

Review of the LTS initiative 2006-8

1. Introduction

The University's Good Practice Strategy was endorsed by the General Board's Education Committee in 2004, and the Learning and Teaching Support (LTS) initiative was launched the following year to implement key strands of the strategy. The aims of LTS are to:

- * share good practice in learning and teaching amongst as broad a community as possible;
- * stimulate reflection about learning and teaching practices across the University;
- * encourage future development and dissemination of good practice by capturing new concerns at faculty and department level;
- * disseminate examples of good practice in learning and teaching at faculty and department level identified through QA processes.

In October 2006 the LTS initiative became part of the remit of a permanent officer in the Education Section. The following is a review of LTS activities since that time.

This review was undertaken as the Officer is conscious of the need to test the ongoing value and relevance of LTS, particularly in light of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, ongoing resource commitments, funding uncertainty and institutional audit.

2. Summary and recommendations

Feedback on LTS has been extremely positive; comments from survey respondents include:

A good initiative, which has to struggle in a highly-devolved university, where learning and teaching decisions belong to many different people even in the same institution.

It's very much worth maintaining and all involved are doing an excellent job. Given the volume of learning and teaching activities, relevant and useful support activities deserve higher priority.

LTS work is well planned and well thought out.

These comments, and other feedback, demonstrate that LTS is fulfilling its aims and has become an established medium for sharing good practice which is welcomed by those interested in learning and teaching at the University. The review has found that, whilst LTS cannot provide the kind of pedagogic support envisaged in the recent Pedagogic Support Scoping Project, it does provide a valued forum for discussion about teaching and learning and an infrastructure through which good practice can be disseminated.

Key findings and recommendations are outlined below for each strand of LTS. Please refer to the corresponding sections in the report for contextual information and further details.

i. Communication (section 4)

- * A number of methods were used to disseminate information about LTS, of which the two email lists (good practice contacts and Quality Contacts) and website were seemingly the most effective.
- * Membership of the good practice contacts list has more than doubled to over 300 academic, administrative and student representatives from across the Collegiate University.

Main recommendations

- * Develop a strategy for evolving the LTS community and for continuing to encourage participation from all members of the Collegiate University with an interest in teaching and learning.

- * Ask Staff Development whether information about LTS could be included in induction material.
- * Investigate whether greater use of new technologies could benefit LTS.

ii. LTS lunches (section 5)

- * Five lunches were held in 2006-7 and four have been held to date in 2007-8 at a total cost of £1,894.54. LTS is currently funded by TQEF which will run out at the end of 2008-9.
- * The sessions covered a range of topics to attract administrative and academic staff.
- * New attendees were recorded at every lunch, and average attendance has risen by c.50% from 2005-6 to this year's mean attendance figure of 45.
- * Feedback has been extremely positive and suggests that the lunches are viewed as useful networking opportunities and a valuable vehicle for disseminating information about topical issues.

Main recommendations

- * Explore whether additional resource could be allocated to enable longer sessions or more lunches.
- * Continue to open events to all members of the University, but signal on invitations which groups are likely to be particularly interested in the topic.
- * Continue to balance sessions with niche appeal with those of wide general interest.
- * Vary the timetable to facilitate broader participation.
- * Encourage more contributions from teaching staff to highlight good practices.
- * Continue to provide details of follow-up actions arising from issues raised at LTS events.

iii. LTS News (section 6)

- * Five editions are published each academical year.
- * All editions are published as an e-newsletter on the LTS website; hard copies are distributed to lunch attendees and Quality Contacts.
- * Feedback on the redesigned template and newsletter content has been positive.

Recommendation

Continue to produce LTS News and to encourage colleagues from cognate departments and those working on teaching and learning projects to contribute articles or notices.

iv. LTS website (section 7)

- * Feedback on the website, which was redesigned and relaunched in 2006-7, has been very positive.
- * The website was the initial source of information about LTS for most respondents.

Recommendation

Continue to maintain and develop the website by adding additional resources.

v. Online database of ideas and examples (section 8)

- * In response to a recommendation in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, LTS launched a University-wide database of ideas and examples relating to learning and teaching in October 2007.
- * Examples collated by the Education Section were added to the database and were later pared back to only those which gave meaningful information.
- * The database offers a useful means of disseminating ideas and research findings to a wider audience but further work is needed to raise its profile.

