



Centre for Teaching and Learning

Learner Support Centres Annual Report Academic Year 2018/19



Contents

Introduction.....	1
1. Science Learning Centre	2
Foreword from the Director	3
Executive Summary	4
1.1 Overview.....	5
1.2 SLC Drop-in and Support Tutorials Semester 1	5
1.3 Semester 2	9
1.4 Service for Students Repeating Examinations	12
1.5 PAR Sessions for Chemistry Students.....	12
1.6 Student Feedback on SLC Services	12
1.7 SOPHia Project.....	13
1.8 Conclusions.....	14
Appendix A: Publications and Presentations	15
2. Mathematics Learning Centre	16
Foreword from the Director	17
Executive Summary	18
2.1 Overview.....	19
2.2 Drop-in Centre	19
2.3 Support Tutorials	20
2.4 Exam Revision.....	20
2.5 Breakdown of Student Usage.....	21
2.6 Impact of MLC on First-year Students.....	26
2.7 Survey of Users	27
2.8 Increased Online Resources	28
2.9 Other Achievements.....	28
2.10 Goals for Next Year	29
Appendix A: Publications and Presentations	30
3. ICT Learning Centre	31
Foreword from the Co-directors	32
Executive Summary	33
3.1 Overview.....	34
3.2 ICT Learning Centre Services	34
3.3 ICTLC Activities and Student Participation	37
3.4 Outline of Plan of Activities for 2019/20.....	42
Appendix A: ICT Initiatives Offered by the ICTLC	44
Appendix B: Presentations	44

4. Regional Peer-Supported Learning Centre.....	45
Foreword from the Director	46
Executive Summary	47
4.1 Overview.....	47
4.2 PSLC Activities and Student Participation	48
4.3 Outline of Plan of Activities for 2019/20.....	53
5. Regional Writing Centre	56
Foreword from the Co-directors	57
Executive Summary	58
5.1 Overview.....	59
5.2 Key Highlights of RWC Activities in 2018/19.....	59
5.3 Details of RWC Activities in 2018/19.....	60
5.4 Innovative RWC Approaches to Writer Development	64
5.5 External Consultation	65
5.6 Research Projects	66
Appendix A: Peer Tutoring in Academic Writing (Demographics).....	67
Appendix B: Publications and Presentations	69

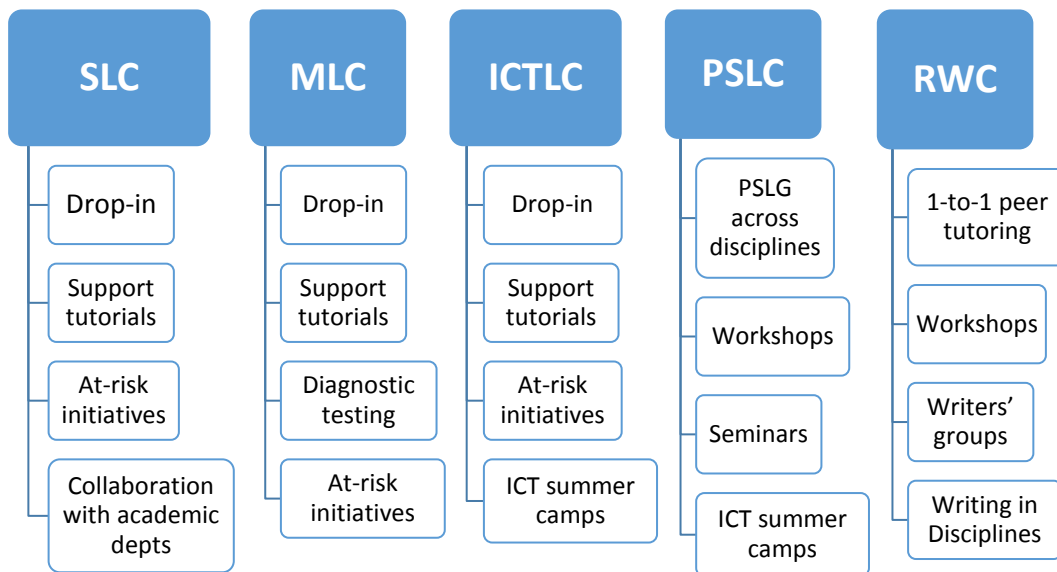
Introduction

A key element of the vision of the University of Limerick (UL) is to provide an engaging student experience. The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) manages five learner support centres, each of which provides a space where students can feel comfortable learning in small groups or in one-to-one situations.

The five learner support centres are as follows:

Science Learning Centre (SLC)	http://www.ulsites.ul.ie/slc/
Mathematics Learning Centre (MLC)	http://www.mlc.ul.ie/
ICT Learning Centre (ICTLC)	http://ictlc.ul.ie/
Regional Peer-Supported Learning Centre (PSLC)	http://pslc.ul.ie/
Regional Writing Centre (RWC)	http://ulsites.ul.ie/rwc/

The learner centres are dedicated to helping students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level to achieve their academic goals by supporting them to build academic confidence and self-esteem and to learn and study more effectively. The key services offered are summarised below.



This report brings together in one document the annual reports of UL's five learner support centres for the academic year (AY) 2018/19.



1. Science Learning Centre

Annual Report 2018/19

Foreword from the Director

The attached report provides a detailed review of learning support activities undertaken at the UL Science Learning Centre (SLC) for the period September 2018 to September 2019. Student participation in all SLC activities was similar to previous years for the period reported. Encouraging participation in SLC activities by students who could benefit from such participation continues to be a challenge.

The SLC has identified early engagement as key to ensuring student success in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects. Data relating to the use of online (Sulis) resources, lecture attendance and general subject preparedness (particularly in mathematics, such as the Minerva/EPI-STEM project) can provide early indicators of a student's likelihood to progress but equally can serve to identify students at risk of failure at a stage when there is still time to remedy the situation. Analytics in relation to student engagement continues to be a priority for the SLC in order to drive targeted support initiatives that meet the actual needs of our students.

The SLC is involved in the development of localised online supports. Key topics recur as challenge areas for many students. A number of exemplar short videos dealing with specific challenge topics have been produced as part of distance support of learning at the SLC. We intend developing simple tools and facilities that will allow us to capture and digitise some of the tutoring in the centre in order to make it more widely available.

Outcome measures using metrics that assess student feedback as well as module attainment and progression are essential in guiding what we do. We try to generate the requisite data through feedback forms and surveys but the time commitment is significant. We would strongly urge UL to support and provide the necessary analytics, compliant with GDPR, as independent objective indicators of the impact of the SLC in relation to student progression and retention.

The SLC successfully competed for Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) funding for its SOPHia Outreach Project in 2018. Led by SLC Manager Dr Gráinne Walshe, the project seeks to encourage female participation in STEM subjects, particularly physics. Targeting pre-Transition Year school students through workshops and school visits led by undergraduate female physics students, the project strives to tackle the direct but often subliminal prejudices and biases that exist towards STEM subjects. The project is already gaining some international attention.

Dr Vincent Casey,
Director, Science Learning Centre

September 2019

Executive Summary

The SLC provides support (through the Drop-in Centre and support tutorials) to undergraduates whose degree includes a science or engineering component. A total of 3,574 visits from students on 27 different programmes were made to the SLC during 2018/19. The following is a breakdown by semester and service:

- Semester 1 drop-in: 625 visits from 285 individual students
- Semester 1 support tutorials: 1,377 visits
- Semester 2 drop-in: 434 visits from 172 individual students
- Semester 2 support tutorials: 1,100
- Repeats: 31
- Workshops: 7

Mature students accounted for 104 visits (from 52 individual students) to the Drop-in Centre in Semester 1 and 46 visits (from 27 individual students) in Semester 2.

The SLC provided drop-in support for students in the week preceding the repeat examinations in August 2018. There were 31 attendances for the week. The centre collaborated with the Mathematics Learning Centre to provide workshops during First Seven Weeks to seven students.

The SLC brought in €31,591 in SFI funding for its collaboration with the Department of Physics on the outreach project SOPHia, which aims to increase the number of school students, especially female students, taking physics at Senior Cycle. It thereby aims to increase gender diversity in physics and STEM generally at undergraduate level and beyond. This is a project with national and international reach. In 2018/19, it engaged with 550 school students and nine teachers as well as delivering workshops in Intel Shannon and NUIG. This it achieved through the co-creation work of 20 UL undergraduate facilitators with SLC/Department of Physics staff.

Feedback from students who availed of SLC services during the year was positive. Common praiseworthy aspects cited by users of the Drop-in Centre included the tutors' friendliness, patience, knowledge and helpfulness; the benefit of having a place to go to ask questions; being able to ask questions without embarrassment; and the one-to-one or small-group learning environment. Suggested improvements included extending the hours, providing more tutors and covering more modules.

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 Undergraduate Learning Support

The Science Learning Centre (SLC) provides support to students whose degree includes a science component. The SLC aims to help first- and second-year students but responds to requests from students at all levels, including postgraduates, when it can.

