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# Recent activities and future plans

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## The Future of the LTSN - All Change?

The services provided by the LTSN Maths, Stats & OR Network may soon be provided under the auspices of a different umbrella organisation following the recent report from the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC). The TQEC was established in early 2002 by UUK, SCOP and HEFCE. The Committee, chaired by Professor Sir Ron Cooke, was asked to review the existing arrangements for supporting quality enhancement in UK Higher Education. In particular, it aimed to identify any gaps or overlap in the activities of the four agencies that work in this area; the QAA, the ILTHE, HESDA and the LTSN. Research showed that there is a widespread perception that arrangements for quality enhancement are fragmented and that many VCs favour a single integrated body. The TQEC set out its vision for the emerging quality enhancement agenda in its report delivered in January 2003 – see <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/TQEC/final.htm>

The report recommends the establishment of a new organisation that would encompass the work currently carried out by the ILTHE, HESDA and the LTSN. The TQEC report suggests that this new organisation is called the 'Academy for the Enhancement of Learning in HE'. The Academy would provide an integrated approach and would work with individuals, groups and institutions. Such an organisation was also described in the recent White Paper The Future of Higher Education where it was referred to as the 'Teaching Quality Academy' – see <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/highereducation/hestrategy>

It is not yet clear how this will affect the LTSN Subject Centres. The discipline-based nature of LTSN services received strong support in the TQEC report and we hope that the Academy will be built on the strengths of the LTSN. However, there are issues related to defining the role of subject centres in the light of the increased emphasis on learning and teaching identified in the White Paper, such as Centres of Excellence, CPD, HE in FE etc. It is also possible that the LTSN 'brand' may be affected in the transfer to an Academy. There will be widespread consultation on the proposals and we expect to receive clear indications of the future position of our Network by the summer.

### Do you know your departmental contact?

All departmental heads of Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research have been asked to nominate a contact for the LTSN Maths, Stats & OR Network, and most of them have done so. We would like this to be a two-way role - we pass on information to you via the contact, but equally we'd like to hear from them what is happening in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. Some contacts are active, and you probably know who they are. Others may not have made themselves known to the other members of the department. If you don't know who your contact is, ask around and see if they need any support in circulating information etc. For example, we sent out posters about our May and June workshops for display on staff noticeboards.

### A database of reviewed educational research in MSOR

The educational literature is vast, and much of this is devoted to school level mathematics education. For staff members in HE mathematics and statistics departments who wish to access this work, it can be very time consuming and frustrating. Initially, without advice from colleagues in education, finding the useful material might be a matter of hit and miss. To help staff locate relevant articles, and using the references these contain access the literature more widely, the Network has commissioned a collection of reviewed articles of educational research in MSOR. This is a small and careful selection of the available literature, made initially by Adrian Simpson, University of Warwick. Each entry has a detailed review (not simply the author's abstract) explaining the main subject of the work. This database is available through a very simple web interface which may be searched by three different methods: author, keyword or using a practical/theoretical filter.

See <http://ltsn.mathstore.gla.ac.uk/resourcecollection>. The collection is an ongoing project and we welcome contributions of a comparable format and standard. If your favorite article does not appear in this collection it is most probably because it has not been reviewed. Please contact Chris Sangwin, [C.J.Sangwin@bham.ac.uk](mailto:C.J.Sangwin@bham.ac.uk) with suggestions for additions to the database.

### Projects and Workshops

On 26 February we hosted a workshop for six FDTL projects in a joint event with LTSN Physical Sciences. The issue of Intellectual Property Rights was addressed, and each project gave a presentation. You can see their summaries at <http://ltsn.mathstore.ac.uk/FDTL/Feb03>. We also identified opportunities for collaboration, networking and dissemination.

We received seven applications for our **latest round of miniprojects**, and can now announce that two have been successful. One will write a series of JAVA applets

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in group theory and complex analysis, and the other will work on diagnostic testing and support.

