

Enhancing Coherence in the Media and Communications Department

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Introduction

Coherence in higher education is a critical factor in shaping student satisfaction, academic success, and career readiness. For the Media and Communications Department at the London School of Economics (LSE), ensuring that students perceive logical connections within their degree program, alignment with pre-enrolment expectations, and support for their professional aspirations is essential. This report synthesizes findings from a comprehensive student survey and focus groups to evaluate three dimensions of coherence: Structural, Expectational, and Goal Oriented, and proposes strategic interventions to address identified gaps.

The study reveals that while the department performs well in certain areas, such as internal module cohesion, there are significant concerns regarding career relevance, administrative flexibility, and alignment between advertised and actual academic experiences. These findings have important implications for curriculum design, student communication, and industry engagement. The recommendations outlined in this report aim to enhance coherence, improve student satisfaction, and strengthen the program's reputation.

Key Findings and Their Implications

1. Expectational Coherence: The Gap Between Promise and Reality

Expectational coherence refers to the alignment between students' pre-enrollment expectations and their actual academic experience. The survey results indicate that 31% of students felt misled by vague program descriptions, while 28% reported significant deviations from their initial expectations.

Notable Findings:

Q3 (Alignment with Expectations): Only 10% of students felt the program "fully" met their expectations, while 31% reported it only "somewhat" did.

Q6 7 (Aspects Differing from Expectations): Students highlighted excessive theoretical focus, lack of practical skills, and Eurocentric course content as key discrepancies.

Implications:

The gap between expectation and reality suggests that the department's marketing and recruitment materials may oversimplify or inadequately represent the program's structure. This misalignment can lead to frustration, disengagement, and even attrition. The Eurocentric critique also points to a need for greater inclusivity in course content, ensuring that non Western perspectives are integrated meaningfully.

2. Structural Coherence: Strong Internal Logic but Redundancy Concerns

Structural coherence measures how well courses and modules build upon one another to create a cohesive learning journey. While 81% of students perceived strong logical connections between modules, core courses such as MC408 and MC411 were frequently criticized as "undergraduate level" or redundant.

Notable Findings:

Q8 (Cohesion Between Modules): 81% found courses "somewhat" to "very" effectively connected.

Q10 11 (Disconnected Courses): 25% identified specific modules as misaligned with program goals, citing MC408 as overly general and methods courses as poorly timed for dissertation preparation.

Implications:

The strong internal coherence is a positive indicator of effective curriculum sequencing. However, the redundancy in core courses suggests that some content may not challenge MSc level students adequately. Additionally, the misalignment of methods courses with dissertation timelines creates unnecessary stress, potentially hindering research quality.

3. Goal Oriented Coherence: Career Support and Administrative Barriers

Goal oriented coherence assesses how well the program supports students in achieving their academic and professional aspirations. While 70% agreed that courses provided relevant skills, only 37% felt the program structure strongly supported their career goals.

Notable Findings:

Q13 (Career Aspiration Support): Only 37% rated support as "very" or "extremely" supportive, while 47% deemed it "moderately" supportive.

Q17 18 (Enrollment Flexibility): 16% found regulations restrictive, limiting their ability to personalize their academic path.

Implications:

The disconnect between skill acquisition and career applicability suggests that students struggle to translate academic knowledge into professional competencies. Furthermore, rigid enrollment policies hinder students from tailoring their degrees to niche interests, potentially limiting their career trajectories.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Enhancing Transparency: A Programme Explorer Portal

Proposal:

Develop a centralized digital platform providing:

Searchable syllabi (including past years) with weekly learning outcomes.

Interactive career pathway visualizations showing how courses align with industry needs.

Student testimonials and professor video explanations to set realistic expectations.

Rationale:

This addresses expectational coherence gaps by ensuring students have accurate, detailed information before enrollment. A pilot could be launched in Michaelmas 2024, with success measured via reduced course switching rates and improved early term satisfaction.

2. Modernizing Core Courses: Differentiation and Applied Learning

Proposal:

Restructure MC408 and MC411 into Foundation (condensed theory) and Advanced (applied case studies) tracks.

Align methods courses with dissertation timelines, offering Term 1 technique training and Term 2 dissertation clinics.

Rationale:

This responds to structural coherence critiques by eliminating redundancy and ensuring MSc level rigor. The applied track could involve live projects with media partners (e.g., Reuters), enhancing practical relevance.

3. Strengthening Career Integration: Industry Partnerships and Digital Badges

Proposal:

Introduce "Challenge Weeks" where students solve real world media problems.

Offer badged micro internships and digital credentials in skills like data storytelling.

Partner with BBC, Reuters, and digital media firms for guest lectures and workshops.

Rationale:

This bridges the goal oriented coherence gap by providing tangible career pathways. Digital badges would help students articulate skills to employers, addressing the theory practice divide.

4. Streamlining Enrollment: AI Driven Course Recommendations

Proposal:

Develop an AI recommendation tool analyzing career goals, strengths, and skill gaps.

Allow limited cross department enrollment (e.g., Politics or Data Science courses).

Assign personal academic advisors for pathway customization.

Rationale:

This reduces administrative frustration (cited by 16% of students) while maintaining academic rigor. A phased rollout would allow iterative improvements based on feedback.

Conclusion: A Call for Holistic Reform

The Media and Communications Department at LSE has a strong foundation in structural coherence, but expectational and goal oriented gaps require urgent attention. The proposed reforms: enhanced transparency, curriculum modernization, industry integration, and regulatory flexibility, are interdependent, each reinforcing the others to create a more cohesive academic experience.