**LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**ACADEMIC BOARD**

**11 June 2014**

**Proposal to restructure the academic year**

1. **Purpose of paper**
   1. To invite Academic Board members to endorse a revised academic year model of two 11-week teaching terms followed by a 7-week exam period for Council to approve.
2. **Drivers for change**

2.1 The School faces three major challenges that are the primary drivers for reconsidering the structure of the teaching year.

2.2 Improving Student Satisfaction and Teaching Quality. Our dependence upon fee income requires us to be especially sensitive to the quality of teaching and learning as perceived by high-fee paying students. Even HEU UGs perceive themselves as paying high fees. Despite our dependence upon high quality taught programmes to fund all other core School activities the NSS results show that student satisfaction is only average amongst Russell Group universities. The School’s 2013 overall satisfaction rating of 88% left us joint 12th amongst Russell Group peers, an improvement from 2012 when we were fourth from the bottom. The School’s 2013 scores in the ‘Teaching’ and ‘Personal Development’ categories were worst in the Russell Group. The 2013 internal PGT mock NSS has also shown that many MSc programmes fail to attract high satisfaction scores and often do not deliver the quality student experience that they need to provide if they are to be sustainable in the long term. Some modest structural changes such as end-of-session assessment (where appropriate) would be very popular amongst PGT students, whereas mid-session reading/assessment weeks would be popular amongst UGs. These changes can both enhance the learning experience, indicate a willingness to address students’ concerns and enhance student satisfaction. Changing the structure of the year might also encourage departments to think of other ways to vary or enhance students’ learning experiences.

2.3 Diversifying our Portfolio. The School has sought to diversify its teaching portfolio with the development of Summer Schools and Executive Education through modular programmes. As these have expanded other universities have sought to compete for our students – KCL has a competitor London Summer School and Warwick University has just launched a competitor Economics Summer School (at higher fees). The late end to our current Summer Term has a considerable impact on our ability to recruit Summer School students. Moving the start date forward by up to three weeks would ensure our position and ability to withstand rising competition. It would also open up the possibility of a third Summer School session that could expand the opportunities for departments that are not currently represented in the summer programme. A second area of diversification includes partnerships within our existing year-long programmes. HoDs report that we could do more by way of mobility and partnership along the lines of some Management Department programmes if we had a School year structure that could map more closely onto that of Sciences Po, Columbia or other partner institutions. The current structure of our teaching year places significant limits on those departments that need to innovate if their programmes are to remain competitive. The status quo has a significant opportunity cost and one that could increase as local and international competition grows for our students.

2.4 Accommodating Teaching in a Research Intensive University. Some faculty regard a change to the teaching year as a threat to research time. However, one of the major drivers for rethinking the current model is to allow for better organisation of research time within the teaching year by giving HoDs greater flexibility in the organisation of a department's teaching offer to the advantage of staff.

