



ECONOMICS NETWORK NEWSLETTER

Editorial

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This autumn has been very busy for the Economics Network.

We held our biennial Developments in Economics Education conference from 5 to 7 September. This year it was kindly hosted by the LSE. Over 120 delegates attended (see pages 3 and 4 below).

Awards were presented at the conference to lecturers for excellence in teaching in three categories. We had a record number of nominations this year and 15 awards or commendations were given (see page 2 below).

In September and October we ran ten GTA workshops and one New Lecturer workshop. Over 220 people attended these workshops, the largest number so far (see pages 5 and 6 below).

We have also continued with our annual programme of surveys. A report is now available on the 2011 lecturer survey on our site at www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/surveys/lec_survey2011 (see page 7 below).

We have continued to build and update our large bank of teaching resources and other

information for economics lecturers on our main site www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk, which now receives over 3 million page requests per year. These include a stock of freely available materials to underpin statistics teaching, available thanks to the Depository of Statistical Resources for Social Sciences (DeSTRESS) project (see page 8 below).

Over the past 12 months we have also continued to build our two websites for students: www.whystudyeconomics.ac.uk www.studyingeconomics.ac.uk (see pages 9 and 10).

The future

November is the final month in which we are funded by the Higher Education Academy. This means we can only continue if we receive funding from other sources.

We have some funding kindly donated by the Royal Economic Society and the Scottish Economic Society, but we will have to raise a significant amount of additional financing if we are to continue.

We will keep you updated.

John Sloman

The Economics Network's Annual Learning and Teaching Awards 2011

Celebrating Teaching Excellence

This year, the Economics Network received an unprecedented number of nominations for its *Annual Learning and Teaching Awards*, which were presented on September 6th at the Development in Economics Education Conference. In all categories the nominees were commended for their innovation, excellent quality of teaching and engagement with students. There was strong competition for each award, but the following winners were chosen for their exceptional contribution to the education of economics:

Professor Steven Cook, from Swansea University's School of Business and Economics, was awarded the **Outstanding Teacher Award**. Steve was praised for his introduction of a new and practical Applied Econometrics Module for final year students. Steve was "honoured to receive such a prestigious award" and "proud of the unprecedented national recognition that economics has achieved in recent years". While Professor Alan Speight, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Academic Quality and Student Experience at Swansea, praised Professor Cook's "efforts in developing a module which demonstrates the practical relevance of a difficult and

sometimes inaccessible subject".

Commendations for the Outstanding Teaching Award were given to **Caroline Joll** from Cardiff University and the **EC307 Development Economics Team (Oriana Bandiera, Greg Fischer, Michael Best and Tara Mitchell)** from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Dr David McCausland, from the University of Aberdeen, and **Dr Chris Jones**, from Aston University, shared the **Student Nominated Award**. David was chosen for his ability to help students understand difficult concepts. His students commented that Dr McCausland "never refused to help a student" and "provided extensive feedback" on work. Angela Black, Head of the Business School at Aberdeen, was "very proud that David's excellent teaching has been nationally recognised". Similarly, Chris' students highlighted his enthusiasm for economics and his ability to share this through his teaching. Professor Nigel Driffield, Head of Economics at Aston, commented: "I have never seen anyone with the same drive for excellence in teaching as Dr Chris Jones... it is clear that the students are very engaged with his teaching".

Commendations in this category were awarded to **Neil Rickman** from the University of Surrey, **Steven McIntosh** from the University of Sheffield, **Peter Sinclair** from the University of Birmingham and **Michael Walsh** from Coventry University.

The **eLearning Award** was presented to **John Gathergood** from the University of Nottingham for his innovative use of technology in teaching. As Professor Chris Milner, Head of Department at Nottingham, states: "in class lecture delivery is supported by video podcasts of lectures and interactive video tutorials and practical exercises. All lectures, lecture previews, add-ons and recitations are videoed and made available via Microsoft Silverlight...and for use on multiple platforms and smart-phones".

Richard Wiseman and **Susan Noble** from MIMAS (Manchester InforMation and Associated Services) were awarded a commendation in this category for the creation of the ESDS International Teaching Tools.

The Economics Network would like to congratulate all the winners and nominees from this year's awards.



Development in Economics Education Conference

Wayne Geerling, La Trobe University, Australia

The Economics Network held its sixth Developments in Economics Education Conference from the 5th to the 7th September. Over 120 delegates attended the conference held at the London School of Economics and Political Science, which was also the main sponsor of the event.

