

# The Economics Network Newsletter

### Issue 24 Autumn-Winter 2014



Working with the Royal Economic Society and Scottish Economic Society to support economics education in the UK and internationally

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The Economics Network is generously supported by the Royal Economic Society, the Scottish Economic Society and over 50 UK higher education economics departments. More information on our supporters and joining the Network is available on our website at: www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/about/supporters

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some experience of teaching before attending and that attending during a vacation would be much easier for most delegates.

This year, the New Lecturers' workshop will be combined with the practice-based **Early** Careers Symposium that was very successfully trialled last Easter and which is open to both new lecturing staff and graduate teaching assistants. Registration for both the New Lecturers' Workshop and the Early Careers Symposium is now open on our website.

The Network is working ever more closely with the Royal Economic Society and Scottish Economic Society; we will be running an event on teaching at the annual **RES Postgraduate** Meeting at UCL in January 2015 and we recently helped the SES run a "deal or no deal" game with students at their SES Teachers' Conference held at Perth in November.

Plans for the next **Developments** in Economics Education **Conference** (DEE) at the University of Birmingham from 9th-11th Sept 2015 are now well



completed its annual round of Graduate Teaching Assistant workshops and is now busy planning its events for the upcoming year. In a change to our usual calendar, the New Lecturers' Workshop, a training event for recent recruits to economics and business departments usually provided in October, is due to take place in April 2015. It was felt by the Network and by CHUDE (Conference of Heads of University Departments of Economics) that the event would be enhanced if delegates had

The Network has just











## Economics Network Newsletter

underway and a call for papers has just been released. Paul Johnson of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Daniel Franklin of The Economist will be our plenary speakers.

We would like to thank Ros **O'Leary** who worked at the Network for many years and is now Head of Educational Development at the University of Gloucestershire. We wish her the best in her prestigious new role and will keep in touch with her as a Network Associate.

#### Alvin Birdi

(Economics Network Director)

The next edition of the newsletter (spring 2015) will feature a piece on application and admissions trends in economics.

# Autumn Workshops

for new economics teaching staff

With the support of the Royal Economic Society and the Scottish Economic Society, we ran a full programme of workshops for graduate teaching assistants across the UK this autumn.

#### **GTA workshops**

This September and October, the Economics Network ran 12 workshops for graduate teaching assistants and tutors across the country. These events were attended by over 250 individuals from 37 different departments.

As in previous years, we received exceptional feedback from all of the events:

- 94% of attendees responded agree or strongly agree when asked if they found the workshop useful.

- 100% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that the presenters were of a high standard (72% strongly agree).

Many thanks to all our associates who ran the workshops.

#### Comments from workshop participants:

"Brilliant workshop, it really boosted my confidence levels".

"The presenters were informative and engaging".

"An excellent workshop, I would advise others to attend".

"The additional teaching resources will be very valuable".

#### Induction events

In addition to the GTA workshops, we also arranged an induction event at the University of Bristol, which Alvin Birdi (Director of the Economics Network) ran with the help of Steve Proud (Bristol),

Juliette Stephenson (Exeter) and Christian Spielmann (UCL).

This workshop was a full day event and included sessions specific to the School of Economics, Finance and Management at Bristol (e.g. university exam regulations, personal tutoring, staff introductions) as well as more interactive sessions on effective small group teaching and providing useful feedback.

The event was well received both by attendees and management within the department. Comments from participants included:

"It was really useful for me to hear about the fears of other staff who are already teaching and the way the deal with them".

"A very well explained, detailed, structured and highly informative induction session".

"As a new teaching associate, also new to the university, just about every aspect of the day was useful including the brief introductions to key staff so I could put faces to names".

If you are running a departmental away day or induction and would like the Economics Network to run a session on teaching or a particular issue (such as using technology in the classroom, providing effective feedback, student motivation or using lecture time more efficiently), please contact us and we can provide some more information.

#### 100% of GTA workshop attendees agreed or strongly agreed that the presenters were of a high standard

#### New lecturers and teaching symposium

In the past, we have also run a workshop for new lecturers in the autumn term. This year, we will combine this with the Teaching Symposium (which we first held in April last year) to make a full two day event on the 16th and 17th April 2015 at the University of Bristol.

