

LTSN-GEES Strategic Plan 2001-2004

Updated June 2003

1. Context

The disciplines of geography, earth and environmental sciences are characterised in UK HE by diverse learning environments which necessitate active and experiential learning and teaching.

Those who teach or support learning are, in general, enthusiastic, motivated and innovative with regard to the content of their subject area and in facilitating student learning. This high degree of engagement with learning and teaching issues is reflected in the disciplines' distinguished record in learning and teaching developments at departmental, national and international levels.

There is, nonetheless, still some level of scepticism within the academic communities regarding the need for change in learning and teaching. As with most HE disciplines, this is largely due to excessive workloads, the low status of learning and teaching (relative to research) and, in some areas, a reluctance to accept the changing HE environment and student populations.

The many and varied pressures on academic staff often inhibit opportunities for satisfactory exchange of information on learning and teaching matters within and between departments and institutions. Similarly, staff often do not have the space to fully reflect on their practice and to take opportunities to develop innovative curricula which can enrich students' learning.

Recruitment into the disciplines seems to be mixed: in some cases, pre-92 institutions have expanded their numbers (partly through modifying their entry requirements) leading to some new institutions and colleges struggling to fill their places. The effects of these changes have included departmental mergers, closures, course cuts and staff cuts. Other cutbacks have occurred through non-replacement of staff who leave or retire. It is likely that this type of restructuring will continue with changing students interests and changes in the political arena, and the subject providers will need to show considerable adaptability and innovation in course development to attract students and cater for changes in the market. Such adaptability is particularly noticeable with respect to the growth of postgraduate level courses in the disciplines.

2. Operational Structure

Culture

Working within the above context, LTSN-GEES aims to build on the disciplines' strong track record in order to facilitate and enhance the exchange of information within and between the disciplines, and to provide ideas, strategies and support for curriculum development. The main focus of activities is on issues which particularly affect geography, earth and environmental sciences but up to date information is also provided on pre-eminent HE issues in general. For this reason, LTSN-GEES also works closely with the LTSN Generic Centre and other Subject Centres to share good practice across cognate disciplines and with the HE sector as a whole.

Many past and current projects are discipline specific but some have spanned all three disciplines and encouraged a more multi- and inter-disciplinary approach. Collaboration was a central feature in the preparation of the original bid for the Subject Centre and is maintained as a continuing hallmark of LTSN-GEES' approach. We will continue to exploit opportunities for the disciplines to work closely together to ensure that they learn from each others' experience and to enlarge the areas of collaboration. However, the three disciplines also have distinctive needs and attributes. Each discipline, therefore, has its own voice and agenda within the wider framework of LTSN-GEES.

The culture of LTSN-GEES, therefore, has the following features:

- Supporting all three disciplines
- Promoting inter-disciplinary collaboration
- Working with subject associations
- Winning hearts and minds
- Building on existing networks
- Providing useful services
- Servicing all kinds of HE institutions
- Working for all parts of the UK
- Focusing on students and staff.

Core Team

The main focus of staffing is at the University of Plymouth, where there are currently seven staff. This ensures that the core is sufficiently strong and coherent to provide the level of activity required. LTSN-GEES also benefits from three 'Senior Advisors' (each at 0.2), one for each of the disciplines. These Advisors, based in their own institutions, are leading figures in their educational fields and play a key role in enabling LTSN-GEES to achieve its strategic aims, and in providing a clear voice for each discipline to ensure that their individual needs are identified and met.

Steering Group

LTSN-GEES activities are overseen by a Steering Group, whose role is to represent the discipline communities and to provide strategic direction. Its membership has broadly proportional representation according to the number of departments and students in each discipline, and includes the relevant heads of department committees and professional bodies. It is chaired by the Director of the RGS:IBG and has two vice-chairs taken from the earth science and environmental science members. To provide a wider perspective, the Group also includes an educational developer.

External Evaluator

The fourth dimension to the Operational Structure is an External Evaluator, Prof Harold Silver, whose role it is to provide independent analysis and review.

Employers Contacts

LTSN-GEES benefits from contact with a number of careers professionals and relevant employers. These individuals provide advice on the following areas as required: key skills, graduate employability, employer links in the curriculum, work-based learning, careers guidance, lifelong learning, CPD, needs of graduate employers, and the changing patterns of graduate employment.

3. Mission Statement and Strategic Aims

Mission Statement

The purpose of LTSN-GEES is to promote and support high quality learning and teaching across the disciplines of geography, earth and environmental sciences in UK higher education and so to support the achievement of the overall strategic aims of the Learning and Teaching Support Network.

Strategic Aims

In order to achieve this purpose, 8 Strategic Aims have been identified. These map onto the overall strategic aims of the LTSN as outlined in Appendix A:

- A1** To identify, collate and disseminate information on good practice, relevant educational resources and sources of expertise.
- A2** To provide opportunities for professional development of teaching and support staff, underpinned by a commitment to the scholarship of teaching, including pedagogic research.
- A3** To support curriculum developments which will enrich the quality of the students' learning experience, promote their key skills and employability, and the foundations of lifelong learning.
- A4** To promote the awareness and adoption of new approaches to learning and teaching, including the use of C&IT, and to be responsive to increasing student diversity.
- A5** To foster a positive approach to the three disciplines working constructively together, whilst recognising and catering for their distinctive attributes and requirements.
- A6** To be proactive in linking with national and international subject-based and generic agencies and networks so as to maximise the opportunities for the sharing of knowledge on learning and teaching innovations.
- A7** To develop into a major national and international hub for the exchange of ideas on learning and teaching within and across the three disciplines.
- A8** To ensure the efficient and accountable development and evaluation of LTSN-GEES' work as the basis for the achievement of its mission.

