**LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**ACADEMIC BOARD**

**13 May 2015**

**Academic year reform – Implementation report**

1. **Purpose of paper**
   1. At its meeting of 5 November 2014, the Academic Board considered a report from the Pro-Director Teaching and Learning, 'Education Strategy – 2014-15 Priorities' (AB/3). Among other things, that report stated that the Academic Board would receive an update on the implementation of the academic year reform in Summer Term 2015. This report is intended to satisfy that undertaking.
2. **Background**
   1. In June 2014 the Academic Board voted to amend the structure of the academic year (AB/33). The current 2014-15 academic session will be the last year to feature three ten-week terms. From 2015-16, Michaelmas and Lent Terms will be extended by one week each to 11 weeks, with the Summer Term reduced to seven weeks. The week before Lent Term 2016 starts – i.e. 'Lent Term Week 0' – will also feature examinations for some papers.
   2. The report that follows sets out the arrangements the School, academic departments and professional services have implemented in readiness for the new academic year structure. It also highlights ongoing work.
   3. This report is for information only. Those elements of the academic year implementation work that require Academic Board approval – e.g. regulatory changes – form the subject of a separate paper.
3. **2015-16 Academic Year: Important dates**
   1. Term dates:

Michaelmas Term 2015: Thursday 24 September – Friday 11 December

Lent Term 2016: Monday 11 January – Thursday 24 March

Summer Term 2016: Monday 25 April – Friday 10 June

* 1. Registration will begin on 18 September, with the bulk of programme registration taking place between 21-25 September during Welcome Week (which replaces Orientation). Michaelmas Term teaching will begin on 28 September. The MT6 reading week will begin on 2 November.
  2. LT0 exams will begin on 4 January and run until 8 January. The LT6 reading week will begin on 15 February. Lent Term will end on Thursday 24 March. The Easter closure day that would normally have been held that day will be moved to the following week (i.e. on Thursday 31 March).
  3. ST1 will be held open for revision teaching. The main exam period will start on 3 May and run to 10 June (i.e. ST2-ST7). The exam sub-boards will be held on 20-24 June, with the Graduate School Board of Examiners held on 29 June and the BA/BSc School Board of Examiners on 30 June. Graduation Ceremonies will take place on 13-15 July.

1. **Project Board** 
   1. A project board was established in summer 2014 to oversee the detailed implementation of the academic year reforms. Its membership was drawn from across the professional service areas and academic departments. Its main aim has been to co-ordinate those operations the School's various service areas will deliver under the new academic model.

* 1. The project board met four times between June-December 2014. It produced three highlight reports for the project executive. These included details of the project board's collaboration with the Rooms and Timetabling System project, necessary regulatory amendments, examination and scheduling logistics, planned departmental use of reading weeks and local operational impacts across professional services areas. The detailed highlight reports can be found on the [project website](http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/TQARO/AYR/home.aspx).
  2. One of the main tasks the project board commissioned was the Professional Services Tasks calendar. Offices across the central professional service areas have input their IMT-dependent tasks into a central calendar on SharePoint. This calendar will help IMT to ensure that the School's business systems are recalibrated to the timings of the new academic year. It will also create a valuable resource that documents in a single place all professional services procedures. This work is ongoing and will be completed by the end of ST.
  3. The project board has overseen communication with academic departments (in the form of 'communiques'). Highlights have included details about the co-ordination of reading weeks, and possible learning activities for those weeks; course assessment via LT0 exams; and the development of departmental Assessment and Feedback Statements. The project board has also sent communications to students at the start of MT and ST, about the changes to the academic year generally and about courses that will be examined in LT0.
  4. The project board will monitor implementation of the new academic year across 2015-16, and put an ‘issues and proposals’ report to the Academic Board in ST 2016, as necessary.

1. **Regulations**
   1. A small working group of academic office holders has reviewed a revised set of degree and related regulations. Registry proposed these revisions to accommodate various School initiatives (e.g. the new academic year structure and the four-year PPE degree); and also to make the regulations in question more efficient and to address redundancies. In the event, few regulatory changes arose directly from the revised academic year structure, and were mainly limited to clarifying when students could re-sit assessments in light of the introduction of LT0 exams, e.g. ‘if a student is required to re-sit an examination or defers an attempt at an examination, the next opportunity will normally be in the next academic year during the equivalent examination period as the original failed or deferred attempt’.   
        
