

Study Skills Acquisition among First-Year History Students.

An unusually large audience was treated to what this reviewer found the most interesting and beneficial of all sessions he attended in Oxford. Dr Foyster's paper was, indeed, so promising that it managed to attract both conference organisers, Paul Hyland and Alan Booth. Elizabeth had been conducting research on behalf of the Subject Centre and was, she said, pleased to be able to demonstrate where the money had gone.

Dr Foyster conducted a survey into good practice in the teaching of new undergraduates, and methods of measurement. This involved statistical illustration of data from the University of Dundee, which were presented very effectively through a variety of pie charts, which no one present would have guessed were the author's first use of them. Liz also handed round the Level-One Study Guide and Workbook she had written for her department's students at Dundee, which, though she professed it quite outdated, impressed colleagues by its breadth and relevance.

Liz emphasised the nature of her research as being ongoing, and that such conclusions as she had made were perforce preliminary. The key concepts introduced in the evaluation of study-skills measurement were centred around the headings Context, Rationale, and Findings.

The Context was the fruit of considerable research and investigation, building in part on the work of Stella Cottrell in *Teaching Study Skills and Supporting Learning*, and more generally on the flowering of interest in teaching and learning, at the apex of which sits the Subject Centre.

The most obvious but curiously often overlooked rationale was that of retaining students. The way in which students have learnt required our understanding: what is it that we as teachers are dealing with? Liz explained that we tend to find ourselves in a content-driven process, where students too often use a 'document as a vehicle for recall'. As teachers of history we have therefore to meet student expectations, such as by improving study skills, and meeting employer expectations.

Liz's principal finding, gleaned from her trips to universities around Britain, was that a direct approach to the question of teaching and learning was preferable: that history departments themselves resolve pedagogic issues, rather than passing them on to a specialist unit for resolution. Study skills relevant to history were much more relevant and useful to her students than any generic methods and practice.

An animated and often informed discussion ensued, where it was very clear that Liz's evidence and preliminary conclusions would serve as a valuable foundation for further enquiry. There was no dissenting from Dr Foyster's central conclusion that study skills can eliminate difference in who fails and who succeeds.