The conference showcased activities and resources specifically developed to support economics teaching and highlighted some of the latest research into pedagogy in economics. It also provided practical advice for lecturers and teaching assistants on how to meet the challenges of current and future teaching environments as well as how to engage students more fully in the subject.



Diane Coyle, OBE, delivered the conference keynote address, which focused on the direction and development of economics as a subject, and the implications for economics curricula.

Wayne Geerling, a 'first-timer' to the conference, recounts his experiences at the conference:

In September, I attended my first Developments in

Economics Education (DEE) Conference, held at the London School of Economics.

The conference was spread across 3 days: Day 1 (Key Contacts); Day 2 (DEE); Day 3 (Internationalisation in Economics workshop).

“Ultimately, this is a positive sum game: everyone benefits if we all become better teachers”

The DEE conference was divided into parallel workshops and presentation seminars. The main benefit of having parallel workshops covering different themes is that there was something for everyone. My preference was for sessions on engagement and motivation, eLearning, linking research and teaching, games and case studies.

Delegates were given access to expertise in a particular aspect of economics education and the forum to discuss and share experiences with like-minded people at different stages of their career and from different institutions across the world.

The community of people who specialise in economics education is quite small but always accessible, friendly and open. It is a refreshing experience to attend a conference in which academics are prepared to share their

ideas and resources with others. Ultimately, this is a positive sum game: everyone benefits if we all become better teachers.

The keynote address by Diane Coyle was certainly a highlight of the conference. The reputation of economics is at a new low because of the global financial crisis, yet this event offered an exciting opportunity for economics to reinvent itself. Of particular interest and relevance to participants was the student learning experience: what should students of economics be learning now and are they getting it from universities?



Delegates enjoy playing 'The Market Game' at the Key Contacts Conference

The economics curriculum lags behind the kind of exciting economics that academics are now engaged in (such as behavioural and experimental economics). Many undergraduate courses have not changed in years, are still taught from outdated textbooks and this saps any curiosity or interest students have for learning. We need to revamp and modernise the economics curriculum to reflect the complexities of the modern

world, while making the study of economics more inclusive, interesting and appealing to students.



If we succeed in motivating student learning, more students will explore

intermediate and advanced theory, creating a positive externality in the form of higher retention rates and a greater pool of economic graduates. The ultimate beneficiary is society, as students who develop an intuitive understanding of core economic principles make better economists, policy advisors and lecturers. Even those students who do not take another economics course will, at the very least, have a stronger grasp of how

economics works and applies to their lives.

I really enjoyed my time at DEE 2011. By the time I got over my jet lag, it was time to fly home again. It's a pity this conference is only held every 2 years. I sincerely hope the Economics Network survives its current funding predicament and that this type of conference survives well into the future, and one day reaches the shores of Australia.

Visit www.economics.ac.uk/themes/teaching for a library of resources and advice

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Monthly Email Updates from the Economics Network

Your role

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lecturer in England Lecturer in Scotland Lecturer in Wales Lecturer in Northern Ireland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching Assistant or New Lecturer Staff Developer
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[Looking for subject areas within economics?](#)

The latest edition of IREE (the International Review of Economics Education) is now available to download from our website

The Economics Network Workshops

Graduate Teaching Assistants & New Lecturers

This autumn the Economics Network ran ten GTA workshops and one New Lecturer workshop, which combined trained over 220 individuals who began teaching economics in universities across the UK this term.



The workshops are designed to help to prepare graduate teaching assistants and new lecturers and to equip them with the necessary skills and motivation to become excellent teachers.

Kilian Huber, a GTA from the LSE shares her experiences of one such workshop:

How do I start the first class of term? What if I can't answer a question a student asks? Do I even know enough microeconomics to teach it?

“The key is getting students involved”

These questions are familiar to most graduate students who set out to teach. To help with these concerns and as part of their work to raise the quality of teaching across UK universities, the Economics Network sent two of its campaign spearheads to the LSE. Dr Michael McMahon, Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Warwick, and Iain Long, manager of the

introductory economics course at the LSE, organised a workshop on the joys and perils of class teaching, attended by economics GTAs from across the capital's universities.

The toolbox of teaching methods that Michael and Iain equipped us with has already come in very useful in my own teaching.

From more trivial issues, such as dealing with excuses along the lines of “my dog ate my homework”, to more serious situations, including taking the right measures to help a student with substantial personal difficulties, they were able to base their advice on their own experiences.