The SLC's director is Dr Vincent Casey and its manager is Dr Gráinne Walshe. SLC tutors are typically UL postgraduate students researching and teaching in biology, chemistry, physics or engineering. In some cases, they themselves had taken the supported modules when they were undergraduates. The tutors work in the Drop-in Centre or on support tutorials or both.

Students can visit the Drop-in Centre without appointment or cost on a first-come, first-served basis. The support tutorials supplement regular timetabled lectures and tutorials. The SLC liaises with lecturers on the organisation and content of the support tutorials.

The SLC is open from Week 3 to Week 13 of each semester. Drop-in Centre hours are from 10.00 to 12.00 and 14.00 to 16.00, Tuesday to Thursday, with extra hours on Mondays and Fridays in the final four weeks of the semester. Support hours depend on tutor availability and resources.

1.1.2 Research, Funding and Outreach

In partnership with the Department of Physics, the SLC is involved in outreach to increase the numbers of students in the discipline area and especially to increase gender diversity in STEM. This it does via the SOPHia project: Science Outreach to Promote Physics to Female Students, for which it won SFI Discover funding for 2019. The project has the support of the Institute of Physics in Ireland. The main project activity involves UL undergraduate facilitators co-creating and delivering a school visit workshop to lower second-level school students to encourage them to take physics as a Leaving Certificate subject.

In collaboration with a colleague in the National Centre for Excellence in STEM Education (EPI-STEM), the SLC was involved in carrying out research into Year 1 student mathematical preparedness for science and engineering at university (the Minerva project).

In collaboration with the School of Education and funded by HEA PATH, the SLC developed pilot online materials for supporting underrepresented groups in initial teacher education.

1.2 SLC Drop-in and Support Tutorials Semester 1

1.2.1 Drop-in Centre

The total attendance in the Drop-in Centre during Semester 1 was 625 visits from 285 individual students. Mature students accounted for 104 visits (by 34 individual students). The tables to follow show the variation in the number of student visits per week, visits per faculty, visits per degree programme and visits per module.

Table 1.1: Drop-in Centre student visits from weeks 3 to 13, Semester 1

Week	Number of visits
3	35
4	51
5	70
6	35
7	43
8	27
9	35
10	67
11	60
12	109
13	93
Total	625

Table 1.2: Drop-in Centre visits per faculty, Semester 1

Faculty	Number of visits
Science & Engineering	452
Education & Health Sciences	132
Mature Student Access Certificate (MSAC)*	3
Kemmy Business School	1
Unknown	37
Total	625

**The MSAC is included in the table because it is an interfaculty programme. The programme is unique in that it aims to support and prepare mature students for entry into undergraduate degree programmes.*

Table 1.3: Drop-in Centre visits by student programme, Semester 1

Degree	Number of visits
Science Education (Bio&Ag/Phys/Chem) – LM092	136
Food Science and Health – LM068	66
Biological and Chemical Sciences – LM123	54
Industrial Biochemistry – LM064	49
Engineering Choice – LM116	48
Construction Management – LM082	43
Pharmaceutical and Industrial Chemistry – LM061	32
Sport and Exercise Science – LM089	28
Product Design and Technology – LM076	25
Chemical and Biochemical Engineering – LM115	23
Electronic and Computer Engineering – LM118	18
Unknown	13
Science Education (Chem & Phys) – LM096	14
Aeronautical Engineering – LM077	13
MSAC	14
Biomedical Engineering – LM071	12
Environmental Science – LM066	8
Bioscience – LM123	5
Materials and Engineering Teaching – LM095	4
Technology Management – LM063	4
Mechanical Engineering – LM073	3
Design and Manufacture – LM119	3
Equine Science – LM093	3
Mathematics and Physics – LM088	2
Applied Physics – LM065	2
Physical Education – LM090	1
Computer Science – LM121	1
Structural Mechanics – LM11	1
Total	625

Table 1.4: Drop-in Centre attendance per module, Semester 1

Module	Attendance	Module	Attendance	Module	Attendance
PH4131	81	BC4903	6	WT4105	1
CH4701	79	ET4003	4	PY4145	1
Unknown	56	ER4001	4	PH4065	1
CH4303	56	CH4405	4	PH4061	1
ME4121	42	CH4021	4	PH4003	1
WT4503	39	CG4003	4	MS4111	1
CH4003	38	BC4905	4	ME4101	1
PH4031	29	PH4011	3	ME4001	1
CH4001	28	CG5011	3	FT4374	1
PH4171	22	CG4017	3	ER4708	1
CH4305	19	PT4013	2	EE4314	1
ME4112	17	PH4041	2	CH4417	1
EE4001	14	ME4533	2	CH4415	1
CH4103	11	ME4523	2	CH4407	1
FS2101	8	FYP	2	CH4203	1
CH4253	8	CH4005	2	CH4013	1
ME4213	7	BY4015	2	BC4803	1
		WT4302	1		
Subtotals	554		54		17
Total:	625				

1.2.2 Support Tutorials

The SLC ran eight support tutorials in Semester 1, as listed below.

Table 1.5: Support tutorials by module

Module code	Module name	Attendance
CH4701/CH4001	General Chemistry/Chemistry for Engineers	403
ME4121	Engineering Science	170
PH4131	Mechanics/Heat/Electricity	196
PH4031	Physics for General Science 1	2
CH4003	Physical Chemistry	135
CH4407	Process Technology 4	172
CH4305	Analytical Chemistry 3	241
PH4041	Optics	58
Total		1,377

1.3 Semester 2

1.3.1 Drop-in Centre

The total attendance in the Drop-in Centre during Semester 2 was 434 visits, with 172 individual visits. Mature students accounted for 46 visits (by 27 individual students). Table 1.6 shows the variation in the number of student visits per week.

Table 1.6: Drop-in Centre student visits from weeks 3 and 13, Semester 2

Week	Number of visits
3	37
4	31
5	28
6	14
7	28
8	28
9	25
10	24
11	49
12	68
Easter break	35
13	67
Total	434

Table 1.7 shows the number of visits per faculty. Once again, most students were from the Faculty of Science & Engineering.

Table 1.7: Drop-in Centre visits per faculty, Semester 2

Faculty	Sum of total
Science & Engineering	381
Education & Health Sciences	26
Unknown	18
MSAC	8
Kemmy Business School	1
Total	434

Tables 1.8 and 1.9 show the number of visits per degree programme and module respectively.

Table 1.8: Visits to the Drop-in Centre in Semester 2 by student programme

Degree programme	Number of visits
Biological + Chemical Sciences	139
Food Science and Health	79
Construction Management and Engineering	47
Engineering Choice	43
Science Education	27
Industrial Biochemistry	25
Pharmaceutical and Industrial Chemistry	17
Chemical and Biochemical Engineering	10
Applied Physics	8
Aeronautical Engineering	7
MSAC	7
Unknown	5
Financial Mathematics	3
Mathematics and Physics	3
Product Design and Technology	3
Technology Management	3
Biomedical Engineering	2
Unknown	2
Physics	1
Computer Skills (AS2412)	1
Materials and Engineering Teaching	1
Music, Media and Performance Technology	1
TOTAL	434

Table 1.9: Total number of requests per module at the Drop-in Centre in Semester 2

Module	Number of visits	Module	Number of visits	Module	Number of visits
Unknown	45	Me4736	3	ME4214	1
CH4041	39	PT4014	3	ME4226	1
ME4111	37	CH3031	2	ME4414	1
PH4032	36	CH4002	2	MS4414	1
CH4031	32	CH4303	2	PH4019	1
PH4022	27	CH4403	2	PH4021	1
CH4012	26	CH4404	2	PH4023	1
CH4304	26	FYP	2	PH4042	1
PH4142	23	ME4516	2	PH4072	1
CH4102	21	WT4102	2	PH4121	1
CH4252	13	BC4008	1	PH4302	1
CH4004	11	BC4902	1	PH4742	1
PH4102	11	BC4904	1	PY4112	1
FS2101	7	BC4907	1	Unknown	1
PH4062	7	BST114	1	WT4505	1
CH4021	6	BY4014	1		
Unknown	5	BY4505	1		
PH4012	4	CH4042	1		
PH4041	4	CH4142	1		
CH4054	3	CH4301	1		
ME4032	3	ME4113	1		
Subtotals	386		33		15
Total					434

An unusually high number of students visited seeking support for modules that we do not usually get asked for help with.

1.3.2 Support Tutorials

Table 1.10: Support tutorials per module

Module code	Module name	Attendances
PAR chemistry	Prepare and Repeat Chemistry Revision	125
CH4041/CH4012	General Chemistry 2/Physical Chemistry	240
PH4072	Electromagnetism	67
ME4111	Engineering Mechanics	236
CH4054/CH4002	Physical Chemistry	74
CH4252	Inorganic Chemistry	194
PH4102	Waves Light Modern Physics	77
PH4032	Physics for General Science 2	87
Total		1,100

The Prepare and Repeat (PAR) revision sessions were run to support at-risk students with revising basic concepts they would need for their Semester 2 chemistry modules (see section 1.5 below).