4. Priority Themes

Geography, earth and environmental sciences are affected by all the issues relating to the changing face of higher education in the UK, including widening participation, reduced per capita resources, changing student expectations, the RAE, and the QAA (including the impact of the qualifications framework, Codes of Practice, Benchmarking etc). LTSN-GEES will provide discipline-specific support and advice in all these areas, as they relate to learning and teaching, in response to the needs of the communities. However, in order to provide foci on which to build the activities of LTSN-GEES, four long-term (next three years) priority issues for learning and teaching in geography, earth and environmental sciences have been highlighted. These issues have been identified through the community-wide needs analysis, through discussion with a range of relevant stakeholders, and through reference to the national areas of priority. Further details referring to the HE priorities listed in HEFCE's TQEF paper are given at the end of the Operational Plan.

Employability

The world of work is continually changing and, with the demise of the 'job for life', career development has become an issue of lifelong learning. There are few jobs entitled specifically 'geographer', 'earth scientist' or 'environmental scientist'; however, the skills and attributes developed by such graduates are widely recognised and valued both within the traditional career paths and in areas apparently non-related to the content of the disciplines.

Due to the nature of the disciplines, key skills development (including team work, C&IT, communication, critical thinking, reflective learning and so on) are a natural part of the diverse learning environments. However, there is an increasing need to make key skills considerably more explicit to ensure that students have a full understanding of, and can articulate, the skills they have developed.

Employability in its holistic sense is, therefore, a crucial area for development in geography, earth and environmental sciences over the next few years. This includes the integration of career development into the curriculum, enhancement of key skills provision, work-based learning and issues related to the introduction of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) and student profiling.

The development and enhancement of the curriculum with respect to career development and employability also has the potential to impact on student recruitment, transition to HE and retention rates.

Students Entering HE (Widening Participation, Fair Access & Retention)

Despite the widening participation agenda, decreasing student applications and recruitment is a major issue for many departments. Whilst recruitment per se is beyond the remit of LTSN-GEES, its specific impact on learning and teaching within the disciplines is an area in which it will provide advice and guidance. We will, therefore, provide support in matters linked to student learning during their early transition to HE, and student retention via learning and teaching strategies.

The Special Education Needs and Disability Act impacts on all areas of learning and teaching in HE and, for disciplines with such diverse learning environments (including the use of C&IT, and fieldwork), this will mean a major curriculum development exercise. By building on the work of the GDN Disability and Fieldwork project and through collaboration with departments, institutions, professional bodies, and agencies such as the National Disability Team, Skill, and TechDis, LTSN-GEES will endeavour to provide advice and support for the development of accessibility to lab-

work, field-work and the use of C&IT, as well as in the more traditional classroom settings of lectures and tutorials.

These issues are all integrally linked to increasing student diversity and the need to provide equal teaching, learning and assessment opportunities for all.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is a distinctive and highly valued aspect of geography, earth and environmental sciences in HE and is highlighted as such in the relevant QAA Benchmark Statements. Learning and teaching in the field has developed over time from a largely didactic, 'Cook's Tour' approach to the interactive, experiential learning environment it is today. There are many issues which affect fieldwork in HE including reduced resources (time and funding).

LTSN-GEES will assist the development of fieldwork as a highly effective learning environment and will provide advice and support to those involved in learning and teaching in the field. The issues related to fieldwork also overlap with those of accessibility and employability.

Scholarship of teaching

The professionalism of teaching in higher education is of increasing importance on the HE agenda. LTSN-GEES is committed to promoting a scholarly approach to learning and teaching and, thereby, supporting its professionalism. This will be achieved through leading by example (building on prior pedagogic knowledge, experience and research as the foundation to all our activities), through the provision of support for continuing professional development (CPD), and through the promotion of discipline-based pedagogic research.

5. Distribution of Activities

There are three main areas of activity within the LTSN-GEES Strategic and Operational Plans:

1: Keystone Activities

A variety of activities were identified at the Subject Centre bidding stage and, as indicated through our evaluations and needs analyses over the last three years, these have proved to be appropriate and effective. These 'keystone' activities are (in the order they appear in the tabulated plans):

- Resource Database
- National Conferences
- Workshop for New and Recently Appointed Lecturers
- Departmental Workshops
- Small-scale Research and Development Projects
- PLANET
- Discipline-based Senior Advisors

A more detailed rationale for each of these activities is given in the tabulated Strategic Plan.

2: Supplementary Activities

In order to further support the achievement of our Strategic Aims and delivery on priority themes, supplementary activities such as ad hoc publications and externally funded projects are also undertaken. These might include briefings, projects funded by the LTSN Generic Centre, and collaborative projects with other Subject Centres.

3: Support Activities

Many support activities are undertaken to ensure the effective and efficient running of LTSN-GEES. These include the enquiry service, web-site, departmental contacts, links with external projects, links with professional bodies, evaluation, publicity, team meetings, staff development and administration.

Budget Distribution

In order to provide our activities and services, the annual budget is distributed approximately as follows:

Staff (Plymouth team and Senior Advisors):	~50%
Activities & Services (see below):	~35%
Travel (internal & external events):	~5%
Equipment and consumables:	~5%
External evaluator & consultants:	~3%
Contingency:	~2%

This distribution is roughly commensurate with that set out at the bidding stage. Experience over the last three years suggests that this distribution is appropriate for the efficient and effective delivery of our activities and services.

6. Tabulated Strategic Plan 2001-2004

The following tables outline the outcomes, performance measures and key activities associated with each LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim. Many of the activities and services will contribute towards the achievement of more than one Strategic Aim, however, for clarity and simplicity, each are detailed under the main one to which they refer.

LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim	Outcome	Performance Measures	Key Activities
<p>A1 To identify, collate and disseminate information on good practice, relevant educational resources and sources of expertise.</p>	<p>Academic departments and practitioners will have ease of access to and information about good L&T practice and resources in GEES.</p>	<p>LTSN-GEES will hold and provide full access to the largest database of L&T resources in GEES in the UK.</p> <p>LTSN-GEES will provide easy access to relevant sources of information held internationally.</p> <p>The extent to which this resource is used.</p>	<p>Resource Database (<i>Keystone</i>) The web-based LTSN-GEES Resource Database provides up-to-date information and peer-review on key resources covering all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment for those who teach and/or support learning in Geography, Earth, and Environmental Sciences higher education.</p> <p>This Database has been developed to support the ‘one-stop-shop’ remit of LTSN-GEES and to supplement and build on that provided through events and publications. As the Database is on-line it can be accessed by academics from their own desk and at their own convenience. The Database has been developed to complement those delivered by the JISC RDN Hubs. The Hubs provide examples of data, literature and images which could be used in learning and teaching. The LTSN-GEES Resource Database provides links to examples (case studies, abstracts of good practice, journal articles etc.) of <i>how</i> data, literature, images, learning, teaching and assessment methodologies etc. can be used effectively to support learning and teaching. Its focus, therefore, is explicitly educational.</p> <p>Externally-funded projects (<i>Supplementary</i>)</p> <p>Enquiry service; Register of Interest; Resource Library (<i>Support</i>)</p> <p>All resources will be catalogued within the on-line Resource Database. Resources will be identified in response to enquiries and in support of other activities (e.g. conferences, workshops, projects). These resources will be harvested by the Resource Co-ordinator together with the Core Team and through contributions and commissioned work from the communities.</p> <p>The Resource Database will be strongly promoted and the communities encouraged to contribute new resources. The enquiry service will continue to operate in support of these on-line services. External funding will be sought for projects that develop case studies, examples of practice and other resources for inclusion in the Database.</p>

LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim	Outcome	Performance Measures	Activities
<p>A2 To provide opportunities for professional development of teaching and support staff, underpinned by a commitment to the scholarship of teaching.</p>	<p>LTSN-GEES will offer a variety of discipline-based CPD opportunities which will be coherent with and will complement generic programmes offered in institutions and nationally.</p>	<p>The extent, relevance, currency and discipline-specificity of the LTSN-GEES CPD programme.</p> <p>The level of take up of the events and other activities by departments and individual practitioners.</p>	<p>National Conferences (<i>Keystone</i>) These focus on key HE themes and their implications for our three disciplines. They also provide an opportunity for individuals from departments to share ideas, good practice, problems and solutions with colleagues from other institutions.</p> <p>These events enable our disciplines to remain up-to-date with new developments and emerging issues in HE. Staff are able to meet, listen to and question key national figures in the HE community, as well as being able to share their own practice and ideas with colleagues from the GEES disciplines.</p> <p>Workshop for New and Recently Appointed Lecturers (<i>Keystone</i>) This two day event is tailored specifically for new and recently appointed lecturers in the disciplines, and is intended to complement any institutional new staff courses that the delegates may undertake. This year, the event has also been opened up to ‘aspiring’ new lecturers.</p> <p>In institutional courses for new teaching staff, it is unlikely that there are more than one or two new teachers from the same or cognate disciplines. A major advantage of a discipline-based workshop is that it provides a unique forum to bring new staff in cognate disciplines together and enable them to share teaching experiences and learn from each other. Such a workshop is provides a very useful complement to the more generic activities undertaken within institutions.</p> <p>Departmental Workshops (<i>Keystone</i>) These provide curriculum design support to departments on the theme or topic of their choice. The workshop is provided within the host department and often the majority of teaching staff are able to attend. The list of available workshop topics is focused on key issues in learning and teaching in the GEES disciplines and is constantly reviewed to ensure that the menu we offer is up-to-date and relevant.</p> <p>These workshops have proved to be a fundamental aspect of our provision of learning and teaching support to the disciplines. Internal and external evaluations, and regular needs analyses have indicated that providing professional and curriculum development activities within a department is the most effective method for engaging the GEES communities and for enhancing our impact on learning and teaching in the disciplines.</p> <p>Externally-funded projects; Collaboration with SCs & GC (<i>Supplementary</i>) Opportunities will be taken for enhancing our programme of CPD activities through projects, and collaborations with other disciplines.</p>

LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim	Outcome	Performance Measures	Activities
A3 To support curriculum developments which will enrich the quality of the students' learning experience, promote their key skills and employability, and the foundations of lifelong learning.	<p>Academic departments and individuals will have opportunities for direct support for developing their curricula.</p> <p>Collaboration between LTSN-GEES and GEES departments will develop curriculum resources that can be shared nationally.</p>	<p>The extent and quality of take up of project funding and the influence of the outcomes on curricula.</p> <p>Extent of collaboration including inter-disciplinary and inter-departmental.</p>	<p>Small-scale Research and Development Projects (<i>Keystone</i>) The main purpose of the small-scale projects programme is to wider participation in LTSN-GEES' work through supporting curriculum developments, learning & teaching research, and other innovations which will enhance the quality of the students' learning experience and/or enrich the learning and teaching research literature. The projects also offer the potential to harness existing staff expertise, and identify and encourage fresh talent, and provides opportunities for the CPD of GEES staff and for dissemination of their good practice to the wider communities. Collaboration and sharing of good practice is encouraged between the three disciplines, between departments in different institutions, and between departments and support services (e.g. educational development units, learning technology officers) within institutions.</p> <p>Externally funded projects (<i>Supplementary</i>) External funding will be sought to supplement our provision in the support projects that enhance curriculum development in the disciplines.</p>

LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim	Outcome	Performance Measures	Activities
A4 To promote the awareness and adoption of new approaches to learning and teaching, including the use of C&IT, and to be responsive to increasing student diversity.	<p>All GEES academics and departments will be aware of major new initiatives and issues in HE.</p> <p>Individuals and departments will have easy access to information about new approaches to learning and teaching.</p>	<p>Extent of dissemination, and relevance and currency of GEES publications.</p>	<p>Biannual journal: PLANET; Special Editions of PLANET (<i>Keystone</i>) This biannual publication provides information and news about LTSN-GEES as well as many feature articles on learning and teaching in the disciplines. It has been extremely well received and currently has a circulation of around 2500 as well as being freely available on our web-site. Special editions of PLANET contain articles focused around single themes and each are usually connected to one of our national conferences.</p> <p>PLANET has three purposes. Firstly, it provides up-to-date information about LTSN-GEES and key issues in HE in general; in this sense it acts as the GEES learning and teaching communities' newsletter. Secondly, it provides a forum for those who teach or support learning in the disciplines to publish short papers on their practice or pedagogic research. The standard for PLANET articles is high, and it provides a scholarly yet accessible medium for the sharing of learning and teaching practice and research. Thirdly, by sending copies of PLANET to every GEES department and all educational development units, it helps to maintain our profile across UK higher education.</p> <p>Resource Briefings (<i>Supplementary</i>) Short briefings will be provided on an ad hoc basis in response to key issues that have not been extensively addressed in our other activities. These briefings will be tied in to the Resource Database and will provide an overview of the main issues and resources available for a particular learning and teaching theme. The briefings will be targeted both at new lecturers as a short introduction to the theme and at more experienced lecturers as an aide memoir.</p>

LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim	Outcome	Performance Measures	Activities
<p>A5 To foster a positive approach to the three disciplines working constructively together, whilst recognising and catering for their distinctive attributes and requirements.</p>	<p>All relevant academic departments and individual practitioners will have equal opportunities to engage with the centrally-run LTSN-GEES activities.</p> <p>All the centrally-run LTSN-GEES activities will utilise resources and information from all three disciplines.</p> <p>Projects will be required to show inter-disciplinary collaboration and/or outcome(s), or to show how the outcome(s) could be transferred to the other disciplines.</p> <p>Each discipline will receive additional, targeted support through the three Subject Senior Advisors.</p>	<p>The relative number of departments or individual practitioners from each discipline who engage with our activities.</p> <p>The extent of inter-disciplinary collaborations (e.g. in projects, workshops, publications).</p>	<p>Inter-disciplinary collaboration and sharing of knowledge is the underlying ethos behind all major events, publications and projects</p> <p>Discipline-based Senior Advisors (<i>Keystone</i>) The majority of LTSN-GEES activities and services are provided through the central team based at the University of Plymouth and are operated across the three disciplines through the UK. In addition, the three discipline-based Senior Advisors (each bought out on a 0.2 basis) work to ensure that we can also provide for the specific needs of each of the individual disciplines, and that the disciplines each have appropriate representation in any decision-making.</p> <p>As well as providing advice, guidance, workshop facilitation, project selection support and many other services to LTSN-GEES, the Senior Advisors also provide additional support to their particular discipline. This support includes, for example, projects, workshops, advice, and outreach visits. The LTSN-GEES structure of a central team at Plymouth assisted by discipline specialists (based in their own institutions) has worked well.</p> <p>Targeted Events (<i>Supplementary</i>) Where appropriate, additional workshops or conferences will be held to provide opportunities for specific groups to network and share ideas and good practice. Such groups might include single disciplines or staff with similar roles (e.g. programme leaders).</p> <p>Ongoing needs analyses (<i>Support</i>) Regular formal and informal evaluations and needs analyses will be conducted by LTSN-GEES centrally and by the Senior Advisors within each discipline in order to ensure that activities and services remain up-to-date, appropriate and relevant.</p>

LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim	Outcome	Performance Measures	Activities
<p>A6 To be proactive in linking with national and international subject-based and generic agencies and networks so as to maximise the opportunities for the sharing of knowledge on learning and teaching innovations.</p>	<p>LTSN-GEES will maintain an up-to-date awareness and understanding of all relevant higher education issues.</p> <p>LTSN-GEES will have access to high levels of experience and expertise from generic and discipline-specific educational practitioners and developers.</p> <p>LTSN-GEES will provide opportunities for others (beyond the UK discipline-based communities) to benefit from and contribute to its experience, expertise, knowledge and resources.</p>	<p>Number of relevant events attended and quality / relevance of outcomes.</p> <p>Number of links developed and type of activities engaged with.</p> <p>Range of bodies worked with.</p>	<p>External links and collaborations with projects, associations and institutions both nationally and internationally are seen as a crucial part of our work. These links enable us to maintain a broad overview of issues and agendas in HE and help to raise the LTSN-GEES profile (and that of the LTSN as a whole). Additionally, involvement with external committees and events provides an element of CPD for the whole LTSN-GEES team.</p> <p>Links with external projects; Links with other Subject Centres, Professional Bodies etc; Synergy with the University of Plymouth (<i>Supplementary</i>)</p> <p>Contribution to external conferences, meetings and publications; Representation on LTSN working groups. (<i>Support</i>)</p>

LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim	Outcome	Performance Measures	Activities
A7 To develop into a major national and international hub for the exchange of ideas on learning and teaching within and across the three disciplines.	<p>LTSN-GEES will be the first port of call for UK HE staff seeking information and/or resources on learning and teaching in geography, earth and environmental sciences.</p> <p>LTSN-GEES will be the main contact / liaison point in the UK for international exchange of information and resources on learning and teaching in the three disciplines.</p>	<p>Effectiveness of publicity through the take up of activities.</p> <p>Number of hits on the web-site.</p> <p>Effectiveness of relationship with departmental contacts.</p> <p>Extent, relevance and currency of international liaisons.</p>	<p>Web-site; Departmental Contacts; Workshop Facilitators / Other Consultants; Publicity; International Liaison (<i>Support</i>)</p>

LTSN-GEES Strategic Aim	Outcome	Performance Measures	Activities
A8 To ensure the efficient and accountable development and evaluation of LTSN-GEES' work as the basis for the achievement of its mission.	<p>LTSN-GEES will work efficiently and effectively as a team to provide high quality deliverables.</p> <p>LTSN-GEES will maintain regular contact with the LTSN Executive to ensure that the aims and outputs of the Subject Centre continue to be aligned with the strategic aims of the LTSN overall.</p>	<p>Feedback from the Steering Group and External Evaluator.</p> <p>Effectiveness, efficiency and co-operation of the LTSN-GEES team as a whole.</p> <p>Punctuality and quality of reports to the LTSN Executive.</p> <p>Quality and appropriateness of reports and plans (as reviewed by the Steering Group and LTSN Executive).</p>	<p>Steering Group; Evaluation inc. External Evaluator; Regular team meetings; Reporting and planning cycles; Staff Appraisal and Development (<i>Support</i>)</p>

6. Summary of Sub-strategies

a) Communication

In order to achieve its Strategic Aims, LTSN-GEES must communicate / disseminate information effectively to the communities. There are three levels of outcome of such communication:

- Raising awareness (of the LTSN, of available resources, of HE issues etc)
- Improving understanding
- Influencing practice

The key stakeholders in this process include LTSN-GEES Steering Group, GEES academics, students, professional bodies, employers, careers advisors, educational developers, and other Subject Centres (including the Generic Centre).

