



**NEWSLETTER**

ISSUE 31 | DECEMBER 2019



Working with the  
Royal Economic Society and  
Scottish Economic Society to  
support economics education  
in the UK and internationally

# About us

The Economics Network supports economics education in the UK and internationally.

We aim to enhance the quality of learning and teaching throughout the higher education economics community.

We provide publications, research, resources, training and other events to support economics teaching staff, students and practitioners.

We are supported by the Royal Economic Society, Scottish Economic Society and over fifty UK university economics departments.

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Further information on the Economics Network can be found on our website at:

[www.economicnetwork.ac.uk](http://www.economicnetwork.ac.uk)



# Economics Network Newsletter

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## Editorial

In September, we celebrated 20 years of the Economics Network and were delighted to have so many new and long-standing members of the Network's community there to mark the occasion with us at the DEE conference (page 4). As Professor John Sloman (Founder of the EN) highlights: 'Central to the Economics Network's mission has been the encouragement of the sharing of ideas and experiences of economics lecturers and

developing a community of practitioners. With the growing emphasis in universities on improving the student experience, this sharing is becoming increasingly valuable'.

This was evident at our DEE conference where delegates from around the world shared innovations and ideas on economics pedagogy (pages 6-7). This September's conference was our tenth and largest yet. One attendee commented that they left the conference with 'a lot of relevant ideas that would be easy to integrate into teaching immediately'.

Our learning and teaching awards were presented at the DEE conference dinner. The awards were given in four categories: Best Paper in IREE, Best New Lecturer, Outstanding Contribution to Economics Education and Outstanding Career Achievement in Economics Education (pages 12-13). We would like to congratulate all our winners once again.

This year has been particularly busy in terms of research projects. We have updated our analysis of the National Student Survey (pages 10-11) and run a new survey of employers of economics graduates (pages 16-17). We have

also undertaken a research project looking at how employability skills are developed within UK economics degrees (pages 20-22). We'd like to express our thanks to Dr Cloda Jenkins at UCL who led this important project.

In September, we also re-ran our survey of public understanding of economics, along with ING. We have published a subset of the results relating to Brexit, which indicate a worrying decline in trust of economists, despite a recognition of the importance of the subject (pages 24-25).

Our programme of training workshops for GTAs and Early Careers staff are ongoing. We have run 9 GTA workshops and will host one more in January (page 5). The Early Careers Workshop booking will also open soon for April 2020 (page 9). We expect that this will be a popular event so please encourage any colleagues to sign up as soon as possible.

In addition, we are excited to be contributing to Discover Economics, a campaign to increase diversity in our discipline. Read more on page 14.

We hope you all enjoy a well-earned break over the holidays!!

*Ashley Lait* (Centre Manager)

# Celebrating 20 years of the Economics Network

We are delighted to be celebrating 20 years of the Economics Network this year.

The Network was established in September 1999 as a subject-specific teaching and learning centre. Its aim was to support teachers of higher education economics and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the subject across the country. This remains our mission today.



Over the past twenty years, we have:

- Trained over [2000 graduate teaching assistants](#) and [500 early careers lecturers](#)
- Held [ten international conferences](#) on economics pedagogy
- Produced [hundreds of teaching case studies](#)
- Produced two editions of a detailed [Handbook for Economics Lecturers](#)
- Published 32 volumes of the [International Review of Economics Education](#)
- Contributed to the publication of the [Economic Review](#), a magazine for A-Level students
- Had millions of visits to our websites, not just this [Economics Network main site](#) but also including [Studying Economics](#) and [Why Study Economics](#)
- Organised symposia, conducted research and influenced discussions on [e-learning](#), [the economics curriculum](#), [graduate employability](#), [effective communication](#), and [public understanding of economics](#)
- Led on mini-projects to create educational content, including [DeSTRESS](#) (statistical resources for social science) and [METAL](#) (maths concepts in economic applications)

Celebrations at the 2019 DEE Conference:



## GTA Workshops

We are running an additional workshop for graduate teaching assistants in January for those who missed the autumn events or are beginning teaching in semester two.



**Venue:** University of Bristol

**Date:** Monday 13th January 2020

The workshops complement any generic-based institutional training delegates might receive (and in some institutions exempts attendees from parts of such training) and are facilitated by experienced economics lecturers.

The workshops enable participants to discuss and evaluate the effective teaching of economics in small-group classes, tutorials, seminars and workshops, including:

- managing student expectations
- students learning styles
- different seminar types
- dealing with diversity
- marking and feedback



**Book your place on our website:**  
[www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/events/gta](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/events/gta)

# Developments in Economics Education Conference 2019

This year's DEE conference, hosted by the University of Warwick in September, was our 10th and also the largest with over 140 delegates from 65 different institutions across the world.

The themes of the conference were online learning (linked to the special edition of the International Review of Economics Education, see page 8) and employability skills in UK economics degrees. This second theme was the focus of a recent Economics Network research project, led by Cloda Jenkins at UCL, and the special session that opened the first day of the conference (see page 20-22). This was followed by a drinks reception at a local brewery where we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Economics Network (see page 4).



The main conference was opened with a plenary in which current and former EN staff collected and shared delegates' views on the Network's influence over the past 20 years, their thoughts and concerns about economics higher education, and what had brought

them to the DEE conference. Through this exercise, it was clear that improving student engagement and ensuring relevance of economics degrees were top priorities for delegates.

Session in the conference addressed these topics, as well as student support, economics games, assessment, teaching data, assessment, feedback, attainment gaps, active learning and curriculum reform. There were also interactive workshops sessions exploring video challenges, online learning and encouraging inquisitive learning. The programme, abstracts and presentations from the conference are available on our website at: [www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/dee2019](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/dee2019).



We were delighted to have [Professor David Colander](#) from Middlebury College in Vermont to give the keynote talk, which focused on the importance of teaching nuance. Professor Colander argued that a nuanced understanding of the discipline should be introduced from the outset in our economics courses and that 'we don't have to change the models; we have to change the nuanced way in which the models are presented to students'.

The conference ended with a panel session on diversity in teaching and the student body, with [Arun Advani](#) (Associate Professor at the University of Warwick and co-chair of the [Discover Economics](#) campaign) and [Christina Segal-Knowles](#) (Executive Director for Financial Markets Infrastructure and co-chair of the Women in the Bank Network at the Bank of England). The panel stressed the importance of breaking stereotypes of economists, to portray the diversity of the discipline and crucially to encourage a more diverse group of students to study the subject and pursue careers as economists. This is the aim of the [Discover Economics](#) campaign that the Economics Network is contributing to (find out more on page 15).



Over the past 10 conferences, we have strived to address important issues in higher education economics (such as curriculum reform, graduate employability and diversity) and to constantly improve the quality and impact of the event. We were therefore delighted that 100% of this year's delegates stated that they would recommend the conference to a colleague and reported that the standard of the paper sessions was 'good' or 'excellent'. One attendee shared their view that 'the conference was great, by far the pedagogical research content is getting stronger and stronger, which is fantastic to see'.

*100% of delegates would recommend the DEE conference to a colleague*



We are particularly proud of the friendly and collegiate atmosphere that has been developed at DEE thanks to the Network's community. One delegate commented: "First time I've been to an Economics Network event. I was impressed and delighted by the camaraderie of delegates and the ease with which we could strike up conversations and exchange of knowledge and experience. Well done for fostering such a genuinely collegiate and sharing atmosphere".

*We're looking forward to DEE 2021 and hope to announce the dates shortly!*

# IREE: Call for Papers

Special issue on online teaching,  
learning and assessment in  
economics



The International Review of Economics Education will publish a special issue on the theme of online teaching, learning and assessment in economics.

Submission deadline: 31 December 2019

For further information, see:  
[tinyurl.com/iree-onlinelearning](https://tinyurl.com/iree-onlinelearning)

 @IREE\_Journal

# Early Careers Workshop



Dates: **23 & 24 April 2020**

Venue: **Swansea University**

This workshop is an interactive two-day event for early careers staff focused on effective and innovative economics teaching. The workshop is endorsed by both the Royal Economic Society and Scottish Economic Society, and sessions are mapped against the UK Professional Standards Framework.