1.4 Service for Students Repeating Examinations

The SLC provided drop-in support for students in the week preceding the repeat examinations. Tutors were available to provide help with first-year and some second-year biology, chemistry, physics and mechanical engineering modules at various times. There were 31 attendances for the week.

1.5 PAR Sessions for Chemistry Students

The SLC collaborated with the module leaders to provide five PAR sessions for first-year students with Semester 2 chemistry modules. PAR sessions were intended to give students who had achieved a C3 or less in General Chemistry 1 an opportunity to revisit core chemistry concepts they would need for their Semester 2 chemistry modules.

At 125 visits overall by 54 students, attendance at the four PAR tutorials was higher than in previous years. The response rate was 30% by the students who had been identified as being at risk.

1.6 Student Feedback on SLC Services

Students who visited the SLC Drop-in Centre or who attended the support tutorials in the final weeks of semesters 1 and 2 were requested to fill out anonymous feedback forms. The vast majority of comments in the 304 collected forms were very positive, with students praising the tutors' friendliness, knowledge and helpfulness. Table 1.11 shows respondents' responses to a question on how helpful they found the drop-in and/or support tutorials.

Table 1.11: Responses to the question: 'How helpful did you find the Drop-in and/or support tutorials?'

Rating of SLC drop-in and/or support tutorials	No. of responses
Very helpful	180
Helpful	91
Sometimes helpful	32
Not helpful at all	1
Total	304

Themes that emerged were similar to previous years, including the importance of having a place to go to ask questions without fear of embarrassment and the one-to-one or small-group context. Tutors were said to be understanding and patient. In tutorials, students appreciated the slower pace, felt that difficult concepts were explained in more detail, found the sample exam questions to be helpful and felt more confident about asking

questions in a small-group setting. The changes respondents suggested making were to do with increased hours, more tutors and more specified modules.

1.7 SOPHia Project

The SOPHia project was awarded €31,561.00 by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) under its Discover Programme call 2019. Led by SLC Manage led by Dr Gráinne Walshe, the SOPHia project was developed by the UL Department of Physics and SLC with the support of the Institute of Physics in Ireland. The main activity is a school visit programme to encourage female students to study physics for the Irish Leaving Certificate. UL undergraduate physics students visit schools and deliver a workshop to female lower-second-level students (see Table 1.12).

Table 1.12: Numbers of students, undergraduate facilitators and teachers involved in SOPHia school visit programme 2018/19

Activity type and participants	Numbers
School visits (autumn 2018 and spring 2019)	9
Intel Transition Year Work Experience Day November 2018	1
Space careers day in NUIG June 2019	1
School students (all activity types)	550
Undergraduate facilitators	20
Teachers	9

The funding is being used to develop a more ambitious school visit programme, one that involves training for undergraduate facilitators. Additionally, there are a number of new elements to the project in 2019, including a student competition for projects researching famous physicists/important physics discoveries/local physics and a showcase event to inform teachers of the issues with regards to gender in physics. An interactive website for parents, teachers and students will be launched in September 2019 to supplement the school visit programme, with curriculum-linked activities. The website includes a BeeWise blog to engage students, parents and members of the public in STEM through highlighting the role of physics in monitoring endangered species and the environment. Worksheets related to the school science/physics curriculum but using data streamed to the cloud from the living bee colony is used to reinforce and broaden understanding and encourage deeper learning.

School students, UL undergraduate facilitators and teachers returned surveys regarding the impact of SOPHia. School student feedback shows that participation in the SOPHia workshop gave statistically significant positive improvement in perceptions and intentions regarding physics. This has been analysed in detail for 310 surveys returned with parental consent. For example, there was a 58% increase in those school students who said ‘maybe’ and a 44% increase in those who said ‘yes’ regarding their intention to take physics as a Leaving Certificate subject. Similarly, following the workshop, in relation to students’ knowledge of physics role models, on a five-point scale (1 – not at all to 5 – very much), the mode rating was 1 before the workshop (54% of respondents) and 4 afterwards (29%). Facilitators

delivering the SOPHia workshop find it personally and professionally beneficial, reviving their passion for physics. Teachers drew out issues that impact students' uptake of physics – especially the lack of diverse role models and perception of physics as being too difficult – that they said the SOPHia workshop would overcome. This has been presented at national and international conferences.

1.8 Conclusions

The SLC continues to support a large number of UL undergraduate students in science and engineering subjects/modules. Student feedback by way of anonymous questionnaires is predominantly positive in relation to SLC supports and services. The centre was successful in its bid for SFI funding to promote gender diversity in physics through the high-profile outreach SOPHia project. The SLC continues to operate in a physical space which, as highlighted in many previous reports, is less than optimal and far inferior to any of the other affiliated learning centres in the university.

Appendix A: Publications and Presentations

Publications

Johnston, J., Walshe, G., & Ríordáin, M. N. (2019) 'Supporting key aspects of practice in making mathematics explicit in science lessons', *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, DOI: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10763-019-10016-1> [accessed 17.12.19].

Presentations

Lane, C. and Walshe, G. (2019) 'Student mathematical preparedness for learning science and engineering at university', presented at *Eleventh Congress of the European Society for Research in Mathematics Education (CERME11)*, Utrecht University, 6-10 February.

McFall, E., Cusack, A., McKeown, C., Clancy, I. and Walshe, G. (2019) 'Undergraduate student co-creation of an intervention to promote physics to female secondary school students', poster presentation at the *International Conference for Physics Students (ICPS) 2019*, Cologne, August 10-17.

Ní Eidhin, D. and Walshe, G. (2018) 'Gender equality in physics', presented at *EPONA Launch*, University College Cork, 22 March.

Walshe, G. and Lane, C. (2018) 'The Minerva project: investigating student mathematical preparedness for science and engineering at university', presented at the *IOP Higher Education Group Regional Community Meeting*, Institute of Physics, London, 26 November.

Walshe, G. and Lane, C. (2019) 'An investigation into student mathematical preparedness for university level physics and engineering degrees', presented at *VICEPHEC (Variety in Chemistry Education/Physics Higher Education Conference)*, University of Bristol, 22-23 August.

Walshe, G., Casey, V., Cauchi, M., Bochet, M., Cusack, A., Kavanagh, Y., McKeown, C., Quinn, M. and Clancy, I. (2019) 'Science outreach to promote physics to girls: an investigation into the impact of a school visit programme', presented at *ESERA (European Science Education Research Association Conference)*, Bologna, Italy, 26-30 August.

Walshe, G., Casey, V., Clancy, I., Corcoran, D., McFall, E., Quinn, M. and Ní Eidhin, D. (2018) 'Addressing the gender imbalance in physics at third-level for undergraduates', presented at *VICEPHEC (Variety in Chemistry Education/Physics Higher Education Conference)*, University of Sheffield, 22–23 August.

Walshe, G., Casey, V., Clancy, I., Corcoran, D., Ní Eidhin, D., McFall, E. and Quinn, M. (2018) 'The SOPHia project: science outreach for promoting physics to female school students', presented at *IOP Higher Education Group Regional Community Meeting*, University of Glasgow, 12 June.



2. Mathematics Learning Centre

Annual Report 2018/19

Foreword from the Director

All individuals need to be equipped with basic mathematical skills to thrive in the rapidly developing global environment and participate actively in our society. The Mathematics Learning Centre (MLC) at the University of Limerick (UL) plays a huge part in helping our students accomplish this goal – it enables young people and adults to learn and achieve throughout their time at UL and to build the skills and knowledge for work and life.

A primary goal of the MLC is to tackle the increasing mismatch between incoming students' mathematical knowledge and the expectations of third-level institutions. The supports that we offer have been shown to have positive impacts on student retention as well as improving students' performance in, and attitudes towards, mathematics. In the academic year 2018/19, there were 7,844 individual visits to the services provided by the MLC, which highlights the high demand for this service as well as the continuing need to be able to provide and staff this service in the coming years.

A significant achievement for the MLC in 2018/19 was the renewed focus that was placed on our digital resources, especially the development and promotion of short informative videos on specific mathematical and statistical topics, which aimed to develop a more learner-centric mathematics support system. Online support was provided for 17 different UL modules and resulted in a total of 8,196 views of the individual videos. These ambitious endeavours offer increased flexibility in terms of engaging students, but not every student is an ideal candidate for online learning and so flexibility must be shown in terms of how we continue to engage our students going forward.

Within the MLC we recognise the scale of the challenges facing us in terms of providing effective mathematics learner support and will continue to work to further develop and enhance the services that we provide so that we can maximise the benefits they offer. This report highlights the sterling and extensive work conducted by the MLC in what was a very busy 2018/19 academic year. The results of our endeavours so far are promising, but we have more work to do and will continue to strive to improve the experience of our students who seek mathematical support in the coming years.