Main recommendations

- * Monitor the quality of nominations so that only meaningful examples are added.

- * Continue to encourage those working on teaching and learning projects to use the database to disseminate their findings.
- * Ask faculties and departments to review their database entries for currency at the same time that they review their quality statement and programme specifications.
- * Continue to investigate ways of increasing the profile of the database.

vi. Have You Tried? (section 9)

- * Since 2006 'Have You Tried?' documents have been developed to collate ideas and examples for 'supporting student representatives' and providing 'feedback to students on academic performance and progression'.
- * Although the profile of the documents is fairly low, those who have used them found them useful and at an appropriate level.

Recommendation

Continue to develop and promote 'Have You Tried?' documents.

vii. LTS forum (section 10)

- * The LTS forum on CamTOOLS is currently maintained in parallel with the website which creates significant duplication of work.
- * Respondents prefer the website to the forum.

Recommendations

- * Close the forum having added all members to the good practice mailing list.
- * Ask MISD to add a feedback function to the website to encourage comment and engagement.

viii. Identifying good practice (section 11)

The Education Section collates examples of good practice via a variety of means.

Recommendations

- * Continue to run LTS lunches as a forum for sharing good practice.
- * Continue to add meaningful examples of good practice to the online database and 'Have You Tried?' documents.

ix. Questions for the General Board's Education Committee

In light of the findings of the review, the Committee is asked whether it is satisfied for LTS to continue in its current format, in line with the recommendations made in the report?

Further, the Committee is asked whether it is prepared to ask the General Board to support increased funding and resource from the Academic Division so that LTS can offer:

- * longer learning and teaching workshops to draw together the work of various learning and teaching support providers;
- * additional events to facilitate greater coverage of student support and learning resource issues?

3. Review methodology

i. Methodology and response

In March 2008 all Quality Contacts were asked to complete an online survey to explore their perceptions of the LTS initiative. Members of the good practice mailing list were invited to complete a separate questionnaire.

55 good practice contacts from a wide range of institutions completed the online questionnaire, of whom 60% were administrative or academic-related staff, 35% academic and 4% student. This is broadly representative of the composition of the good practice list as a whole and corresponds to 29% of the current membership of the list, excluding Quality Contacts. This is a good response rate for an unsolicited questionnaire to such a disparate mailing list, and the responses provide very constructive feedback and demonstrate significant engagement with the initiative. The response rate from Quality Contacts was lower but those who did reply (11 or 22% of the total number) provided very useful comments.

Feedback from the survey has been integrated into this report. Copies of the survey, and the full results, are available on request from Madeline McKerchar (mjm61@cam.ac.uk).

After the survey, discussions were held with colleagues in Staff Development, CARET and a number of other University institutions. The purpose of these discussions was to seek feedback from those who have contributed to the lunches, to demonstrate that LTS is not solely an Education Section initiative, to encourage collaboration, and to ensure that LTS remains relevant as it evolves.

4. Communication

i. Quality Contacts and good practice contacts

Information about LTS is routinely sent to two groups: Quality Contacts and good practice contacts.

Quality Contacts

The Education Section maintains a list of 51 Quality Contacts, generally one per faculty/department, who are asked to receive and disseminate information about quality assurance and enhancement (including LTS) to relevant officers or committees in their institution. Quality Contacts are commonly Departmental Secretaries or Secretaries of Teaching Committees. 50% of Quality Contacts have attended LTS lunches, and several are regular attendees.

Good practice contacts

The good practice list consists of past lunch attendees and University members who have asked to be kept informed of learning and teaching initiatives. The list has more than doubled in the last two years to over 300 members. New members are added after each LTS lunch; for example, over 20 new members were added following the last lunch, many of whom were from Colleges. The composition of the list is as follows:

- * 58% (182) administrative/academic-related;
- * 34% (107) academic;
- * 1% (3) librarians;
- * 1% (3) external;
- * 6% (19) students.