The first day, intended for staff who have recently been employed as lecturers, will be the main new lecturers programme (with sessions on effective large group teaching, assessment and feedback, using games in the classroom and synthesising teaching and research).

The second day, which will also be open to GTAs, will be a more interactive, practice based day with sessions on teaching specific economics topics, voice and presence in the classroom (with a professional actor) and technology in teaching.

Further information is available on our website:

www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/ events.

## **New Lecturers' Workshop** & Teaching Symposium

An interactive, two day event for new lecturers focused on effective and innovative economics teaching. The second day is also open to graduate teaching assistants from UK economics departments.

#### **Sessions include:**

#### For new lecturers

- Making lectures more effective
- Seminars and small group teaching
- Synthesising teaching and research
- Games and experiments in the classroom
- Alternative use of large group teaching time
- Effective assessment and feedback •
- Synthesising teaching and research

#### For all attendees (including GTAs on day 2)

- Voice and presence in the classroom (with a professional actor)
- Games and the media in teaching
- Technology in teaching
- Teaching quantitative economics (parallel session)
- Teaching essay-based economics (parallel session)

Plus a keynote address from Andy Ross (Professor at the University of Leeds and Former Deputy Director of the Government Economic Service)

Booking now open on our website!

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## The future of lectures?

Ashley Lait & Alvin Birdi, Economics Network

n his well-known 1971 work, 'What's the use of lectures?', Donald Bligh provides a sympathetic critique of the predominant method of teaching in higher education. He interrogates the value of relaying information to students in a large lecture theatre, a process that may neither promote deep learning nor inspire great interest in the subject.

Yet four decades on the lecture continues to be the mainstay of teaching provision in most higher education institutions, and with increasing student numbers and pressure to 'up' the quantity of contact hours, it seems unlikely that they will disappear from timetables any time soon. Nevertheless, the calls to scrap lectures all together remain, with arguments such as 'why retain the face-to-face lecture when its value as a pedagogical tool is so limited? There seems to be no other reason that the old justification: "we've always done it this way"' (Clark, 2014).



While it is certainly true that many lecturers still deliver their classes in the traditional 'lecturing' style of reading notes or going through PowerPoint slides, there have been various innovations that are recasting the lecture. These teaching tools may be slowly reinventing this staple of university life. In what follows we highlight three of these innovations.

#### **Clickers or polling technology**

The use of clickers or other classroom response systems (including polling software or apps on

personal devices), which allow students to individually and/or anonymously respond to questions, brings an interactive element to lectures that teachers have struggled to achieve in large class settings since the widespread use of pre-prepared Powerpoint



slides. Victor Edmonds of the University of California at Berkeley points out that: 'Putting up your hand in class is a pretty complex thing, kind of dangerous, socially and academically. But everyone is willing to give anonymous answers'. The value of clickers in increasing interactivity has been attested to in a number of studies (Stowell & Nelson, 2007; Freeman et al., 2006).

#### "Perhaps less evident is the role polling technology can play in facilitating peer learning"

However, despite the fact that students have reported that they find clickers useful (74% of students in Wit's 2003 study thought the handsets were useful to very useful in aiding their understanding) and many lecturers accept the value of clickers to break up lectures and promote engagement, questions remain about the pedagogical worth of this technology. So, are they just a gimmick or are there more benefits to integrating clickers into large group classes?

Classroom response systems stream students' responses live to the lecturer's computer and they can then be displayed in graphic format on a projector screen. The lecturer is able to see whether students have understood the material, identify any areas of difficulty and provide relevant and timely feedback; which in the past has only really been possible in smaller group teaching environments. Jon Guest at Coventry University has found that 'with a traditional way of monitoring whether learning is taking place, the same students always answer the questions and there is no way of knowing if they were representative of the group as a whole. Clickers are able to overcome this problem. By periodically setting questions embedded into a PowerPoint presentation, it is possible to obtain more reliable and representative feedback on the extent to which the material is being understood'. This also enables lecturers to tailor seminars more closely to the group's needs.