**Dr Patrick Johnson,
Director (Acting), Mathematics Learning Centre**

September 2019

Executive Summary

The MLC provides a drop-in service, support tutorials and tailored online resources to students whose programmes include a mathematics or statistics module. A total of 7,844 visits were made by UL students to the MLC during 2018/19: 4,190 attendances from 1,013 individuals in Semester 1 and 3,654 attendances from 1,009 individuals in Semester 2. In addition, 71% and 70% of users visited the centre more than once in semesters 1 and 2 respectively. The majority of attendances were from students taking science and engineering programmes. The ratio of school-leavers to mature student attendances among users (percentage) was approximately 84:16 in Semester 1 and 89:11 in Semester 2.

The Drop-in Centre was attended 1,232 times by 405 individuals in Semester 1 and 838 times by 263 individuals in Semester 2. The MLC delivered 60 support tutorials in Semester 1, which attracted 1,925 attendances from 525 individual students. Fifty-two tutorials in Semester 2 recorded 1,371 attendances from 417 students. Exam revision programmes were attended by 563 students (1,033 attendances) in Semester 1 and by 753 students (1,445 attendances) in Semester 2.

In addition to the physical services offered by the MLC, a renewed focus was put on online resources available on Sulis to students. The MLC provided online video assistance for 17 modules over the year as well as providing supplementary online videos for the Head Start mathematics course for mature students. The number of video views recorded on Sulis for the year was 8,196.

The MLC collected voluntary anonymous surveys, which were available to users to submit throughout the year. The results were very positive: 82 out of 124 students surveyed stated that they feared that they would fail their mathematics module, with 62 of those students stating that the MLC will help them pass their exams or get a good grade. This represents a fantastic cost-benefit to the university.

Noteworthy achievements during the year include:

- Promoting maths at second-level, including contributing to the publication of nine national newspaper supplements and an invited talk to Senior Cycle students on pursuing mathematical studies at UL
- The Head Start Maths programme to mature students
- Coordinating the President's Volunteer Programme for mathematics
- A new [website](#) to ensure compliance with GDPR
- Delivering tutor training for PhD mathematics students who teach tutorials
- Election of the MLC manager as Public Relations Officer of the Irish Mathematics Learning Support Network

In addition, the MLC has had three peer-reviewed journal papers published or accepted for publication and has presented at a conference.

2.1 Overview

The Mathematics Learning Centre (MLC) is situated in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics and is funded by the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Its facilities include a Drop-in Centre, support tutorials outside timetabled hours, an extensive range of online resources tailored specifically for UL students and twice-yearly examination revision programmes. All UL students studying courses that have a mathematics or statistics module can avail of the MLC's services free of charge. The MLC is staffed and supervised throughout the day during the semester. The Drop-in Centre is open 10.00 to 12.00 and 14.00 to 16.00, Monday to Friday.

The MLC's director is Dr Patrick Johnson (acting on behalf of Dr Olivia Fitzmaurice), its manager is Dr Richard Walsh and its educational developers (EDs) were Dr Aoife Guerin (until December 2018) and Mr Niall McInerney (January–May 2019). The vast majority of the MLC's programmes are coordinated, developed and delivered by the manager and ED along with help from a small number of hourly paid tutors.

2.2 Drop-in Centre

The MLC Drop-in Centre was consistently busy throughout the academic year with 2,070 visits from UL students. In Semester 1, 405 individuals attended 1,232 times in total. In Semester 2, 263 individuals attended 838 times in total. The week-by-week engagement with the Drop-in Centre over the full year is shown in Figure 1.

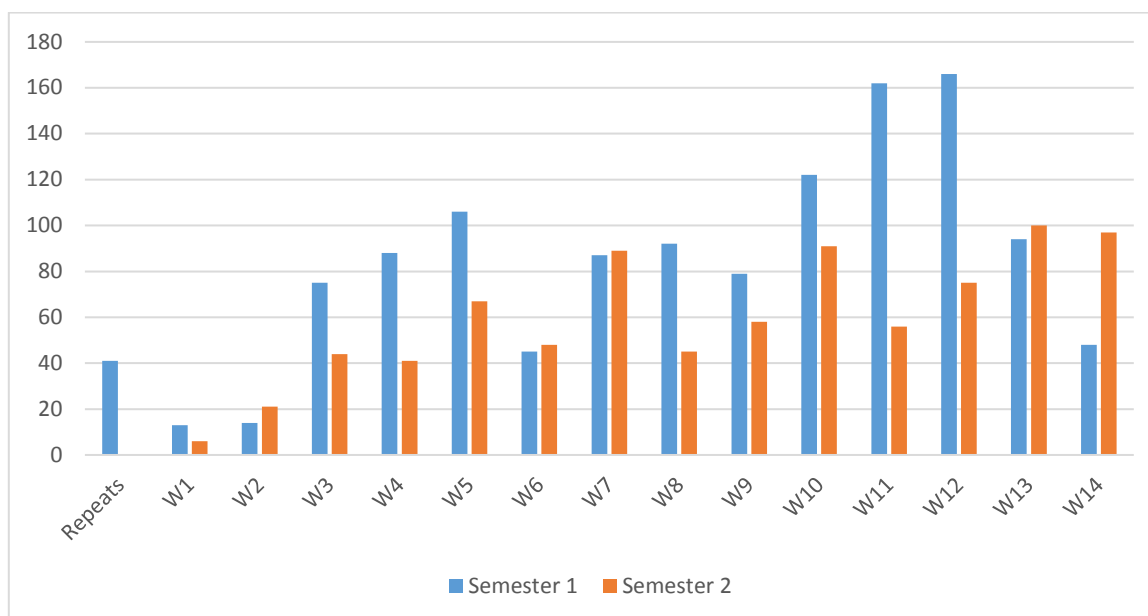


Figure 2.1: Attendance at the Drop-in Centre in 2018/19

Students on Science & Engineering programmes are the highest users (see sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.3 for details).

2.3 Support Tutorials

Student engagement with support tutorials on most modules was very strong during the year – see Tables 2.1 and 2.2 for details. First-year and entry-level students accounted for 57% of attendances in Semester 1 and for 58% in Semester 2.

Table 2.1: Attendance at support tutorials in Semester 1

Module	No. of tutorials	No. of students	Total attendances
MA4001 Eng. Maths 1	9	88	298
MA4003 Eng. Maths 3	8	163	577
MA4113 Business Maths	9	68	244
MA4601 Science Maths 1	9	120	410
MA4701 Tech. Maths 1	8	67	210
Head Start	17	19	186
Totals	60	525	1,925

Table 2.2: Attendance at support tutorials in Semester 2

Module	No. of tutorials	No. of students	Total attendances
MA4002 Eng. Maths 2	8	125	485
MA4004 Eng. Maths 4	9	40	86
MA4006 Eng. Maths 5	5	84	212
MA4114/4302 Business Stats	8	61	181
MA4602 Science Maths 2	9	77	294
MA4604 Science Maths 4	9	22	102
MA4702 Tech. Maths 2	4	8	11
Totals	52	417	1,371

2.4 Exam Revision

Exam revision programmes were attended by 563 students (1,033 attendances) in Semester 1 and by 753 students (1,445 attendances) in Semester 2. The distribution of attendances per module is shown in Figures 2.2 and 2.3.

