# THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

**ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**ACADEMIC YEAR RESTRUCTURE PROJECT BOARD**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2014**

1. Welcome and Update from the Chair
   1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
   2. The project board agreed a 'comms plan' at the last meeting. It set out that the project board should give departments early encouragement to start thinking about implementing the new academic year structure; namely, how they would organise the extra term-time week; whether, and the extent to which, they would make use of Lent Term 'Week 0' exams; and the scheduling of their executive programmes.
   3. The chair undertook some preparatory work before he wrote to departments about these points. A separate project is working on replacing the current timetabling system which will be introduced in 2015/16. The academic year project needed to work out with Timetables to determine how space would be allocated during the ‘extra’ week for structured learning activities, which, during the consultation phase, students stated they wanted (i.e. as opposed to simply a week off from teaching, they wanted skills-based workshops, research opportunities, guest lectures, etc.). The least difficult approach in the transitional year was simply to guarantee all course conveners the same rooms at the same times as their normal teaching activity; but the School needs to know whether individual course conveners will be using their rooms during the extra term-time week so that, if not, Timetables can release them for other users. Where the academic year project and the room-booking and timetabling project needed the same information (i.e. 2015/16 departmental teaching space requirements and use of their rooms during the ‘extra’ term-time week), the projects needed to be joined up so they weren’t asking for this information at different times and by different deadlines. So there was some work involved in identifying the overlaps of these projects, and agreeing how to align their work.
   4. After this consultation Mark Thomson put together a departmental communique on which several of the project board provided helpful feedback. This advised departments to begin feeding into their local planning arrangements details about implementing various strands of the new structure:
      1. 1) Organising the extra term-time week: this asked departments to think about e.g. whether they would allow individual course conveners to run structured learning activities on individual courses; or whether they would run a selection of activities at the departmental level; or whether no learning activities would be offered, and students would be allowed a break from teaching to consolidate learning. It is known that some departments do not plan to hold a ‘reading week’ (e.g. EC, MA). But where they are, we’ve asked to know about it by the beginning of the Lent Term, as part of departmental submissions to timetables about their teaching space requirements for 15/16. The Teaching and Learning Centre has also been in touch with departments about some of the structured learning activities they (i.e. the departments) might offer during the extra term-time week.
      2. 2) Lent Term ‘Week 0’ exams: this asked departments to give some early thought to this, and to express early declarations of interest in using the earlier exam period for any of its MT half-unit courses. Departments were asked to respond by 7 November. Student Services would then use the responses to model capacity/logistical requirements for the 2016 LT ‘Week 0’ exam period (alongside a modelling exercise looking at the ST 2016 exam period). The exercise would also work through some student progression/completion scenarios to help flag up where we need to make amendments to degree regulations. This work would also look to see if we can make any efficiencies in the exam-setting/scrutiny process. Will report by end of January 2015; with a view to making recommendations to Academic Board about degree regulation changes in March.
      3. 3) Timetabling of executive programmes: consideration needs to be given to the intense pressure on space, encouraging early contact with Timetables.
   5. Our communication plan sets out the need to keep students in the loop. Mark Thomson has prepared a short communique that will go out to students in the next week or two; and this will be followed up at regular intervals across the year. Our next note to departments will remind them of the need to discuss their plans for the new academic year with their SSLCs; and of the need to ensure the timely updating of their student-facing information (e.g. websites, handbooks, Moodle, etc.).
   6. One of the strands of work on the professional services side is looking at making our schedule of committee meetings fit under the new structure, in what will amount to the net loss of one week. Colleagues in the Governance, Planning and Legal Division (GLPD) are working on this, and the Chair has asked for an update and timeframe for their conclusions.
   7. The project board aims to feed into the decision about the timing of the Graduation Ceremonies in January 2015, after completion of the ‘ST 2016 exam’ modelling exercise. This will indicate the timing of exam marking and exam board meetings, which needs to be established before the School can determine whether it can bring the ceremonies forward, and by how much. (but see minute x below)
   8. The Chair has had meetings with Unison reps about the concerns of contract staff on ‘term time only’ contracts (catering and cleaning services). These concerns related to the net loss of one term time week; and about possible reduction in demands for their services during the extra term-time week. The Chair has given assurances, and is working with colleagues in Accommodation and Facilities Management to hold ‘town hall’ style meetings to answer questions from these staff, many of whom don’t have access to our electronic information sources.
