**Implementing the academic year reforms**

**To: HoDs, Deputy HoDs, Chairs of Departmental Teaching Committees, Departmental Managers**

The purpose of this note is to bring you up to speed with developments in the academic year reform project; and to highlight three specific tasks for departments.  As a reminder about how the academic year will be reformed, please see [here](http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/TQARO/AYR/home.aspx).

The project board overseeing implementation has met twice during the summer.  It has developed a set of tasks that will ensure the new academic year structure is implemented in time for the 2015/16 session.  The action plan and related documents can be found at the link above.  Please check this page regularly for updates on progress.

There are three specific tasks for departments, as follows:

1. **Week 6 ‘reading weeks’**

Background

* 1. The Michaelmas and Lent Terms will each be extended by one week to 11 weeks in 2015/16.  Week 6 has been designated as a ‘reading week’ in each term. Use of this extra term-time week will be at the discretion of departments, and there is no expectation that it be used as an additional teaching week. Courses will continue to be taught over 10 and 20 weeks. The extra term-time week may be used to allow students to consolidate learning, complete formative/summative assessment, and (if the department decides to run them) participate in Week 6 departmental learning activities, e.g. writing or dissertation workshops, ‘extra example’ sessions, guest lectures, etc.
  2. The Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) will provide guidance and support to departments as they consider how to organise the extra term-time week.  This could include reviewing the design of courses and programmes in light of the changing academic year, looking at ideas for how departments might use these extra weeks within the context of a course delivery review.  Or TLC could provide guidance on additional learning activities that departments might run to supplement their existing approach to teaching delivery.  How departments make use of these weeks remains optional (within the constraints set out below), and might vary across a department’s course portfolio depending on individual course conveners.
  3. Faculty are normally expected to maintain office hours during the extra term-time week. Departments are invited to consider how this might work in practice.

For decision

* 1. Departments are asked to plan in Michaelmas Term 2014 how they will organise the extra term-time week in Week 6 (i.e. in both Michaelmas and Lent Terms from 2015/16). The simplest approach would be to hold a ‘reading week only’ in Week 6 across all departmental courses, e.g. allow students to consolidate learning, to attend office hours, and to complete formative/summative assessment.
  2. Alternatively, a department could – in addition to the above – host learning activities for its students. These could be run at the departmental and/or individual course level. Hosting learning activities will have space requirements. Week 6 room availability will be the same as a department’s standard teaching room allocation, i.e. course conveners who wish to run a learning activity during Week 6 will have the same rooms available on the same days/times for their courses as they do during the main teaching weeks.
  3. Departments will be asked to begin submitting their 2015/16 teaching space requirements to Timetables in January 2015. Departments should indicate whether they plan to use their allocated teaching space during Week 6 to host learning activities.
  4. Any departments/course conveners planning Week 6 learning activities that have space needs that differ to their standard teaching allocation may put special requests to Timetables. Timetables will advise departments how to do so later in Michaelmas Term 2014.
  5. Departments are therefore asked to plan how they will organise the extra term-time week according to the timeline below. Departments should set out their organisation of Week 6 ‘reading weeks’ clearly to students, using a variety of media, e.g. websites, handbooks, course handouts, Moodle, etc.

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| 2 October 2014 | TLC begins co-ordination with departments, re: to scope possibilities for learning activities during Week 6 reading week |
| 3 November 2014 | Timetables advises departments on how to make ‘non-standard’ Week 6 room requests |
| 12 January 2015 | Departments begin submitting to Timetables their 2015/16 teaching space requirements, including confirmation about whether they will use their rooms to host learning activities in Week 6 |

1. **Executive programme scheduling**
   1. Timetables schedule executive programmes’ intensive teaching blocks separately from the main teaching timetable. The reform of the teaching year means that some executive programme teaching blocks will need to move from their current position in the calendar. Any Executive Programme Director who has not yet been in touch with Timetables about their 2015/16 teaching schedule should do so at their earliest convenience.
2. **Lent Term ‘Week 0’ exam period**

Background

* 1. A new, earlier exam period will be held in Lent Term ‘Week 0’ for Michaelmas Term half-units. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no requirement for departments to hold exams in Lent Term ‘Week 0’ – the decision to do so is down to individual departments and course conveners, subject to capacity.
  2. In Michaelmas Term 2014, the central exams office in Student Services will model the new exam period. This exercise will help determine capacity and the impact of earlier exams sittings on different student profiles.

For decision

* 1. Conveners of half-unit courses normally held in Michaelmas Term are asked to declare their interest in holding the exam in the Lent Term ‘Week 0’ exam period (i.e. for the first time in January 2016). This information will form the basis of the exams office’s modelling exercise.
  2. A declaration of interest to make use of the Lent Term ‘Week 0’ exam period does not at this stage bind course conveners to holding their exams in the early exam period. The exams office will arrange binding confirmation in Summer Term 2015. It will produce the Lent Term 2016 ‘Week 0’ exam schedule in Michaelmas Term 2015.
  3. Departments should declare their interest in holding Lent Term ‘Week 0’ exams to Mark Thomson ([m.t.thomson@lse.ac.uk](mailto:m.t.thomson@lse.ac.uk)) by **7 November 2014**.

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| 7 November 2014 | Departments declare early interest in holding MT 2015 half-unit exams in LT 2016 ‘Week 0’ exam period |
| 23 January 2015 | Student Services finalise LT 2016 ‘Week 0’ exam modelling exercise; determine capacity/logistical requirements, and required amendments to degree regulations; outcomes conveyed to departments |
| Summer Term 2015 | Departments to confirm half-unit exams to be scheduled in LT 2016 ‘Week 0’ exam period; required degree regulation amendments to committee |
| Michaelmas Term 2015 | LT 2016 ‘Week 0’ exam timetable finalised |
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I am happy to take any questions you have about these tasks, or about any other aspect of the new academic year structure and its implementation. The expectation is that the issues above will be discussed at departmental teaching committees, and with the department as a whole. Departments may also wish to consult with students via Staff:Student Liaison Committee meetings. The Heads of Departments Forum will also consider matters relating to preparing for the new academic year structure, so as to share different approaches and ideas.

Transforming the School’s teaching year in this way is a major undertaking. Delivering it successfully will be down to the hard work of departments and professional services. I am very grateful for project board members’ proactive approach so far, and for the supportive approach many departments have already demonstrated.

All best,  
  
MTT

September 2014