      *NB. At the time of writing this draft of the report for DHF, the working group had not yet finalised its review of the Registry team’s initial proposals. It would complete its work w/b 20 April. The VCAB would then review the group’s final version of the regulatory amendments, with a view to exercising the powers the Academic Board delegated to him at its February 2015 meeting to approve them on its behalf. A summary of those revisions would then be put to the Board’s meeting on 13 May.*
   2. The timing for the appointment and re-appointment of external examiners will need to be recalibrated to ensure that externals are in place in good time to participate in the scrutiny of LT0 exam papers. Colleagues in Registry have this in hand.
2. **Reading week** 
   1. AB/33 stated that the extra MT and LT weeks of the new academic year could be used for a reading or formative assessment week, for a revision week in WK11 (i.e. for LT0 exams) or for other departmentally determined learning support activities. The only requirement was that where departments decided to hold a reading week, it was to be held in WK6.
   2. Known departmental intentions for use of the extra term-time week vary, as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Approach | Details | Departments |
| Pure reading weeks | Some departments plan to hold department-wide reading weeks, with no scheduled activities. This approach will preserve space in the middle of the term for students to consolidate their learning and to prepare assignments. | Anthropology, Gender, Methodology |
| Mixed reading weeks | Some departments plan to hold department-wide reading weeks, but have permitted programme directors and individual course conveners to determine how best to make use of the time. Some courses (i.e. within the same dept) plan to offer a pure reading week, while others will hold essay-writing and advice sessions; research methods and design workshops; skill development training; film viewings; applied case studies; field trips, to name but some of the additional learning activities that departments have reported. | International History, International Relations, Management, Geography and Environment, Government, Sociology |
| Formal teaching + mixed reading weeks | Some departments have left both the decision about whether to hold a reading week and what to do during it to individual course conveners. Some courses (i.e. within the same dept) will feature teaching across all 11 weeks (e.g. lectures in WK1-10; classes/seminars in WK2-11; or formal teaching in WK1-10 and revision teaching in WK11); while other courses will feature WK6 reading weeks, of which some will host additional learning activities. | Accounting, Statistics |
| Formal teaching | Some departments have confirmed that they will teach across all 11 weeks of term in all courses (e.g. lectures in WK1-10, classes/seminars in WK2-11; or formal teaching in WK1-10 and revision teaching in WK11). | Economics, Mathematics,  Language Centre |

* 1. It is evident that intellectually justified variations of reading week practices are emerging across departments. This is fine. But departments will need to communicate clearly with their students about whether they expect them to be present during WK6 at the individual course level; and about the nature of WK6 contact between the department and its students (e.g. compulsory formal teaching or optional additional learning activities; and, in the case of pure reading weeks, the level of staff presence students can expect, e.g. office hours). Course-level reading week information should be published on departmental websites and in student handbooks. Individual Moodle pages should include WK6 information about the course in question.
  2. Some departments have not yet indicated their intentions for WK6, and some of the departments listed above have not yet provided course-level details. As a result, their WK6 space requirements are unknown. This makes it difficult for Timetables to allocate space during this week to other School users (e.g. to Recruitment for Graduate Open Evenings, to the Summer School for an additional Executive stream, etc). Obtaining outstanding course-level information from departments about their plans for WK6 will be the main priority of the remaining AYR implementation work for ST 2015.