To enable easy tracking of participation in LTS events the good practice contacts list has been converted into spreadsheet format. Analysis revealed that a huge range of faculties, departments and Colleges are represented in the list but that there are differences in participation between schools. Within the schools certain faculties seem to dominate membership:

- * School of Arts and Humanities (SAH): 34 contacts (13% of established staff), including 9 members of the Faculty of MML;

- * School of Biological Sciences (SBS): 23 contacts (8% of established staff) with fairly mixed membership;
- * School of Clinical Medicine (SCM): 15 contacts (6% of established staff), most of whom are from the main Clinical School;
- * School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS): 43 contacts (13% of established staff), including 10 from the Faculty of Law and 8 from the Faculty of Education;
- * School of Physical Sciences (SPS): 24 contacts (7% of established staff), with fairly mixed membership;
- * School of Technology (ST): 27 contacts (10% of established staff), 7 of whom are from the Computer Laboratory and 8 from the Department of Engineering.

It is encouraging to see such interest from particular faculties but it does suggest that it would be worth investigating why membership varies. It is proposed that this issue be investigated in further discussions with Quality Contacts.

Until recently LTS was primarily targeted at members of faculties and departments rather than Colleges. However, there was a considerable College presence at the last LTS lunch and as Colleges are heavily involved in learning and teaching it seems logical to encourage their participation in LTS as a means of disseminating good practice throughout the Collegiate University. One respondent also suggested that LTS could also help to improve communication between the 'centre' and groups which do not otherwise fit into the University structure (i.e. CTOs) by engaging them in discussions about teaching and learning.

ii. Communication methods

During the past two years the following methods have been used to promote and disseminate LTS:

- * redesigned LTS newsletter;
- * notices in *Reporter* in advance of LTS lunches;
- * lunch invitations, reports and editions of LTS News posted on the revamped LTS website;
- * lunch invitations emailed to good practice contacts;
- * lunch invitations emailed to Quality Contacts with a request that they disseminate the information within their institution;
- * annual LTS lunch schedule sent to all contacts at the start of the academical year;
- * invitations sent to specialised groups for particular topics (e.g. Computer Officers, Librarians, Graduate Secretaries in College Tutorial Offices).

iii. Feedback on the profile of LTS

Survey responses suggest that the profile of LTS is high among those directly involved in educational activities (i.e. administrators and those involved in the management of teaching arrangements), but low amongst other members of the institutions. However, several Quality Contacts commented that this is appropriate and that trying to raise the profile of the initiative amongst the rest of their colleagues would be futile, and perhaps counter effective as it could be considered a nuisance.

A couple of respondents commented that the profile of LTS is growing (as evidenced by the expansion of the good practice list). Suggestions for raising the profile of LTS further amongst those with an interest in teaching and learning include:

- * developing 'priority areas' relating to learning and teaching to help engage and sustain interest;
- * using LTS to disseminate the findings of ongoing projects;
- * developing collaborative relationships further;
- * making further use of technology to support professional networking;
- * promoting LTS more among Librarians as they contribute to learning and teaching;
- * interviewing academics to find out what would bring them to LTS events;

- * including information about LTS in staff induction sessions or materials.

iv. Feedback on LTS communication

Most Quality Contacts claimed that the website is their initial source of information about LTS and the rest said that they would contact the Education Section directly – none would consult the LTS forum.

Quality Contacts were positive about LTS communications; 80% said that they generally find LTS emails useful, and the remaining 20% said that they sometimes find them useful. 30% of respondents said that they always forward emails to colleagues, and 70% said that they forward emails if they contain relevant information. Some also commented that, when forwarding emails to colleagues, they find targeting specific interests and responsibilities to be more productive than blanket emailing. Others prefer to promote LTS by displaying the invitations and programmes on their noticeboards. One respondent suggested that the Deputy Academic Secretary could write to Heads of Department at the start of the academical year and request that they circulate the LTS programme to Faculty Boards and Teaching Committees.

Good practice contacts were similarly positive about LTS emails with 73% of respondents describing them as 'generally useful' and the remaining 27% as 'sometimes useful'.

v. Recommendations

Many of the respondents' suggestions are already in progress. The Officer is working with colleagues to develop collaborative relationships and investigate their priorities. LTS News regularly features reports on teaching and learning projects such as LLP and TfLN and several lunches have been held to disseminate project findings.

