School of Oriental and African Studies  
Faculty of Law and Social Sciences  
Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee  

Thursday 15th November, 2007  
Held in Room 116 at 9.00am

MINUTES

Members:

Ms Sonja Ruehl   Associate Dean – Learning and Teaching (Chair)
Dr Jens Lerche   Development Studies Department representative
Dr Helen Macnaughtan   Financial and Management Studies Department representative
Dr Dic Lo   Economics Department representative
Dr Gunnar Beck*   The School of Law representative
Dr Matthew Nelson  Politics Department representative
Mr George Sanders**  Undergraduate student representative

In Attendance:

Mr Nicholas Page **  Deputy Registrar
Mrs Barbara Spina  LASS Faculty Librarian
Ms Zoe Davis   Student Services
Mr Mark Humphreys Learning and Teaching Unit
Ms Alex Dawson Learning and Teaching Unit
Mr Luke Dillon Committee Secretary

*= not present
**=not present – apologies received

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting:  
The minutes of the last meeting, held on 11th October 2007 were APPROVED.

2. Matters Arising:  
It was NOTED that due to time constraints any matters arising not included on the Agenda, should please be forwarded to Luke Dillon for consideration at the next FLTC.

The Student Services Annual report was NOTED Ms Zoe Davis, the Student Disability Officer, attended to introduce the Report and highlighted key issues:

- There is a need to strengthen links between academic staff and Student Services, so as to provide a more efficient and effective service to students. FLTCs are invited to consider how this is best achieved given that Student Services (Counselling, Welfare Advice, Disability Advice) are all based at Vernon Square.
- In September/October 2007, Student Services were working with Registry and the Careers Service to better identify students at risk of drop-out, to encourage students to seek help early in the academic year. Better identification of non-attending students is needed. FLTCs are asked to consider how data on students at risk can be used at Faculty level.
- The replacement of personal tutors with year tutors needs to be kept under review regarding potential drop-out rates.
- Current hardship funds for EU and international students are proving inadequate.
- There are a number of proposals to improve arrangements for disabled students, and FLTCs are asked to ensure
  1. consistency in restoring marks deducted for late work, especially for dyslexic students; and
  2. early (pre-summer holiday) availability of reading lists and study packs, so that
scanning and other work on them on behalf of students with visual impairments, can be done in time.

Action points for FLTCs are indicated throughout the Report, which also summarises the achievements of Student Services against objectives, highlights trends over the year 2006-7, and includes statistical appendices and commentary.

3.1 It was AGREED that Ms Zoe Davis would send to Mr Luke Dillon the Survey of Disabled Students for distribution.

4. Interim Report on Timetabling 2007-08 (Appendix B)

The Committee thanked Mr Mark Humphreys and Ms Alex Dawson for attending the meeting to present and discuss the report, which addresses the major issues affecting the timetabling process this year especially in Law and Social Sciences.

4.1 The Interim Report on Timetabling 2007-08 was NOTED.

Key issues highlighted were:

- Space constraints had been a major problem given the strong growth in both student and academic staff numbers, exacerbated by a net loss in teaching space. SOAS uses space efficiently against external benchmarks.
- SOAS lacks teaching space for the number of students we already have; and there is a mismatch between rooms available and teaching group sizes. The largest SOAS lecture theatre has a maximum capacity of 200 but some courses were in excess of this capacity. Identified possible solutions were to hire external theatres e.g. with the Institute of Education; online lectures; or the provision parallel delivery.
- Certain teaching had been accommodated externally but such space often fails to meet the specification provided.
- Some Departments such as the Law School had over-recruited spectacularly and information on this, and on options for floaters and intercollegiate students, was slow in reaching Timetabling and this had caused delays.
- Ms Dawson (Learning and Teaching Services Coordinator, Timetabling) had joined LTU in July 2007 and there had been a necessary period of handover. During the critical period Timetabling had received 1683 emails in 30 days and there had been technical problems with online tutorial sign-up and with the BLE, demanding attention at the crucial period for Timetabling.