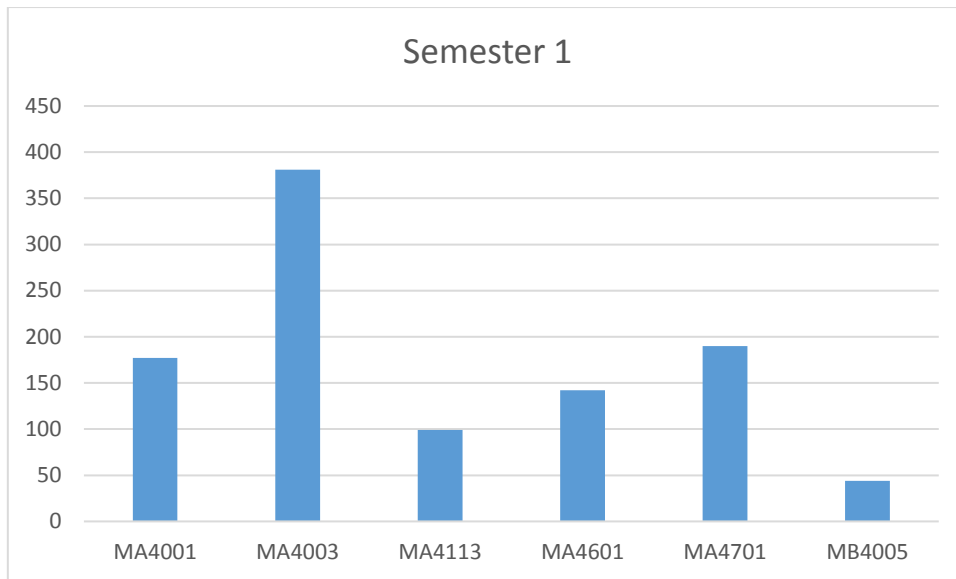


Figure 2.2: Attendance per module at exam revision programmes in Semester 1

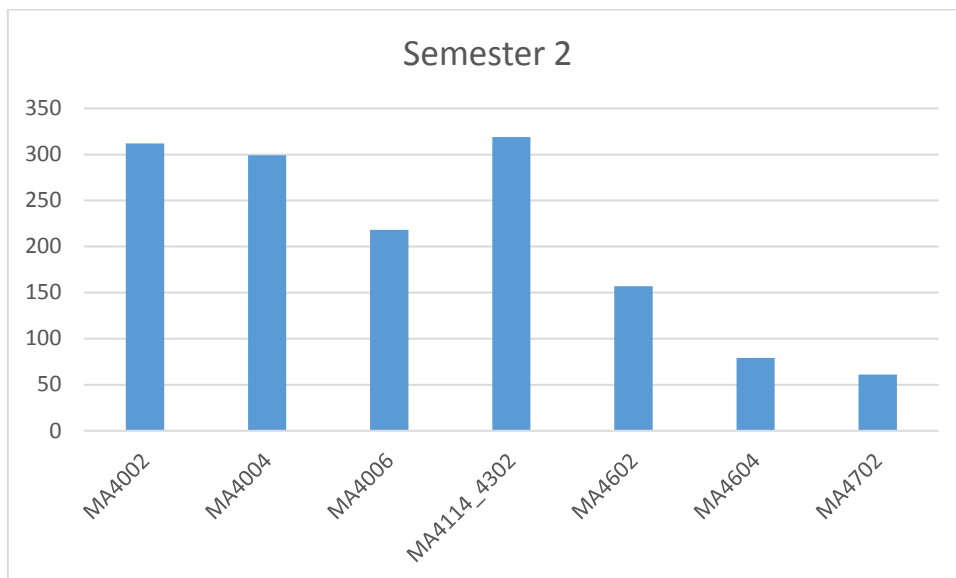


Figure 2.3: Attendance per module at exam revision programmes in Semester 2

2.5 Breakdown of Student Usage

2.5.1 By Faculty

Student usage of the MLC by faculty is shown in Figure 2.4 for Semester 1 and Figure 2.5 for Semester 2. (Note that if a student's course was not self-reported, it was omitted in analysis. Sample sizes for semesters 1 and 2 reported below are 875 and 924 respectively.)

Students from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences made only three attendances at the MLC in both semesters, representing the 0% figures in both charts below.

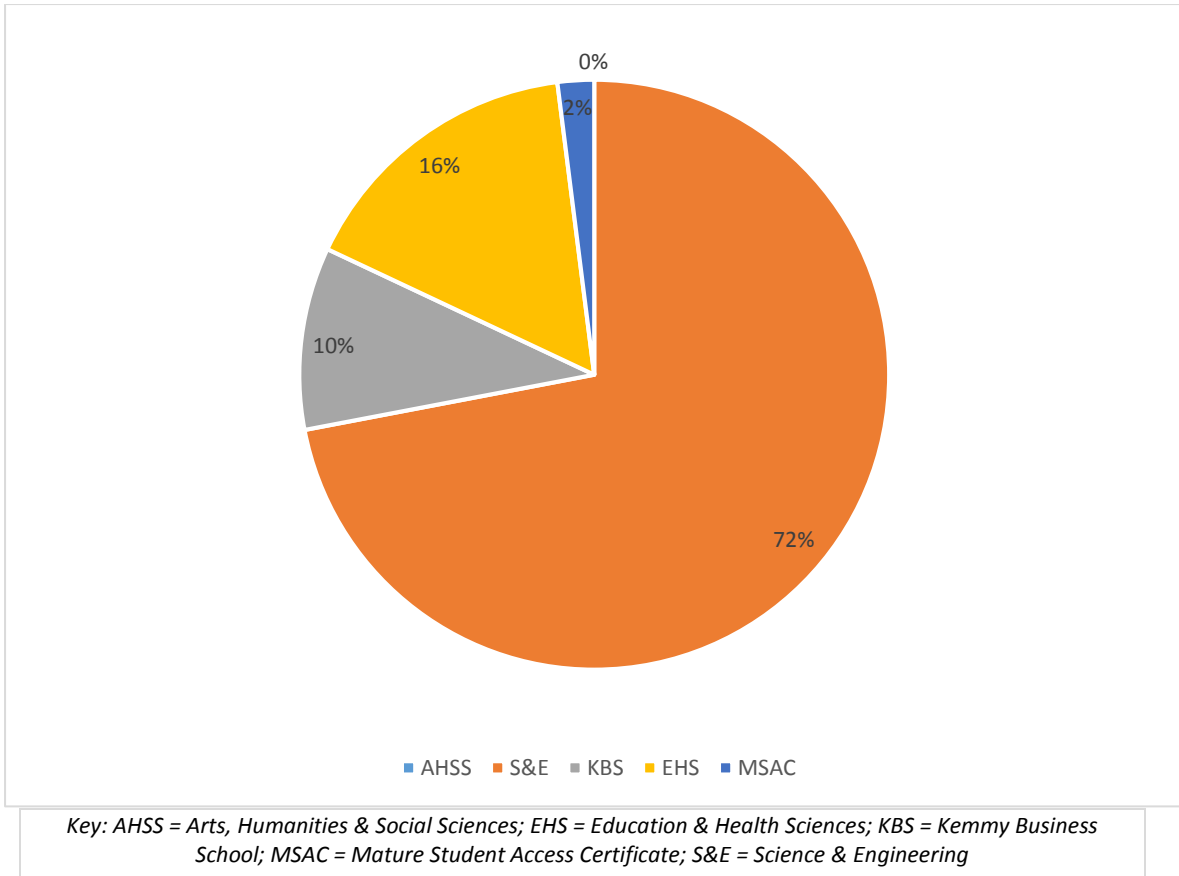


Figure 2.4: Breakdown of usage by faculty¹ in Semester 1

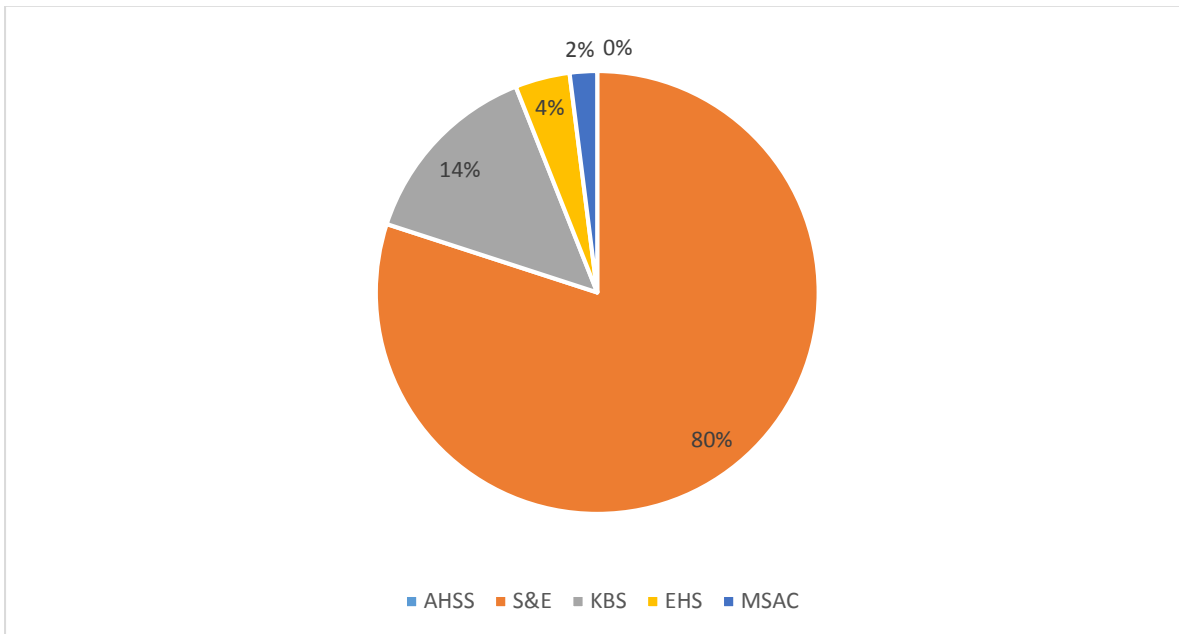


Figure 2.5: Breakdown of usage by faculty in Semester 2

¹ Although the MSAC is not a faculty, the programme is included as a subgroup in the graph because of the traditionally high usage of the MLC by its students.