Perhaps less evident is the role recent polling technology can play in facilitating group work and "peer learning". Mathematician Derek Bruff of Agile Learning and physicist Eric Mazur from Harvard University have been using the "Learning Catalytics" technology to encourage students to learn from each other. Unlike some other polling technologies, this one allows graphical



Adapted from D. Bruff, 'Teaching with clickers for deep learning', 2011, http://tinyurl.com/nfqpv86

Video demonstration of Eric Mazur using this method available at: http://tinyurl.com/lyqjuen

> and free-form input which may be of particular use to technical subjects such as economics. It also allows the instructor to see in real time the understanding shown by every individual in the lecture. Mazur uses these individual responses to create pairs of students who have different (perhaps opposing) answers to a question so that they can try to convince each other at an

individual level during the lecture. Only after this peer learning takes place does he reveal the correct answer to the problem.

Polling technology used in this way is not merely engaging the students in an interactive way, but it is inviting them to justify, reason and communicate their answers with peers, developing some of the vital skills that we look for in our learning outcomes and which are valued highly by employers.

Finally, clickers may have an additional use for economists: lecturers are able to save the raw data they collect through polling their students, providing valuable data that might be analysed to better understand and reflect on their courses.

There are increasing numbers of providers of this hardware and/or software including:

- Turning Technologies
- Konnect
- Learning Catalytics
- Poll Everywhere
- Socrative

#### Lecture capture

This technology, now widely available in UK universities, enables teaching staff to record their lectures and make them available to students online, usually via a virtual learning environment. One of the clear benefits of lecture capture is also touted as its main downfall: students can catch up on classes they miss. While it is therefore a useful tool for legitimate absences, this raises significant concerns about videoed lectures replacing the 'real deal', resulting in a drop in attendance. However, as

Caroline Elliott has found: 'lecture recordings appear to be used to supplement rather than replace lecture attendance' as there was no obvious fall in student numbers in classes. This is supported by a number of other studies, including those by Bongey et al. (2006), Toppin (2011) and Copley (2007), which found that only a small number of students would be tempted to miss a lecture because they see the recording as a substitute. The idea of recorded lectures as a 'supplement' is certainly the intended use of this technology. Being able to watch a lecture several times or even in sections makes this a useful tool for revision prior to an assessment or to clarify parts of the lecture that students may have found challenging when first introduced, which is 'of particular value for international students and students with special learning needs' (C. Elliott, 2014).

#### "67.7% of students affirmed that using recorded lectures was very beneficial to their learning"

Less immediately obvious are the advantages of lecture capture that can be felt by teaching staff, for example: without the pressure of needing to complete a full set of lecture notes before the end of the hour, students are able to listen and engage more in the class knowing the material will be available online later. Or that demands on lecturers' time in the form of repeated questions about the same problematic issue may be reduced because difficult concepts are clarified by watching the videos.



In addition to concerns about attendance, the introduction of lecture capture led to doubts about how much it would be used, especially when significant university funds and time were going to be spent. However, it has turned out to be very popular with students: Elliott's study found that at least 84% and 95% of students accessed videos in the two years of the study, while Toppin reported that 67.7% of students affirmed that using recorded lectures was very beneficial to their learning.

There are a range of lecture capture softwares available including:

Mediasite

Tegrity

- Collaaj Panopto
- Echo360
- Kaltura
- Prezi



#### Flipping the classroom

In 'flipped' classrooms, students are first exposed to subject material before the lecture (often through short videos and readings) so that class time can be used more effectively for student learning. The idea is that students cannot sit passively in the class, but instead must use this time to engage in activities that are often considered part of their independent study or homework, such as problem solving, applying what they've learnt and working with peers (Berrett, 2012).

Above all, the flipped approach is student-led. By using videos, students can tackle the material at their own pace and repeat sections if required, something that has never been possible in a traditional lecture. The time in class can then be used to focus on topics and concepts students found difficult when first introduced to the material (Brunsell, 2011). Jon Guest, for example, asks his students to watch short videos before the lecture and then uses clickers in the lecture to assess their understanding of that material.

