

A Decade Supporting Economics Teaching

Welcome to this 10th Anniversary edition of the Economics Network Newsletter. The Economics Network began life in September 1999, with the setting up of the national Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN). Then known as 'Economics LTSN', we were, and still are, one of 24 subject centres covering all the subjects taught in UK higher education. We are now part of the Higher Education Academy.

Over the past 10 years, the Economics Network has provided a whole range of services to Economics lecturers. These are valued by the economics HE community and the take-up of them is high. The support that we can offer to lecturers and departments is becoming ever more important as higher education faces reduced levels of funding and as lecturers are faced with increased class sizes, increased marking loads and greater accountability to students and HE managers.

The services that we offer include:

- **Websites for staff, students and school leavers.** economicsnetwork.ac.uk has resources to make your teaching easier and more effective, information on projects, funding and awards, and specialist sections for all the sub discipline areas. www.studyingeconomics.ac.uk for economics undergraduates and www.whystudyeconomics.ac.uk for school students thinking of studying economics at university.
- **Support for departments.** We run many departmental

workshops; we run student focus groups to identify issues and solutions and then provide confidential feedback to the department; we have departmental contacts in each department who provide information to the department about our activities and services and also feed back to us about current issues; we conduct lecturer, student, alumni and employer surveys and provide detailed analysis of their results, with confidential reports to departments.

- **Recognising effective teaching.** We offer annual awards to lecturers in three categories and we invite lecturers to submit case studies to us on their experiences of teaching/learning innovations. We have over 100 such cases on our website.
- **Funding small-scale projects.** We have funded many projects over the years, many of which have had significant impact on teaching.
- **Support for new lecturers.** We run residential workshops for new lecturers (at least once per year) and one-day workshops for graduate teaching assistants in various parts of the country. These have proved very popular, both with those attending and also with their departments.
- **Publishing research** into Economics Education in our peer-reviewed journal, the International Review of Economics Education. IREE now has a similar citation impact to the long-established Journal of Economic Education.

- **Holding a biennial international conference:** Developments in Economics Education (DEE). This attracts delegates from around the world and has developed a thriving community.

You will see examples of some of these in this Newsletter and some of the reactions of colleagues. A lot of work over the past 10 years has gone into developing our services, much of it from colleagues across the country who have shared their ideas and resources and have run events for us.

The celebrations of 10 years, however, are dampened by severe threats hanging over us. The Higher Education Academy is facing cuts of 30 per cent by 2012/13 and these are already being phased in, with a cut of 15 per cent this coming academic year. In response, the Academy is considering various ways of restructuring its provision. This could well see the end of the Economics Network and the other subject centres.

We hope that the support from our various communities and from universities will be enough to save the subject centres – but at present, our future is highly uncertain and under considerable threat.



John Sloman
Director

Learning and Teaching in Economics

A departmental perspective

We work with many departments to help identify key learning and teaching issues and offer relevant support and funding. The economics department at Coventry University has been particularly active in the using Threshold Concepts, and Games and Simulations in undergraduate economics courses.

Bhagesh Sachania caught up with colleagues and students in the department who kindly shared their experiences of working with the Economics Network and how it has impacted on their teaching and learning.

Jon

Jon Guest
Senior Lecturer in
Economics



Before my involvement with the economics network I never looked at the method of teaching delivery only the content. Working with the network made me reflect about my existing teaching practice and how it could be improved: Is this effective? Do I need to mix it up? How can it be improved?

The DEE conferences were a really good starting point and gave me some useful ideas about what I could introduce to the classroom. Charlie Holt's keynote presentation at the 2005 DEE Conference was a particular highlight. It gave me the self confidence to try new methods and develop other small scale teaching innovations especially in classroom games and experiments.

Since then I've been involved in various events, projects and activities with the network. I was also awarded the Student Nominated Teaching prize in 2005. My experience with the subject centre has always been very positive. The staffs are very supportive and there's a huge range of resources available to economics lecturers.

In fact, I think it's more vital than ever for the network to exist. There are some massive funding changes ahead for the whole HE sector. We're under increasing pressure to teach more students but with an ever diminishing unit of resource so there is a need to innovate and develop low cost methods of delivery. Teaching staff will need to be supported because the pressures are going to be immense. In my view this support has always been more effective when it's delivered from a subject specific rather than an institutional or generic point of view.