Recommendations for the ongoing development of LTS:

- * develop a strategy for evolving the LTS community and for continuing to encourage participation from all members of the Collegiate University with an interest in teaching and learning;
- * ask Staff Development whether information about LTS could be included in induction material;
- * discuss with CARET whether greater use of new technologies could benefit LTS;
- * investigate why engagement with LTS apparently varies between faculties and schools;
- * investigate whether the Deputy Academic Secretary could request that Heads of Department circulate the LTS programme to Faculty Boards and Teaching Committees;
- * continue to target invitations to LTS initiatives i.e. sending an invitation to the Librarian's mailing list if a particular lunch seems relevant to them;
- * as feedback indicates that the website is the primary source of information about LTS, publicize the url more widely and include it on all LTS communications;
- * include links to urls in LTS emails, rather than attachments, to avoid clogging up mailboxes.

5. LTS lunches

i. Overview

Five LTS lunches were held in 2006-7 and four have been held to date in 2007-8. Each was held on a Monday lunch time and a buffet lunch was provided.

Lunch topics were selected from suggestions made by Quality Contacts and Officers of the Education Section, based on their knowledge of topical learning and teaching issues. The choice of topics was intended to provide a balance between the following themes:

- * Course Design and Assessment (CDA)
- * Structures and Governance (SG)
- * Staff Development (SD)
- * Policies and Procedures (PP)

- * Learning Resources (LR)
- * Student Support (SS)

It was hoped that the topics would be of interest to both academic and administrative staff. A list of possible future topics is maintained by the Officer and added to throughout the year [see Appendix 2].

ii. Format

LTS acted as the facilitator for the majority of the lunches, providing administrative support to invited presenters. In the past two years colleagues from the Board of Graduate Studies (BGS), the Language Centre, Staff Development and CARET have presented LTS lunches, and feedback indicates that they find LTS a useful vehicle for disseminating their expertise.

The format of the sessions varied according to the topic, the number of attendees and the preference of the presenter. Several respondents commented that they prefer a seminar format to small group work as, due to the time constraints, they prefer to be given the information. However, others commented that they value group work and discussions as they encourage brainstorming and information sharing. Presentations followed by question and answer sessions also seem to work well and several respondents commented that they particularly appreciate being given practical examples and advice.

iii. Attendance

Attendance fluctuated considerably from 24 to 73 attendees. This is not surprising as the appeal of the topics varied. For example, the smallest lunch on 'interacting with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)' would only appeal to those whose faculties and departments have an associated PSRB. By contrast the best attended lunch on 'academic and pastoral support for overseas graduate students' was of interest to academics and administrators in many faculties, departments and Colleges. Attendance has increased considerably since 2005-6 when the average number of attendees was 28 compared to this year's mean figure of 45.

LTS lunches are open to all members of the University. As observed in the 2005-6 review there are a number of regular attendees (excluding members of the Education Section there are 15 'regulars' who have attended 5 or more lunches) but each lunch has attracted new attendees, sometimes as many as 20 a lunch.

The majority of LTS lunch attendees are administrators (62%), many of whom attend the sessions on behalf of their colleagues. It may be argued that this is entirely appropriate as administrators are well placed to assess what will work in their institution.

However, academics still form a substantial proportion of attendees (31%), most of whom attend only if the topic is of direct relevance or interest to them or their role. For example, the lunch on pedagogic support was particularly well attended by academics.

One welcome development is that a number of students now regularly attend the lunches. This adds a new perspective to discussions and will hopefully foster better understanding between the 'University' and its students.

When asked who LTS events should be targeted at, the vast majority of respondents commented that the events should continue to be open to all members of the University, although some felt that academic staff should be the focus and others thought that the lunches should be aimed at administrators.

iv. Scheduling

Lunches were held termly with additional sessions just before Christmas and at the start of the Long Vacation. Attendance did not seem to be unduly affected by whether the event was held in or out of term.

LTS lunches have historically been held on Monday lunch times as the committee schedule is generally lightest on Mondays. Holding sessions over lunch necessarily constrains discussion as the time available is so limited. Respondents suggested that it would be useful to vary the times of the lunches as some are prevented from attending by timetable clashes. Also, some respondents commented that they would

prefer mid-afternoon meetings rather than giving up their lunch hour. Early evening sessions were also suggested but could be problematic for those with family commitments, and one respondent even suggested a regular LTS 'happy hour' at the grad pad bar to foster networking. Another suggestion was supplementing lunches with longer workshops to draw together the work of the Education Section, Staff Development, CARET and other institutions offering learning and teaching support. Several topics would merit longer workshops but unfortunately it would not be possible to run longer workshops unless additional resource could be allocated to LTS.

v. Location

LTS lunches have been held in a number of faculties and departments. Some respondents commented that they appreciate the opportunity to visit different institutions, whereas others suggested that, for convenience, they would prefer the lunches to be held at one location in central Cambridge.