Raising Awareness

Raising awareness is a continuous activity both to introduce new stakeholders to LTSN and to refresh those currently or previously involved. It is concerned with promoting LTSN-GEES and the LTSN overall as a learning and teaching support service throughout the HE community to all academics and support staff.

The types of activities which help to raise awareness include:

- regular and wide distribution of promotional material and newsletters
- use of departmental contacts to disseminate information
- presentations and publications within relevant HE GEES fora / media

Improving Understanding

Improving understanding involves keeping stakeholders engaged with LTSN-GEES activities such that they are able to raise awareness with their colleagues and to make the most of the services we offer. It is concerned with maintaining contact with those people who have attended our events, read our publications, visited our web-site and otherwise engaged in our activities.

The types of activities which help to improve understanding include:

- regular postings to the GEES Headline News email list
- regular postings to the three email discussion lists
- developing a sense of ownership through needs analyses, feedback forms etc.

Influencing Practice

Influencing practice includes developing stake holder's commitment to LTSN-GEES as well as supporting curriculum development / change. The key stakeholders are those who want to further develop their learning and teaching, but perhaps lack the time, resources and ideas, and those that are experts in certain areas of learning and teaching, who want to share their experiences.

The types of activities which help to influence practice include:

- developing and utilising the Register of Expertise
- developing / enhancing the Good Practice Database, Information Gateway and Enquiry Service
- funding small scale learning and teaching development projects
- national conferences, departmental workshops and Planet

Internal Communication

In addition, our internal communication systems (between the Plymouth-based team, Senior Advisors, Steering Group and External Evaluator) are also important, and regular team meetings and other systematic correspondence is crucial to maintain effective and efficient operations.

b) Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to the success of LTSN-GEES. Their purposes are:

- To secure good management practice so that the strategic aims are met effectively and efficiently;
- To assess performance against targets and measures of success;
- To contribute formatively to LTSN-GEES' development and programme of work;
- To ensure that LTSN-GEES is responsive to the communities' needs;
- To provide accountability to the funding bodies, Steering Group and host institution;
- To record and disseminate the lessons learned from LTSN-GEES' processes and outcomes.

Monitoring and evaluation play a key role in ensuring the quality of LTSN-GEES' programme and performance. They cover the main areas of work including products (web-site, publications and other resources), activities (conferences, workshops, swap-shops etc) and processes (e.g. communication and management).

Both formative and summative evaluations are undertaken with the emphasis on the former so that lessons can be learned promptly and, if necessary, steps taken to enhance performance and quality. Through adopting the 'SMART' approach, detailed intended outcomes are regularly defined.

Evaluation is undertaken by a range of different stakeholders (e.g. Steering Group, departmental contacts) and includes self-reflection, peer review, external evaluation (Prof Harold Silver), feedback from service users and event participants.

In 2003 / 2004, our evaluation strategy will be adapted to cover the requirements of the LTSN framework developed at the evaluators' meeting in July 2003.

c) Scholarship

A commitment to scholarship underpins all the processes and outcomes of LTSN-GEES. By building on prior experience and research both generic and in the disciplines, LTSN-GEES aims to support and enhance learning and teaching and to promote professionalism. This commitment is reflected in our activities in three main ways:

Leading by example

Our events, publications and other resources integrate a 'sharing practice' approach with a theoretical / empirical underpinning, thereby ensuring that ideas and current pedagogical thinking are disseminated meaningfully to the communities.

Continuing Professional Development

Previous experience from learning and teaching projects has shown discipline-based professional development to be effective and valued by the communities. LTSN-GEES, therefore, will continue to support the increasing demand for continuing professional development (from the funding councils, professional bodies and the academics themselves) through events and other activities.

This support for CPD primarily focuses on national and departmental events, and the residential workshop for new and recently appointed lecturers. LTSN-GEES also offer a 'CPD Advisory Service' to support practitioners in reflecting on their participation in our activities in the context of their own CPD profile, and to advise generic educational developers on how LTSN-GEES might contribute to their schemes. In addition, LTSN-GEES will be working closely with the professional bodies to discuss affiliation of our activities and services with their CPD schemes.

Pedagogic research

With respect to pedagogic research, LTSN-GEES aims to:

- Develop and maintain an overview of current research in L&T in the three disciplines.
- Become a central point of contact for information on GEES L&T research in the UK
- Provide a forum for the dissemination of learning and teaching research.

Many of the activities with which LTSN-GEES is engaged in order to support staff are also relevant to learning and teaching research. Specifically:

- Attendance at relevant conferences, e.g. GSA, INLT, GeoSciEd, ALT, SEDA, HERDSA
- Relevant journals, specifically: JGE, JGHE, TES
- National and International contacts
- Membership of professional bodies and organisations: NAGT, GSA, IGEO, INLT

Additionally, LTSN-GEES will support learning and teaching research in the UK by:

- Funding small scale learning and teaching research projects
- Providing opportunities for the dissemination of learning and teaching research methods, practice, results and analyses (PLANET, conferences, good practice database)
- Providing information and advice to those interesting in pursuing research through links to resources, expertise and mentoring services.
- Providing a contact point for discipline-based learning and teaching research in relation to other disciplines and 'generic' research:

d) Communication and Information Technologies (C&IT)

The use of C&IT is an integral component of curriculum design in all disciplines including GEES. Additionally, specialist software such as Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and the use of C&IT to support fieldwork (including 'virtual' fieldcourses) are key features in many GEES courses and programmes.

