



Teaching Matters

Teaching and Learning Development Office

SPECIAL EDITION Issue 9, July 2002

OUTCOMES FROM TEACHING QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE REVIEWS

In this issue

In the current academic year an internal review team has reviewed eight of the School's teaching departments/institutes on behalf of the Teaching Quality Assurance Committee. The review team's reports conventionally end with a list of recommendations for the department and for bodies within the School. But the exercise also brings to light much interesting and innovative practice – the stuff of commendation rather than recommendation.

This issue of Teaching Matters draws out a number of examples of interesting practice that caught our attention in this year's reviews. It has been compiled by Liz Barnett (TLDO) and Simeon Underwood (TQARO). In case any departments reviewed this year feel left out, there has been no systematic attempt to ensure representation. Nor is there any agenda here, hidden or otherwise, other than celebrating good practice. If we haven't picked up on interesting elements of departmental practice which may well be of interest to other departments, please contact Liz Barnett so they can be included in forthcoming issues.

Contacts

Dr Liz Barnett, Teaching and Learning Development Officer, rm. H417, ext. 6623, email: l.barnett@lse.ac.uk

Simeon Underwood, Assistant Registrar, Teaching Quality Assurance and Review Office, rm. F217, ext. 6253, email: s.underwood@lse.ac.uk

Student Assessment

One area where the School has found itself significantly at odds with the apparent external agenda is on assessment. Given that the School's approach to assessment is often characterised as conservative and unadventurous it has been refreshing to find several examples of a more adventurous approach.

This year, **Statistics** experimented with student (formative) self-assessment on problem sets. On one second year course solutions were presented by one of the full time faculty in a session to the full group and students marked their own work, prior to handing it in. This appeared to work well.

The **Methodology Institute** has a portfolio assessment for part of one of its courses. Students undertake a range of practical data collection exercises, which they compile into a portfolio of work. Alongside, they maintain an experiential diary of what they have learnt about the various methods

from the experience of using them. They also identify what they would need to do to improve on method usage in the future, should they be faced with implementing them in formal research settings.

At the postgraduate level **Social Psychology** uses not just coursework essays but also a take-home statistics assignment; methodology reports of hands-on empirical work which make use of SPSS and NUDIST for data analysis; and written project plans. The Department is also unusual in providing students with some research report support over the summer.

Information Systems includes team training and group assessment in one of its MSc courses. The assessment includes a requirement that students write a reflective journal of their group work experience, which counts for 10% of the overall mark for the course.

Accounting and Finance uses a range of types of assignments, including numerical and computer-based exercises, critical essays and commentaries, and individual and group presentations, for example on case studies and mini-projects.

International History includes assessment of and feedback on oral presentations as an element of its formative assessment mix in one of its core courses and a number of its optional courses. This ensures that all students completing the BSc International History will have had the opportunity to develop their oral communication skills.

International History also has a spectacular range of departmental handouts in its public folders, including the feedback cover sheet that staff use for giving students feedback on course work. Students particularly appreciate use of the sheet and the quality of feedback provided.

Information Systems uses electronic forms for student feedback, and gives tutors the option of adapting the form to their particular course requirements. The electronic format allows for fast and efficient handling of student assessment details and provides the opportunity for staff to cross-check marking standards.

Mathematics has instituted a simple four point marking scale for course work this year (very good, good, satisfactory, poor). The scheme is designed to mirror the end of term class reporting scheme. Staff and students find it clear and easy to understand and prefer it to percentage grading.

Mathematics has also introduced a diagnostic test at the start of the first year for undergraduates, to check out how recent changes to the “A” level syllabus have affected what students know on entry.

In some departments, an interesting dimension has been the student attitude to innovation in assessment. In some cases the review team found an apparent wish for greater variety in assessment methods balanced against an instrumentalist approach whereby the students seemed to want the methods used for formative assessment to mirror those used for summative assessment.

Face-to-face teaching: examples of practices students appreciate

On lecturing, several students have commented on their appreciation of tutors who make effective use of public folders. Examples of materials made available to students include: PowerPoint presentations, a single page summary to follow each lecture, additional readings, and in some cases full lecture notes. However, there is also some resistance to this in some quarters, on the grounds that it can amount to “spoon feeding”.

Several students have commended tutors who go beyond the standard “student presentation followed by plenary discussion” format for classes. For example, one tutor was particularly commended for his system of selecting four key readings for each seminar, and expecting all students to present, in groups of two. Students regularly comment that they appreciate tutors who “force you to speak” ... it’s a bit like school – but it works!” was one comment.

In **International History**, students clearly appreciate the departmental policy that all full time faculty teach at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with occasional teachers being employed for first year class teaching only.

The **Methodology Institute** has a system of “advisory hours” to support its main quantitative methods courses. These “first come first served” surgeries provide advice to students on any aspects of quantitative methods that are causing them particular difficulties. They also serve as a highly successful safety net and a vital mechanism for controlling the anxiety that tends to be endemic amongst essentially non-numerate students faced with quantitative courses.