Mike

Mike Walsh – Senior Lecturer in Economics

My first involvement with the Economics Network was at the DEE Conference. It was a great opportunity to meet other like minded colleagues such as Cillian Ryan [University of Birmingham] and it also gave me an chance to collaborate with them on various projects.



The threshold concepts project has also been very useful. Using games to demonstrate economics threshold concepts has made the teaching (and learning) more engaging.

Peri

Peri Yavash
Principal Lecturer in
Economics



The DEE conference has been an extremely valuable resource. I've learnt so much through talking to other people and finding out what they're doing.

I've always found the Economics subject centre very friendly and approachable. They provide economics lecturers with several networks of opportunity and advice. This is definitely a key strength. I can talk to other economists about learning and teaching issues at a subject level rather than a generic level. This is much more meaningful and useful to me and my teaching.

“In fact, I think it's more vital than ever for the network to exist.”

"I've always found the Economics subject centre very friendly and approachable."



Petya

Undergraduate

I really enjoy playing the games. They're simple but fun! You actually learn a lot of economics through interaction and discussion. The seminar sessions often require giving a presentation. This has really boosted my confidence and helped me develop my presentation skills.

I would like to pursue a career in management consultancy and I've already spoken to some potential employers. I know my economics degree is going to be an advantage.



Coll

Undergraduate

One of the most interesting and useful things about studying here is that we're always playing a lot of economics games. This has given me a really good insight into behavioural economics.

There's a lot of advice and help from staff members – it's also a very open and supportive environment to learn in. I feel I can talk to Mike (Walsh) about the economics issues surrounding any topic or newsworthy item.

Matt

Undergraduate

It's a very topical subject. You can relate economics to almost any issue: terrorism, the environment, cybercrime. I find I'm always trying to apply what I've learnt to what's going on around me. I'm also beginning to understand how some of the economics subjects/topics relate to each other. This wasn't the case at A-level so I'm getting a much deeper understanding of economics on my degree course.



Fillip

Undergraduate

Economics is a much broader social science and interfaces with lots of other subjects like maths, geography and even physics! I like finding and exploring these links.

Jon (Guest) teaches us in a way that is really challenging. You have to participate in a whole range of 'messy' games. But when you reflect on your experience and discuss it in the seminars you can focus on key areas and begin to understand how they might apply to other people and real life.

I also liked the fact that Peri (Yavash) introduced us to some more challenging macro topics in the first year. This gave me an idea of what to expect in my second year.



Charlotte

Undergraduate

I like playing the economics games. You often go into them blind. You feel the incentives before you have to analyse them. The group work is also enjoyable. The students really try to support each other.

I recently attended an open day at the GES. It was really interesting to see all the different government departments that use economists. Andy Ross gave a talk and used the analogy of a donut to explain some of the issues about the credit crunch which was different but informative. It made me realise that it's an important skill to be able to apply economics to a particular problem and then explain it to someone who might not have any specialised economics knowledge. Careerwise - I definitely want to put my economics degree to use in the public sector.



Workshops and other events

Since 2000 the Economics Network has held over 200 events involving over 2000 participants. One key measure of success has been the high number of requests for further workshops from departments having appreciated previous ones.

"Its impact has been tremendously positive on my teaching. It has brought about a paradigm shift in my teaching as well as learning. Particularly, it provided me insights

on the importance of student-centered learning against the conventional passive learning. It has significantly altered my ways of delivery."

Lecturer, follow-up feedback 2009.

"I think many academics are put off exploring new technologies in their teaching by the perception that doing so is difficult and time-consuming, involving learning lots of

complex new things; this was certainly true for me with podcasting until Bhagesh Sachania showed me how easy it in fact was when he ran a session on this at the Welsh Economics Colloquium earlier in the year."

Lecturer, University of Swansea, Sept 2007, now using podcasting in his teaching.



Delegates engaged in a classroom experiments activity

Supporting New Lecturers and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

A total of 21 GTA and New Lecturer workshops have been run (most of them in the past 3 years) with 378 participants.