1. **LT0 2016 exams** 
   1. The 2016 Lent Term ‘Week 0’ (LT0) exam period will take place on 4-8 January. Thirty-six courses will be examined at this time. These will mainly comprise final exams for MT half-unit courses, though ‘mid-term’ exams for 11 full-unit courses will also be held during this time.
   2. The BA/BSc and Graduate School Boards of Examiners recently agreed that results from LT0 exams would remain provisional until ratified in the summer (for 9- and 10-month MSc and BA/BSc papers), and in the autumn (for 12-month MSc papers). It would represent good practice to provide provisional results and feedback to students during LT; and some departments that will be holding LT0 exams intend to do so. However, School policy does not compel departments to provide provisional results or feedback on students’ LT0 exam performance.
   3. In terms of future growth, Economics plans to introduce LT0 exams for its second year UG papers in 2016-17, and for its third year UG papers in 2017-18; and incrementally for its PGT papers, until all EC papers feature a LT0 exam. These additions will come close to exhausting the School’s capacity to host LT0 exams. If the School plans to add additional LT0 exams in the future (i.e. in addition to the phased growth of EC papers), it will need to consider running exams at the weekend, hiring external exam venues, encouraging departments to consider alternative exam modes, or some combination thereof. It will also need to consider these options in those years when LT0 is less than five full working days (e.g. in 2016-17 and 2017-18).
2. **ST 2016 exams and Graduation Ceremonies**
   1. ST1 will be kept open for revision teaching, with exams beginning in ST2 and running to the end of ST7. In modelling the ST 2016 exam period, Registry has aimed to maintain the current sequencing of examinations as far as possible, e.g. beginning with 9-month MSc programmes, then moving into Language and LLB exams, then into the main diet of undergraduate exams, and finally into 12-month MSc exams.
   2. Undergraduate examination sub-board meetings will be held between 20-24 June. The GSBE meeting to ratify all 9- and 10-month MSc degree results will be held on 29 June. The SBE meeting will be held on 30 June. Presentation Ceremonies will be held on 13-15 July.
   3. The overall mark processing exercise will be completed a week earlier than under current arrangements, although the timing of the Graduation Ceremonies will remain the same. Examiners will also have some additional marking time. The rationale for increasing the time between the release of results to students and the date of the ceremonies is two-fold:
3. The student experience suffers under the current arrangements. Results cannot be released to students until the day before the ceremonies. This creates communication problems, i.e. in ensuring that all students who have not satisfied the requirements for their degrees know this before they attend their ceremony. It is also problematic when students have arranged for family from overseas to attend when, in the event, they have not completed.
4. The current mark processing arrangements Registry oversees are currently running in the ‘red zone’. The time pressure on Registry and departmental staff for returning and processing marks mean that mistakes can happen.
5. **Non-standard teaching provision** 
   1. The Executive Summer School has declared an interest in running an additional stream during MT6 2016. This initiative remains on hold until the School is clearer about departmental plans for MT6 at the individual course-level (see paragraph 6.4).
   2. Scheduling of executive programme teaching is currently being undertaken by Timetables, which confirms it has all of the information it needs from programme directors to proceed.
6. **Other updates**
   1. Colleagues in the Governance, Legal and Policy Division (GLPD) are mindful of maintaining the sequence of academic committee business; and will be making necessary amendments to the 2015-16 schedule of meetings. Attendance and quorums will be monitored across next year’s cycle of committee meetings, with a view to further developing the schedule as necessary.
   2. Residences have amended student contracts to reflect the new academic year structure and updated print and digital publications.
7. **Next steps for academic departments**
   1. Departments to establish course-level plans for WK6, e.g. to determine whether courses will feature formal teaching in WK6, or a reading week; and if the latter, whether any learning activities will be scheduled. MTT to contact Departmental Managers w/b 27 April with guidance and brief template (based on the reading week information submitted by the Statistics Department).
   2. Departmental course conveners to engage with the annual course guide review process to ensure course guides contain any relevant new information arising from the revised academic year structure, e.g. any course-specific reading week activities already planned, revised assessment formats or deadlines. Deadline for revised course guide submission via CAPIS is 15 May.
   3. Departments to ensure their student-facing information is up-to-date, e.g. websites, student handbooks, Moodle pages, and platforms used for post-offer contact information. Departments will need to be clear about course-level WK6 plans and about any LT0 exam arrangements. Deadlines for producing this information should follow local publication deadlines for updating 2015-16 websites, student handbooks, etc.
8. **Questions**
   1. Colleagues with questions about the new academic year, or about any aspect of its implementation, are welcome to contact Mark Thomson ([m.t.thomson@lse.ac.uk](mailto:m.t.thomson@lse.ac.uk), ext 6114).

Professor Paul Kelly

Mark Thomson

April 2015