Sessions at the workshop include:

- Making large group teaching more engaging
- Using games and the media in teaching
- Voice and presence in the classroom (with a RSC-trained actor)
- Teaching interpretative sessions
- Teaching analytical sessions

As in previous years, attendees from subscribing departments will be offered reduced registration fees for this workshop.

Further information and booking is available on our website at:

[www.economicnetwork.ac.uk/events/earlycareers](http://www.economicnetwork.ac.uk/events/earlycareers)



**Booking open soon on our website!**  
We will send out updates via email and on Twitter

# National Student Survey Analysis

Click to view the full report  
[www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/hss/2019](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/hss/2019)

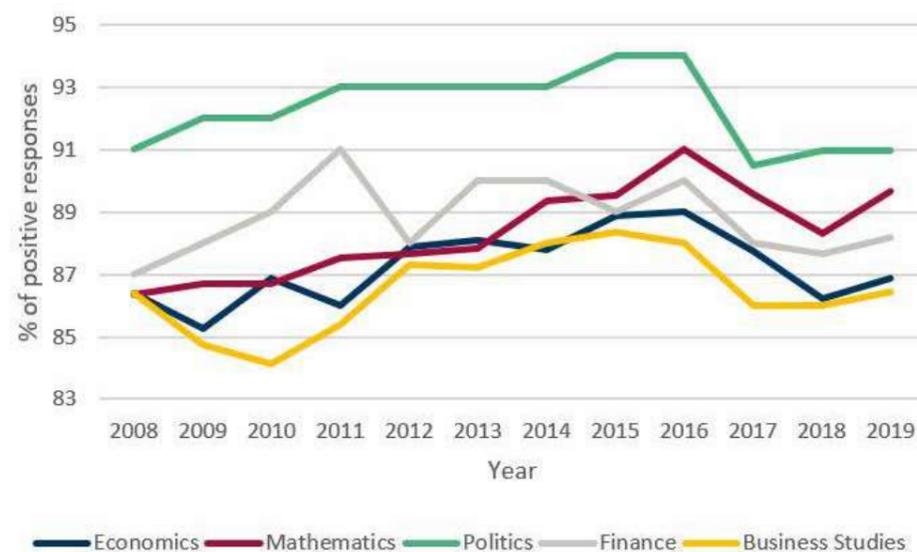
## Introduction

The National Student Survey (NSS) is an annual survey conducted by the National Union of Students (NUS) aimed at final-year undergraduates in the UK. With approximate response rates of 70%, the survey constitutes some of the most important data available for gauging student satisfaction.

As part of our wider research into trends in undergraduate economics and the employability of economics graduates, we analyse the NSS data. To help gain perspective, we compare the results for economics to similar subjects (mathematics, politics, finance and business studies) and also break the results down by university type ('Russell Group', 'Post-1992' and 'Other'). [A more detailed report is available on our website](#) but we have included a selection of graphs below.

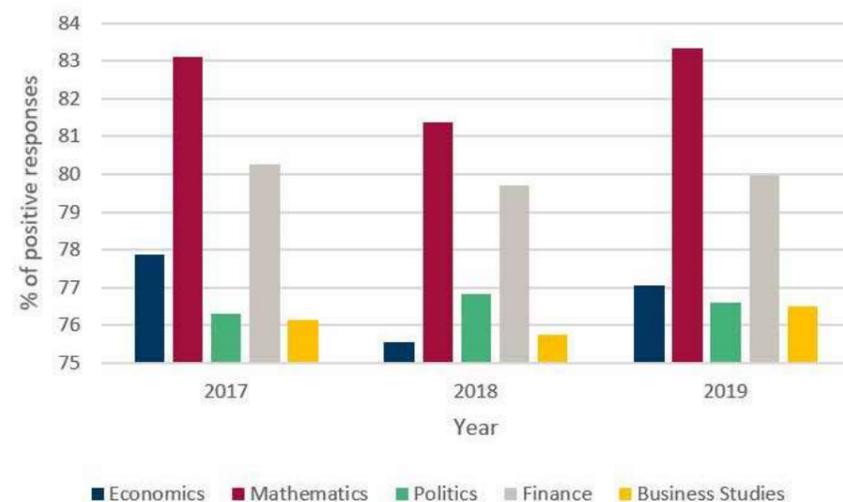
## Teaching

### Q1. The staff are good at explaining things



In the most recent 2019 survey, economics sees a positive response rate of 86.9%. Since 2008, economics has been ranked in the bottom two for all but 3 years. However, the positive response rates are still quite strong, with all subjects improving upon their 2018 scores.

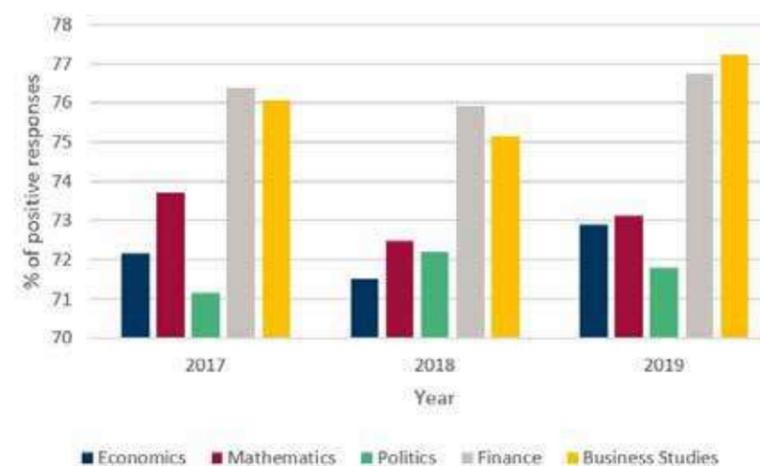
### Q4: My course has challenged me to achieve my best work



Despite ranking third in 2017 with a score of 77.9%, economics falls into the lowest ranking position in the 2018 survey, attaining a score of 75.6%, but manages to regain the third rank in 2019 with a score of 77.0%. Mathematics attains the highest score for all three years.

## Learning Opportunities

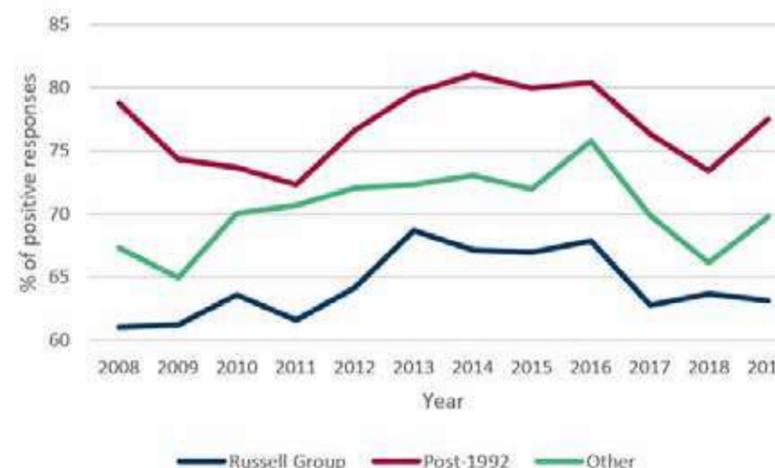
### Q7. My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt



Relative to the other questions in the new 'Learning opportunities' section, positive response rates are low. Finance and business studies give students the greatest degree of opportunity to apply what they have learnt, with scores of 76.8% and 77.2% in 2019 respectively. For economics, this score is just 72.9%.