2.5.2 By Student Type

The approximate ratio (based on available data) of traditional to mature student attendances at the MLC was 84% to 16% in Semester 1 and 89% to 11% in Semester 2.

2.5.3 By Programme

Students who engaged the most with the MLC during semesters 1 and 2 were studying on the programmes listed in Figures 2.6 and 2.7 respectively.

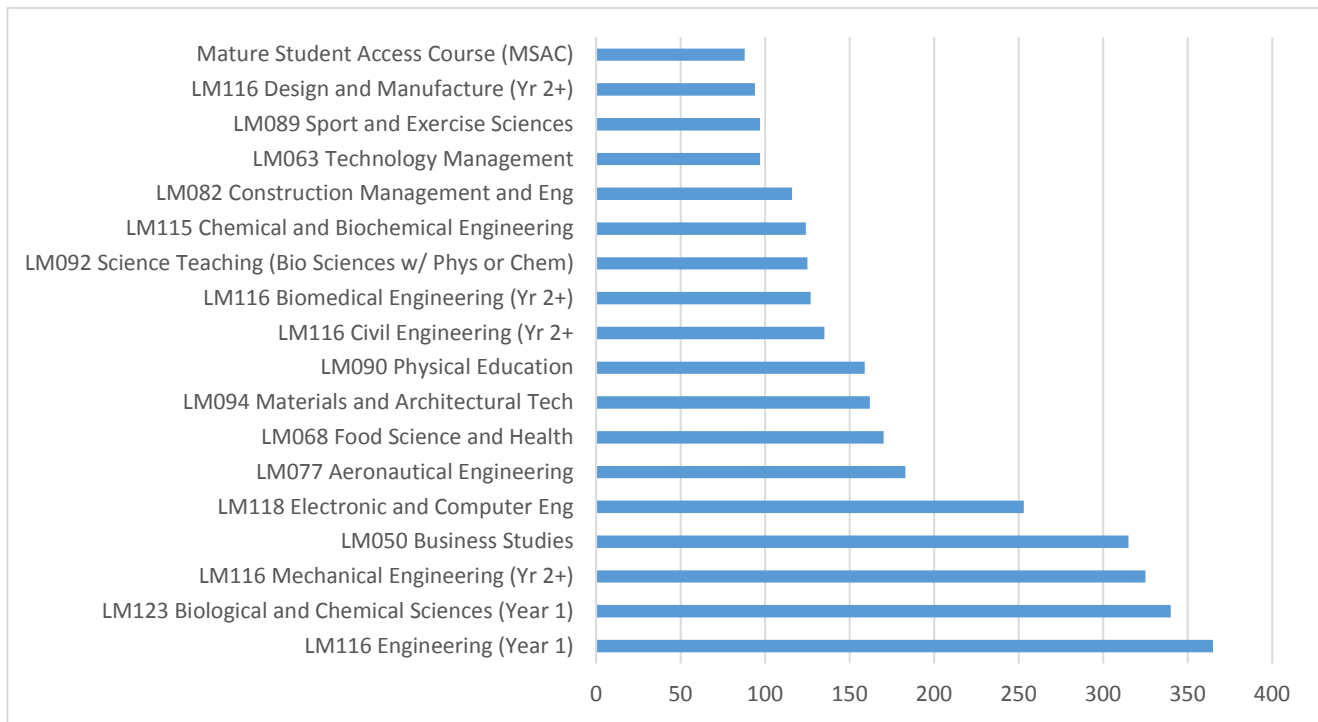


Figure 2.6: Attendance at MLC by degree programme, Semester 1

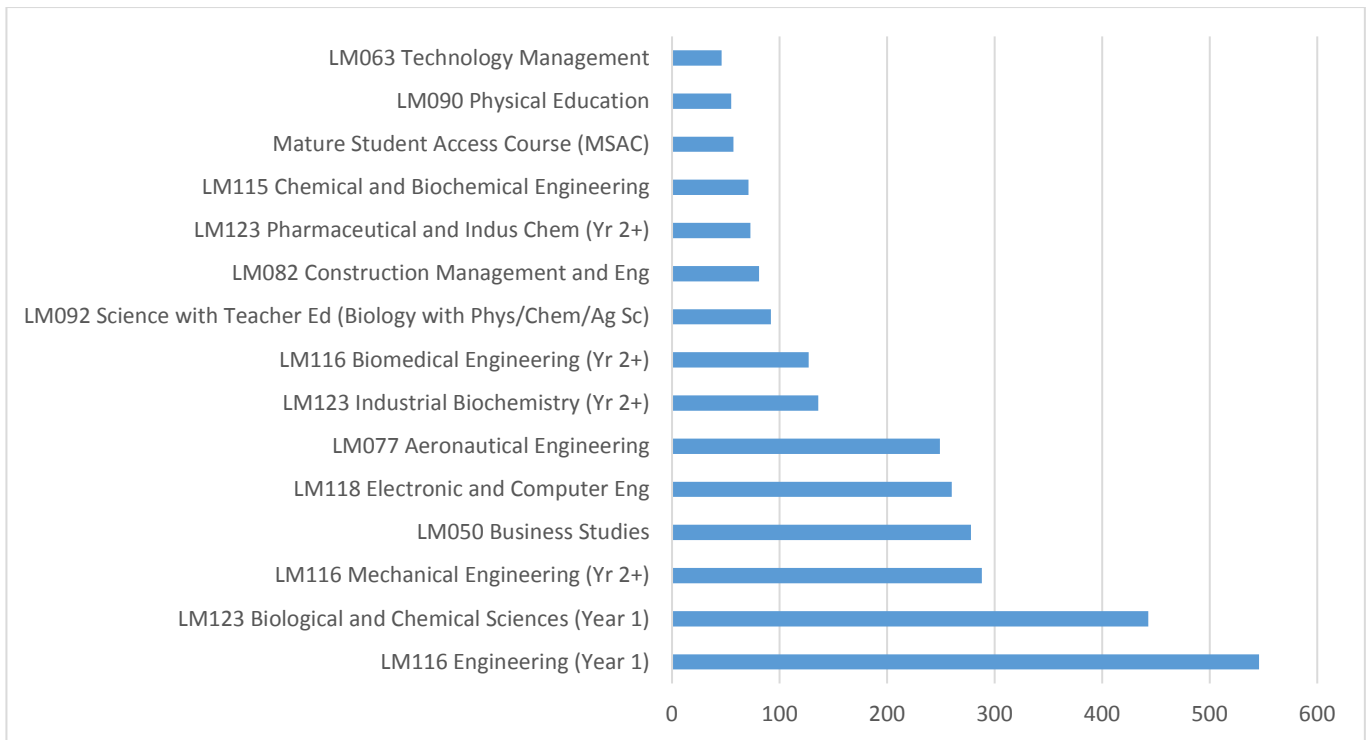


Figure 2.7: Attendance at MLC by degree programme, Semester 2

2.5.4 By Frequency of Visits

In Semester 1, 297 individual students visited the MLC once and 716 visited it more than once; 103 individuals used the MLC on 10 or more occasions. Figure 2.8 shows the frequency of visits per student in Semester 1.

