The “Enhancing Teaching-learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses” (ETL) Project is intended to strengthen the research base informing the quality of teaching and learning in UK HE. It is an ESRC-funded research project conducted in collaboration with partner departments in contrasting subject areas, of which economics is one. This workshop discusses the findings of one of such collaborations in economics.

A threshold concept has been described as “a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a possibly transformed way of understanding … without which the learner cannot progress” (Meyer, E., and Land, R., 2003 Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines. ETL Occasional Report 4, Universities of Edinburgh, Coventry and Durham, p.1). The case study explores students’ developing understanding of opportunity cost and elasticity as threshold concepts within the context of a first year microeconomics module. Questions about authentic situations related to students’ everyday lives were used to investigate whether students’ thinking has changed as a consequence of learning and being taught about threshold concepts. The workshop will discuss the usefulness of such questions as diagnostic tools as well as the impact of the teaching-learning environment on students’ understanding of these concepts. It will give participants the opportunity to explore whether the notion of a “threshold concept” can help lecturers to think about learning and teaching and enhance teaching-learning environments.

1 hour workshop, Economics, HE