1. **Consultation: background** 
   1. At its 16 October 2013 meeting, the Academic Board considered a green paper about possible reforms to the teaching year. The Board asked the School to consult stakeholders, with a view to bringing a proposed model back to the Board in Summer Term 2014.
   2. Consultation was held with staff and students across Michaelmas and Lent Terms. A consultation email address received 42 individual responses. TQARO circulated further consultation documents to departments at the start of Lent Term. Eighteen departments responded, some of which included details of SSLC discussions (TQARO reviewed separately those SSLC minutes that were available at the time of writing up the proposals).
   3. TQARO also conducted a 'straw poll' of student opinion at the end of February. 2735 students responded – a response rate of 26%.
   4. Separately, the Student’s Union conducted a series of focus groups, resulting in a report setting out the views of the student body on the proposals: ‘Restructuring [the] School Year: Report and Recommendations’.
   5. Two meetings of an Academic Unit Managers working group were held to ensure the views of departmental professional services staff were reflected in the proposals.
   6. The Pro-Director (Teaching and Learning) and the Head of TQARO held separate meetings with various service leaders across Michaelmas and Lent Terms.
   7. The proposals were discussed at meetings of the Director’s Management Team, the Academic Planning and Resources Committee and the Departmental Heads’ Forum, undergoing some fine-tuning along the way.
   8. The ‘major academic initiative’ report prepared for these meetings is available for Academic Board members to access on the ‘Papers and other documents’ section of the [Academic Board webpage](http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/governanceAndCommittees/committeesAndWorkingGroups/academicBoard/Home.aspx). It contains the detailed consultation outcomes.
2. **Proposal for a restructured academic year – ’11,11,7’**
   1. The proposal to revise the academic year is not meant to suggest that the current model somehow 'short-changes' students. Instead it explores whether by delivering existing volumes of academic content across slightly longer teaching terms the School might enable more effective student learning. On the basis of the consultation responses, and in light of student input, the Academic Board is asked to approve a revised academic year structure that sees Michaelmas and Lent Terms extended by one week each to 11 weeks, followed by a seven-week exam period. The details are as follows:
3. Michaelmas Term will begin one week earlier than under current arrangements (i.e. teaching will commence one week earlier, with registration and Orientation held from the preceding Thursday in MT ‘Week 0’);
4. Michaelmas Term will run for 11 weeks, and end at the same time as under current arrangements. Use of the extra term-time week will be at the discretion of departments, and there is no requirement that it be used as an additional ‘teaching’ week. Half-unit courses will continue to be delivered over 10 weeks, full-units over 20. The extra term-time week may be used for a reading or formative assessment week, for a revision week in Week 11 (i.e. for post-Christmas MT half-unit exams) or for other departmentally determined learning support activities. The only requirement is that where departments choose to hold a reading week, it must be held in Week 6.
5. A post-Christmas exam period will be held in Lent Term ‘Week 0’ for MT half-units (i.e. the same week in which the LSE100 exam is currently sat), subject to capacity. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no requirement to hold MT half-unit exams in LT Week 0 – the decision to hold exams in this period will be down to individual departments and course leaders, subject to capacity.
6. Lent Term will start at the same time as under the current year, but will last one week longer. Like the MT, it will run for 11 weeks, with the extra term-time week again deployed according to individual departmental discretion. Formal teaching will finish after the end of Week 11, which under current arrangements would be the end of the first week of the Easter break.
7. Summer Term will start at the same time as under the current year and run for seven weeks. The first week will be reserved for revision teaching, with exams held in the remaining six weeks. Given that LT will be one week longer, the Easter break will be reduced by one week (to four weeks) for those course leaders who run revision sessions, but will effectively remain at five weeks for those who do not.
8. The formal academic year will end three weeks earlier than under current arrangements.
9. Annex A plots the proposed ’11,11,7’ academic year against the current ’10,10,10’ version.
   1. The degree of discretion afforded to departments under these proposals is worth emphasising. It will be for individual departments to decide how to use the extra term-time week; there is no requirement to use it as an additional ‘teaching’ week; and module volumes will remain at current levels of 10 weeks for half-units and 20 weeks for full-units. There is also no requirement to hold MT half-unit exams in the LT ‘Week 0’ exam period.
   2. The School will need to take care in describing its academic year under the proposed model, and in setting out the times at which students will be required to be in attendance. This will be a matter of business for the project board described below in section 6.
10. **Alternative models considered**
    1. The initial consultation included several possible models for a revised teaching year, arising from the proposals set out in the green paper’s annex. These included a full semester system (e.g. 2 x 15-week semesters) and a derivative thereof, i.e. 2 x 12-week teaching terms followed by a six-week exam period. Full semesterisation was rejected by early consultation respondents on the basis of transition costs, including the significant curriculum reform required to make the School’s portfolio of programmes and courses ‘fit’ the new structure. Respondents also expressed concerns about the excessive curtailment of Christmas and Easter breaks, and the impact this could have on the School’s research standing.
    2. Departments were therefore asked to comment on the ’12,12,6’ model during the second stage of the consultation at the beginning of January. Again, this model was largely rejected on the basis of preserving ‘in year’ research time, and on the need to ensure adequate time in Summer Term for dissertation support. The final ’11,11,7’ proposal emerged out of discussions with departments as a compromise solution.
11. **Next steps**
    1. If the Board approves the proposals for a revised teaching year structure, a project board will be convened to oversee detailed implementation. Its membership will be drawn from service areas across the School. It will also include several Departmental and Research Centre Managers.
    2. Its role will be to recalibrate operations the School’s various service areas deliver under the new academic year model, guided by departmental and student needs. It will look in detail at the various services that underpin the School’s core business, identify interdependencies, and look at how and when they are delivered under the revised academic year structure. In doing so it will prioritise those areas for which it needs higher-level approval to change. It will also need to identify any resources needed to enable the transition to the new structure, though these are expected to be minimal.
    3. The project board will carry out its work in summer 2014, and across the 2014/15 academic year. Current plans are to implement the first year of the new academic structure in 2015/16, though determining the feasibility of achieving this target will be part of the project board’s remit.
    4. The project board will report regularly to the Pro-Director (Teaching and Learning), and to the School’s committee structure as necessary.
12. **Decision**
    1. Academic Board members are asked to endorse the reforms to the academic year set out in section 4, above; namely, that the School restructure its academic year into two teaching terms of 11 weeks, followed by a seven-week exam period.

Professor Paul Kelly

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