“Attention to detail in class preparation will not only benefit the students, but also save teachers' time and nerves in the long run.”

Often it was the situations which they initially struggled to deal with that I will certainly remember should I face a similar situation. Michael, for example, was very honest in explaining how he struggled to find the right degree of closeness to his students in his first year of teaching. This affected not only his own research work but also put him under excessive pressure from dealing with personal issues that were neither part of his expertise nor his responsibility.

The importance of preparation was also emphasised in the

discussions. Attention to detail in class preparation will not only benefit the students, but also save teachers' time and nerves in the long run. Seeing a well-prepared teacher motivates students to take their work seriously too, making classes run more smoothly and effectively.

“I can highly recommend workshops of this type to all GTAs”

Iain also introduced a more theoretical aspect to the workshop by outlining three types of learning: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. While this was unfamiliar to most participants at first, we began appreciating that with thorough preparation, there is great potential to kinaesthetic “learning by doing” approaches.

“Teaching is like coaching sports” is one of Michael's didactic mantras. No one becomes good at scoring goals by admiring Wayne Rooney smash them in from 30 yards and no one becomes a good economist by watching their teacher shift curves on the whiteboard. The key is getting students involved. In my first class I took this analogy even further and got my students quite literally moving around the classroom. This may seem like taking the sporting comparison too far but some physical movement changes the rhythm of the session and refocuses students' attention. Although students usually don't like it at first, coming to the whiteboard and presenting a solution in front

of the class helps them learn. It also shows the teacher what students are struggling with. As Iain pointed out, “knowing what they don’t know” can be a real challenge.

It was the following three aspects of this workshop that

stood out in particular: the organisers’ ability to relate anecdotes from their own experience to advise GTAs on how to deal with certain situations; the emphasis they put on the benefits of thorough preparation; and the analogy of teaching and sports coaching as a

guideline for coming up with ways for students to learn.

I can highly recommend workshops of this type to all GTAs, whether experienced or new to the world of teaching.

I’m a new lecturer, get me out of here!!

Mike Reynolds, from the University of Bradford, has written about the new lecturer workshop he attended earlier this term:

Sleepless nights, a stomach full of knots, and sweaty palms: nope, you aren’t a washed up contestant faced with *I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here’s* ‘Bush-Tucker Trial’ but a fresh-faced new academic out on your first days as a real, proper bona fide lecturer with a head full of ideas and doubts for company. Will they like me? Will they be able to understand me?

And that’s just the students! What about my new colleagues? Then there are all those reflections that lie over and between. Not forgetting the eternal question: just what sort of lecturer am I going to be?



Never fear the Economics Network is here to help. Not

only is the website full of material to help get you started, but once a year they run a ‘Residential Workshop for New Lecturers.’ And this is exactly where I found myself in early October. Just six weeks into my job at the University of Bradford and still suffering the same doubts, fears and excitement that I had felt on the confirmation of my appointment.

“the plethora of hints, tips and advice on offer”

The first thing that struck me as I walked into the workshop room – set in some Rivendell-esque elf haven in Bristol – was the friendliness of the team. Inna Pomorina, Ros O’Leary, and John Sloman greet with genuine warmth and work hard to create an open, engaging environment.

This air of encouragement and support is vital as you feel free to express your own opinion and discuss the plethora of hints, tips and advice on offer. You are compelled to listen to tales from presenters and your fellow new lecturers at the

workshop as you build a camaraderie; slowly becoming safe in the knowledge that you aren’t alone in this brave new academic world.

The workshop is made up of a number of sessions, ranging from the use of classroom experiments and games (presented by Jon Guest from Coventry University) to the more sober (but no less useful) topic of ‘effective assessment and feedback.’ Alvin Birdi and Gervas Huxley popped in from the University of Bristol to give us guidance on running seminars and teaching to small groups, giving us no end of encouragement on how we can manage this with aplomb.

Even without all the ideas and help we received, the workshop would still have been a great success thanks to the atmosphere and the other attendees. Add all the hints, tips and guidance in there and it becomes a workshop that is vital for all new lecturers – and, dare I say, a must for a few older ones too.

Economics Lecturers' Survey 2011: Support and Advice for Change

Having taken a brief look at the results from the sixth biennial Survey of Economics Lecturers in the last newsletter, we'll now look into more detail regarding support and funding for teaching and change in teaching practice. This year 145 lecturers from 57 universities took part in the survey.