LTSN-GEES clearly recognises the increasing significance of C&IT (particularly with respect to institution-wide strategies such as the use of Virtual Learning Environments, and to GEES-specific technologies). Indeed one of our Strategic Aims is "To promote the awareness and adoption of new approaches to learning and teaching, including the use of C&IT...", and, in our start-up phase, this was addressed through the role of a Senior Advisor for C&IT.

Resource constraints have meant that funding for the C&IT Advisor has had to be re-allocated to other priority areas. However, LTSN-GEES is keen that the emphasis on C&IT, and the pedagogic implications of its use in curriculum design in particular, is not diminished in any way. In the first year of this new strategy for C&IT, the processes and activities were piloted and evaluated, and the strategy reviewed in the light of experience. It was concluded that additional C&IT support from a specialist Senior Advisor was no longer necessary but that advice and guidance would be sought from appropriate experts as required.

General advice and information on curriculum design issues will be provided through the Enquiry Service, examples of practice and other materials developed through the Resource Database, and professional development opportunities will be provided through the National Conferences, Departmental Workshops, and New Lecturers' Workshop programmes.

LTSN-GEES C&IT Technical Support

The C&IT Manager will maintain the content of the LTSN-GEES web-site and, together with the Resource Co-ordinator, the Resource Database. The web-site will be highly accessible and will be constantly updated with news and information about LTSN-GEES. The technical maintenance of the web-site (including the Server) will be provided by ICO3. The technical maintenance of the Resource Database is provided under contract by the team who developed it at the University of Leeds, led by Dr Andy Evans.

LTSN-GEES C&IT Pedagogical Support

The experience and expertise of the C&IT Manager in the pedagogical side of using C&IT to support learning and teaching will be supplemented by advice and guidance from external consultants, including our previous C&IT Senior Advisor, Geoff Robinson.

Additional support for these activities will be sought from relevant bodies and individuals, including the Technologies Centre, LTSN Generic Centre and individual contacts. Members of the GEES communities will also be encouraged to liaise with those providing local support at their institutions, including teaching and learning technology officers, particularly with respect to the more technical aspects of the use of C&IT.

LTSN-GEES Operational Plan

1st August 2003 – 31st July 2004

1. Introduction

This plan sets out the programme of activities needed to support the achievement of LTSN-GEES' Strategic Aims. The plan builds on the foundations developed in Years 1 to 3, and provides foci for the achievement of specific aims, whilst responding to the needs of the discipline communities. The majority of the activities specified in this Operational Plan relate to all three disciplines. The needs of each individual discipline are supported through the three Senior Advisors. Coherence is maintained between these two dimensions of activities through regular Senior Advisor meetings and frequent email correspondence. The Senior Advisors are an integral part of the LTSN-GEES team and are involved in all the major operational decisions.

The 2002-2003 evaluation exercises confirmed that our variety of activities and services is appropriate for our discipline communities. The quality of these activities is high and, although we can't necessarily please all of the people all of the time, we are generally getting a high level of satisfaction. The impact of LTSN-GEES on individuals and departments seems to be two fold:

- 1) It supports them in changing / enhancing their learning and teaching practice, though the precise extent to which this happens is usually dependant on their local circumstances;
- 2) LTSN-GEES is seen as an integral part of their professional lives. They may not use us all the time but they are secure in the knowledge that we are there if they need us.

As a result of this evaluation, the following actions were recommended for 2003-2004 and will be incorporated into the Operational Plan:

- Maintain the type and variety of our activities and services.
- Contact again those departments that have not yet engaged beyond the level of departmental contact in order to discuss their needs and how they might want us to support them.
- The model of pre- and post-programme workshops to get different project teams together (Pedagogic Research programme) worked well. This will be applied to our small-scale projects in order to develop a good relationship between the project leaders and LTSN-GEES, to help the projects network and share ideas with each other, and to support them in project planning.
- Our communication systems are working well as short-term measures but minor changes need to be made to enhance them for longer-term sustainability. These changes include running a 'divisional job clarification' exercise at the next team away day, where we will discuss our strategies and aims and discuss how the individual's roles go to support these.

2. Principal Activities

Further to reflection on the last three years' activities and, the following main *activities* have been planned for 2003-2004:

- Continue the programme of keystone activities:
 - Resource Database
 - National Conferences
 - New Lecturers' Workshop
 - Departmental Workshops
 - Small-scale Projects
 - PLANET
 - Senior Advisors

- Continue to provide services and activities in support of all relevant learning and teaching issues and particularly those priority themes identified in the Strategic Plan:
 - Employability (including PDPs)
 - Students Entering HE (student diversity, widening participation, fair access and retention)
 - Fieldwork
 - Scholarship of Teaching (including training of external examiners)

- Pro-actively enhance our presence in Wales through targeted activities (e.g. departmental workshops and our main national event).

- Support the Quality Assurance agenda in Scotland in the areas of assessment and student induction (e.g. through departmental workshops).

- Support and help to lead LTSN initiatives in the field of education for sustainability.

- Continue to develop and maintain working relationships with generic staff and educational developers:
 - Maintain close links with SEDA;
 - Continue to work closely with University of Plymouth Educational Development Services;
 - Share in joint LTSN discussions regarding links with generic educational developers;
 - Make available themed workshop materials, bibliographies and other resources.

- Work closely with other Subject Centres, the Generic Centre and LTSN Executive to support the transition to the new Academy, whilst ensuring minimal disruption to our activities and services for the GEES communities.

In addition, it should be noted that LTSN-GEES will be moving offices in September 2003 to a new location on the University of Plymouth campus. This move is only likely to disrupt our activities for a week at the most. Our telephone and email details will remain the same, and we will circulate our new address as soon as become applicable.

List of Activities 2003-2004

This list maps our intended activities to our Strategic Aims. Following the categories within our Strategic Plan items highlighted in bold are our **keystone** activities; supplementary activities are those that further support the achievement of our Strategic Aims and delivery on priority themes; and support activities (those in italics) are undertaken to ensure the effective and efficient running of LTSN-GEES.