Some teaching staff are concerned about the time required to create videos, podcasts and reading lists necessary to adopt a flipped approach. These are certainly legitimate concerns but there are resources available online to aid the process of production and videos, once created, can be used repeatedly.

#### "Igotoverwhelminglygreatevidence on the provision of these clips"

For example, Ralf Becker at the University of Manchester uses a flipped approach to his econometrics lectures:

"One example where I used a flipped approach is when I ask students to watch an online lecture on Proxy Variables and Instrumental Variables Estimation before a lecture (http://youtu.be/ dNpKrFjrjP4). Then I use a one hour lecture to slowly work through one applied problem: how to evaluate whether students' attendance in peer assisted study sessions improves the grades in that course. It turns out that I can use Semester 1 data for the very students sitting in class.

I start from that research question and ask students how they would evaluate this. They From the outside looking into university quickly identify that there is a self-selection classrooms, one would still see lecture theatres problem (i.e. good students choose to attend packed with hundreds of students and one lecturer these sessions) such that measures of attendance stood at the front talking and pointing. So on the in these sessions are endogenous to the problem. surface Bligh's critique of university teaching I have the statistical software at hand in the provision seems relevant in 2014. However, from classroom, such that I can quickly implement inside the auditorium, there might be something student suggestions and discuss these (lectures altogether different taking place. Lectures might are recorded such that students will have the yet have a future. As Christopher Bigsby has chance to replicate the work afterwards). At a written: 'Lectures have their value... The best are fairly slow pace we discuss potential avenues to not those that attempt to pour information into tackle this problem, concluding the lecture with your ear, the approach unaccountably adopted an attempt to solve the endogeneity problem by by Hamlet's uncle when administering poison, using an instrument. As the instrument turns out but those that send you spinning off into your to be very weak, this attempt ultimately fails, but I own mind. Outside the lecture theatre your real don't mind as this is a good lesson anyway. enquiry begins'.



What I do use a lot is online clips to supplement the material delivered in lectures. You could call the lectures quite traditional style lectures, but I do use clips to cover boring or technical but vital (and exam relevant) material such that I can then use the lectures to present material that deepens understanding. I got overwhelmingly great evidence on the provision of these clips".

#### So what is the use of lectures?

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#### Further reading:

- D. Berrett, 2012, 'How "flipping" the classroom can improve the traditional lecture', The Chronicle of Higher Education, http://tinyurl.com/nc5np88
- S. Bongey, G. Cizadlo & L. Kalnbach, 2006, 'Explorations in course-casting: podcasts in higher education', Campus-Wide Information Systems, Vol. 23, Issue 5, pp. 350-367
- E. Brunsell & M. Horejsi, 2011, 'Flipping your classroom', The Science Teacher, Vol. 78, No. 2
- D. Clark, 'Ten reasons we should ditch university lectures', The Guardian, 15 May 2014, http://tinyurl.com/o2tuyvd
- J. Copley, 2007, 'Audio and video podcasts of lectures for campus-based students: production and evaluation of student use', Innovations in Education and Teaching International, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 387-399
- V. Edmonds (Educational Technology Services, University of California at Berkeley) in D. Bruff, 'Classroom response systems ("Clickers"), Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University, http://tinyurl.com/kcafse3
- C. Elliott, 2003, 'Using a personal response system in economics teaching', International Review of Economics Education, Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 80-86
- J. Stowell & J. Nelson, 2007, 'Benefits of electronic audience response systems on student participation, learning and emotion', Teaching of Pyschology, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 253-258
- M. Freeman, P. Blayney & P. Glinns, 2006, 'Anonymity and in class learning: the case for electronic response systems', Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, Vol. 22, pp. 568-580
- I. Toppin, 2011, 'Video lecture capture (VLC) system: A comparison of student versus faculty perceptions', Education and Information Technologies, Vol. 16, Issue 4, pp. 383-393
- E. Wit, 2003, 'Who wants to be... the use of personal response systems in statistic teaching', MSOR Connections, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 14-20

### New teaching resources

The Ideas Bank section of the Economics Network website is dedicated to collating examples of innovative learning and teaching methods.

We welcome new submissions to the ideas bank, for example, you may have tried using some of the teaching tools and methods mentioned above.