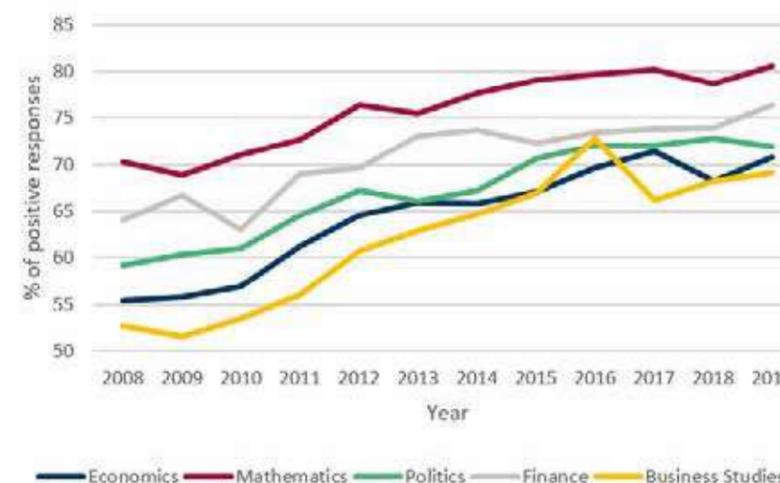
## Assessment and Feedback

### Q8: The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance



Across the entire horizon, the rankings remain constant with 'Post-1992' universities receiving the highest positive response rate, followed by 'Other' and then 'Russell Group' universities.

### Q10: Feedback on my work has been timely



Economics, mathematics and finance all obtain a better score in 2019 than 2018; these scores are 70.7% (up from 68.3%), 80.5% (up from 78.6%) and 76.3% (up from 73.9%).

84% of economics students were happy with the overall quality of their course in 2019

# Learning and Teaching Awards



We have been running the Economics Network Learning and Teaching Awards since 2011. These awards are given in recognition of exemplary teaching practice that encourages understanding of and inspires interest in economics.

This year we received more nominations than ever before and these were of a very high quality. An independent panel was formed to review the nominations and select the winners and runners up in the categories listed below. The awards were presented at the Developments in Economics Education Conference dinner at the University of Warwick.

To read more on the Awards and the winners, visit our website: [www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/awards/2019](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/awards/2019)

## Outstanding Career Achievement in Economics Education

This is a special award that our independent awarding panel is authorised to make when there are multiple nominations for an individual whose contribution to economics education is sustained over a long period and very substantial in its impact.



This “Outstanding Career Achievement in Economics Education” is awarded to [Professor Wendy Carlin](#) of University College, London. The award recognises Professor Carlin’s tireless and successful leadership

of the CORE project which has had a transformative impact on the content and pedagogy of economics teaching at over 200 universities worldwide and has

also brought the value of economic thinking to non-specialist students in cognate subjects.

## Award for Outstanding Contributions to Economics Education

*Joint winner: Steve Proud, University of Bristol*  
Steve was nominated for excellence across a variety of activities, all focused on improving the experience of students. Not only do the materials and delivery in his own teaching get very high ratings, but Steve also has an admirable record of publishing pedagogical research and using research to improve the student experience.



*Joint winner: Dimitra Petropoulou, London School of Economics*



This award recognises Dimitra’s passion and charisma as a teacher as well as her lasting influence promoting active learning. Through her career, she has led on the training of economics Graduate Teaching Assistants, through events, individual mentoring, and hugely influential case studies. The nomination says “Dimitra does not just do innovations but reflects on them in an impressively analytical way. She does not just identify what works, but ponders deeply on why it works.”

*Joint runner-up: Ben Knight, University of Warwick*  
A nomination signed by former students as well as colleagues testified to Ben inspiring and engaging students consistently over a career of more than 50 years. Again and again, he has brought in real-world perspectives to his teaching, both from his own experience as a consultant and from well-chosen external speakers.



*Joint runner-up: Matthew Olczak, Aston University*



Matt has been pivotal to a number of teaching innovations at Aston, including the introduction of classroom games into economics teaching. He was nominated not just for the success of his own courses, but a range of activities promoting good practice.

## Best New Lecturer Award

*Winner: Maria Kozlovskaya, Aston University*

In four years of teaching at Aston, Maria has established herself as an outstanding innovator and lecturer. This award recognises her success on many fronts including classroom games and experiments, online teaching with webinars and interactive resources, and outreach beyond the university. She also actively shares her practice, by co-running sessions in the Aston Centre for Games in Education and in her publications.



*Runner up: Tadeusz Gwiazdowski, University of Leeds*



Tad’s colleagues speak of his infectious energy and enthusiasm but also his willingness to challenge conventions. He has shown more established colleagues better ways to use the Virtual Learning Environment. He has also introduced “Lunch with the Economists”, a series of informal events that get students discussing and even role-playing.

*Commended: Ruth Badru, University of East Anglia*



Ruth’s nominators praised her teaching and sharing of teaching practice. Ruth has also become the school champion of the “Decolonise UEA” initiative and led an event on the experiences of black and minority ethnic students. She is also broadening the curriculum to expose students to more non-Western scholars.

*Commended: Brian Varian, Swansea University*

Brian’s work revamping two large compulsory modules attracted praise for their clear structure, real-world focus, and rigour and for Brian’s effectiveness in delivery, assessment, and in supporting GTAs. Brian has also led the student Economics Society, putting on events.



## Best paper in the International Review of Economics Education



The award for best paper in IREE for 2018 was presented to Steven Cobb, Michael McPherson, David Molina, John Quintanilla, Elizabeth Rasmussen and Jeffrey Rous for their paper entitled ‘[Teaching economics to the masses: The effects of student help centres on academic outcomes](#)’ (Vol 27, pp. 16-23). This paper was voted best by the Editor-in-Chief Ross Guest, Editors William Bosshardt, Edmund Cannon, Sarah Cosgrove and David McCausland.

The paper makes an important contribution to the economics education literature by showing, through rigorous econometric analysis, that voluntary peer tutoring significantly improves student performance in introductory economics classes, as well as identifying cofactors in this relationship.

*Congratulations to all our winners!*

# A campaign to diversify economics

The Economics Network is proud to be contributing to [Discover Economics](https://www.discovereconomics.ac.uk), a campaign launched in October 2019 which aims to:

- broaden the appeal of economics to potential students
- change their perceptions of economics and economists
- increase diversity among economics students

Sarah Smith, co-chair of the campaign and Head of Department at the University of Bristol comments:

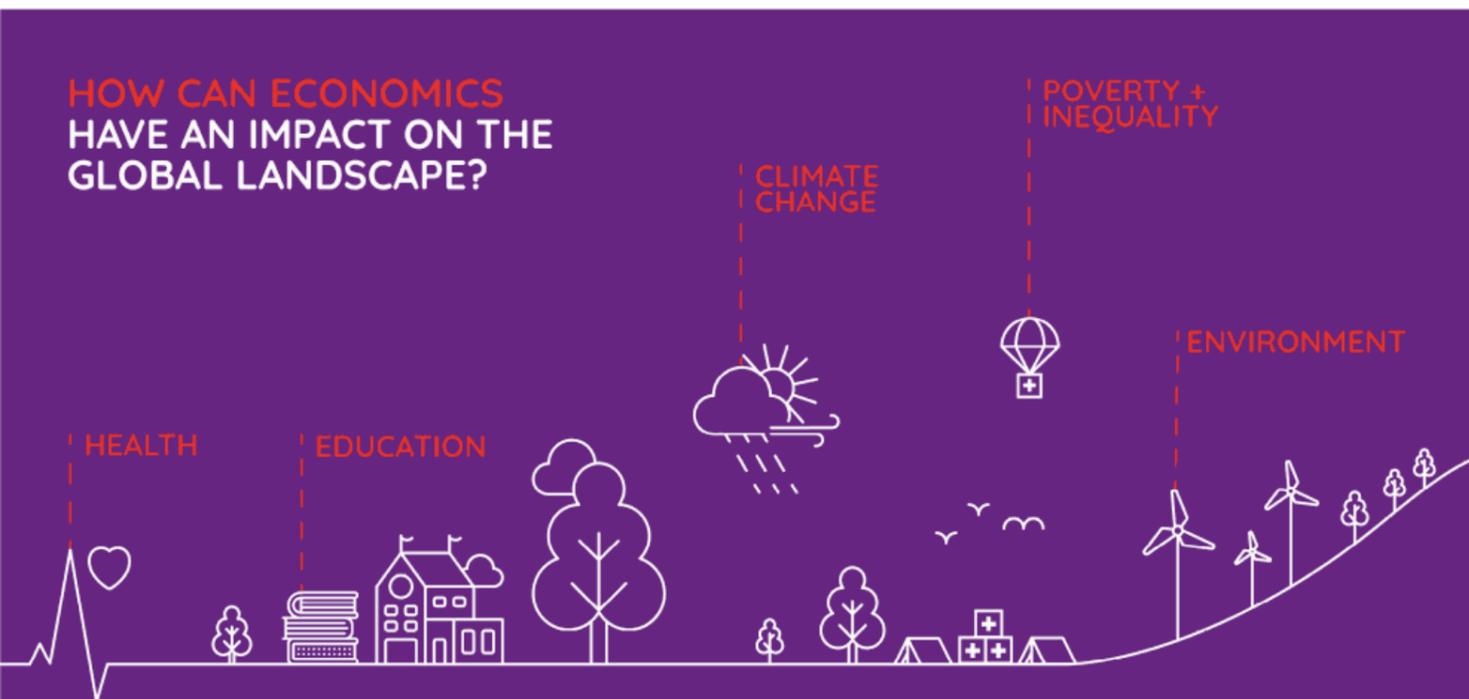
“Discover Economics is a campaign to increase diversity among economics students. State school students and many minority groups are under-represented, and while STEM has made progress in broadening its appeal to women, economics now lags behind maths, chemistry and biology in the share of women studying the subject at A level and university.

