ease of access, copies are available from the Teaching and Learning Development Office.

There are also some development projects working on more detailed training of students in these fundamental skills:

- Dr Sunil Kumar (Social Policy) is piloting induction sessions with students involving them in "practice" seminar facilitation, with detailed feedback
- Simon Davies (Information Systems) will be...
- At PhD level, for the past 2yrs the TLDO has collaborated with Economic History to video student presentations in a departmental seminar series and undertake a debrief/review session with them. 1<sup>st</sup> year students give their presentation prior to upgrading review. Final year students present a conference paper, using the opportunity to test-run a paper which they subsequently present at an international conference.
- This year there will be at least two sessions on running classes and public speaking in the central study skills programme, plus additional support materials available to students and staff on the study skills web site: <http://learning.lse.ac.uk/>

## Student study support

A leaflet outlining the full range of TLDO study skills support work is being circulated with this issue of Teaching Matters. Evidence from previous years suggests that students find our services useful and thoroughly approachable/appropriate to their needs. Please feel free to direct students to us, and do not hesitate to get in touch if you wish to discuss any study support matters. We are very interested to hear about any departmental study support provision - and would like to include examples of departmental guidance papers on the LSE Learning World website, with agreement of authors of course! If you have anything that you think may be appropriate, please let us know.

Special thanks are due to Professor Patrick Dunleavy who has made a substantial contribution to the programme over the past two years - and previously - with no real recognition for the time and effort he has put into this work. As he is on sabbatical this year, the sessions he has run to date will be taken over by Liz Barnett.

## Teamwork tutoring

There are a few teachers in the School who give their students group projects to do as part of their academic work. Peter Levin and Ivan Kent have been working on an action-research basis with staff and students in three departments to provide 'teamwork tutoring' to help students work effectively as members of a team and in the process enhance their repertoires of learning strategies to include co-operative as well as individual ones. This work will be continuing in 2001-02. For more information see <http://www.teamwork.ac.uk>

## Dyslexia Support Service: the first six months

by Jean Jameson, Dyslexia Support Tutor

This has been a time of induction and introductions, an international conference on dyslexia at York, an informal audit of need and some tentative steps forward. The laminated posters of famous dyslexic people, like Einstein, Ben Zephaniah and Steven Redgrave, which were displayed round the School, have all disappeared, so the policy of greater awareness is obviously working!

A dyslexia information day, for students and interested staff, was held on 20 June. About twenty people attended the morning session, to hear Claire Jamieson, UCL defining dyslexia and Mary Ellen Clancy describing the student support service she leads in St Frances Xavier University, Nova Scotia.

Later, a group of students met with Jill Ramsay, adviser to students with disability and myself, to design a support programme for LSE. In a "wish list", students with dyslexia listed the ideal changes, systems, facilities and attitudes which they wished had been in place when they arrived at LSE. The main issues arising from that discussion were the need for an awareness and understanding of dyslexic difficulties across the whole institution, greater involvement and feedback in

student/tutor relations and clearer lines of communication.

As a result of this meeting, the students plan to form a Dyslexia Society, to offer peer-group support and to work with me to provide a support programme. They are also forming a "Speakers' Bureau", whereby students will themselves be prepared (and trained) to address groups of staff and fellow students to talk about dyslexia at LSE.

We are producing two leaflets about dyslexia at LSE: one for staff and one for students, with information about facilities available, planned events and contact details. There will be a meeting for those new students with dyslexia we already know about during Freshers' Week. However, we know that nearly half dyslexic students only come forward after arrival at university, so please don't hesitate to refer students you think might be dyslexic.