

LSE 100.

The LSE Course

A distinctive course for a distinctive institution



From the Director, Judith Rees

LSE is a unique institution that is devoted to the social sciences and aims to produce graduates who will make significant contributions in many areas of life through their understanding of the social, economic and political factors that shape our world. LSE is an exciting place to be because we address these fundamental issues in our research and in our teaching. Every subject that is studied at LSE – be it economics, law, philosophy or geography – makes a particular contribution to understanding these issues.

Through LSE100 we introduce students to some of the “big questions” that engage LSE’s top academics and that we believe will also fascinate LSE students, whatever background they come from and whatever subject they choose to study at LSE. “LSE100 The LSE Course: Understanding the causes of things” is a compulsory two-term course that gives students an opportunity to benefit from the full breadth of expertise at LSE.

LSE graduates have always been rather distinctive: they’re a global group who go on to do very well in their careers. Looking to the future, it’s important for us to say that LSE graduates have experience in analysing and debating some of the big issues of our time. LSE graduates not only have a real depth and analytical understanding of their subject area, but through LSE100 we can ensure that they can engage in issues of public policy, of contemporary history, of economy and societal organisation, and can do that with people of different backgrounds and different nationalities. Success on LSE100 will be a real added trump card for LSE graduates in the future.

“ We’re a global institution with a global perspective and the great thing about this course is that it enables students to broaden their perspective and open their minds no matter what course they are taking so it gives them a really good foundation for the rest of their lives in all different types of areas. ”

LSE Students’ Union General Secretary, Alex Peters-Day

Thinking like a social scientist

From the Director of LSE100, Jonathan Leape

LSE100 introduces all first year undergraduates to the fundamental elements of thinking like a social scientist. Thinking like a social scientist means thinking like an economist, lawyer, political theorist, historian. At the heart of all of these fields are questions of evidence, explanation and theory. LSE100 uses important issues and debates to explore these questions from the perspective of different disciplines.

LSE has a long tradition of engaging with the important issues of the time – and of encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to these issues. LSE100 brings students squarely into this rich tradition. No important issue can be fully understood through a single lens and LSE100 produces students whose intellectual grounding in their discipline is complemented by an understanding of different ways of thinking. In the current syllabus, for example, students examine ethnographic evidence on Masoalan villagers in Madagascar to assess the prospects for a World Bank-led national conservation policy and analyse economic and philosophical arguments about property rights alongside legal cases in considering the proposed “three strikes” approach to illegal downloading.

Engaging fully with important issues also requires working with people from different backgrounds. Here, too, LSE100 builds on the strengths of LSE. Students learn not only from a range of lecturers, topics, resources and disciplines, but also from each other. LSE100 classes are interdisciplinary in the mix of students, as well as the mix of approaches, enabling students to learn from collaborating and

debating with fellow students from other disciplines and cultural backgrounds. By engaging with big questions through research-led teaching, students on LSE100 strengthen their critical research and communication skills – for example, in evaluating and interpreting different types of evidence and in finding and assessing information. Students learn to construct persuasive arguments orally and in writing on questions such as: “Was the United Nations right to choose the dollar-a-day measure of poverty as its target for the first Millennium Development Goal?” and “Copyright law is fair to creators and necessary for the 21st century economy”.

This ambitious course is underpinned by an innovative approach to teaching and learning. LSE100 has small, interactive classes, which are led by talented and highly trained teachers. It introduces new learning technologies to engage students and support active learning in the lectures and through self-paced web resources.

In all of these ways, LSE100 is designed to help students get the best of LSE: lectures from leading researchers across a broad range of disciplines; an innovative, interdisciplinary approach to important questions; a chance to work with and learn from LSE’s globally diverse students and an overriding emphasis on critical thinking, evidence-based argument and public debate.

LSE100 brings real world issues into the core undergraduate programme to give LSE students the intellectual breadth and strong critical skills they need for success at LSE and afterwards.



“LSE100 is centrally located in LSE’s traditions.”

Broadening the intellectual experience

How should we manage climate change?
Does culture matter?
Why are great events so difficult to predict?

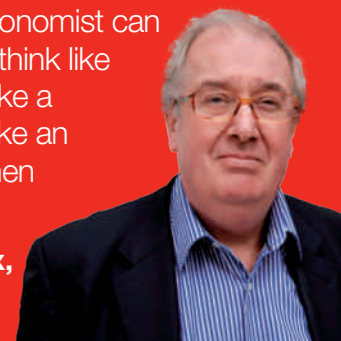
Focusing on “big questions”, students explore the different types of evidence, alternative forms of explanation and different strategies for abstraction and modelling that are used in the different social sciences. In this way, the course not only broadens the intellectual experience of undergraduates at the School, but also deepens students’ understanding of their own discipline. LSE100 is an integrated programme of 20 lectures and 20 classes, taught in the second term of students’ first year, and the first term of their second year. Over these 20 weeks, six big questions are explored in three week modules.