Existing miniprojects are currently contributing to an exciting programme of workshops as can be seen below, in the Diary and at <http://ltsn.mathstore.ac.uk/workshops>

**Minisymposium on Mathematics Education:** on 8 April our Network contributed a minisymposium to the British Applied Mathematics Colloquium at the University of Southampton with invited speakers Tom Roper (Leeds), Jane White (Bath), Chris Sangwin (Birmingham) and Kjeld Laurson (Copenhagen). Kjeld also spoke at a special session within the British Mathematical Colloquium at the University of Birmingham on 9 April.

**The 2003 HoDoMs conference** was held in the lovely surrounding of Greenwich from 10-11 April. John Blake spoke on Teaching Quality Enhancement, Neil Challis on personal development planning and Pam Bishop on other issues which are likely to come up over the next few years.

**Risk-Based Decision Analysis with Applications in Industry, Healthcare, the Environment:** 8 April at UMIST, Manchester, led by Simon French

**Teaching Statistics in Finance:** 29 April at the RSS Offices, London. A repeat of the workshop held at Nottingham Trent the previous year.

**Using posters for assessment:** 2 May, Leeds Metropolitan University; a joint event with LTSN Information and Computer Sciences.

**Mathletics - Online objective tests:** 8 May, Brunel University. A hands-on workshop to inform users and potential users of what mathematics tests are already available and how they might be used as a stand-alone system or within other VLEs.

**Assessment Symposium – Testing Times:** 16 May, University of Edinburgh. The day will include a debate which we hope will provide some provocative copy for the next newsletter.

**Teaching Multivariate Analysis: What are Lectures for?** 19 May at the University of Sheffield, led by Nick Fieller.

### European Women in Mathematics

**Mentoring Scheme:** <http://ewm.brookes.ac.uk>

This website provides a resource for women starting a career in mathematics to link up with a mentor. A mentor is a more experienced academic (male or female) who has volunteered to act as an informal advisor on issues such as careers, applying for grants, balancing family and career and gender issues in the workplace. The mentor's aim is to advance the

educational and personal growth of the mentee. Matching is based on common interests in careers in academia or industry, mathematical education, balance of career and family, or research interests.

There are also links on this website to information about jobs and education in mathematics, about mentoring in general, to biographies of women working in mathematics and gender policies in the EU. If you are a female postgraduate or postdoctoral student in mathematics do consider visiting the site. Please pass this information on to others you know who might benefit from this scheme.

### Mentors needed

In order to find good matches for those who sign up with this scheme we also need volunteer mentors. As a mentor you don't have to have all of the answers, but maybe you can help to make the connection to someone or some place that does. In order to be a mentor the most important thing is that you will be able to give a regular amount of time to the project. Other than that the only requirement is enthusiasm and a willingness to help others by listening, sharing experience and offering advice. Please consider signing up by visiting the website.

This project has been funded by the European Commission and the web site was created with support from Oxford Brookes University. Further details from Dr Catherine Hobbs, Department of Mathematical Sciences at Oxford Brookes University, email [cahobbs@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:cahobbs@brookes.ac.uk)

### Publications

In addition to the MathsTEAM booklets described on page 2, the following publications can be ordered at any time. There is no charge for the leaflets or for individual copies of the booklets.

**Facts and Formulae leaflet:** bulk copies available free of charge for distribution to students

**Algebra Refresher, and Calculus Refresher:** Bulk copies can be purchased for distribution to students. The current cost is £125 for 100 copies, payable in advance.

**Learning and Teaching in Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research:** occasional series ISSN 1476-1378. Individual copies available free of charge:

- 1/01 Post-sixteen mathematics within Curriculum 2000 (only a few copies left)
- 2/01 Guidelines for Introducing Groupwork in Undergraduate Mathematics
- 3/01 Good Practice in the Provision of Mathematics Support Centres (currently out of print, but we are taking orders)

Full details at <http://ltsn.mathstore.ac.uk/publications>