4.2 The Interim Report contains specific recommendations from the Timetabling side, including:

1. An increase in physical space available; parallel or online lecture delivery for courses of over 200 students; shared use of academic offices.
2. Reduction in reliance on individual staff members, for timetabling.
3. Timelier information about student numbers and potential problems.
4. Clear guidelines for academic staff and HODs on how timetabling works.
5. More centralised (e.g. Faculty) construction of the Timetable and less scope for change by individual academics. Coordination at Departmental level before requests are made to Timetabling.
6. Termly room use audits to continue.
7. The introduction of central timetablers at Faculty level, to design and maintain a workable timetable in liaison with student recruitment and admissions.

These proposals were discussed, and other suggestions were made by FLTC members.

4.3 Mr Mark Humphreys raised the issue of clarity of responsibility for timetabling matters within the Faculty and it was NOTED that Carolyn Heath would be the point of contact for the Faculty.

The Committee NOTED that an additional dedicated administrator for timetabling was not part of future Faculty staffing plans and FLTC did not support the introduction of such a post.
FLTC suggested that there should be greater focus on releasing underused space, for example where courses had under-recruited compared with expectations. Dr Jens Lerche NOTED that the Timetable had been published one week late this year and should have been ready earlier. Consolidation of the timetable in March would be advisable.

4.4 Dr Jens Lerche NOTED that the suggestion of academics sharing an office was unacceptable. Academics are full time, with research as well as teaching commitments, and require office space to conduct research, at times when they are not teaching.

4.5 FLTC PROPOSED that tutorial group timetabling slots could be rolled over from year to year, as lecture slots already are; Timetabling having confirmed this was acceptable to academic staff concerned. Adjustments could be made for student numbers, before the commencement of teaching. The Associate Dean PROPOSED that LASS be looked at first because it had the greatest number of students.

4.6 Dr Dic Lo NOTED that he was unhappy with teaching in Vernon Square because of the additional travel time required. Mark Humphreys stated that it was difficult to find a balance because the majority of the larger teaching rooms that could fit 20-25 people were located at Vernon Square.

4.7 The Committee thanked LTU for its good work in improving Timetabling considerably over the past five years, despite the problems at the start of this term.

5. Assessment Guidelines for PG Students (Appendix C): The paper on Assessment Guidelines for PG Students (Dr Ted Proferes 17.10.07) was NOTED and discussed. The Associate Dean explained the context of the guidelines regarding the greater standardisation of assessment across the School, taking special note of the need not to disadvantage students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia, but without introducing separate assessment guidelines for such students.

5.1 FLTC had no problem with the guidelines proposed (Paragraph 1 and Page 2), since these were LASS guidelines approved by LASS FLTC in November 2006. However, it rejected the proposals in Paragraph 2 (points a–d), with FLTC members opposed to the separation out of specific marks for presentation in assignments. The academic workload associated with the proposal was also found problematic.

5.2 FLTC on balance preferred an approach to assessment which ‘read through’ presentational difficulties associated with dyslexia (or indeed, with non-native English to some extent), to focus on the core of the argument in assessed work. This was in fact closer to Carol Johns’ original paper on this issue.

5.3 The Student Disability Officer Ms Davis, noted that under the DDA it would be acceptable to insist on certain requirements, such as a logical flow of argument, even if that were more difficult for some students to attain, provided that this was in accordance with desired learning outcomes for the course.

6. Assessment Guidelines for Study Abroad Students (Appendix D): The assessment guidelines for Study Abroad Students and the Summary Report on the Study Abroad Recruitment Visit (Appendix E) were NOTED. The Committee would be interested to see a list of universities visited. The proposed ‘One size Fits All’ solution to assessment of Study Abroad students does not in fact fit the diversity of assessment methods used in LASS courses and so could not be supported as it stands. Academic members of the Committee were concerned that a separate examination paper would de facto have to be set (even if this used a subset of questions), as well.