It seems clear that we need to do more to attract the brightest and the best from all backgrounds, not least so that future economic advisers in government and the Bank of England reflect the society that they are helping to shape.

Economics suffers from an image problem – seen as a subject about money and populated by boring men in suits, it is time to show students a different, broader – and more accurate- picture.

The campaign has launched a new website and is looking to increase outreach both through Discover Economics events and a student ambassador programme which we hope to launch for 2020-21. We would encourage all departments to engage with the campaign and to think seriously about how they can appeal to a more diverse student audience”.

[www.discovereconomics.ac.uk](https://www.discovereconomics.ac.uk)



# Special offer: 75% off for student group membership

## Who are we?

We are Europe’s largest network of economists, with over 1200 members and growing. We exist to provide a forum for economists where they can learn about and debate some of the key economic issues of the day with key thinkers and policymakers; develop their network and careers; and extend their professional competence.

The Society is open to both established economists and younger members, including recent graduates and students considering a career in economics. Our membership is drawn from all areas of the profession.

## Why join?

The Society offers a wide range of benefits to its members, including:

- A world-class speaker event series, in which leading economists and policymakers discuss and debate current economic issues
- Opportunities for professional development, including our Continuous Professional Development Programme and a series of masterclasses presented by leading lights in their field
- Opportunities to network with other economists, working in different organisations and in different fields. We also hold a regular careers event, where leading practitioners share their career stories and tips on building a successful career as an economist
- Recruitment: we have an area for employers and recruiters to advertise job opportunities for economists through the Society

## How much does it cost to join?

Ordinarily, membership costs £100 per year. However, we have recently launched an offer giving reduced membership rates of £40 for students and recent graduates. *An even bigger discount is available to HE providers wishing to enrol 25 or more of their students at just £25 per member.* Membership includes our newsletter, regular monthly seminars, masterclasses from leading researchers and practitioners; informal networking events and discounts on our annual conference and annual dinner.

## Where can I find out more?

If you are interested in joining the Society or would like to find out more, please visit our website ([www.spe.org.uk](https://www.spe.org.uk)) or contact our admin office ([admin@spe.org.uk](mailto:admin@spe.org.uk) / 01264 737552).

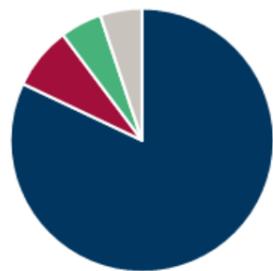
*‘I value my membership of the SPE highly - the speaker events are always stimulating. And they are also a good chance to catch up with old friends and make new contacts.’* Dame Kate Barker

# Employers Survey 2019

This is the Economics Network's fifth survey of employers of economics graduates. The aims of the survey are to:

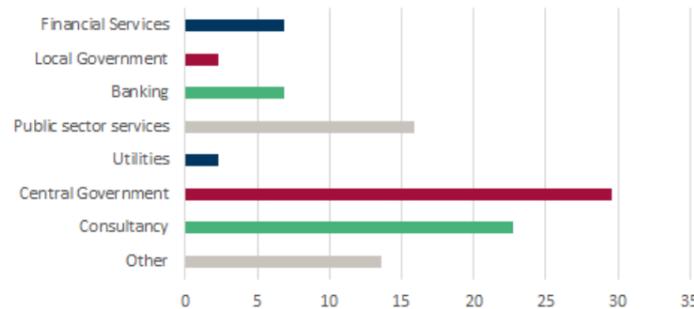
- improve understanding of the skills economics graduates need in the workplace
- establish whether employers think current economics graduates generally possess the required skills and knowledge
- reveal any clear shortfalls in order to inform the UK economics academic community

How qualified do you feel economics graduates are for their current employment?



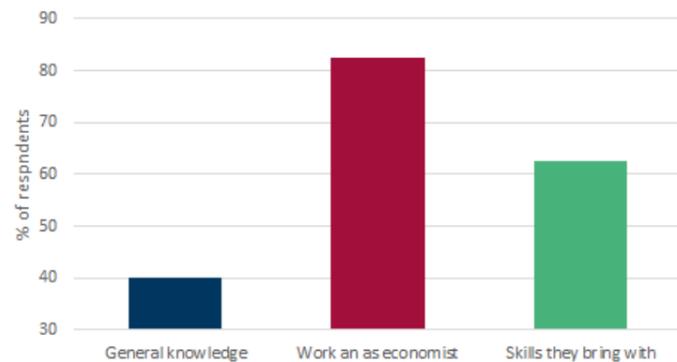
■ About right ■ Under qualified ■ Uncertain ■ Other

Which sector is your organisation in?



% of respondents

Why do you recruit economics graduates?

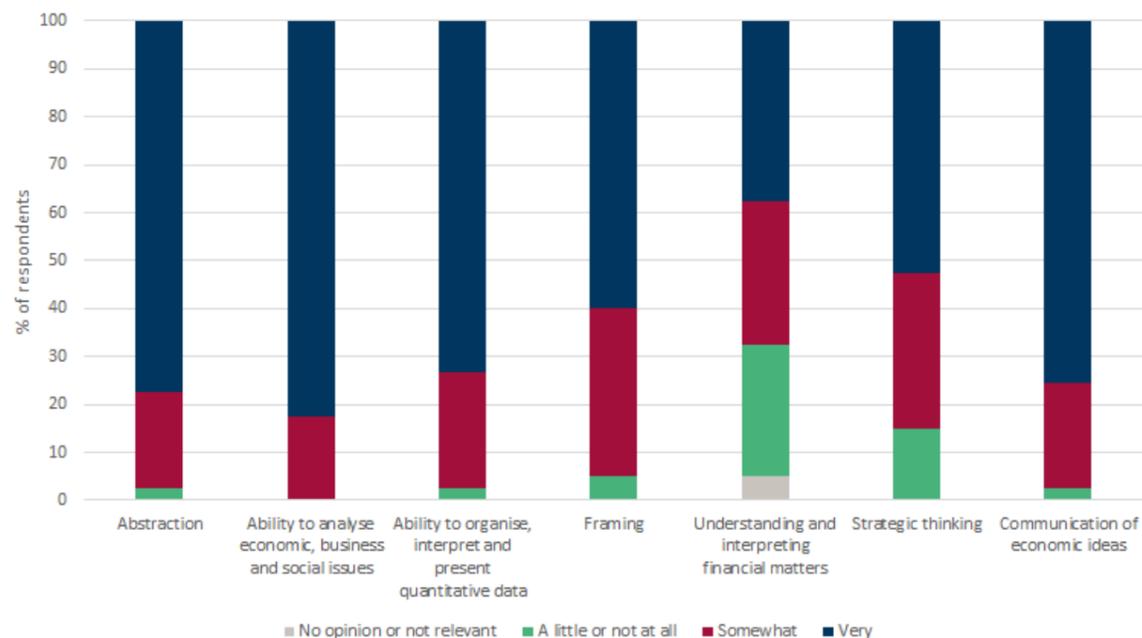


How large is your organisation?



