# THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

**ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**ACADEMIC YEAR RESTRUCTURE PROJECT BOARD**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2014**

Present: Mark Thomson (Chair), Cath Baldwin, Hannah Bannister, Keith Clarkson, Rachael Elliott, Mandy, Li, Tom Maksymiw, Dr Neil Mclean, Ginney Pavey, Osmana Raie, Martin Reid, Wayne Tatlow, Rachel Ward, Joy Whyte, Chris Wood.

In attendance: Ann-Marie Foxcroft (Secretary)

Apologies: Elizabeth Aitken, Linda Taylor

1. Welcome and Update from the Chair
   1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
   2. The Chair summarised the consultation and approval process which had already been undertaken regarding the restructure of the academic year. He explained that the first task of the project board would be to confirm whether or not the School could deliver the new academic year structure by 2015/16.
   3. The Chair proposed that the board identify those operations and procedures that needed to be revised in light of the new academic year structure; and to prioritise those that were time sensitive. Once the project board had established this priority list, it could then take a view on whether the time-sensitive items could be revised in time for the new structure to be implemented for the 2015/16 academic year. The board would need to decide whether the new structure could be delivered in 2015/16 by mid-August 2014, when the 2015/16 term dates were listed in external documentation (e.g. graduate prospectus).
   4. The project board discussed the Major Academic Initiative checklist (MAI) as a means to identify those operations and procedures that would require revision under the new academic year structure. A summary of the discussion follows.
2. Financial Support Office (FSO) - Section 1.5
   1. Applications had to be shortlisted and agreed in time for recipients to then organise their arrival in the UK (including applying for a visa, securing accommodation and travelling to the UK). The new academic year structure created smaller window for the FSO to process these.
   2. LSE bursaries would need to be approved two weeks earlier than under current arrangements. This would, in turn, mean that the Financial Award Panels would need to be held earlier in the summer, and would require the participation of relevant academic staff. This reliance could affect service delivery if it is not joined up.
   3. The FSO would require some time-specific resources to cope with these pinch points, including being relieved of its current involvement with Graduation.
3. Programme Regulations - Section 1.8
   1. The restructured academic year would make it possible (but not required) for departments to hold Michaelmas Term half-unit exams in Lent Term 'Week 0' (i.e. the week in which the LSE100 exam is currently held). The board discussed the impact of this new exam period.
   2. The time required for setting-up/clearing for examinations was raised as something which needed to be considered. At present it took three days for the LSE100 exams. It might be possible to set-up rooms prior to the Christmas Break (if available), but additional staffing might be required to ensure that rooms are cleared again in time for teaching the following week.
   3. The possibility of clashes with setting-up/clearing of Michaelmas Term exams and Presentation ceremonies would need to be looked into.
   4. Based on the assumption that the same exam-setting/scrutiny process would be the same for Lent Term 'Week 0' exams as was currently the casefor Summer Term exams, departments raised concerns about how early in Michaelmas Term the process would begin. It was felt that the process needed to be more flexible. The additional exam period also raised progression issues the School would need to address. Departments noted that until they had this information they could not make a decision on whether to set Lent Term ‘Week 0’ exams.
   5. Student Services reported that they were looking at exam processes as part of a review they would shortly be undertaking on ‘assessment’ more broadly.
4. Admissions and Registration - Section 1.10 and 1.14
   1. Recruitment, admission and registration processes would operate as they do now, with some adjustments to the timing of certain processes within these wider operations. There might be a need for additional resources at specific times. Registration processes might be an issue if higher than normal numbers of late registrations occurred.
   2. The current assumption was that Presentation ceremonies would remain in their current slots. This would slightly ease the difficulty of the proximity of results and graduation in the summer - currently results were released the day before graduation starts. However, if there were compelling operational reasons for doing so, the project board could look at the impact of moving the ceremonies closer to the end of term.
   3. There were concerns raised about the effect on international students as there would be less time between applicants getting their entry exam results, being able to apply for a visa and then travelling to the UK.
   4. At the undergraduate level, accommodation contracts started on the Sunday before the first Thursday/Friday of term, with registration taking place two weeks prior to that. This would result in a tight turnaround time between A-level and IB confirmation in mid-August and the confirmation of unconditional offers.
   5. Departments with pre-sessional courses, and some executive programmes, would simply shift forward and start earlier. There were concerns raised about how the new academic year structure would impact on turn-up rates. Even with the current structure there were occasions when students did not receive their visas in time to attend.
   6. The Chair would liaise with GLPD to see if there were any issues arising from the timing of the honorary fellows process.
5. Timetabling - Section 1.16 and 1.18
   1. Concerns were raised that departments were providing Timetabling with information later and later which affected its ability to timetable rooms.