For the full report see: http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/surveys/lec_survey2011

Support and advice:

When asked about support or advice for their teaching, the majority (69.6%) reported receiving advice from colleagues; 40.0% from a central university Education Development/ Support Unit; 44.8% from the Economics Network and 8.9% stated that no support was required.

Comments on support and advice:

"Colleagues are always a good sounding board on assessment issues in particular"

"Economics Network information is integral for improving on teaching content and quality"

"Mixed results – some internal courses on teaching have been useful, others a total waste of time"

Changes in teaching practice:

Since 2003, we have asked if lecturers have changed their teaching practice within the last 2 years. More than half of the respondents in previous surveys answered positively to this question and again in 2011, the results have followed this trend, with nearly 75% of respondents reporting a change in teaching practice – an indication that the Economics Network's resources remain useful even for experienced lecturers.

Reasons for change included: Feedback from students (44.8%); Students' skills and abilities (46.2%); number of students (40.0%); suggestions from workshops (25.5%); colleagues' suggestions (24.8%). In addition to changes in technology; personal reflection on teaching; a larger number of low ability students; promoting transferable skills that employers identified as important; responding to pedagogic literature; and increased numbers of international students.

Comments on changes introduced by lecturers:

"Introduced peer feedback on formative oral presentations. This peer feedback (alongside my own) is then used by students as the basis of a summative assessment, which requires students to reflect on their individual learning experience"

"Explaining the meaning of words and phrases; slowing down in my delivery; providing far more written material; testing at a more regular interval"

"Use of blogs, wikis, quizzes, group work, econometrics cafe for answering student questions"

Role of the Economics Network:

Lecturers were asked what possible resources and services the Economics Network could provide in the future. A multitude of respondents praised the contribution of the network and would like to see its work maintained.

Comments on the Economics Network:

"I think the Economics Network is providing an excellent service"

"It provides a huge amount of support, and via this, encouragement"

The results of the survey will inform the Economics Network's strategy and planning of events, resources and publications in support of economics lecturers.

Free Resources for Statistical Literacy

DeSTRESS

A growing stock of freely available materials to underpin statistics teaching is now available thanks to the Depository of Statistical Resources for Social Sciences (DeSTRESS) project.



Like the earlier METAL Project for Maths in Economics, DeSTRESS is a “pick and mix” showcase of resources. It does not set out a curriculum, but provides video, text and interactive graphs to be copied or adapted for different teaching contexts.

The site is run on a “leave a little, take a lot” principle. Educators are welcome to copy material so long as they respect the Creative Commons licences, which require credit to the original author. At the same time, users are encouraged to use these and other Open Educational Resource sites to showcase their own work.

At the moment the site holds:

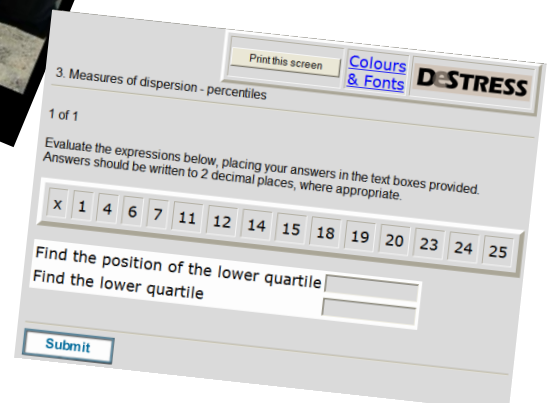
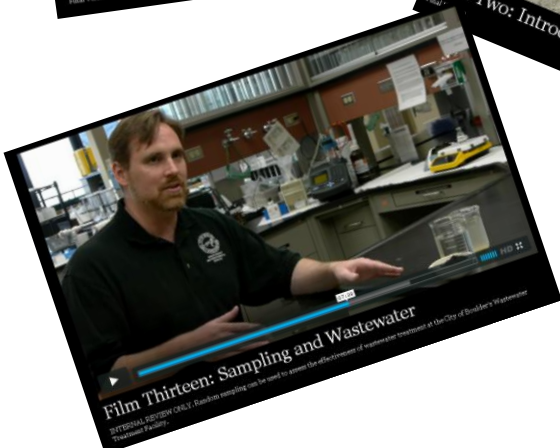
- A total of three and a half hours of high-quality, professionally produced video, hosted by Ken Heather of Portsmouth. Each film introduces a statistical concept in a real-

world context such as aircraft safety, elections, or shoplifting. Narrated animations take the viewer through a worked numerical example

- Interactive parameterised tests that draw from a bank of 400 question templates, prepared by Martin Greenhow of Brunel University
- Interactive graphs, booklets and handouts

And there's more to come...