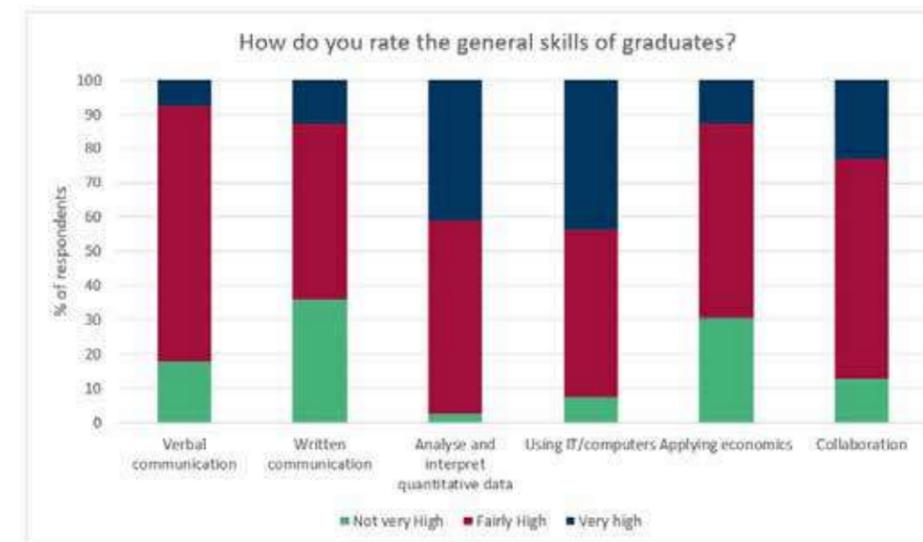
■ Small (1-49) ■ Medium (50-249) ■ Large (250+)

Which of the following skills do you see as important for economics graduates?



■ No opinion or not relevant ■ A little or not at all ■ Somewhat ■ Very

How do you rate the general skills of graduates?

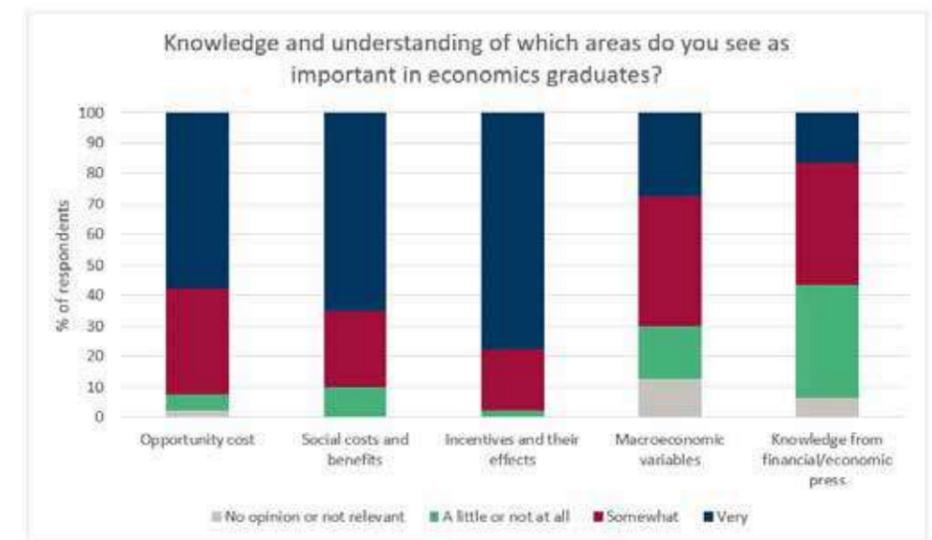


**97%**  
have high or very high ability to analyse & interpret quantitative data

Ability to communicate clearly in writing & wider application of knowledge are considered weaknesses among economics graduates

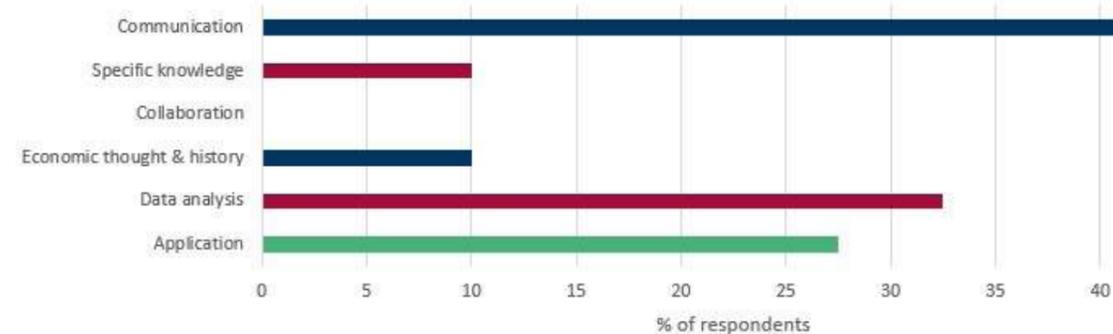
Knowledge and understanding of which areas do you see as important in an economics graduate?

**77.5%**  
of employers surveyed think understanding of incentives is very important for graduates



■ No opinion or not relevant ■ A little or not at all ■ Somewhat ■ Very

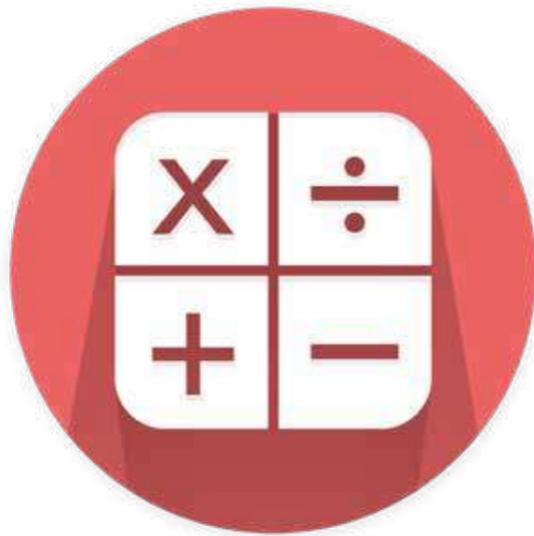
Which skills and knowledge do you believe most need to be developed further in economics degree courses?



Click to view the full report

[www.economicnetwork.ac.uk/projects/surveys/employers2019](http://www.economicnetwork.ac.uk/projects/surveys/employers2019)

# Online maths questions



Maths E.G. is an online interactive question tool for maths skills, with rich feedback. Visit the website at:

[www.mathcentre.ac.uk:8081/mathseg/](http://www.mathcentre.ac.uk:8081/mathseg/)

The new version that has just been released has a total of around 4000 fully-randomised questions, each with links to related material. The interface has also been re-vamped, especially the teachers' interface.