LSE100 lecturers: Professor Janet Hunter,
Dr Catherine Allerton, Professor Rita Astuti

“ I think one of the great dangers that we – and all universities – now face is over-specialisation. I think a course like this can at least provide a much broader view on how to think about the social sciences, so an economist can think like a social scientist, an historian can think like a social scientist, an accountant can think like a social scientist ... I think this will actually make an enormous difference to the way students then perceive their next three years at LSE. ”

Professor Michael Cox,
Department of International Relations, LSE



Leading lecturers

LSE100 lectures explore how social scientists address important questions facing society, examining different forms of evidence and assessing competing explanations. Students hear from leading experts: among the lecturers for the current LSE100 syllabus are Professors Nicholas Stern, Rita Astuti, Danny Quah and Michael Cox. The topics of the modules are broad-ranging and change over time. The lectures and classes are challenging but, at the same time, accessible to students from all backgrounds and disciplines.

Challenging classes

LSE100 lectures are complemented by small-group classes that are designed to develop an understanding of the core methodological concepts of evidence, explanation and theory and to build and reinforce critical research and communication skills. In these 20 weekly classes, students analyse different types of evidence and are asked to critically assess particular explanations and draw their own conclusions, developing their arguments in writing and debating the positions taken. Learning how to evaluate evidence, how to assess positions and to think critically, how to structure arguments in writing and how to argue persuasively are fundamental parts of the course. LSE100 classes are mixed across departments, providing an opportunity for students to learn from their fellow students in other disciplines.

LSE100 lecturer:
Professor Danny Quah



Who caused the global financial crisis?
Is population growth a threat or an opportunity?
Who should own ideas?

Ensuring quality and balance

The LSE100 Steering Committee, composed of senior members of the School from a range of departments, has strategic responsibility for ensuring that the course achieves its objectives. It reviews the structure and content of the course to ensure that the topics covered are timely and relevant, that the syllabus as a whole provides an appropriate range of disciplinary perspectives and that the strategy for delivering the course is effective. The syllabus for LSE100 evolves continuously, as individual modules are updated and revised and new modules are brought in. All departments at LSE are encouraged to be involved in future modules.

Innovative technologies

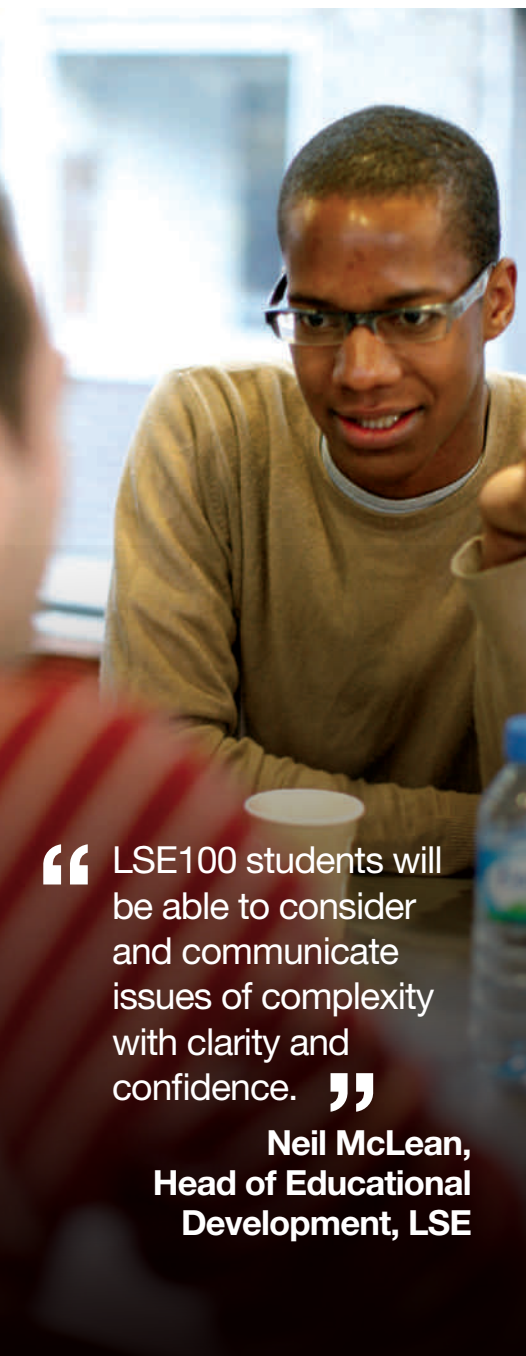
LSE100 uses learning technologies to support active learning in lectures and to provide self-paced learning resources in the course virtual learning environment. The course pioneered the use of personal response systems (PRS or “clickers”) at LSE with the aim of engaging students effectively in lectures while providing real-time feedback to lecturers. PRS encourages students to reflect on the material presented and introduces controlled discussion into lectures, while also enabling lecturers to adjust their pace and emphasis in response to the real-time feedback from students. LSE100 also uses a texting/SMS service to elicit real-time student feedback on “muddy points” – points they found unclear in the lecture. To tailor the course for the heterogeneous interests and backgrounds of students on the course, the LSE100 virtual learning environment offers diagnostic and self-paced resources to provide additional support and to provide extension materials for students who want to go beyond the material presented in lectures and classes.