   2. The new academic year structure gave departments the option to structure the 11 week term either with a reading week/enhancement activities in week 6 or to have 10 weeks teaching and then a revision week. Timetabling dealt with teaching-related bookings during term time and Conferencing and Events dealt with bookings outside term time, and with non teaching-related activities during term time. Timetabling and Conferencing and Events sought clarification on where responsibility would lie for booking rooms if departments were not teaching in week 6.
   3. Departments with pre-sessional courses reported that, even with the current academic year structure, there were issues around the timeliness with which HR prepared teaching contracts for non-permanent staff. This led to problems with teachers not having access to ICT when they started. It was noted that there was not a representative from HR on the project board to answer these queries. Board members identified the need for a member of HR to join the project board.
   4. It was not anticipated that IT/CLT and Estates maintenance work would be affected by the change to the academic year and that they would continue to schedule work around teaching/ other activities.
   5. It was noted that if there was an intensification of teaching alongside the planned building works this may cause an issue with space availability.
6. Academic and Professional Development Division (APDD) – Section 2
   1. The addition of a reading week provided the Teaching and Learning Centre with the opportunity to offer additional activities for students either directly or through departmentally coordinated events. The board noted that TLC and departments would need to co-ordinate provision during reading weeks to ensure no duplication of effort at School and departmental levels.
   2. It was not envisaged that there would be any greater student demands on the Language Centre.
   3. It was noted that LSE Careers played an important role in supporting some pre-sessional students. Earlier access would be required to support the earlier start dates for these courses.
7. Centre for Learning Technology (CLT) – Section 3
   1. It was not envisaged that the change to the academic year would result in greater demand for student-facing CLT services, though it will need to review its capacity and ability to reset and transition the VLE (along with other learning technology systems such as lecture capture) for the next academic year.
8. Academic and Professional Development Division – Section 5
   1. The Library representative reported that he did not foresee any problems. The Library would amend opening times to match the new term dates and adjust the timing of special arrangements made during examination periods to match new exam dates.
9. External Relations Division (ERD) – Section 6
   1. The term dates on the website had been updated to reflect the proposed new academic year structure with the caveat that they were provisional and would be confirmed on 31 August 2014.
10. Conferences and Events – Section 6.4
    1. Although many pre-sessional activities would simply move forward and start earlier, several potential clashes and issues in the weeks leading up to the start of the current Michaelmas Term had been identified which would cause space availability problems. Space requirements would be further complicated if the timings of some of the activities that required School space in August and September changed.
    2. Conference and Events requested that the School provide improved guidance on how to deal with these conflicting requirements on space.
    3. It was also noted that the School’s agreement with the Peacock Theatre required that bookings were made two years in advance.
11. Residential Services – Section 8
    1. Residential Services reported that changes to the academic year would not affect levels of demand for student accommodation but would alter the occupancy dates. The details were outlined in the MAI document.
    2. The change to term dates had the potential to result in shorter accommodation contracts, which would *prima facie* bring prices down for students whilst they were in halls, but they would then face a greater council tax burden once leaving halls. Additional advice to students to aid them in their financial planning was advised.
    3. Student sponsors would have to be made aware of the changes to the academic year, particularly as these changes would result in payment deadlines changing.
    4. Issues might arise with current third party suppliers of accommodation as occupancy/contract lengths were reduced.
    5. Earlier occupancy to accommodate summer schools would not be an issue, whether it be span of growth or redistribution.
12. **Student Union Representatives:**
    1. Student representatives requested that consistent, reliable communication was provided to student by departments regarding the layout of their courses, and the times during which they were required to be present at the School.
    2. Assurance was also sought that academic staff would be available during reading weeks.
    3. Student representatives also raised concerns about the compression of the examination period in ST and the additional pressure on students during this period, but noted that this might be alleviated by examinations in LT ‘Week 0’.
13. Other Comments:
    1. The new academic year structure referred to examinations in ST but did not make reference to exam boards. Clarification was sought as to whether these would be held in week 7 of ST.
    2. The School would need to consider whether the Academic Induction Programme, which is currently held in early September, needed to be brought forward.
    3. The Medical Centre and Chaplaincy would need to be kept informed of changes to the academic year as it would impact on their service delivery.
    4. The introduction of the new academic year structure would coincide with the start of the demolition work on Houghton Street.
    5. The timing and cycle of committees would need to be adjusted to reflect the new academic year structure.
14. Resources
    1. Due to time constraints, resourcing was not discussed at the meeting.
15. Date of next meeting
    1. The next meeting will be held on Monday 14 July 2014 from 12:00-13:00 in LRB.R.505.

AMF  
1 July 2014