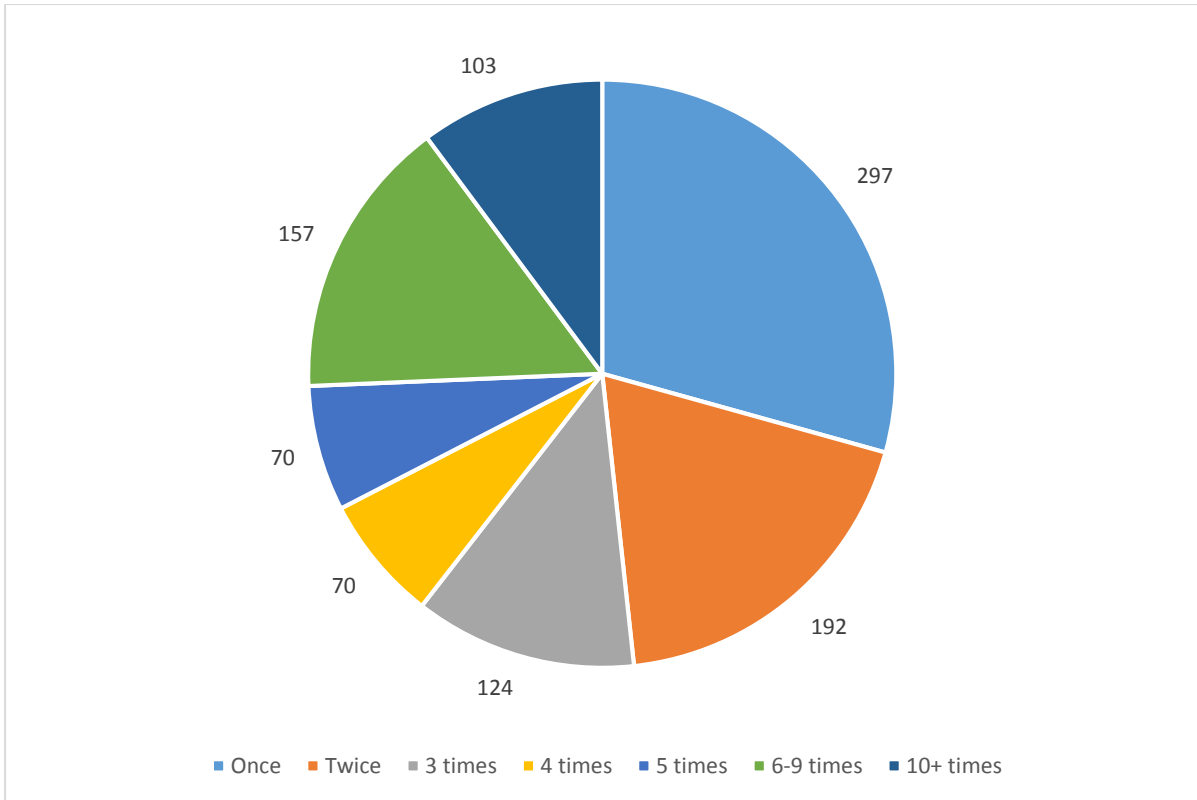


Figure 2.8: Frequency of visits in Semester 1

In Semester 2, 307 individual students visited the MLC once and 702 visited it more than once; 64 individuals used the MLC on 10 or more occasions. Figure 2.9 shows the frequency of visits per student in Semester 2.

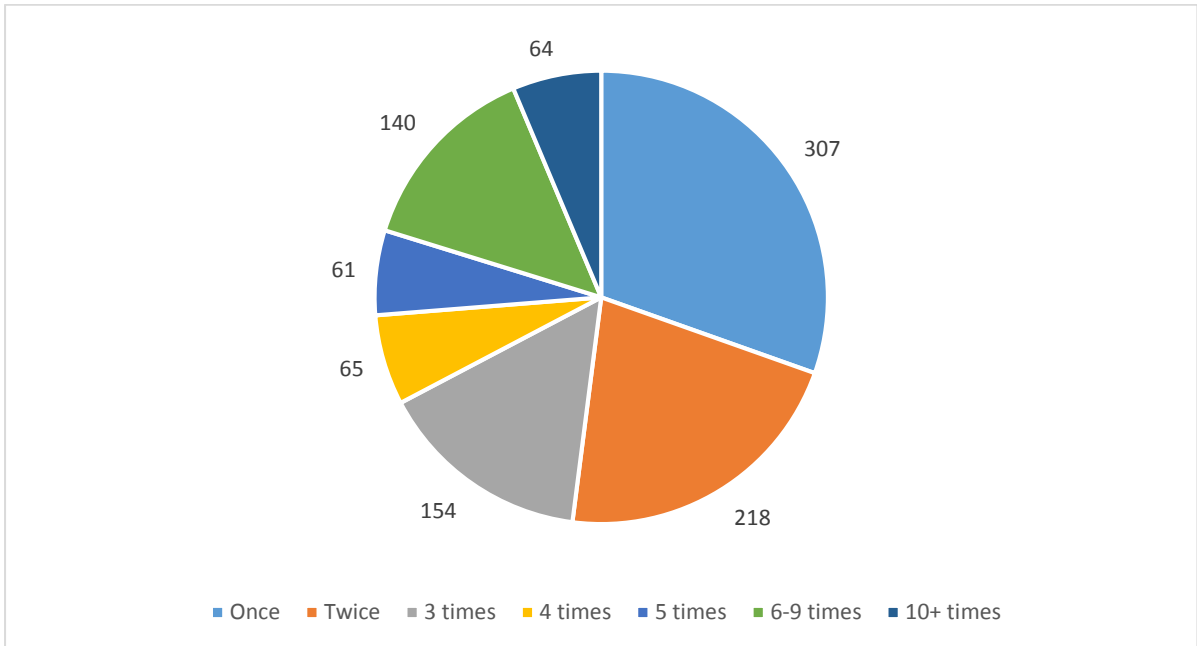


Figure 2.9: Frequency of visits in Semester 2

2.6 Impact of MLC on First-year Students

The MLC carried out research during 2018/19 to determine the impact of the centre on first-year student users from one particular cohort. Table 2.3 shows the number of students failing² mathematics in Semester 1 for varying degrees of engagement with the MLC versus students' incoming ability level from the MLC's diagnostic test³. Table 2.4 shows the number of students failing Semester 2 mathematics for varying degrees of engagement with the MLC versus students' mean improvement⁴ from Semester 1 to Semester 2 respectively. The findings (n=237) show that, on average, only 5% of students who engage with the MLC on 10 or more occasions fail an examination(s) in their first year while approximately 24% of non-engagers fail. This is despite the non-engagers having a higher incoming level of ability on average (approx. 11% higher in diagnostic testing).

Table 2.3: Number of students failing Semester 1 mathematics for varying degrees of engagement with the MLC versus students' incoming ability level from diagnostic test

Amount of engagements with a MLC service	No. of students	Mean diagnostic score	No. of students <40% in final
≥10	8	60.62%	0
5-9	28	60.68%	3
1-4	95	69.30%	11
0	121	71.52%	22

Table 2.4: Number of students failing Semester 2 mathematics for varying degrees of engagement with the MLC, versus students' mean improvement from Semester 1 to Semester 2

Amount of engagements with a MLC service	No. of students	Mean improvement	No. of students <40% in final
≥10	29	7.2%	2
5-9	48	-0.5%	4
1-4	87	-4.3%	24
0	73	-6.5%	24

Other findings include:

- Students who obtained an H4 (n=72) or below in the Leaving Certificate had a fail rate of 32% in Semester 1 whereas for those with an H3 or above (n=163), the fail rate was only 6%. Students who fell below the mean diagnostic result (n=121) had a 23% fail rate in Semester 1, whereas for those who scored above the mean (n=131) the fail rate was 6%.
- Eighteen students engaged with the MLC Drop-in Centre in Semester 1 with a mean improvement of 2.8%, 15% higher than the population mean. One hundred and thirty-one students engaged with at least one MLC service with a mean

² A 'fail' is assumed to be <40% but in many cases it is less than this value.

³ Consent was obtained from participants to carry out this research – the findings below solely pertain to students from which consent was obtained and were over the age of 18.

⁴ 'Improvement' is defined as (*% scored in final MA4001 exam*) – (*% scored in diagnostic test week 1*) for Semester 1 and (*% scored in final MA4002 exam*) – (*% scored in final MA4001 exam*) for Semester 2 for the purpose of this study.

improvement of -8.5% , 4% higher than the population mean. One hundred and twenty-one non-engaging students had a mean improvement of -16.3% . The resulting difference in means between engagers and non-engagers was found to be significant by carrying out an independent samples t-test ($p=0.00025$).

- Of the students that engaged with the MLC Drop-in Centre in Semester 2 ($n=52$), the mean improvement was 3% , which is higher than the non-engagers ($n=185$), whose mean was -4.5% . An independent samples t-test verified that the difference in these means is significant ($p\text{-value}=0.00078$), which clearly demonstrates the impact that the MLC had in improving a student's final marks between Semester 1 and Semester 2 examinations.

2.7 Survey of Users

An anonymous paper-based survey was distributed to MLC users throughout the academic year. The following is a summary of the main survey findings:

- 87 out of 124 students surveyed agreed that they found maths very difficult.
- 82 out of 124 students surveyed stated that they feared they would fail their mathematics module, with 62 of those students stating that the MLC will help them pass their exams or get a good grade.
- 97% of respondents agreed that MLC tutors were knowledgeable.
- 98% agreed that MLC tutors were friendly.
- 60% agreed that the MLC changed their opinion positively on mathematics.
- 83% agreed that the MLC made them feel more confident about mathematics.

A large number of positive comments were made, for example:

- "Amazing service, great staff, helpful and great at explaining the subjects."
- "Wouldn't have made it to third year only for ye. Cheers!"
- "I would be completely lost without this centre. I feel completely at ease in there and I don't feel like any of my questions are deemed silly! No matter how many times I ask them."
- "I found all the staff very helpful, in particular [tutor name], he was extremely helpful and I always felt better about maths after coming out of the MLC. Thank you to all."

However, a common theme emerged from student comments regarding the busy nature of the centre and the need for extra resources to be established.

- "The MLC would benefit greatly from more tutors. Very often the tutors would be busy getting around to everyone and often wouldn't have the time to help me through an equation step by step."
- "More opening hours and more tutors. They're overrun and you only get maybe 2 qs answered per hour, i.e. more one-to-one and offer grinds one-to-one."
- "It gets very busy at times. Maybe getting a bigger room and more tutor[s] is necessary."