The demand for these workshops has grown significantly and there has been enthusiastic support from Heads of Department. Support from Heads of Department as well as the

Royal Economic Society and the Scottish Economic Society who have both sponsored these events for the last few years.

...Economics Network organises workshops, which are aimed at lecturers of economics. This is somewhat rare. Taking part in this workshop enabled me to further develop my inclination towards making my teaching of economics more effective and find out the ways technology can underpin this.

Dr Vitalia Kinakh
The Manchester College

There is something very refreshing about the New Lecturers Workshop, and partly that is because it isn't just for new lecturers. This is also a chance to meet other young (careerwise) economists, a place to interact outside of the usual conference settings and a good way to network across the country. On top of that, it's free for the



attendee, it's free for the department and hopefully it will be good for my students. That seems like a win-win situation to me.

Benjamin Mitra-Khan
Formerly at City University London

"The best thing about this workshop is that it provides an opportunity for all the GTAs to get together and talk about how their teaching is going, share issues and solutions, etc."

Graduate Teaching Assistant
External Evaluator's report 2008

Conference

Developments in Economics Education

The Economics Network has held a biennial two-day conference since 2001. It consistently attracts some 120 delegates and offers a range of sessions and workshops and high profile keynotes.



"The DEE conference has been an extremely valuable resource. I've learnt so much through talking to other people and finding out what they're doing."

Peri Yavash, Coventry University



For further information see:
www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/dee2009/
<http://dee09.wordpress.com/>

Journals

The Network publishes two peer-reviewed journals, the International Review of Economics Education (IREE) and Computers in Higher Education Economic Review (CHEER). Both journals are available both electronically and in a paper version.

Numbers of accesses to the two journals on our website are particularly high, for example 227,897 successful page accesses for CHEER during 2008/9, and 117,346 for IREE.

"The IREE articles have helped me change the content of the macro-economics module which I teach."

Lecturer, Lecturers' survey 2009

"I tried out my first 'new' material on my first year ICT & Study Skills for Business and Economics module last Friday, using an idea that I'd originally come across in a paper ... in the latest issue of the International Review of Economics Education".

Lecturer, Case study November 2007

A citation-based appraisal of three pedagogic journals in the area of economics, *Journal of Economic Education (JEE)* and *Journal of Economics and Finance Education (JEFE)* and the Economics Network's *International Review of Economics Education (IREE)* found that IREE had a similar citation impact as JEE and 'both the JEE and the IREE have had a significantly greater impact than the JEFE':

www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/iree/v7n1/mixon.pdf

Websites

The Network has three comprehensive websites: the main Economics Network site, **Why Study Economics?** (for prospective students) and **Studying Economics** (for undergraduates).

The Network's main site currently receives around two and a half million hits per year, including for its two peer-reviewed journals. The Network's student-focused sites attract an additional half million hits per year.

If 'Economics' is searched in google.co.uk, the Economics Network site comes second in the list. If 'Economics learning teaching' is searched, the site comes first in both google.co.uk and google.com.

Examples of resources/online services:

- Handbook for Economics Lecturers in 19 chapters
- External examiners' database with 66 individuals registered
- 147 Economics learning and teaching case studies submitted by lecturers;
- Economics Book catalogue with more than 7,000 economics text books categorised by subject
- Economics Question Bank with over 1,300 essay questions, multi-choice questions and problem sets.