#### Our latest case studies:

- Illustrating international trade in the classroom: how current world events can facilitate ten rounds of active learning
- Directional forecasting, forecasting accuracy and making profits

See our website for further information or to submit a case study of your own: **www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase** 

#### **Economics films to use in teaching:**

'We the economy' have created 20 short films about different aspects of the economy, which may be useful resources for your students or to use in teaching.

The films are available at: https://wetheeconomy.com/

## **Bristol's Festival of Economics**

Now in its third year, the Festival of Economics held every November in Bristol is going from strength to strength. The event is programmed by Economics Network patron Diane Coyle and welcomes economists and other experts from around the UK to debate some of the key economic questions of our time.

his year's Festival of Economics certainly met expectations with a packed programme of panels, interviews and debates on many of the most pressing economics questions in the news today. Overall there were 10 sessions with 38 speakers, that were attended by over 2,230 participants.

Once again, diverse panels and full audiences of students and the public discussed issues from the technical (quantitative easing) to the familiar (obesity).

Topics included "The Economics of Crime and Punishment", benefitting from the first-hand experience of Vicky Pryce, and "Should the Economy be More Local?", a topical discussion in a city which has a local currency: the Bristol Pound.

Across the topics of employment, housing and inequality, a recurring theme was how political short-termism blocks desired change. Reactions to Thomas Piketty's work were another theme, with Adair Turner amongst those discussing the implications for modern economics.

Thanks to a collaboration with the University of Bristol and a new schools' challenge, supported in part by the Economics Network, it was encouraging to see larger numbers of students and school pupils at the festival this year.

The school's challenge gave sixth form students the opportunity to learn about economics and behavioural economic thinking in the context of obesity and healthy eating, for example, what kind of nudges and incentives might the public respond to if implemented to encourage healthier lifestyles. Five local schools and one international school took part in the challenge, which asked students in teams of 4-6 to design and present ideas for one or several interventions to encourage school pupils to choose healthier options for school lunches and/or to promote eating school lunches rather than going to local fast food establishments.

The teams came up with a range of ideas including taxation, reward schemes, alternative payment methods and improved marketing.

Planning for the 2015 Festival of Economics will soon be underway and we will keep you updated about the programme and booking information.

In the meantime, the full programme from this year's festival is available online along with audio recordings of the sessions (available through SoundCloud).

Links:

- http://www.ideasfestival.co.uk/festival-ofeconomics-2014/
- https://soundcloud.com/bristol-festival-ofideas/sets/festival-of-economics-2014

Martin Poulter & Ashley Lait



## **Research Project Data**

#### About the project

The Economics Network is leading a collaborative research project which explores how economics students' expectations, attitudes and behaviour may have changed as a result of reforms in higher education funding and the rise in tuition fees. We also consider how economics teaching and learning practice and curricula might be adjusted to meet emerging needs.

#### Update

We have now surveyed first and second year students from 15 UK universities twice (in spring 2013 and 2014).

This data has been published on the Economics Network website, along with a summary of our initial analysis of the results. A more detailed analysis will follow imminently.

### What's next?

We have set up a discussion forum on the website, where individuals can express a research interest or pose a research question based on the data and find other researchers interested in this topic. We hope to establish small groups working on various issues raised by the results.

We will be presenting some of the findings from the project at the Developments in Economics Education conference in September 2015 and would also encourage others working on the data to submit an abstract for a paper session.

### **Further information**

To access the data sets, STATA files, discussion board and summary of the results and early analysis, please visit: www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/research2013



## dee 2015 **Call for Papers** Developments in Economics Education Conference 2015

### 10-11 September 2015 **University of Birmingham**

We are welcoming submissions for paper, poster or workshop sessions at the 2015 DEE conference.

DEE is the UK's leading conference on economics education. Sessions at the conference introduce new and innovative ideas on teaching and learning methods, the economics curriculum and student engagement.

The deadline for submissions is Friday 20th February 2015.

Abstracts can be submitted on our website, where you will also find further information about conference themes and booking.