7. Submission of Assignments on CD: Dr Dic Lo PROPOSED on behalf of the Department of Economics that assignments be submitted
on CD to facilitate identifying cases of plagiarism. The Committee **REJECTED** this proposal because the Faculty Office did not have the facilities to cope with such submission and because there would be difficulties in establishing a match between hard copy and CD versions of assignments in contested cases. However, FLTC supported the principle of electronic submission and recognised the need for it, in relation to plagiarism testing.

7.1 The Associate Dean **NOTED** that ‘Turnitin’ software can now provide students with a plagiarism report based on a red, amber and green traffic light system, and that many institutions now use this. It puts the onus on students to go through a test for plagiarism before their work is submitted for marking.

7.2 Dr Dic Lo stated that the Department of Economics would be happy with a form of electronic submission other than its specific proposal of CDs. Dr Helen MacNaughtan **NOTED** that electronic submission would lead to electronic marking. Sonja Ruehl commented that this was already done in distance-learning assignment marking and tutors reported it to be quicker.

7.3 FLTC noted that Dr Bentham had discussed this issue at the last LTQC meeting and had suggested that electronic submission on Blackboard, which has a plagiarism testing facility within it, would be the best option. Dr Bentham would be invited to the next FLTC to **REPORT** her findings and discuss a specific proposal.

8. **Library Matters:**

   8.1 FLTC were very concerned at the possible loss of a separate Teaching Collection which is heavily used by this Faculty (for example, Development Studies having multiple book copies in the Teaching Collection because of large student numbers). There was also concern at a lack of consultation with Library staff over the issue.

   8.2 FLTC asked the Faculty Librarian Mrs Barbara Spina to comment on proposals to move the Teaching Collection from the main library area due to new projects and space constraints and outline the options under consideration.

   The Faculty Librarian commented that the School had offered room G60 as compensatory space, and though it was not load-bearing, it could be used for study space. There was therefore now a possibility that the Teaching Collection might be rehoused in the current Reading Room in the short term.

   In the medium term, one option might be to reintegrate the collection into the general book stocks available to non SOAS students on 24 hour loan. Other possibilities under discussion are offsite storage; or ‘matching’ the current Teaching Collection with electronic books. There was considerable enthusiasm for the ‘electronic books’ possibility.

8.3 Dr Jens Lerche **NOTED** that the Library had made the best of a difficult situation.

8.4 The Associate Dean **NOTED** that the British Library is keen to extend the usage of its Social Science Reading Room and that membership of the BL is now more widely open, including to undergraduate students. The AD and DeFIMS HOD had taken up the offer made to all Departments by Ian Cooke, of a tour the BL facilities for Social Science and for Business and an explanation of the Library’s new content management strategy, which was very useful.

9. **UG Programme Reviews for 2006-07**

   The UG Programme Reviews received from three Departments, were **NOTED**.

   Dr Dic Lo **NOTED** that the BSc Economics and BSc Development Economics programmes required an increase in economics content including additional Quantitative courses. It was
**NOTED** that this would require programme amendment outlines and course proposal forms to be completed and submitted to the next FLTC.

9.1 It was noted that Law UG Annual Programme Review was incomplete because of missing External Examiner Reports, which were being actively chased up. However, the AD would produce an APR Summary for Faculty Board and LTQC, for all four departments including the partial submission from Law, so that the quality assurance and other issues identified in them could be discussed in the School in a timely way.

9.2 It was **NOTED** from the LTQC that the question had been raised by IFCELs regarding two year offers for MSc and MA programmes. It was envisioned that this would anchor students at SOAS. The Associate Dean **NOTED** that departments would need to engage with setting appropriate admissions requirements for this if it were to go ahead.

10. **Any Other Business:**
    Display of documents by projector at FLTC meetings (plus email distribution) rather than provision of papers in hard copy at the meeting, was agreed.