The Officer maintains a spreadsheet of available rooms, their attributes and any associated costs but it is still difficult to find suitable rooms for the LTS sessions, particularly because many faculties and departments are unwilling to allow outside caterers or charge for room hire. Dr Wallach has kindly suggested that Senior Tutors might be able to book rooms in Colleges for the lunches and LTS is keen to accept this offer in 2008-9.

vi. Budget and catering

The cost of the lunches (excluding staff time and incidental resources) was £876.02 in 2006-7 and £1,018.52 to date in 2007-8. Both are within the allocated budget of £1,500. The overall cost has risen this year due to the increase in attendance numbers. Per capita costs have also increased as the Finance Office insisted that we change caterer and consequently, to maintain the quality expected at LTS lunches, costs have risen. See Appendix 1 for a breakdown of lunch costs.

vii. Feedback and follow-up

Feedback is sought after each event, generally via feedback forms circulated at the lunch although a recent trial of an online survey tool resulted in a higher response rate. In future we will use the online survey tool. Responses are available on request from Madeline McKerchar (mjm61@cam.ac.uk).

Discussions at LTS lunches are followed up in a number of ways:

- * a report of the lunch is circulated by email to lunch attendees and is posted on the LTS website;
- * resources relevant to the topic are identified in liaison with the lunch speaker and posted on the LTS website where appropriate;
- * any good practice identified at the session is included in the lunch report and examples are added to the online database of examples and ideas;
- * the subsequent edition of LTS News contains an edited version of the lunch report.

Wherever possible the report gives details of follow-up actions arising from the sessions. Respondents appreciate this and also commented favourably on the related resources which are posted on the LTS website with the lunch report.

viii. Programme for 2007-8

Respondents suggested many topics for inclusion in the 2008-9 programme. These have been added to those which were suggested throughout the year and are attached as Appendix 2. The topics are overwhelmingly related to student support and learning resources which suggests that the schedule should feature more lunches on these themes, or perhaps additional sessions could be held if extra resource could be found.

Discussions are ongoing with colleagues in cognate institutions to plan a stimulating programme for the coming year which reflects their knowledge of current issues and expertise.

ix. Appraisal and recommendations

Feedback about the lunches was generally very positive. Several respondents commented that it was useful to meet counterparts in other fields and that the events provide very good networking opportunities. It seems that some view the networking and awareness raising aspects of the events as more useful than the content itself, as the broad scope of the sessions means that the content can be fairly general.

Recommendations for 2008-9:

- * explore whether additional resource could be allocated to enable longer sessions or more lunches;
- * continue to open events to all members of the University, but signal on invitations which groups are likely to be particularly interested in the topic;
- * continue to balance sessions with niche appeal with those of wide general interest;
- * vary the timetable to facilitate broader participation;
- * encourage more contributions from teaching staff to highlight good practices;
- * seek feedback from attendees via an online form;
- * continue to provide details of follow-up actions arising from issues raised at LTS events.

6. LTS News

i. Overview

An edition of LTS News is produced five times a year to coincide with LTS lunches. The newsletter is circulated in hard copy to lunch attendees and a copy is sent to all Quality Contacts. The newsletter is emailed in PDF format to the good practice mailing list, and to Quality Contacts for them to forward to colleagues as appropriate. The newsletter is also archived on the LTS website and forum.