### Keynote speakers



Daniel Franklin, Executive Editor, The Economist



Paul Johnson, Director, Institute of Fiscal Studies

### www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/dee2015

# **Employers Survey**

The fourth **Economics Network employers survey** has just been launched.

These surveys aim to improve our understanding of the **skills and knowledge** that economics graduates require to be effective in the workplace.

This year's survey is supported by the Government Economic Service and the Society of Business Economists and forms part of our ongoing research project **exploring the effectiveness of learning and teaching in higher education economics.** 

Government

Economic Service

If you are an employer of economics graduates, we would greatly appreciate it if you could complete the online survey (it should take 10-15 minutes). Alternatively, please forward the details to any employers you are in touch with.

If you would like any further information on the employers survey, or to read a report of the results from our last survey, please visit: http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/surveys#Employer\_Surveys

### Access the survey at: http://www.survey.bris.ac.uk/ltsn/employers2014



## News from the Royal Economic Society

#### Royal Economic Society Resources:

You may not be aware that the Royal Economic Society has a library of webcasts freely available to view from most of our events, including Conference keynote lectures, short films on aspects of economic research and our public and policy lecture series. These can be viewed via www.res.org.uk on the RES YouTube channel.

#### Funding

The Royal Economic Society provides financial and other resources to support the education, training and career development of economists at all stages of their careers. Full details can be found on the website www.res.org.uk or from the office on royaleconsoc@st-andrews.ac.uk.

#### Visiting Lecturer Scheme

The Society would particularly like to encourage University departments to consider the reinstated RES Visiting Lecturer scheme when they are planning lectures. The conditions of the scheme are that Economics departments in any UK university may suggest the name of a distinguished economist from the UK or overseas for a visit to their department. The visiting lecturer is expected to give a series of lectures, seminars or workshops and to be available for consultation by staff and students. At least one of the lectures etc. should be open to those outside the host University and should be publicised, for example in the RES Newsletter. It will be the responsibility of the host department to cover the costs of travel and hospitality. The Society will pay a fee of £2000 to the lecturer. At the conclusion of the visit both the visiting lecturer and host department should submit a report to the Secretary-General. Full details are available on the website or please contact the RES office at the address provided above.

#### Royal Economic Society Conference

The UK's largest annual economics Conference, the Annual Conference of the Royal Economic Society will be held at the **University of Manchester from Mon 30th March to Wed 1st April 2015**.

The following **keynote addresses** will be delivered: Hahn Lecture: Pierre-André Chiappori (Columbia) Sargan Lecture: Michael Keane (Oxford) Economic Journal Lecture: Philippe Aghion (Harvard) Presidential Address: Sir Charles Bean (LSE)

The 2015 conference also celebrates the **125th anniversary of the Royal Economic Society and the Economic Journal**. A number of special sessions will be linked to the launch of the 125th anniversary special edition of the Economic Journal and will include contributions from a distinguished list of speakers including: Philippe Aghion, Anthony Atkinson, Orazio Attanasio, Alan Auerbach, Richard Blundell, Nicholas Stern, Peter Wakker. In addition to the main conference agenda, there will be a **reception** on the Monday evening at Manchester's Museum of Science and Industry, while the **Gala Dinner** will take place at the Old Trafford Cricket Ground, the home of Lancashire Cricket Club and international venue for the England Cricket team.

Further information about the conference, including details of financial assistance for PhD students, is available via the Conference webpage: http://www.res.org.uk/2015conference\_home.



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## Events 'round-up'



Royal Economic Society Postgraduate Meeting University College London http://www.res.org.uk/view/postgraduateJob.html



Royal Economic Society Annual Conference University of Manchester http://www.res.org.uk/view/newsevents.html



Scottish Economic Society Annual Conference Mercure Perth Hotel, Perth http://www.scotecon.org/conference.html





New Lecturers Workshop & Early Careers Teaching Symposium University of Bristol http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/events



American Economic Association Conference on Teaching & Research in Economic Education Radisson Blu, Minneapolis, USA https://www.aeaweb.org/committees/AEACEE/index.php





European Economic Association Congress Mannheim, Germany http://www.eeassoc.org/





**Developments in Economics Education Conference** University of Birmingham http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/events



