

## **Title: Using Prizes and Open Educational Resources (OER) to Enhance Engagement in Microeconomics**

Author: Sofia IZQUIERDO SANCHEZ. Senior Lecturer in Economics, Department of Economics.

Building on last year's success with the *Diversifying the Curriculum* initiative (Izquierdo Sanchez and Gonzalez Bonnet, 2024), our 2024/25 Microeconomics 4 project took another step toward inclusive, student-led learning. This year, we expanded the blog assessment introducing a competitive edge.

### **Rationale and Aims**

The core aim remained the same: to make microeconomic concepts more relatable and engaging through collaborative, student-generated content. We asked students to create blog posts connecting theoretical frameworks to real-world issues. However, to deepen engagement, we introduced a prize — in the form of Amazon vouchers — for the most innovative and relevant blog post, as judged by teaching staff. The winning entry was also promoted on Instagram via our outreach account, [@dailylifeecon](#) (Izquierdo Sanchez and Tayler, 2024; 2025).

This dual incentive (a £50 Amazon voucher for each group member and social media publication) had two goals: to motivate excellence and creativity in student work, and to offer visibility and recognition for high-quality outputs beyond the classroom.

As in the previous year, all blog posts were shared anonymously on the Microeconomics blog ([microeconomics4blog.blogspot.com](#)), now a co-created Open Educational Resource (OER) (Izquierdo Sanchez, 2024). This initiative aligns with inclusive pedagogies and the values of open education — improving accessibility, encouraging student agency, and supporting peer learning (Wiley et al., 2013; Moriña, 2017).

### **Outputs and Delivery**

Students worked in groups to produce blog posts applying microeconomic theory to current societal issues. The winning post, “*The Hidden Signals of Shrinkflation*,” explored how market signalling conceals changes in product value — a highly relevant and creative topic. What stood out was its ability to connect core theoretical concepts with current consumer trends, while also linking the material from Microeconomics 4 with broader topics covered in other economics modules. This demonstrated not only subject understanding but also interdisciplinary thinking and the ability to synthesise learning across the curriculum.

Incentivising assessments — whether through public recognition or rewards — can significantly boost student motivation and creativity (Rust, 2002; Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). In this case, the combination of prize and publication encouraged students to go beyond meeting basic requirements and think more critically and originally about their work. Additionally, by embedding these outputs into an OER, we ensured that student contributions had lasting value beyond the module itself.

### **Student Reception and Evaluation**

The response from students was overwhelmingly positive. A post-course opinion survey (completed by around 40% of the cohort) revealed:

- 90% of students rated the blog coursework as “interesting” or “very interesting.”

- 86% agreed or strongly agreed that it helped them engage with real-world applications of economic theory.

More specifically:

- On a 5-point scale (1 = not interesting, 5 = very interesting), 87 students rated it a 5, and 29 rated it a 4.
- For real-world engagement, 74 students rated it a 5, 33 rated it a 4, with very few selecting 3 or below.

These results support the idea that the blog-based OER assessment not only supported conceptual understanding but also increased motivation, creativity, and a sense of ownership in learning.

### **Challenges**

Introducing a prize naturally raised questions about balancing motivation with inclusivity. To address this, we designed a clear marking rubric focused on relevance, creativity, and clarity — rather than writing style or prior academic experience. We also ensured transparency in how decisions were made, and made space in class for all students to share and discuss their work.

Managing the logistics of evaluating and selecting the winning entry was time-intensive. However, involving teaching assistants in shortlisting helped streamline the process.

### **Next Steps**

Given the success of the prize and OER components, we plan to embed both permanently in Microeconomics 4.

Additionally, we aim to contribute further to the teaching and learning community supporting wider adoption of inclusive, creative, and student-led assessment design.

### **Broader Reflections**

This project reflects several principles of curriculum diversification:

- Empowering student voice – Students share their own examples and ideas, not just reproduce textbook answers.
- Valuing diverse knowledge – Group work and open sharing invite a range of disciplinary and cultural perspectives (Izquierdo Sanchez and Jabeen, 2025).
- Real-world relevance – The combination of blogging and social media encourages students to connect economic theory to daily life and contemporary issues.

Ultimately, students don't just learn economics — they help communicate and apply it.

### **References:**

Gibbs, G. and Simpson, C. (2004) Conditions under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LATHE)*, 1, 3-31.

Izquierdo Sanchez, S. (2024). "The Microeconomics Blog: Inclusive Learning Using Open Educational Resources (OER)", *Economics Network Ideas Bank*, URL: [https://economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/izquierdo\\_sanchez\\_blog](https://economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/izquierdo_sanchez_blog)

- Izquierdo Sanchez, S., and Gonzalez Bonnet, N. (2024). "Diversifying the Curriculum: Microeconomics 4 Blog", *SoSS Teaching and Learning*, <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/sossteachlearn/2024/07/01/diversifying-the-curriculum-microeconomics-4-blog/>
- Izquierdo Sanchez, S., and Jabeen, S. (2025). "Diversifying the Curriculum: Developing Employability and Critical Thinking through Interdisciplinary Group Work and Peer Review", *SoSS Teaching and Learning*, <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/sossteachlearn/2025/04/03/diversifying-the-curriculum-developing-employability-and-critical-thinking-through-interdisciplinary-group-work-and-peer-review/>
- Izquierdo Sanchez, S., and Tayler, W. (2024). "Instagramming Economics", *Scholarship and Innovation in Management Education (SIME)*: [https://doc.your-brochure-online.co.uk/Lancaster-University\\_Scholarship-and-Innovation-in-Management-Education/23/](https://doc.your-brochure-online.co.uk/Lancaster-University_Scholarship-and-Innovation-in-Management-Education/23/)
- Izquierdo Sanchez, S., and Tayler, W. J. (2025). "Integrating Social Networks into Economics Education: Engagement & Research-led Learning", *Economics Network Ideas Bank*, URL: [https://economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/izquierdosanchez\\_socialmedia](https://economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/izquierdosanchez_socialmedia)
- Moriña, A. (2017). Inclusive education in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 32(1), 3-17.
- Rust, C. (2002). The Impact of Assessment on Student Learning: How Can the Research Literature Practically Help to Inform the Development of Departmental Assessment Strategies and Learner-Centred Assessment Practices? *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 3(2), 145-158.
- Wiley, D., Bliss, T. J., and McEwen, M. (2013). Open educational resources: A Review of the Literature. In *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology* (pp. 781-789). Springer.