
Staff development project – First steps

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Maths, Stats & OR Network

In the August 2001 issue of *MSOR Connections* you may have seen that the LTSN Maths, Stats & OR Network had been successful in its bid for a staff development project. Full details can be found at <http://ltsn.mathstore.ac.uk/bids/staffdev.PDF>. Part of the project was to appoint two consultants, one in mathematics and the other in statistics. I am the mathematics consultant and Warren Gilchrist, of Sheffield Hallam University is the other. Until recently I was a lecturer at Nottingham Trent University.

The project plan expects the consultants to:

- Conduct one-one interviews with key staff in selected universities;
- Collect examples of good practice, paper and electronic based.

The project's planned outputs, which are directly relevant to the visits, are two national resources:

- Paper and electronic based libraries of good-practice-type material for enhancing the learning experience of students.
- On-line web-based modules for staff development for new and existing staff.

At the time of writing this I have only visited two universities, one "old" - one "new", so I am not going to draw any general conclusions yet. This article outlines the issues I am exploring in the interviews and I would welcome feedback and contributions from readers. We will not be able to visit every university so we are very interested to hear of existing materials that universities have that might be relevant to the project.

The main areas explored are:

- *Current provision for staff development for new and existing staff:* Universities often have a central provision for introducing new staff into teaching and lecturing but it has a small subject specific provision. Most MSOR specific provision seems to be via mentoring, seminars and similar non-written channels. Does any university have written or web based MSOR specific staff development materials that they would be prepared to share with the community?
- *What sort of items could usefully be made available via a web site?* The following are the main suggestions so far – from the project plan, my thinking and suggestions from the visits.

We are not guaranteeing all of them will be worthwhile or feasible to proceed with.

- a) *"Good practice" examples of notes provided for students.* Probably this is the easiest material for the project to acquire but how much would a new lecturer learn about how to construct as lecture course just from this source?
- b) *Packs produced by lecturers to show how they designed one or two lectures.* I see each pack containing one or two pages of explanation of how the lecture(s) were designed, the lecturers teaching notes, any overheads used and the notes or other handouts the students were given. Obviously this idea would need volunteers who would put a pack together. Any volunteers? If some packs were produced do you think they would be useful?

- c) *A web-based bank of example exam questions.*
The idea would not be a place to lift questions wholesale but a way to see the various examining strategies other institutions use.
- d) *A national data bank on the web for diagnostic testing and support of students.* This idea was raised by one of the universities visited. They saw a need where local tests could be put together rapidly from this bank which had already sorted out a good maths taxonomy. If this idea was considered worthwhile it would probably have to be a future project.
- e) *A web-based bank of examples of non-exam assessment methods:* Assessment these days is not just the “n hour do k questions from m” style of paper. Coursework and many innovative types of assessment are in use. We think it would be useful to have a bank of examples of coursework briefing sheets and brief articles outlining

innovative forms of assessment (written up in a similar fashion to (b)). Do you think this would be useful? Would you be prepared to contribute an example?

- f) *A hints and tips web-site:* mainly of a “How to ...” nature. e.g. “*How do I convert a Word document which uses Equation Editor into a PDF file.*” Does your department have any existing handouts of this nature which it would contribute to the wider community? Are there topics which you and your colleagues would like to see covered in it? Do you know of any such items already on the web which you can give me the pointers to?

As you can see I am asking not only for feedback but for offers of active help and contributions. If many can contribute a little and the Maths, Stats & OR Network can make them available nationally we could all be the beneficiaries!!

Teaching Statistics in Higher Education

A day of learning and sharing experiences

November 14, 10.00 - 16.00

at the Royal Statistical Society, 12 Errol Street. London EC1Y 8LX

Aims for the Day

- To assist in the induction to teaching statistics for new lecturers
- To enable experienced staff to share and reflect on their experiences
- To provide ideas and support for the teaching of statistics

Key feature: Exhibition of collected good practice material, experience sharing, relating educational theory to good practice, emphasis on choices facing teachers

Session 1 10.00 – 11.00

Introduction

Introduction to the LTSN and issues facing the statistics community

Neville Davies, Director, RSS Centre for Statistical Education

Session 3 13.15 – 14.30

Teaching Statistics

Insights from the practice of teaching

Neville Hunt, Coventry University

Session 2 11.15- 12.30

Learning Statistics

Insights from Learning Theory

Warren Gilchrist, Emeritus Professor, Sheffield Hallam University

Session 4 15.00 – 16.00

Assessment

Assessment choices, examples related to particular teaching approaches

Peter Holmes, Senior Consultant, RSS Centre for Statistical Education

If you teach statistics in HE, do come and share your experiences and your good ideas. It would help others if you would bring some illustrative material to add to our growing collection. Contact Alison Davies at the RSS Centre for Statistical Education, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, NG1 4BU, tel 0115 848 4476 for info on this and future workshops.