See: [www.mathcentre.ac.uk:8081/mathsegteacher/teacher.jsp](http://www.mathcentre.ac.uk:8081/mathsegteacher/teacher.jsp)

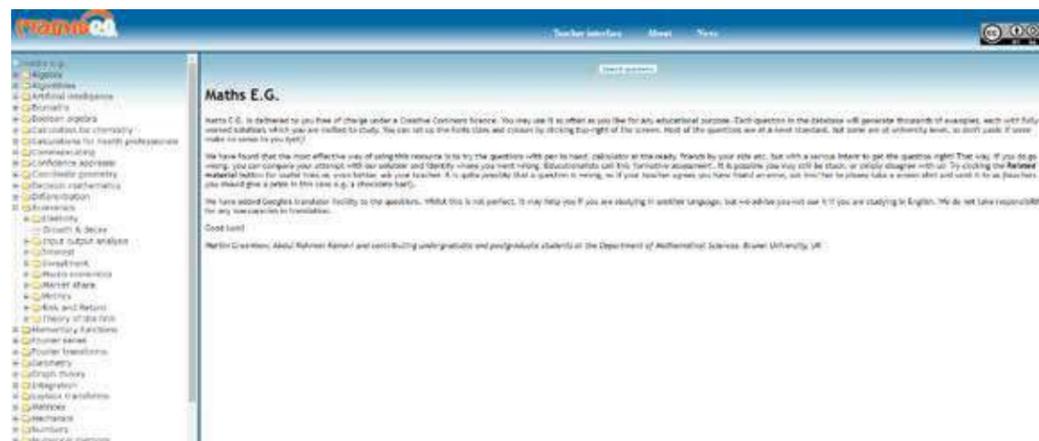
Martin Greenhow of Brunel University writes:

“Please take another look and do point your students and colleagues to the completely free resource. We do have quite strong evidence that students benefit quite a lot from using it (Greenhow, M., 2015, Effective computer-aided assessment of mathematics; principles, practice and results, *Teaching Mathematics and its Applications*, 34(3), pp. 117-137). This paper includes comments/thoughts/advice on incorporating any e-assessment package into your teaching. In return, I would very much appreciate knowing how you and your students use Maths E.G.

Do you simply point students to it, or create your own assessments, or simply use it as a good source of questions in include in problem sheets or even exams? Or maybe something else that we haven't even thought of. Please can you let me know and include the maths level of your students, ideally mapped to the UK system so GCSE, A-level or first/second year undergraduates.”

Contact Martin: [www.brunel.ac.uk/people/martin-greenhow](http://www.brunel.ac.uk/people/martin-greenhow)

The website:



THE SCOTTISH ECONOMIC SOCIETY  
SCOTTISH JOURNAL OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

## Scottish Economic Society 2020 Annual Conference

Sunday 26th - Tuesday 28th April  
Perth Concert Hall, Perth, Scotland

[Call for papers and proposals for organised sessions](#)

The Society invites submissions of papers and proposals for organised sessions from all areas of Economics, Economic Policy, and Econometrics.

Deadline for submissions:  
27th January 2020

[President's Lecture](#)

Sir Tim Besley

Professor of Economics and Political Science & W. Arthur Lewis Professor of Development Economics, London School of Economics

[Sir Alec Cairncross Prize](#)

The Society awards a prize of £1000 for the best paper presented at its Annual Conference by an economist currently registered for a PhD who has successfully completed within the last five years.

Further information can be found on the conference website:

[www.scotecon.org](http://www.scotecon.org)

# Employability Skills in UK Economics Degrees

Cloda Jenkins (UCL), Stuart Lane and Ashley Lait (Economics Network)

For the past year, the Economics Network has run a collaborative research project exploring how employability skills are developed in economics programmes across the country, both in the classroom and through different forms of assessment. Some of the results from this project, led by [Dr Cloda Jenkins](#) (UCL and the Centre for Teaching and Learning Economics), are summarised below but a detailed report can be found on our website ([www.economicnetwork.ac.uk/research/employability](http://www.economicnetwork.ac.uk/research/employability)).

## Introduction

In light of the increased policy focus on employability in higher education, and parallel criticism of economics degrees, this research report considers whether economics departments are providing sufficient targeted

*“There has been much criticism of the extent to which a university economics degree prepares its graduates for work and yet we know, for example from discussions at DEE 2017, that many economics lecturers are doing a lot to help students develop skills for employment. This project provides an opportunity to bring the discussion forward with a stock take of what is actually being done in relation to employability skills; allowing us to identify actual and perceived differences between what economics departments are trying to do and what skills graduates need to have in the labour market.”*

Cloda Jenkins, Project Lead

opportunities in their degrees for students to develop skills that are valued by employers. It considers whether there are gaps between what departments are doing and what employers are looking for; if the strategies used are effective; and what challenges need to be overcome to improve skills development in degrees.

Understanding of employer requirements comes from the Economics Network Employer Surveys (see pages 16-17). Information about what is happening in economics degrees comes from our 2019 survey of economics departments (completed by 39 departments) and two focus groups involving employers, academics and students. The findings, given the nature of our methodology and information base, provide a descriptive indication of the current state of employability skills development in UK economics degrees.

## Is there a gap between what employers are looking for and what is happening in degrees?

Economics departments and employers seem to largely prioritise the same skills areas, namely communication, application to the real world and data analysis. Both say that collaboration and wider employability skills, such as resilience, are also important but are less of a priority.

Skill area	Degree priority rank 1 = top priority	Employer priority rank 1 = top priority	Employer concern about graduate skills
Communication	3	2	High
Application to the real world	2	3	Medium
Data analysis	1	1	Low
Collaboration	5	-	High
Wider employability skills	4	4	High

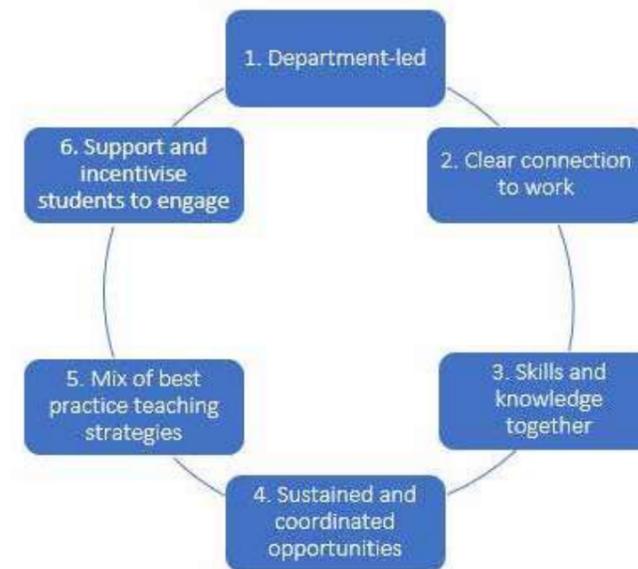
However, as shown above, employers say that economics graduates do not have high levels of skill in these areas. This may be because economics departments have only recently introduced activities designed to develop these skills and as a result there will be a lag before employers see improvements. The gap may also arise because economics departments interpret these skills in different ways to employers. For example on communication, the focus is on traditional academic writing in degrees whereas employers are looking for both written and presentation skills aimed at non-expert audiences.

Similarly, considering data analysis, both employers and economics departments value strong technical/econometric skills. However, employers value more basis skills such as being able to find, clean and organise datasets, as well as being able to use Excel and coding software.

If an economics department wants to provide opportunities for students to develop skills that matter most to employers, it is not enough to read a list of employer priority skills. An in-depth discussion with employers is needed so there is a common understanding of what those skills mean in a work context.

## Are the approaches that economics departments are using are effective for skill development?

The skill level of economics graduates may also be limited if the teaching and learning strategies being used are not effective for skills development. The figure below sets out the criteria, based on literature and ideas from our focus groups, that we think are needed for a degree to be effective in this area.



We find, based on the departments that responded to our survey, that there is a lot happening in economics degrees that is going in the right direction. Economics departments are taking responsibility for employability skills, working with careers services and societies. Yet, it is unclear how much is coordinated within the degree.

Around 60% of those surveyed had a placement experience as part of the degree. In most cases these were optional or not available to all students.

Opportunities for the development of academic writing, applying economics and data analysis are provided,

according to our survey respondents, in economics modules rather than bespoke skills or careers modules. The opportunities are generally provided across all years of the degree, with a slight increase in the final year. These skills appear to be developed over time alongside economics content.

