

Economics Network (UK): Ten major successes from the past ten years of operation

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The Economics Network began life in September 1999, with the setting up of the UK national Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN). Then known as “Economics LTSN”, we were, and still are, one of 24 subject centres covering all the subjects taught in UK higher education. We are now part of the Higher Education Academy.

Over the past 10 years, the Economics Network has provided a whole range of services to Economics lecturers. These are valued by the economics HE community and the take-up of them is high. The support that we can offer to lecturers and departments is becoming ever more important as higher education faces reduced levels of funding and as lecturers are faced with increased class sizes, increased marking loads and greater accountability to students and HE managers.

Among our successes:

1. Large bank of resources with high use rate

The Network has three comprehensive websites: the main Economics Network site, *Why Study Economics?* (for prospective students) and *Studying Economics* (for undergraduates). These have had a total of 173 new resources specifically created for them in 2008/9.

The Network’s main site, www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk, currently receives around two and a half million hits per year, including for its two peer-reviewed journals. The Network’s student-focused sites attract an additional half million hits per year.

2. Supporting New Lecturers and GTAs

In both 2008/9 and 2009/10 the Economics Network ran six (each year) dedicated annual training events for graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) (one-day workshops), and for new and early-career lecturers in both England and Scotland. A total of 21 GTA and New Lecturer workshops have been run (most of them in the past 3 years) with 378 participants. An average of 95% of participants have found the workshops useful.

3. A range of successful Continuing Professional Development activities (CPD)

CPD workshops are run both nationally, regionally and for specific departments. Since 2000 the Economics Network has held over 200 CPD events involving over 2000 participants. One key measure of success has been the high number of requests for further workshops from departments having appreciated previous ones. Another measure is satisfaction expressed in feedback forms: consistently over 95% of participants have found the workshops useful.

4. Evidence base: Surveys and evaluation

A key focus of the Economics Network over the past 10 years has been developing a comprehensive evidence base to inform the planning of departments and, along with key stakeholders, to inform the Economics Network’s own planning.

Since 2001 the Economics Network has undertaken 5 student surveys with over 10,000 respondents (an approximate response rate of 7.5% for each survey), 5 lecturer surveys with 741 respondents (an approximate response rate of 8.8% for each survey), 2 alumni surveys (a total of 749 respondents) and 2 employer surveys (36 respondents) and a total of 15 focus groups.

5. Developing networks

Developing networks to build capacity and sustain interest and enhancements in student learning have been a key feature of the Economics Network strategy. The Network has reached out not just to Key Contacts (from each department teaching economics) and Heads of Department, but also to enthusiasts (our Associates) who's expertise can be called upon in supporting the community, as well as the research community through our sub-discipline-focused Teaching Resources for Undergraduate Economics (TRUE) Open Educational Resources project.

6. Student engagement and student learning

A focus on improving the student experience by involving students has been a key success of the Economics Network. Since 2001 the Network has undertaken biennial student surveys and annual student focus groups to understand the economics students' experience both across the community and at a departmental level. .

Individual confidential reports have been returned to departments to support internal planning and provide more detail to National Student Survey results.

7. Supporting projects and initiating curriculum change

The Economics Network funds and supports a large range of projects, with a focus on curriculum changes. These small projects of up to £5000 concern the development, implementation and evaluation of innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in Economics Higher Education. 41 have been funded since the programme began in 2004/5. Many innovations and solutions have resulted from these projects that the Network has then been able to disseminate across the community.

8. Working with stakeholders

Employers, professional bodies and stakeholders are all represented on the Economics Network Advisory Group, feeding into the Network's strategy and planning.

9. Research into Economics learning and teaching

The Network publishes two peer-reviewed journals, the *International Review of Economics Education (IREE)* and *Computers in Higher Education Economic Review (CHEER)*. Both journals are available both electronically and in a paper version.

There are 274 subscribers to the paper copy of IREE and 144 subscribers to the paper copy of CHEER. Numbers of accesses to the two journals on our website are particularly high, for example 227,897 successful page accesses for CHEER during 2008/9, and 117,346 for IREE.

10. Celebrating excellence and raising the status of teaching

Since 2001 the Network has had an annual teaching awards programme to recognise and reward exemplary practice from within the UK academic economics community. Awards are given under three categories: Outstanding Teaching, Student Nominated and eLearning. There has been a total of 37 winners and 30 commendation award holders (and over 100 nominations).

A lot of work over the past 10 years has gone into developing our services, much of it from colleagues across the country and abroad who have shared their ideas and resources and have run events for us.

We hope that the support from our various communities and from universities will be enough to save the subject centres – but at present, our future is highly uncertain and under considerable threat.