Strategic Aim	Activities
A1 To identify, collate and disseminate information on good practice, relevant educational resources and sources of expertise.	a. Resource Database b. Linking Teaching & Research c. <i>Enquiry Service</i> <i>Register of Interest; Resource library</i>
A2 To provide opportunities for professional development of teaching and support staff, underpinned by a commitment to the scholarship of teaching, including pedagogic research.	d. National Conferences e. New Lecturers Workshop f. Departmental Workshops g. Area Studies Network h. Supporting New Staff project
A3 To support curriculum developments which will enrich the quality of the students' learning experience, promote their key skills and employability, and the foundations of lifelong learning.	i. Small-scale Projects j. L&T Guides in Earth & Env Sciences k. Employability project
A4 To promote the awareness and adoption of new approaches to learning and teaching, including the use of C&IT, and to be responsive to increasing student diversity.	l. Bi-annual journal: Planet m. Special Editions of Planet n. Resource Briefings
A5 To foster a positive approach to the three disciplines working constructively together, whilst recognising and catering for their distinctive attributes and requirements.	o. Discipline-based Senior Advisors <i>Ongoing Needs Analyses</i>
A6 To be proactive in linking with national and international subject-based and generic agencies and networks so as to maximise the opportunities for the sharing of knowledge on learning and teaching innovations.	p. Links with external projects q. Links with other SCs, prof bodies etc. Synergy with University of Plymouth <i>External events and publications.</i> <i>LTSN working groups</i>
A7 To develop into a major national and international hub for the exchange of ideas on learning and teaching within and across the three disciplines.	r. <i>Web-site</i> s. <i>Departmental Contacts</i> <i>Workshop Facilitators / Other Consultants</i> <i>Publicity (inc. quarterly GEES Digest)</i> <i>International Liaison</i>
A8 To ensure the efficient and accountable development and evaluation of LTSN-GEES' work as the basis for the achievement of its mission.	<i>Steering Group</i> <i>Evaluation inc. External Evaluator</i> <i>Regular team meetings</i> <i>Reporting and planning cycles</i> <i>Staff Appraisal & Development</i>

Key to Abbreviations

Staff

BC: Prof Brian Chalkley (Director)
HK: Dr Helen King (Manager)
MS: Mike Sanders (C&IT Manager)
SG: Dr Steve Gaskin (Dissemination Co-ordinator)
YK: Dr Yolande Knight (Resource Co-ordinator)
ShG: Dr Sharon Gedye (Employability Researcher)
JG: Judith Gill (Administrative Assistant)

MH: Prof Mick Healey (Geography Senior Advisor)
NT: Dr Neil Thomas (Earth Science Senior Advisor)
JB: Jennifer Blumhof (Env Science Senior Advisor)

Summary of Meeting Key HE Priority Areas

Widening Participation

(Including: Support for the target of 50%; Support for a more representative social mix; Support for progress towards fair access; Lower rates of non-completion)

For the disciplines covered by LTSN-GEES, problems with achieving a suitable level of student recruitment far outweigh those associated with widening participation. Declining student numbers in these disciplines, together with the issues raised by being a small department in the RAE, have caused many departments to close or merge.

However, whilst widening participation (WP) has had little effect in terms of student numbers, institutional WP strategies will potentially have an influence on the types of students taking up courses in the GEES disciplines. This, potentially, increased variety of students brings issues such as social inclusion, more diverse learning styles, cultural differences and associated barriers to learning, new learners (e.g. first generation HE students, those returning after an extensive period in the world of work) and so on.

LTSN-GEES believes in addressing these issues holistically as part of a ‘good learning for all’ ethos, rather than singling out particular groups for special treatment. Social inclusion is best dealt with by offering everyone the same opportunities for learning and ‘learning to learn’, just because a student is from a ‘traditional’ background does not mean they do not suffer the same problems as their ‘WP’ peers.

The issues that LTSN-GEES will be particularly looking at in relation to the WP agenda, and in the context of curriculum development, include:

- Transition to HE
- Retention
- Student diversity (including learning styles, social inclusion, cultural differences and barriers to learning)
- Accessibility (SENDA)

LTSN-GEES has already begun to tackle some of the issues associated with WP including learning styles, SENDA, and transition and retention. These have been addressed through national conferences, departmental workshops, small-scale projects and publications. Additionally, One of the major components of GEES courses, fieldwork, is recognised as providing excellent opportunities for developing social inclusion particularly when undertaken early on in level one.

Our main strategy in the area of WP will be to provide more information about the above listed issues and the relationship between them in order to explicitly engender a more holistic approach to WP that advocates ‘good learning for all’. This approach is particularly important for our disciplines given that the main concern is with declining student recruitment.

The work already done in this area will be built on and developed through the Resource Database, events and publications, in particular Widening Participation will be one of the themes addressed at our annual residential conference. LTSN-GEES is collaborating with the Geography Discipline Network and providing dissemination services to two other projects funded by the HEFCE aiming to support provision for students with disabilities.

Employability

As stated in our Strategic Plan, employability is a key aspect of LTSN-GEES's activities and is a crucial area for development in geography, earth and environmental sciences over the next few years. This includes the integration of career development into the curriculum, enhancement of key skills provision, work-based learning and issues related to the introduction of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) and student profiling. Additionally, the development and enhancement of the curriculum with respect to career development and employability also has the potential to impact on student recruitment, transition to HE and retention rates.

Considerable work has already been done in the disciplines through the activities of both LTSN-GEES and its preceding projects (such as those funded by the FDTL), however, there is still much to be done. Additional funding has been secured from the LTSN Generic Centre to support the development of our employability strategy and, in particular to address those areas where we are lacking in experience, expertise and resources such as business awareness, employer links, self-management, career development and entrepreneurship. This will be extended and enhanced in 2003-2004 to include the link between the development of employability skills and PDPs. Furthermore, LTSN-GEES is benefiting from synergies with the work of Brian Chalkley (Director) and Pauline Kneale (Steering Group member) who are both exploring employability issues through their National Teaching Fellowship awards.