   9. To date, most of the project’s planning energies have focussed on the academic side of the house. The project board now needs to put in place measures to align the business systems in our professional services areas with the new academic year structure, e.g. recruitment/admissions, financial support, registration; availability of services for ‘early arrivers’, like pre-sessional students (e.g. access to accommodation, catering and Library); we’ll also need to move Orientation forward by a week.
2. Project Board updates from members
   1. Learning Technology and Innovation: LTI is looking at offering development activities during week 6. It has started work on assessing business processes in parallel with this process. For example there is a need to be able to schedule lecture capture requirements in a timely manner prior to the start of the academic year. LTI is looking to develop an interface between the lecture capture database and the room booking and timetabling system to automate this process.
   2. Student’s Union: Have been looking at possibilities of offering welfare support during the extra term-time week. Queried whether joint degree students would get a full reading week. The Chair clarified that under the proposed scenarios not all students would get a full reading week, such as those taking EC or MA courses, whose departments would be teaching across all 11 weeks (e.g. lectures in Weeks 1-10 and class/seminars in Weeks 2-11). Some departments were also considering a ‘reading and reflection’ week which would be staggered across different weeks at course level depending on summative assessment deadlines.
   3. Department of Finance: That the department already ran an informal 11-week term and the restructuring of the academic year fitted with the model already in place. Several points were raised as being under discussion within the department:
      1. LT ‘week 0’ exams – the driving force to date had been concerns over the timing of the exam-setting/scrutiny process, and the processing of marks. As some full-unit FM courses were already taught intensively over one term, week 0 exams could be possible for core courses finishing at the end of MT, subject to the resource demands of running an additional exam-setting/scrutiny process.
      2. Pre-sessional course would need to start in late August under the new structure. This raised questions over staffing requirements, visas and students finishing internships which traditionally finished on 1st September.
      3. One option under discussion was using week 6 to run summative in-class assessments.
   4. Student Services: Various strands of work were underway in the SSC to prepare for the implementation of the new academic year structure:
      1. Once departments indicated their demand for LT ‘Week 0’ exams (by early November), work would begin on scenario mapping and the impact this would have on academic regulations, and on the need for an earlier round of sub-boards and School Boards etc. The indicative numbers from academic departments would help assess demand and model capacity/logistical requirements.
      2. A review of SSC services was in process and had identified work that would need to be duplicated at different points in the year or would need to be moved.
      3. Work was underway to assess the timing of the academic year project decisions and how these would need to feed into existing School decision making processes.
   5. Accommodation Services:
      1. A draft scheduled had been mapped out to align the new academic year structure against term dates and tenancy contracts currently offered. Contract lengths had been adjusted to accommodate the new structure, although some would remain unchanged due to contractual obligations already in place.
      2. Working on back office arrangements. With pre-sessional courses in late August there would be a very short turnaround period between results, issuing contracts and arrivals, plus Summer School and short lets over the summer. The question of sequencing required further attention from Accommodation staff.
      3. Budget planning was being looked at in parallel, but there was no intention to deviate from the current model.
   6. Summer School: Summer School:  Consideration had been given to how the current arrangements would need to be adjusted. SS currently runs an executive programme held in the NAB (the only suitable location at present), followed by a 6 week summer school programme and a 2 week Methods Summer Programme. The intention is to shift the entire 10 weeks forward by 2 weeks to the start of June. However the ability to do so depended largely on three things; Widening Participation, Graduation and School Open Days. Open Days currently take place in the middle of the ESS Graduation occurs during the second week of the first session of the Summer School and currently causes a two-day loss of SS teaching activity and WP has claims on teaching space during the  Summer School.  Moving the ceremonies or expanding WP or Open days would have a profound effect on SSEP activities.  (see minute 2.7)
   7. Conferences and Events: Confirmation that the Peacock Theatre had been secured to fit with the new term dates, for teaching and orientation in 15/16 and 16/17.