<http://economicsnetwork.ac.uk/statistics/>



Studying Economics

A Life Line for Economics Students

Richard Wood-Power, The Economics Network



It has never been more expensive to be an economics student in the UK. With the introduction of the governments higher education reforms students will soon have to pay far higher fees to attend university.

Students paying these fees will likely expect more from their courses. However, a combination of the global financial crisis and public sector austerity will mean that universities as a group will have fewer resources to devote to teaching. So how do universities and specifically teaching staff deal with these increased demands on lower budgets?

At the Economics Network we believe part of the solution is to improve not just the teaching of economics, but also, to look at helping students to become better learners.

To this end we set up the Studying Economics website in 2009 to provide students with advice on a wide array of issues that economics students often face. These include topics that tend to prove problematic, such as econometrics, as well as help with writing projects or dissertations.

Students who are aware of such resources are able to not only get the answers to the questions faster, but also waste less valuable time with tutors. The website also enables particularly driven students to

get ahead by cutting down the time they need to spend on research. Although an online explanation is no perfect substitute for one-on-one learning in all cases, it is far cheaper and enables teaching staff to get on with other tasks.

Partly due to the site's success and partly due to changing conditions in higher education we have decided to make a number of major upgrades to the site.

“Studying Economics has proven to be a great help to many students”

Firstly, we are adding a new section on the first few weeks at university. While students will likely be thinking of their course in the weeks before their arrival, for most it will go to the back of their mind once the madness of freshers' week begins. This section will provide advice on what to look up before students begin their course, what to do if they think they are falling behind, as well as more general advice on settling in.

While many of us got a lot more out of university than simply our degrees, in the end, the formal qualification is still vitally important. For most, getting this qualification will mean taking a multitude of final

exams. As a result, later in the year the website will host a wide range of past exam questions, in addition to advice on exam techniques for economics students.

Lastly, at a time of record youth unemployment, getting a job after university is proving a major worry. If students are asked to pay such a large upfront fee for their education they are likely to care a lot more about their career opportunities afterwards. As well as adding information to the website about what can come after university, we are also hoping to make students more aware of the huge amount of help that is available to them, often through their careers service.

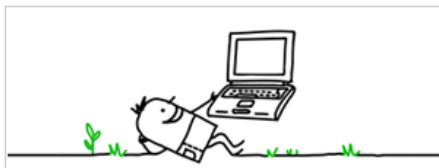
Studying Economics has proven to be a great help to many students. It can, however, only help those that know about it. Fundamentally, without the support of departments, the Economics Network cannot make an impact upon economics within higher education. A little awareness can make a huge difference.

This is why we ask you to promote the Studying Economics website to students, and the main Economics Network site to lecturers and tutors. By getting these resources to those that can use them we can continue to make a real impact on economics at degree level and beyond.

Studying Economics

<http://www.studyingeconomics.ac.uk/>

► TIPS FOR WORKING EFFICIENTLY



Help on writing essays, effective reading, data collection, making a presentation, revision, **maths help** and much more. Go to **[tips for working efficiently](#)**

The Studying Economics website offers a large bank of resources and advice for students studying economics.

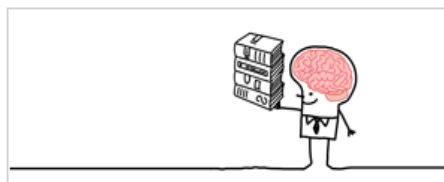
These cover all aspects of studying for a university degree, from note taking in lectures and researching for seminars to writing essays and dissertations.

<http://studyingeconomics.ac.uk/tips-for-working-efficiently/>

Choosing what courses to study at university can be difficult. The Studying Economics website gives students information on economics modules and helps them to make the right personal choice.

<http://studyingeconomics.ac.uk/module-options/>

► MODULE OPTIONS



Information on economics module options to help you decide which ones are right for you.

Go to **[module options](#)**

► AFTER YOUR DEGREE



What happens after your degree? Information, help and ideas on jobs, careers and further study will make this question easier. Go to **[after your degree](#)**

Often leaving university can be just as daunting as starting! That's why the Economics Network has created a section of the Studying Economics website that is dedicated to students' options after university.

This is designed to advise students on considering postgraduate study, career options and drafting CVs.

<http://studyingeconomics.ac.uk/where-next/>