Plan and Targets relating to WP and Employability 2003-2004

Activity	Target
National Conferences	To provide opportunities for discussion and sharing of practice on several themes associated with WP and employability, and to show the relationships between them.
Departmental Workshops	To provide departmental workshops related to the WP and employability agendas.
Publications	To produce a Special Edition of PLANET, and to encourage articles in the mainline issues Planet on these themes.
Small-scale Projects	To continue to support those current projects linked to WP and employability
Enquiry Service	To be responsive to individual enquiries regarding WP or any of its elements, or employability.
Resource Database	To continue to review and catalogue those resources acquired through the above activities, such as case studies of good practice.

Strengthening Teaching Excellence

As can be seen from our Mission Statement, our Strategic Aims and those of the LTSN as a whole, strengthening teaching excellence is at the heart of our organisation and, hence, all of our activities and services contribute towards this objective, including:

- Resource Database
- Enquiry Service
- National conferences
- Residential workshop for new and recently appointed lecturers
- Departmental workshops
- Small-scale learning and teaching development projects
- Bi-annual journal: Planet
- Special, themed editions of Planet
- Discipline-based Senior Advisors to provide specific support for the individual disciplines
- International liaison – to share ideas and practice with colleagues overseas

Appendix A

Mapping the LTSN-GEES Strategic Aims onto the Overall Aims of the LTSN

LTSN-GEES Aims	LTSN Strategic Aim(s)
<p>A1 To identify, collate and disseminate information on good practice, relevant educational resources and sources of expertise.</p> <p>A2 To provide opportunities for professional development of teaching and support staff, underpinned by a commitment to the scholarship of teaching.</p> <p>A3 To support curriculum developments which will enrich the quality of the students' learning experience, promote their key skills and employability, and the foundations of lifelong learning.</p> <p>A4 To promote the awareness and adoption of new approaches to learning and teaching, including the use of C&IT, and to be responsive to increasing student diversity.</p>	<p>S1 To be the primary information and advice resource for all staff involved in learning and teaching in HE on subject specific and generic learning and teaching practices.</p> <p>S2 To promote, transfer and broker good innovative learning and teaching practices, including those that meet the diverse learning needs of the HE student population, to enhance learning and teaching activity in UK HE and FE institutions.</p>
<p>A5 To foster a positive approach to the three disciplines working constructively together, whilst recognising and catering for their distinctive attributes and requirements.</p> <p>A6 To be proactive in linking with national and international subject-based and generic agencies and networks so as to maximise the opportunities for the sharing of knowledge on learning and teaching innovations.</p>	<p>S5 To develop and sustain effective relationships and partnerships with appropriate stakeholders, to ensure a co-ordinated and coherent UK-wide approach to enhancing learning and teaching activity.</p>
<p>A7 To develop into a major national and international hub for the exchange of ideas on learning and teaching within and across the three disciplines.</p> <p>A8 To ensure the efficient and accountable development and evaluation of LTSN-GEES' work as the basis for the achievement of its mission.</p>	<p>S3 To develop and maintain a coherent and integrated network of effectively managed centres with a clear remit and national identity.</p> <p>S4 To promote the LTSN within institutions, and the HE sector more widely, so that all staff involved in learning and teaching are aware of, and have access to, the resources provided by LTSN.</p> <p>S6 To develop a network with the position and capacity to support the delivery of learning and teaching related national policy objectives.</p> <p>S7 To provide an international outlook on learning and teaching matters in terms of importing (observatory) and exporting (beacon) L&T resources, materials, trends and ideas.</p>

Appendix B

Discipline-Based Senior Advisors' Plans 2003-2004

Geography

Prof Mick Healey, University of Gloucestershire

The plan for the next 12 months is to continue to represent the needs of the geography community and to support the Plymouth-based team in the planning and development of LTSN-GEES activities. I will also continue to act as an ambassador for the centre with various geography and educational organisations and keep LTSN-GEES up-to-date with new developments in these areas.

Specifically in 2003-04, among the additional things in which I will be involved are:

- Helping SG with the Special Issue of *Planet* on Teaching and Research
- Planning with LTSN-GEES the INLT contribution to IGU2004 and the proposed post-IGU workshop
- Representing LTSN-GEES at various conferences, including International Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conference in London, International Geoscience Conference in Calgary, and RGS-IBG Annual Conference in London
- Completing the two LTSN-GEES projects, which I lead / co-lead, and contribute to the publication and dissemination of their findings.

I will also contribute to the discussions and planning of the proposed Academy for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and the proposed Centres of Excellence in Teaching initiative.

Earth Science

Dr Neil Thomas, Kingston University

Activities for 2003-4 will be centred on the topical themes of employability and student transition/retention/progression, in response to community needs. I have already highlighted a development project for funding, based at the University of Brighton. The intention of this initiative is to produce an intensive course on professional practice, which will be a national exemplar in the Earth Sciences. Also, an extensive research/development project will be conducted with the aim of comparing mechanisms of effecting transition into HE, managing retention and progression of undergraduate students on Earth Sciences courses in the UK and Australia. This project will be closely linked with the other GEES employability project in the Geography area (Brian Chalkley) and results will be disseminated at the 2004 GEES Residential conference. Other key activities will centre on taking an active role in the ESEF and conducting outreach visits to under-represented departments/regions, such as those in Wales and Scotland.

Environmental Science

Mrs Jennifer Blumhof, University of Hertfordshire

I anticipate that the same range of activities that we have been engaged on this year will continue next. We are about to survey ES departments to attempt to get an overview of current structures and staffing. We are hoping that this work will help us to target our activities on ES Programmes rather than the ever changing landscape of Departments, Divisions Faculties and Schools. We expect to be running at least two Swap Shops as these have proved popular and effective to share and disseminate good practice. The Guides Project should be completed and raising awareness of these will be another plank of our work. The Fieldwork project will continue and we also hope to contribute work to the employability project that is developing at Plymouth. This will link in to careers work being undertaken by CHES and the IES. Work with these two organisations will continue particularly organising meetings and the accreditation initiatives. The latter linking in with a potential CPD project.