      1. Graduation – December 2015 and July 2016 graduation dates unchanged. 2016/17 graduation now had two sets of dates provisionally booked: one set that assumed the current arrangements would continue; and a second that assumed the ceremonies would be held a week earlier.
      2. Open Days – 15/16 PGT evening and Spring Open Days unchanged. The timing of the Summer Open Day was still to be confirmed. Different options are being considered, with weekend open days as one possibility.
   8. Estates: As stated previously, Estates would react to emerging developments during the project, but do not foresee any major concerns with proposals made to date. The main consideration from Estates is the centre building developments due to get underway in Summer 2015. There will be a three-year period during which the centre of the campus will be a building site and there will be a huge physical impact, especially when it comes to graduation and open days. Project members encouraged to attend the Centre Buildings Redevelopment Public Exhibition Monday 13 – Friday 17 October 2014 in the Three Tuns.
   9. Information Management and Technology: Work had begun on an impact analysis encouraging departments in IMT and across the School to check with customers about possible impact on IT systems resulting from the changes to the academic year. IMT was also seeking meetings with other institutions who have managed a similar change. A key requirement would be to ensure that routine and major IT works/maintenance could be worked into the new calendar from the outset.
   10. Library: Staff do not anticipate any problems with Library opening hours, although the question of term-time contracted staff such as shelvers had not yet been assessed. The Library is in discussion with TLC about how to participate in proposed development activities during the extra term-time week such as digital information skills training.
   11. Human Resources: A working group was being set up to start looking at the implications on staff contracts, committee work and promotion and review procedures. The Chair suggested that HR consults with GLPD about their review of School committee arrangements.
   12. Department of Law: Various issues were under discussion in the department:
       1. Resource implications were a concern. The department was already thinking through changes in response to recent NSS scores. Coping with the changes required for to the academic year restructuring would require support/resource from the School (such as TLC, LTI, Library).
       2. Human resource implications had been discussed. The timescale for dealing with part-time teacher contracts had been raised as the timing was already very late and the early start to term would exacerbate difficulties with this process. In addition, questions had been raised over sabbatical leave and teaching relief/buy-out. Some guidance would be appreciated on whether all three terms would be considered equal.
       3. LT ‘week 0’ exams – the possibility of an automated/online exam marks system had been posed, but no end product had emerged. Is this still being considered/developed? The issue of scrutiny procedures, marking and feedback were of concern. The department felt that they needed some more information about possible arrangements/requirements/timings in order to be able to decide on whether to hold week 0 exams or not. Some further guidance on alternative assessment options, such as take-home exams, would also be appreciated.
       4. Timescale could be problematic, with concerns over visas especially at UG level being an issue.
   13. Department of International Relations: The sequencing of departmental meetings, committees and SSLCs was a factor in the internal consultation in process. Discussion over whether to adopt a departmental or course level approach to the extra term-time week and LT exams was still to be resolved. Similar concerns as those detailed by Law had been raised over the scrutiny and marking process for the LT exams, plus the resource implications for the new structure including requirements to update course and programme materials, handbooks and website. Would also be interested to have a School view on the query raised over sabbatical leave entitlement.
   14. Timetables:
       1. There remained uncertainty over the space requirements for the proposed reading week, especially considering the growing number of requirements that may need to be worked into timetabling processes to include teaching/assessment and additional development activities run by TLC, LTI, Library etc. Data were required to properly assess the resource/space implications but it was not yet complete. This would be produced as part of the RATS project.
       2. The earlier start to term and teaching creates additional time pressures to get everything ready, with part-time teacher contracts being finalised highlighted again as a particular concern.
       3. Timetables had been provided with information on changes to available space resulting from the centre buildings redevelopment and other works. This was being worked into the review of the academic year restructure and the RATS project.
   15. RATS (Room Booking and Timetables project): The project team was working on the change to the timetabling system and how the new system would work in terms of data input, data capture and data use by Timetables, room booking and other systems.

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10 October 2014