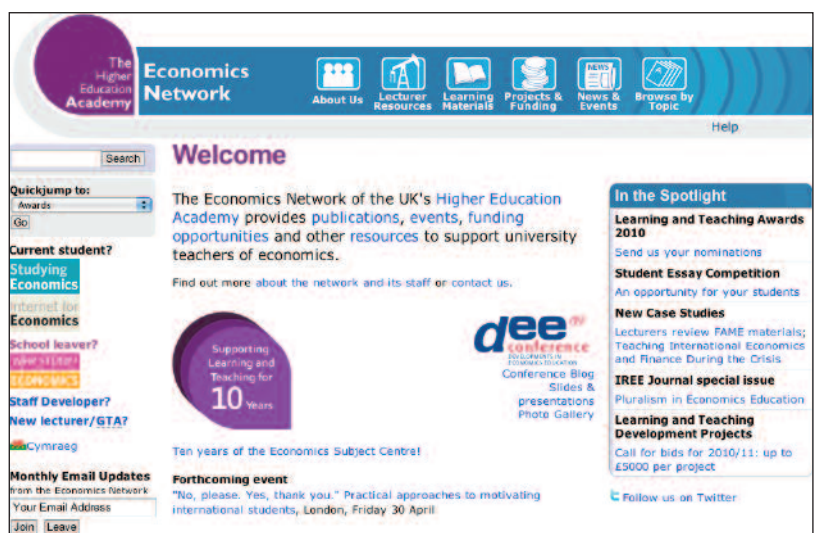


Studying Economics website
www.studyingeconomics.ac.uk



Why Study Economics website
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"The Network's main site currently receives around two and a half million hits per year"



Main Economics Network website www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk

Celebrating excellence and raising the status of teaching

Since 2001 the Network has been running an annual teaching awards programme to recognise and reward exemplary practice from within the UK academic economics community. Awards are given under three categories: Outstanding Teaching, Student Nominated and eLearning. There has been a total of 37 winners and 30 commendation award holders (and over 100 nominations).



Iain Long, LSE – the 2008 winner of the Outstanding Teaching Award commented on his award:

"As a young economist

starting out in his career, winning the Outstanding Teaching Award means a great deal to me. When I won the award, I had only been teaching for two years. When I started, I was determined to be the kind of teacher that I liked as an undergraduate: engaging, interested and conscientious. The award was an extremely strong signal that I was on the correct track. It has given me much greater confidence to offer suggestions on departmental teaching policy, and has significantly raised my profile within the London School of Economics."

Outstanding Teaching Award winner 2007 Robert Hoffman said:

"I am very pleased that high-quality teaching is increasingly being recognized as a key part of an academic's job. This type of award and similar initiatives within the higher education sector will provide the right individual incentives to help us continue to meet the expectations of students and their future employers."

Professor David Paton, Head of the Industrial Economics Division at Nottingham University Business School, said:

"We are very proud of the quality of our economics courses here in the Business School and I am absolutely

delighted that Rob has received the Economics Network award. Everyone in the School already knows what an excellent teacher Rob is, but to have this recognised by such a prestigious national award is just tremendous." (University of Nottingham Press release 2007)

The Network's annual award scheme engages many individuals in its nomination process (including students), but as well as Heads of Department who are required to provide supporting statements for nominations. This also raises the profile of award winners at an institutional level.



Nominations for this year are now open. The deadline is Wednesday 30th June 2010 and the winner of each category will receive £250.

Additional information, including submission guidelines and online nomination forms are available at www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/awards

Directly funded learning and teaching development projects

These small projects of up to £5000 concern the development, implementation and evaluation of innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in Economics Higher Education. Forty one have been funded since the programme began in 2004/5.

www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/mini.htm

"It would not be possible without the network. My university operates on the principle that if someone outside will fund something, then they will too."

"There are 3 or 4 people in my department who would not be doing pedagogical research without the mini [learning and teaching development] projects. Now we are thinking of setting up an applied centre for pedagogical research in economics".

(Learning and Teaching Development Project holders 2006/07, External Evaluator report 2007)

Forthcoming events

Annual Key Contacts Conference

Wednesday 8th September 2010, Bristol

The Economics Networks has established a network of Key Contacts throughout UK Higher Education Institutions. This event will explore current issues in teaching and learning in economics and will give Key Contacts the opportunity to inform the national strategy for supporting economics education.

Key Contacts Conference 2008



eLearning Symposium

Thursday 9th September 2010, Bristol

This event will present a range of the latest technologies suitable for supporting economics teaching and research. There will be plenty of hands-on opportunities to try out technologies as well as workshop sessions including case studies and demonstrations.

www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/news

"Widely cited as the Academy's flagship programme, the Subject Network has been in its current configuration of 24 Subject Centres since its inception in 2000. It is clear that the discipline-led focus is highly valued by the sector, and the need for such a network in the future is, in our view, manifest."

Interim Evaluation of the Higher Education Academy: A report to HEFCE, HEFCW, SFC, DELNI, GuildHE and UUK by Oakleigh Consulting Ltd, section 1.5, (HEFCE, January 2008)

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