Small group classes are the main vehicle for developing skills, although many of those surveyed also say that skills are developed in large lectures. Whether or not the skills are genuinely developed depends on how active students are in those classroom settings. A mix of independent learning activities, including closed book exams, are used to develop skills. It is difficult to say how effective these activities are without further information on precisely what students are asked to do. A closer look at the outputs that students produce shows that there is a strong preference for traditional academic-style essays and presentations.

**~60%**  
of those surveyed have a placement experience as part of the degree

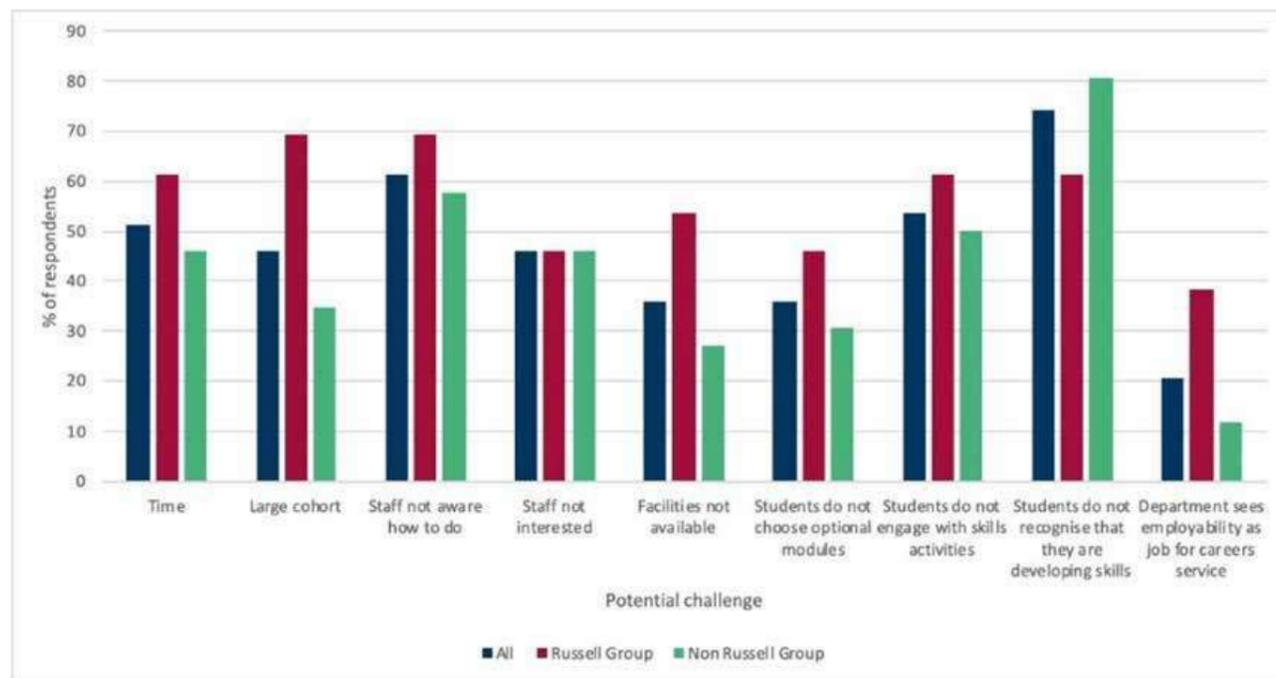
Amongst those that responded to our survey it appears that much of the skills development happens in compulsory modules. It is not clear however whether the activities themselves are considered compulsory. A high proportion of activities are assessed for academic writing, applying economics and data analysis,

which suggests that the incentives to engage should be there. However, it may be the case that only a part of a question links to the skills and may be given less attention by students. Indeed, students may not fully understand how the assessment and skills development connect.

There may be a need to redesign activities, used in the classroom and for independent study, so that they are genuine opportunities for work-related skills development. The nature of assessment, and how clear the importance of skills development in that assessment is, also warrants further consideration.

#### *What are the challenges of doing more and doing it effectively?*

Is it by no means an easy task, for an individual lecturer or a whole department, to effectively embed employability skills development into an economics degree. The main challenges, shown below, are difficulties with getting students to engage and incentivising and supporting staff.



Our focus groups suggest that students are more likely to engage if lecturers are transparent about what skills are being developed and explain clearly the connections between skills development and (assessed) activities inside and outside the classroom. Employers can help by explaining to students why it is important to develop skills and assuring them that skills development in the degree is valued.

Promotion criteria linked to REF-able research is a difficult hurdle to overcome

On supporting and incentivising staff, promotion criteria linked to REF-able research is a difficult hurdle to overcome. More can be done to limit the time and effort required. Encouraging lecturers to use approaches linked to their own research skills may be a good starting point. Establishing processes to make it easier to connect with employers and developing open-source teaching materials that are aligned with what happens 'on the job' may also help. These support structures can help lecturers to work out what to teach and how to teach without needing to make significant trade-offs between content and skills.

#### *Next steps*

Great efforts are being made by the economics departments in our survey to embed the development of employability skills in their degrees. We hope that this research project provides ideas for further progress. [Employability case studies, published on the Economics Network's website](#), provide practical insights on what can be done. We will also include a chapter on employability skills in our [Handbook for Economics Lecturers](#). Finally, we recommend that the economics education community takes steps to engage with employers more regularly and effectively going forward. The Economics Network welcomes ideas on how this might be facilitated.

Click to view the full report  
[www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/employability](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/employability)

# Economics Tournament



## Inter-University Student Economics Tournament 2019-2020

"Economics Games" is launching a new Inter-University Student Tournament, based on an IO Market Game! (simulations close to those that are described here: <https://lud.io>).

The qualification phase consists in playing a few years of a mono-player simulation, between 27 January and 9 April 2020. Students can play when they want, at their own pace. The 24 best teams (with the additional constraint of a maximum of 5 teams per university/campus) will qualify for the finals (and scores will be reset). The finals will be played between 12 and 21 May 2020. Both phases are played online.

Students can participate on their own, with no need for support from their instructors. The game will require some strategic thinking but there is no prerequisite in economics. Teams (1-4 players) from any university or school are welcome to participate. This year, there is no limit on the number of teams from the same university.

The winning team will be awarded a voucher of around €300 as a first prize (on Amazon or a similar site).

Students can register at: <https://lud.io/tournament>

## New Case Studies



### Using Active Assessment to Stimulate Learning in Economics

This case study by Michael McCann (Nottingham Trent University) is concerned with the use of active assessment to address the extent of student engagement and learning. The innovation developed is an active assessment design, which when linked to teaching and learning activities, enhances engagement and promotes deeper learning. In doing so, the assessment enables students to apply economic concepts to real-world data and practice valuable employment skills in sourcing, interpreting and presenting data.

View the case study at: [www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/mccann\\_assessment](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/mccann_assessment)

### Employability Skills in Economics Degrees

We have published a number of case studies linked to our employability skills project. These address themes including: integrating history of economic thought, enhancing student dissertations, improving students evaluation and interpretations of data, placement years and economic policy modules.

View the case studies at: [www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/employability](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/employability)

# Public understanding of economics survey

Alvin Birdi and Ashley Lait (Economics Network)

In 2017, we ran a survey with ING on Public Understanding of Economics ([report](#)). In September, we ran this survey again through YouGov with 1,641 respondents. They were asked a series of questions about their understanding of economics, how they access economic news and their sense of the importance of economics for their everyday lives and their trust in economists.

We will be releasing the results from the 2019 survey in a series of reports. The results below give a preliminary snapshot of a subset of the results related to Brexit and the upcoming election. They focus in particular on public understanding, trust in economists and differences between Leave and Remain voters. A full report will follow shortly.

## New public opinion poll finds that Brexit has harmed trust in economists' views

Amid the rancorous debate over Brexit, even Remain voters have become more sceptical of the expert views of economists on the economy. But the level of trust among Leave voters is now less than half that of Remain voters: the former are far more likely to believe that economists are basing their views on political opinions.