Using Communications and Information Technology in Teaching

It has been especially interesting to see how different departments are developing their teaching strategies in the context of technological transition.


Information Systems makes extensive use of public folders not only to deposit lecture and other materials, but also for active student on-line discussions. The Department also gives students access to examples of assessed work, so they can get a feel for standards expected of them. And it was the first Department to pioneer the use of WebCT, the virtual learning environment with which many other departments are now starting to experiment.

Mathematics has developed its own website with an extensive range of materials and links for students – see below. The course pages include the solutions to the weekly problem sets, as well as full worked answers to past exam papers for a few courses. Students find these materials invaluable, and apparently use them proactively, rather than as a quick way of avoiding work during the course.

MSc students in **Statistics** were particularly appreciative of the quality and speed of e-mail response from tutors. This is becoming an important element of the personal tutor system and perhaps its implications have not been fully recognised as yet.


Accounting and Finance is developing WebCT support for AC100, one of the School’s largest undergraduate courses. The site will include on-line facilities such as self-tests, quizzes and a discussion forum.

It is worth noting that students are not the only ones who benefit from the development of on-line support for courses. Occasional Teachers also find on-line development a major advantage. For some, it is a simple case of easy access to course resources. For others (see Issue 8 of Teaching Matters), on-line support is being used more proactively to manage and support OTs and to enable cross-fertilisation of ideas across classes.




THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Department of Mathematics



Student Pages



These pages are intended for our current students. They are designed to give you quick and easy access to some of the most important School sites, and also links to useful careers and mathematics information. Prospective students should click [here](#) to find out more about the Department, our degrees and application procedures.

LSE Links	Careers Links	Mathematics Links	Maths and Stats Society	Photos	Fun Stuff
-------------------------------	-----------------------------------	---------------------------------------	---	------------------------	-------------------------------

If you would like to see anything other links or information on these pages, please e-mail your suggestions to:
admin@maths.lse.ac.uk

PhD support

PhD students in **International History**, **Social Psychology** and **Information Systems** applauded recent developments within their Departments to provide more structure and opportunity for PhD students to meet and discuss their work in the first year and beyond.

Accounting and Finance PhD students benefit from Doctoral Scholarships, funded by the Department, and an annual conference allowance to enable them to participate in conferences.

In **Social Psychology**, a tape recording is made of the discussion of each student's thesis at the upgrade meeting, so that both student and supervisor can review issues raised in the meeting at a later stage.

One of the administrative staff in **Information Systems** has developed an electronic guide of scholarships and grants for PhD students, which is much appreciated by the students: <http://is.lse.ac.uk/phdprog/Funding.pdf>

In **Mathematics**, a weekly email bulletin for the Centre for Discrete and Applicable Mathematics is produced, which is circulated to PhD students. They find this extremely useful in keeping them up to date on forthcoming internal seminars, as well as external meetings and conferences that may be of interest.

Departmental investment in learning resources

Both **Accounting and Finance** and **Information Systems** were congratulated by their students for inventive and attractive departmental workspace made available to them. Both departments have invested significant departmental funds in their teaching provision. In Information Systems, a large open plan area called "I-Studio 5" provides workspace for PhD students. Students agree that the space improves communication and the sense of community in the Department.



Teaching Committees

The review teams found examples of a new interest in the quality assurance systems underpinning teaching and learning. Simeon Underwood will be writing round to departments shortly with examples of interesting practice in several different medium-sized and small departments.

Teaching Quality Related Committees 2001/2

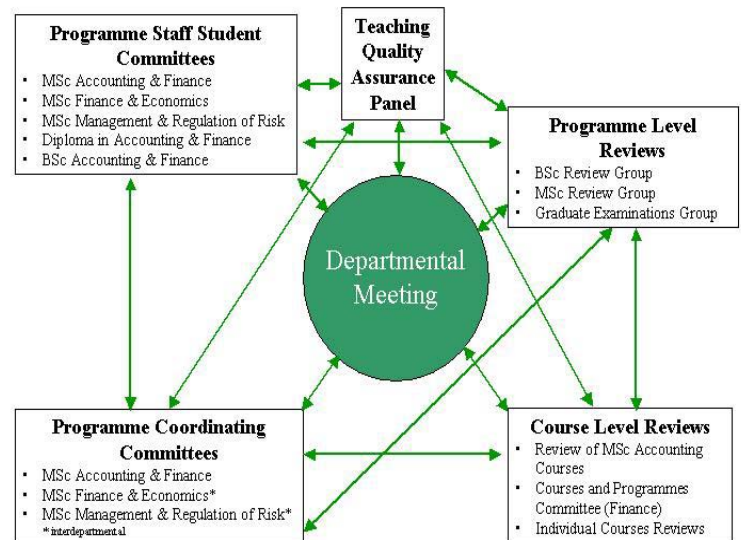


Figure 1 above shows how **Accounting and Finance** organises its teaching quality committees.

