

## Quick Guide to Café Forums

An overarching assumption of [LSE Curriculum Shift 2020](#) is that building and sustaining community and belonging should be an integral part of the curriculum design process. Belonging is central to ensuring students feel valued during their time at LSE and are enabled to thrive and succeed.

### What is a café forum?

A café forum is a Moodle-based forum that is student-led and community-focussed. The primary aim of the forum is to build and sustain an online learning community for a group of students within a department which is not directly linked to the specific courses they are studying. A café forum can be a useful way of building community between students irrespective of whether they are studying on-campus or at a distance.

### Guidelines at a glance

- Where?

As part of your Curriculum Shift 2020 work we have suggested that you develop programme level Moodle pages. Including a café forum at this level helps distinguish it from course level forums that are focused on specific learning activities.

- Who?

Wherever possible the café forum should be moderated by students. Moderating a café forum could provide second and third year students with a flexible opportunity to develop their skills through volunteering. This could be particularly useful for students who, for whatever reason, may be unable to take up other volunteering opportunities.

Although students will work as volunteers the department should formally recognise their contribution. It can be useful for students to be given a document that outlines the skills they have developed as a moderator, including advice on how these skills might be articulated in applications for jobs and/or further study.

- How?

When setting up the café forum on the programme Moodle page it would be useful to include text that outlines the aims of the café forum. The aims should highlight that the forum is student-led and that there should not be an expectation that teachers will respond to study-related queries in the café forum. It might also be useful to provide a link to [guidance on good practice](#) when contributing to forums. Please feel free to adapt this guidance to suit your needs.

It will be useful for moderators to be provided with ideas for discussion threads that they may choose to introduce across the year to stimulate engagement. Some examples:

- An activity during welcome week where students use the café forum to introduce themselves to their peers.
- Links to online media (e.g. TV, radio, podcasts, blogs, Ted Talks) that focus on topics that have links to their discipline.
- Details of any social activities that the department is organising, including encouraging students to ask any questions about the event.
- Online celebrations of any key School or departmental dates/events.
- Invitations to students to contribute to discussions relating to specific [UN International Days](#) (e.g. on [World Poetry Day](#) students could post their favourite poem) and/or [less formal celebration days](#) (e.g. on [International Joke Day](#) students could share their favourite joke)
- Students could share study and revision tips.
- Students could make contact with peers who share interests and hobbies.

### **Where can we find out more?**

If you would like support with planning your café forum please consult your Eden Centre departmental advisers.

If you would like to join a practice-sharing group to see examples of what community-building activities colleagues across the School are planning and discuss how these might link into your café forum please email either Sandra Ma ([s.s.ma@lse.ac.uk](mailto:s.s.ma@lse.ac.uk)) or Adam Judge ([a.judge@lse.ac.uk](mailto:a.judge@lse.ac.uk)) or Zoe Adams ([z.c.adams@lse.ac.uk](mailto:z.c.adams@lse.ac.uk)).

Funding and support may be available to evaluate the impact of café forums, and to produce case studies for use by other Departments.