

## Threshold Concepts: teaching and learning activities

Our teaching and learning activities were developed given the pedagogical principles that we considered in our last newsletter. The activities, which begin by posing an applied question in economics, were trialled at four universities over the last two years and appropriate amendments made. There are three types of learning activities:

### 1. Reflective exercises

The first part of these exercises aims to get students to recognise alternative ways of framing an answer to the problem. It highlights variation in understanding in the basic concepts needed to proceed with the question and aims to expose the way economists model. Students are then presented with a variation on the initial question and asked to provide a coherent overall response to the problem, drawing on the feedback they have received, with the intention of helping them to integrate their understanding.

### 2. Problem-focused exercises

The title of this type of exercise reflects a debt to problem-based learning (PBL), but no intention to rigorously follow PBL principles. Our problem focused exercises require less substantial initial data, less time and more structured 'scaffolding' for students than would be expected in a PBL activity.

### 3. Threshold network exercises

The exercises give a short applied problem and students are asked to consider certain concepts that might be used to make sense of the problem. In many of these exercises they are also asked what model (and associated diagram) is appropriate for analysis of the applied problem. The aim is to encourage students to appreciate the web of concepts and the importance of modelling in the economist's approach to problems.

*The project is led by Staffordshire University and our partners are Coventry University, Durham University and the University of the West of England. The project aims to improve students' understanding in economics by developing first year undergraduates' acquisition of threshold concepts.*

*The funding is by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) under the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning.*

The ETC project has extended the identification of threshold concepts in economics and assessed ways of embedding these in the first year curriculum for both specialists and non-specialists.



# Website News

*This section highlights the main recent additions to the website.*

## Teaching and Learning Materials

All our teaching and learning materials will be available on our website during September.

There are three types of exercises: reflective, problem-focused and threshold network.

\* For staff the exercises are in Word format to allow tailoring to particular modules.

\* For students the exercises will be available as an online resource. After each individual part of the task is completed the student progresses to feedback before going on to attempting the next part of the task.

Each exercise will have its own URL so that this can be given to students as part of module information.

## Current Developments

### Teaching and Learning Activities

The final versions of our teaching and learning exercises will be available in September. These will be available in two forms:

(i) *Staff version*

This will include the full exercise and lecturer's notes (including information on timing and prerequisites).

(ii) *Student's version*

This version allows students to try the exercises online as part of their independent learning.

The activities cover many aspects covered at level 1, covering microeconomics, macroeconomics and international.

### Conference Papers and Articles

Members of the team are taking part in four sessions related to Threshold Concepts at the Developments in Economics Education Conference in September. In December we expect to present a paper on assessment and threshold concepts at the Society for Research in Higher Education Conference.

'Embedding Threshold Concepts: From Theory To Pedagogical Principles To Learning Activities' will appear as a Chapter in 'Threshold Concepts within the Disciplines' edited by Meyer and Land.

### Future Developments

Although the main FDTL5 project finishes at the end of September, the project team intend to keep working and publishing in this area. Transferability funding for next year will enable us to further investigate the embedding of threshold concepts in economics modules for business undergraduate and MBA students and our work on assessment will be continued.

### Contacting us.....

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Bookmark our website

<http://www.staffs.ac.uk/thresholdconcepts>