Five issues of LTS News were published in 2006-7, and a further four have been published to date in 2007-8:

- * Issue 14 - Electronic Detection of Plagiarism [April 2008]
- * Issue 13 - Feedback to students [February 2008]
- * Issue 12 - The Cambridge Learning Landscape [December 2007]
- * Issue 11 - New Database of Ideas & Examples [October 2007]
- * Issue 10 - Interacting with PSRBs [July 2007]
- * Issue 9 - Supporting Student Representatives [April 2007]
- * Issue 8 - Pedagogic Support - the Ways Forward? [February 2007]
- * Issue 7 - Preventing Plagiarism [December 2007]
- * Issue 6 - Learning Resources - Bells and Whistles? [October 2006]

ii. Content

Each newsletter focuses on the topic of the previous lunch. An edited version of the lunch report forms the main part of the newsletter. Other content might include:

- * descriptions of, and links to, related resources;
- * University or HE sector learning and teaching news;
- * updates on University teaching and learning projects;
- * an advertisement for the next lunch.

Suggestions for adverts or articles are welcome from any member of the University but reminders are specifically sent to CARET, Staff Development and the DRC to invite them to contribute articles or notices. This is intended to increase collaboration, to secure more 'buy in' for LTS and to help promote learning and teaching initiatives more effectively.

iii. Feedback

Feedback from the recent survey was very positive, with comments that the newsletters are 'well written and helpful', 'extremely useful' and 'very informative'. Respondents commented that they particularly appreciate the report of the previous LTS lunch.

Most Quality Contacts either circulate the newsletter to their colleagues as a matter of course or if they think that an article will be of interest. There was a fairly even balance between those who prefer to read the newsletter online and those who prefer it in hard copy.

48% of the good practice contacts who responded said that they read the newsletter, and a further 39% said that they read it if the articles are relevant to their work.

Feedback on the newsletter template, which was redesigned to coincide with the redevelopment of the LTS website, was also very positive. Appendix 3 shows 'before and after' versions.

iv. Recommendations

Continue to produce LTS newsletters and to encourage colleagues from cognate departments and those working on teaching and learning projects to contribute articles or notices.

7. LTS website

i. Overview

In October 2007 the LTS website was relaunched in a new stylesheet which was designed to complement the LTS logo (www.cam.ac.uk/lts). The main development was the introduction of an online database of ideas and examples (see section 8 below). Existing features were retained and enhanced.

ii. Appraisal

Feedback on the redesign has been extremely positive. As might be expected for a website of this sort most survey respondents visit the site infrequently or only when prompted.

iii. Recommendations

* Continue to maintain and develop the website by adding additional resources.

8. Online database of ideas and examples

i. Overview

In October 2007 LTS launched a University-wide database of ideas and examples relating to learning and teaching (www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/lts/examples). The database provides a searchable resource of ideas and examples to help staff reflect upon their teaching, and to raise awareness of a variety of solutions to learning and teaching issues.

The database was developed in liaison with MISD and was intended to be intuitive and easy to use. Users can search by theme and/or by institution and/or by specifying a key word. Each example features a description and a number of links to related websites and/or resources. Any member of the University can contribute examples for inclusion using either online or word versions of the nomination form.

All Quality Contacts and good practice contacts were notified of the launch of the database and the launch was the lead article in the October edition of LTS News. Letters were sent to CARET, Staff Development, the Language Centre, BGS and the Disability Resource Centre to invite them to contribute examples. The database was also promoted at LTS lunches.

ii. Appraisal

The database was initially populated with all the good practice examples which had been noted by the Education Section. However, as these were often 1-2 line references from External Examiner or Review Committee reports they were not particularly informative. At the start of the year the Officer wrote to each faculty and department to inform them of the launch of the database and to invite them to expand upon their examples. The response was patchy but some of the examples were expanded.

A more successful approach seems to have been to invite various learning and teaching projects to contribute to the website. The recently concluded TfLN project contributed a number of comprehensive examples which are of wide general interest, and the Officer is liaising with other project teams to encourage them to add their findings. This not only enhances the database but also helps disseminate research findings to a wider audience and so is welcomed by the project groups.

In March 2008 the examples were reviewed and, after consideration, incomplete or patchy examples were removed from view. There are currently over 50 examples in the database and some of the 'hidden' examples are being rationalised into a more useful format.