“ The LSE100 course puts lawyers, economists, sociologists and historians in the same room and challenges them to view critical world issues through several new pairs of eyes. It’s thought-provoking and inspiring and – above all – deeply exciting. I have loved the lectures with a brilliant new speaker and a whole list of new ideas every week. I have looked forward to classes which help you to think, discuss, dissect, engage, debate and write, making the transition into everyday life at the LSE a lot easier. The amount of academic support available for the course is incredible and the amount of interest it has garnered in internship interviews is unbelievable. ”

LSE100 student

Developing critical skills



“ LSE100 students will be able to consider and communicate issues of complexity with clarity and confidence. ”

**Neil McLean,
Head of Educational
Development, LSE**

Developing critical skills

LSE100 helps students develop the critical skills that underpin the study and application of the social sciences. The course is based on a set of nine key research skills, or learning outcomes. These skills fall in three categories – methodological skills, information skills and communication skills – that together provide the foundation for social scientific thinking and research:

Methodological skills

- **Evaluate** and **interpret** evidence of different types, including documentary and other qualitative sources as well as statistical data.
- **Explain** the respective roles of, and interaction between, questions, theories, evidence and explanations in the social sciences.
- **Identify** the role of counterfactuals in social science explanations.
- **Analyse** a contemporary social problem using theoretical perspectives from more than one social science discipline.

Information skills

- **Find** and **access** information relevant to social science problems, making use of good searching principles and techniques.
- **Evaluate** information sources, distinguishing scholarly sources from other content and critically assessing information from internet and other sources.
- **Manage** information – and reduce information overload – using online and other resources as well as appropriate citing and referencing techniques.

Communication skills

- **Construct** coherent and persuasive arguments – both orally and in writing – on current issues in the social sciences, structuring the arguments logically and supporting them with relevant evidence.
- **Plan** and **deliver** an engaging and well-argued presentation that coherently addresses both question and audience.

“ I do think that the ability to work closely, analyse, describe, communicate, recommend – those skills are absolutely fundamental and in addition you’re going to need the skills to communicate and work with people with different backgrounds from your own... ”

I believe that there is no place better than LSE to acquire those skills and no set of skills that you are going to need more in terms of what you do in the future. ”

Professor Lord Nicholas Stern, LSE100 Lecturer

Opportunities and achievements

Developing skills

The benefits to students of developing their critical skills, broadening their LSE experience and deepening their knowledge of the social sciences are not limited to their time at LSE. Most employers, from the financial sector to NGOs, are looking for graduates who have well-developed skills and a degree of breadth to complement the specialist knowledge in their subject area. They want mathematicians who can also write a report, historians who can also understand a graph, and, most of all, employees who can talk to clients and partners all over the world with confidence. LSE100 is designed to help produce a distinctive LSE graduate with skills that cut across specialist subject areas.

Employers are looking for graduates who can think, analyse, present and interact, and want to see examples of how students demonstrate these skills. LSE100 lecturers challenge students to think rigorously about important issues drawing on different social science perspectives, while the small-group classes require students to investigate the relevant evidence, assess alternative explanations and present their arguments coherently both orally and in writing – sometimes working individually, sometimes in groups. The LSE100

team works closely with LSE Careers to ensure that employers have the course information they need.

Demonstrating achievement

The innovative approach to teaching and learning in LSE100 is also reflected in how the course is assessed. The course uses non-numeric marks: Pass, Merit, Distinction or Fail. The final mark is based on five assessments over the course: an essay due at the end of Lent term, three in-class assessments including a group presentation project and a two-hour final examination. Students' marks for LSE100 are shown on their transcript.

At a recent graduate recruitment event for key LSE employers, 83 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

“LSE100 makes LSE graduates more attractive as potential employees.”

“ LSE100 enhances graduates' academic offering by broadening their outlook and enabling them to develop and enhance the 'soft' skills which are so critical to successful organisations. The interdisciplinary nature of the experience alongside the utilisation of new technologies provides participants with a distinctive edge in today's competitive labour market. ”

Jennifer Owen, Head of LSE Careers

“ Standard Chartered place a high emphasis on the ability to communicate effectively and with confidence and are pleased to support LSE100 which enables students to further improve their skills. ”

**Karen Goodacre,
Graduate Recruitment,
Standard Chartered Bank**

“ LSE100 is producing the sort of graduates that employers want. ”

**Liz Ellis, Employer
Liaison Manager,
LSE Careers**





LSE100 team recognised March 2010



LSE100 was winner of the Courses category, commended for the 'exciting and bold whole institution' strategy and the interdisciplinary approach to environmental and social issues.

Contacts

LSE100 Course office
The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

Tel: +44 (0)20 7107 5361

Email: LSE100@lse.ac.uk

Website: lse.ac.uk/LSE100

The information in this publication can be made available in alternative formats, on request. Please contact the LSE100 Course office.

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