*Since the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, Leave and Conservative voters have become even more sceptical about economists.*

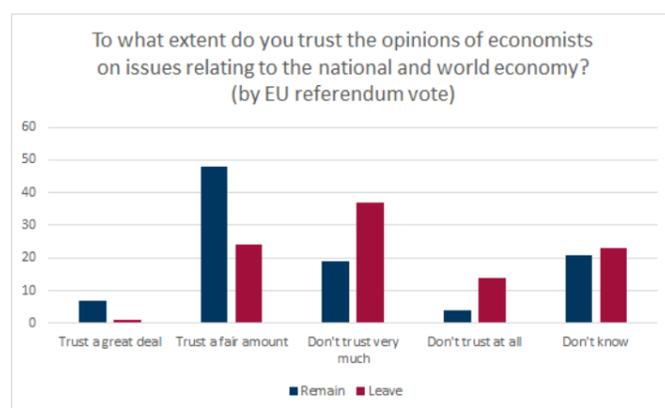
The poll also shows that people instinctively feel that economics is relevant to both their private finances and their understanding of the world –

**70%** of respondents think that the government should listen to the advice of economists

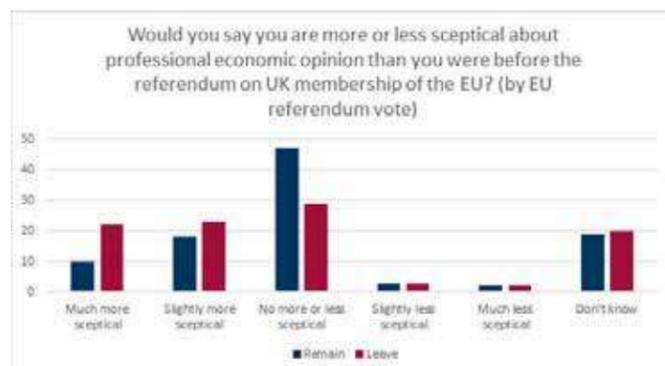
and they believe that the government should listen to the views of economists. But many believe that the economy is getting harder to understand and that economists do not

understand the day-to-day lives of ordinary people.

- Significantly higher numbers of Leave voters (51%) distrust the opinions of economists on the world economy compared with Remain voters (23%).



- Scepticism has intensified since the EU referendum, even among Remain voters. 45% of Leave voters have become more sceptical, compared with 28% of Remain voters. Most of the rest express either no change in their scepticism or no opinion.

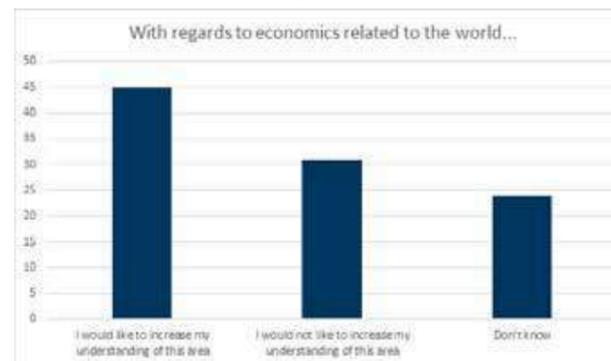


- Scepticism is also more prevalent among Conservative voters (46% compared with 31% of Labour voters), older people (over 40% of over 50-year-olds compared with just under a quarter of 18-49 year olds), men (36% compared with 31% of women) and the less educated (24% of

people without GCSEs are much more sceptical compared with 11% of people with a degree).

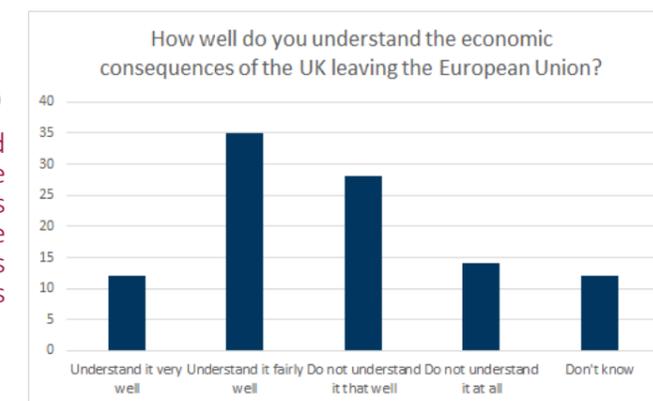
**55%** of respondents would like to know more about economics to help them make decisions in elections and referendums

- Under a third of Leave voters (31%) believe that economists base their comments on verifiable data compared with over a half (58%) of Remain voters. Similarly, 26% of Leave voters believe such comments are based on political affiliations compared with 13% of Remain voters.
- Just under a quarter (23%) of respondents say that they find economics content in the media difficult to understand and around a third (35%) say that they find it easy to understand.
- Around 40% of respondents say that it is becoming harder over time to understand economics relevant to both making sense of the world and for informed voting in elections and referendums.
- Over a half of respondents would like to increase their understanding of economics. The desire to increase economic understanding for voting is considerably higher among Remain voters (65%) than for Leave voters (49%).



- Just under a half of voters (47%) feel that they understand the economic consequences of leaving the EU, but 42% say that they do not understand these consequences. On the other hand, when asked about their understanding of economics related to the effects of interest rates on personal finances and the effects of exchange rates on holiday costs, most respondents (67%) felt that they were well informed.

*Leave voters were also more likely (45% compared to 28%) to say that their scepticism had intensified since the EU referendum.*



These survey results which indicate a perceived lack of understanding of economic issues, an interest to learn more economics and a distrust of economists poses a significant challenge to the discipline, as well as democratic participation.

Alvin Birdi, Director of the Economics Network: 'Economic understanding is so important to decision-making in civic life that the question of how much the public understands and trusts the discipline is not just academic but is vital to the functioning of our democracies. The more we can find out about public trust and understanding of economics, the better equipped economists will be to ensure that their discipline works for the good of all.'

Mark Cliffe, Chief Economics of ING: 'It is sad to see that the Brexit debate has harmed trust in economists' views on the state of the economy, even among Remain voters. This is particularly so in the light of people finding the economy harder to understand and wishing to know more. Economists need to make what they actually do clearer and more relevant to people's everyday lives. Since people get their information on economics primarily through digital channels, that's where economists should focus their efforts.'

### Press coverage:

- Chris Giles, "[Economists among 'least trusted professionals' in UK](#)" FT, 3 November 2019
- Tim Wallace, "[Voters really have had enough of experts: trust in economists has slumped since referendum](#)" The Telegraph, 22 November 2019
- David Smith, "[PS" to his Business Outlook column](#)" The Sunday Times, 24 November 2019
- Alvin Birdi, Ashley Lait, Mark Cliffe, "[Many voters do not believe economists are impartial](#)" LSE Brexit Blog, 6 December 2019



Click to view more results  
[www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/understandingecon/2019](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/research/understandingecon/2019)

# Events 'round-up'

Jan 2020

3-5

**American Economic Association Annual Meeting**  
San Diego, California, USA  
[aeaweb.org/conference/future-annual-meetings](http://aeaweb.org/conference/future-annual-meetings)



Apr 2020

6-8

**Royal Economic Society Annual Conference**  
Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland  
[www.res.org.uk/event-listing/annual-conference.html](http://www.res.org.uk/event-listing/annual-conference.html)



Apr 2020

23-24

**Economics Network Early Careers Workshop**  
Swansea University, Wales  
[www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/events/earlycareers](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/events/earlycareers)



Apr 2020

26-28

**Scottish Economic Society Annual Conference**  
Perth, Scotland  
[www.scotecon.org/](http://www.scotecon.org/)



May 2020

27-29

**American Economic Association Conference on Teaching and Research in Economic Education**  
Chicago, Illinois, USA  
[www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/committees/economic-education/ctree/2020](http://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/committees/economic-education/ctree/2020)



Aug 2020

24-27

**European Economic Association & European Economic Society Conference**  
Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands  
[www.eeassoc.org/index.php?site=EEA2020](http://www.eeassoc.org/index.php?site=EEA2020)