The database is a fairly new resource so the questionnaire was used to investigate its profile. Many respondents had not visited the database which indicates that further promotional work is needed. 70% of good practice contacts said that they would consider contributing to the database whilst interestingly 75% of the Quality Contacts surveyed said that they would not. Most respondents cited time constraints as their primary reason for not visiting or contributing to the database. Others commented that the resource could be useful and that they are happy to promote it but that it would be more appropriate for those directly involved with teaching. Finally, one respondent commented that 'Have You Tried?' documents are a 'far more useful way of communicating good practice and suggesting alternatives' (see section 9 below).

iii. Recommendations

- * Monitor the quality of nominations so that only informative examples are added.
- * Continue to encourage those working on teaching and learning projects to use the database to disseminate their findings.
- * Ask faculties and departments to review their database entries for currency at the same time that they review their quality statement and programme specifications.
- * Investigate the feasibility of adding a RSS feed.
- * Continue to investigate ways of increasing the profile of the database.

9. Have You Tried?

i. Overview

'Have You Tried?' documents draw together ideas and examples around a particular theme. They are intended to stimulate consideration of ways to improve learning and teaching, and examples are given to illustrate various approaches.

ii. Appraisal

Since 2006 'Have You Tried?' documents have been developed to collate ideas and examples for 'supporting student representatives' and providing 'feedback to students on academic performance and progression'. The document about student representatives was circulated to attendees at an LTS lunch on the topic; feedback on its usefulness was excellent. The second document arose from research into a General Board policy statement and was not circulated at an LTS lunch, although one section was included in LTS News as a taster. Both documents were posted on the LTS website and forum.

It is difficult to pitch this kind of document appropriately and cater for different levels of knowledge. However, whilst feedback from the survey indicates that the profile of the documents is fairly low, those respondents who had read them found them useful and at an appropriate level. A couple were very

enthusiastic about this 'excellent resource' and commented that they are more useful than the online database. This would suggest that the 'Have You Tried?' strand is worth continuing and promoting more widely. Suggestions for further 'Have You Tried?' documents include:

- * academic and pastoral support for overseas graduate students;
- * preparing students for the job market;
- * collecting evidence about learning and teaching practice;
- * using images and video in learning and teaching;
- * using technology to support collaborative activity.

iii. Recommendations

Continue to develop and promote 'Have You Tried?' documents.

10. LTS forum

i. Overview

The LTS forum was launched in September 2005 on CARET's CamCommunity system, and was migrated to CamTools in April 2006.

The forum has 111 members, of whom the vast majority are also good practice contacts. The site features a resource bank, organised by LTS lunch topic and by theme, and can be used to notify members of forthcoming events.

ii. Appraisal

Although CamTools is widely used throughout the University the LTS forum has had limited success. Whilst the good practice contact list has expanded greatly from its 2006 membership, there has not been a corresponding increase in the membership of the forum whose membership is now far lower than that of the good practice mailing list.

Since the revamp of the LTS website many contacts have commented that they prefer to visit the website as they find it more user-friendly. Maintaining both the website and the forum involves significant duplication of work so, as the recent survey demonstrates that the vast majority of contacts prefer the website, it is proposed that the forum should be closed and the website expanded. 94% of the good practice contacts who responded to the survey, and all the Quality Contacts, said that they would not miss the forum if it was closed.

The only feature which cannot immediately be replicated on the website is the wiki feature which was used to create a series of editable 'Have You Tried?' documents. However, the wiki feature is very rarely used and discussions with contacts indicates that static, or periodically updated, versions of the 'Have You Tried?' documents are equally valued. Engagement with the documents seems to be more successful when the documents are used as the basis for discussion at LTS events as people are too busy to comment on wikis.

iii. Recommendations

- * Close the forum having adding all members to the good practice mailing list (the vast majority are already on the list).
- * Ask MISD to add a feedback function to the website to encourage comment and engagement.

11. Identifying good practice

The primary aim of the online database of ideas and examples and the 'Have You Tried?' documents is to disseminate interesting or particularly effective practices across the University. Officers of the Education Section collate examples which are identified via:

- * General Board Learning and Teaching Reviews;
- * annual quality statements;
- * external examiners' reports;
- * committee business including the General Board's Education Committee and the Senior Tutors' Standing Committees;
- * LTS events;
- * discussions with colleagues.

At a departmental level good practice is identified via the reports of internal and external examiners, student feedback questionnaires, appraisals, committee meetings and peer review. Word of mouth can be an effective means of identifying good practice, especially within small departments. One respondent commented that LTS events are 'extremely useful' for 'finding out what other faculties do – or don't do – which highlights our own good practices'