Following its TQAC review, **Sociology** has established a teaching committee. Its membership includes:

- The Convenor
- Departmental Administrator
- A representative of the convenors of MSc programmes, on a rotating basis
- Director of Postgraduate Studies
- Director of Undergraduate Studies
- Departmental Tutor
- One representative of class teachers, selected by his/her peers
- Student representatives by invitation

Its terms of reference are:

- To review the Department's teaching provision (curriculum; range of programmes/courses; viability; aims and learning outcomes)
- To review teaching methods in the light of current best practice
- To review assessment and feedback mechanisms in the light of best practice
- To ensure that teaching programmes and activities are appropriately consistent and co-ordinated by overseeing the communication and publication of key course/ programme documents

Sociology and **Accounting and Finance** both invite Liz Barnett and Simeon Underwood to their Teaching Committee meetings. We attend when we can. This enables us to highlight good practice that might be of interest from other departments and to note issues that are being discussed elsewhere in the School. It also provides us with useful insight into the detail of departmental practice, which we can then subsequently pass on to other departments as appropriate. If other departments are interested in getting us involved on a regular or occasional basis, please get in touch!

Selecting, training and supporting occasional teachers

The use of part-time and occasional teachers attracted the interest of the team, and it is clear that most departments are paying close attention to ensuring the quality of the teachers they appoint.

International History advertises for occasional teachers through the University of London, rather than restricting their search within the School or Department. One member of staff within the Department has special responsibility for occasional teachers, with the focus for this role primarily on recruitment and initial induction. TQAC data and student comment indicate that the OTs in the Department are of a particularly high calibre.

Mathematics has developed an excellent handbook for OTs to supplement the School guidance on good practice. "The main purposes of the Handbook are to collect in an accessible form the most important information about what the Department does, and to set out how we view class teaching and what we expect of class teachers, and what they can expect of lecturers." **Mathematics** and **Accounting and Finance** undertake teaching observation of all new occasional teachers.

Comments from externals of LSE's internal review process

TQARO has recently conducted a "review of reviews". It contacted all eight departments, as well as the externals who join the review team. The majority replied, several with very positive support for the system that is evolving in the School. To give just a few examples:

"LSE is well ahead of [my university] when it comes to reviewing the quality of educational provision...LSE seems to have succeeded in picking out the benefits offered by external TQAC reviews, without their drawbacks in a way which we have not yet thought of doing."

"I was pleased to experience the constructive and supportive approach of the review to the development of teaching within the Institute, and to find that the review did not overemphasise the requirements of a QAA review. The review clearly made a useful contribution to the management of teaching and learning, in particular providing recommendations for the School, as well as the Institute."

Capitalising on TQAC reports

Inevitably, any review system brings with it the costs and time involved in preparation for the review. TQARO is mindful of this and is working to ensure that departmental effort is kept to a minimum. There are also some possible benefits to the time invested. One contributor to the recent "review of reviews" noted that the Departmental Statement written for the review can subsequently prove very useful as a guide to departmental practice for new staff. Some departments already make their TQAC Departmental Statement available to their staff and students via public folders or the web. The final report by the review team is also being made more public: once it has been agreed by the department and gone through the committees, it will be

made available on the TQARO website:
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/admin/tqaro/>

And finally.... A few things to think about

Most of this issue has focused on the many examples of good practice that are obvious across the School. Detailed comments have gone back to individual departments where there are specific issues that need to be addressed. This final section highlights a small number of matters of more general concern, which departments may wish to reflect and act on.

A common concern raised by many students is the lack of consistency between the web site, prospectus entries, calendar and "reality" once they arrive at LSE. MSc students in particular would value more advanced notice of core or preparatory readings, and advanced notice of any likely changes to the options on offer.

Several MSc students from different programmes have expressed surprise at the size of some of the MSc programmes, and the consequent impact this has on their access to teaching staff in the departments.

The tutorial system is one area that appears to need further attention. It is perceived in broadly negative terms by significant numbers of students (with some notable exceptions). MSc students again often express concern at the very limited interaction they may be able to have with senior academic staff.

Next year's reviews

Over the past three years the TQAC review process has been tweaked in ways that are intended to make it developmental and to discourage departments from being defensive. These changes are enabling us to act as brokers in sharing practice across the School (rather than simply complying with whatever the QAA deems to be good practice). We hope this will continue into next year and beyond.

Next year, **DESTIN**, the **European Institute**, **Government, International Relations**, **Law** and **Media@LSE** will be facing teaching reviews.

Note of thanks from Nicholas Sims (Chair of the Teaching Quality Assurance Committee):

TQAC at its final meeting on 26 June warmly thanked the internal Review Team members, who had worked long and hard at carrying through the tightly scheduled series of Reviews of Educational Provision this session, and who by general consent had made a great success of this new review process. They were Mark Hoffman (Dean of Undergraduate Studies), John Madeley (Dean of the Graduate School), Liz Barnett (Teaching and Learning Development Officer), Claire Taylor (SU General Secretary) and, alternating reviews with her, Dave Clay (SU Education & Welfare Officer), ably supported by Simeon Underwood (Assistant Registrar) and his staff in the Teaching Quality Assurance and Review Office. I gladly add my own thanks for the outstanding service they have all done the School.