2.8 Increased Online Resources

In line with the goals and quality improvement plan (QIP) established following the CTL's quality review in March 2018, the MLC established new Sulis sites for 17 modules during 2018/19 as well as providing supplementary online videos for the Head Start mathematics course for mature students (see <https://ulsites.ul.ie/mlc/online-resources> for modules supported). These videos comprised previous and new videos produced by the MLC and creative commons open licence videos compiled by the MLC. Students could join any of these Sulis sites through our website and access mathematics help at any time that suited them: 466 individual students joined our Sulis sites, and 8,196 video views were recorded on Sulis for the year. Although one of the aims of doing this was to reduce pressure on the MLC teaching staff (as it was envisaged that more students would use online resources and may not attend the MLC physically), this does not appear to have occurred given that 7,844 physical attendances were still recorded.

2.9 Other Achievements

Other achievements by the MLC during 2018/19 include the following:

- The MLC continued to coordinate all aspects of the mathematics modules for the MSAC (five modules) as well as delivering mathematics modules on the International Foundation Programme (Aoife Guerin).
- In conjunction with EPI-STEM National Centre for STEM Education, the MLC manager and ED (Aoife Guerin) formed part of a team that continued its work on promoting mathematics at second-level by publishing nine supplements for Senior Cycle entitled Sum It. The supplements are distributed by the *Irish Independent* to second-level schools nationwide.
- The MLC spent much time aligning itself with GDPR regulations.
- The MLC established a new, more mobile-friendly website: www.ulsites.ul.ie/mlc/. The new website allows the MLC to track usage of the site (including number of visits and most popular pages within the site). There were 9,059 unique page views in the period 13/05/18 to 13/05/19.
- The Maths for STEM certificate (QQI Maths for STEM Level 5 Special Purpose Award) for mature students was run in conjunction with UL's Mature Student Office and the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. This replaced the previous Leaving Certificate higher-level mathematics course for mature students.
- The MLC's Head Start Maths programme (two-week mathematics bridging course for mature students in August 2018) had another successful year with 19 students taking part in 17 different MLC workshops.
- The MLC's ED continued to coordinate the President's Volunteer Programme for mathematics this year; the programme involves UL undergraduate students tutoring second-level students from the Access Campus. Twenty-three volunteers received awards from the president this year, which takes the total of mathematics volunteer awards to 234 between the MLC and the Faculty of Science & Engineering since the programme began.
- The MLC manager sat on interview panels to select candidates for the Professional

Master of Education (Mathematics).

- The MLC delivered mathematics tutor training from January to March for PhD students from the Department of Mathematics and Statistics who were teaching tutorials in Semester 2.
- The MLC published (or has accepted for publication) three peer-reviewed journal papers and presented at a conference in Glasgow.
- The MLC manager was an invited speaker at St Mary's Secondary School, Mallow, Co. Cork at a Careers Day talk on pursuing Mathematical Sciences in UL.
- The MLC's ED gave an invited workshop on developing problem-solving and modelling skills for PME (maths) students.
- MLC delivered 'Succeeding in Science and Mathematics' workshops with the Science Learning Centre as part of the First Seven Weeks programme at the beginning of semesters 1 and 2.
- The MLC manager was elected as Public Relations Officer of the Irish Mathematics Learning Support Network (IMLSN).

2.10 Goals for Next Year

With consistent levels of student engagement totalling approximately 33,300 attendances over the last four academic years, it is clear that the need to provide maths support to students is ever-present and that the level of support should not be reduced. Furthermore, some students who were surveyed felt that the centre was too busy at times and that the tutors were not able to spend as much time with them as they needed, although the students appreciated that the tutors were under pressure. Empirically, comments such as these are likely to emanate from students surveyed at examination time (midterm/end of term).

For the coming academic year, the MLC aims to have more staff on duty around examination time, particularly around the later weeks in Semester 1, as evidenced in Figure 2.1. We will also continue to research best practices in mathematics support and mathematics education in higher education and contribute to mathematics support on local, national and international levels through our work in UL, our outreach and publications and through professional bodies such as the IMLSN.

Appendix A: Publications and Presentations

Publications

Guerin, A. and Walsh, R. (2019) 'Effective marketing strategies to promote engagement with online mathematics learning support', *MSOR Connections*, 18(1), 16-23.

Lane, C., O'Meara, N. and Walsh, R. (2019) 'Pre-service mathematics teachers' use of the mathematics register', *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(3), 790-806.

Walsh, R. and Guerin, A. (2019) 'A framework and rubric for guiding the training of mathematics tutors in third-level education', *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology*, 50(3), 390-420.

Presentations

Walsh, R. and Guerin, A. (2018) 'MLS and the needs and means to be in n places at once: a brief share of ideas', presented at *CETL-MSOR 2018: Evidencing Excellence in the Mathematical Sciences*, University of Glasgow, 5-6 September.



3. ICT Learning Centre

Annual Report 2018/19

Foreword from the Co-directors

The ICT Learning Centre (ICTLC) is a student support unit providing a number of academic enrichment and intervention schemes within the University of Limerick (UL). The schemes target students on ICT-related programmes and so form an important part of UL's ICT retention initiatives. The main schemes currently offered by the ICTLC include a drop-in service, targeted topic and skills workshops, core programming language workshops, Peer-Supported Learning Groups (PSLG), in-lab pair programming (PP) and support and prepare and repeat (PAR) sessions.

During 2018/19, the ICTLC had a busy and fruitful programme of activities. This is highlighted by the continued and successful delivery of our supplementary academic learning supports (SALS), delivery of four successful editions of our Cybercamp and Cybercamp Plus thanks to securing extra fund from the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and being instrumental in UL ICT students' successful participation in two national computing competitions. In addition to this, the ICTLC played active roles in other activities, such as the outreach workshops to promote UL ICT courses, particularly among female second-level students.

This annual report gives detailed descriptions of all the above activities. This includes all the academic enrichment and intervention programmes delivered by the ICTLC over the three semesters of 2018/19; other support services and activities related to student engagement, motivation, professional and transferrable skills development; and our outreach activities, particularly UL Cybercamp and Cybercamp Plus 2019. The report provides quantitative data pertaining to the number of students who avail of these services and their distribution per course and year of study. The data show that during 2018/19, the centre delivered more than 600 hours of various academic enrichment and intervention schemes and facilitated 4,308 student visits, of which more than 82% were from first-year, second-year, graduate diploma or higher diploma students. Our Cybercamp and Cybercamp Plus attracted 117 second-level students and saw an increase in the number of attending female students following our active promotion campaign.

**Professor Hussain Mahdi and Dr Michael English,
Co-directors, ICT Learning Centre**

September 2019

Executive Summary

In the autumn semester, each week from weeks 3 to 12, the ICTLC operated 18 hours of drop-in and 7 hours of PSLG support, and 24 hours of targeted support/workshop sessions were given. Lab support with pair programming increased over 30% from the previous year: 84 hours of such collaborative support was provided to two first-year, first-semester computer programming modules. A total of 382 students availed of our supports during the semester. In partnership with the Peer-Supported Learning Centre (PSLC), ICTLC ran three two-hour introductions to programming workshops for entry-stage students and second-level Transition Year (TY) students; 31 students attended.

In the spring semester, each week from weeks 3 to 12, the ICTLC operated 18 hours of drop-in and 5 hours of PSLG support, and 19 hours of targeted support/workshop sessions were given. Additionally, 20 hours of retention-focused, lab-based PAR learning sessions were provided to review difficult modules from the autumn semester. This support was provided in the core Computer Science and Information Systems (CSIS) programming module to students who achieved a grade of C3 or lower in their autumn semester exams. Pair programming support was introduced to first-year, second-semester programming modules in both the CSIS and Electronic and Computer Engineering (ECE) departments: 52 hours of such collaborative support was provided. In total, 330 students availed of our supports during the semester. In partnership with the PSLC, ICTLC ran three 2-hour introductions to programming workshops for 48 second-level TY students and one 2-hour workshop for 32 primary-level female students. In the summer semester, the centre delivered a total of 30 hours of drop-in support to repeating students during the two weeks prior to their annual repeat exams.

The ICTLC manager presented an overview of the learning centres in UL and the supports they offer at both of the UL Open Days and co-presented such a session to staff of affiliate institutions during the international partner week.

Our successful Cybercamps ran again over the last two weeks in June 2019. Each of the two weeks involved a three-day Cybercamp followed by a two-day Cybercamp Plus. In total, 117 students from 35 schools took part in UL Cybercamp 2019 and UL Cybercamp Plus 2019. Following a successful application, we secured an extra fund of €9,000 from the HEA ICT Summer Camps 2019 programme, which helped us to better promote and successfully attract more female student participation.

3.1 Overview

The mission of the ICT Learning Centre (ICTLC) is to support and promote active learning among the students of ICT-related programmes through the use of proven learner support approaches, tutoring innovation, research and evaluation. The centre aims to support learners to be confident and effective ICT practitioners. To achieve this, the ICTCL has the following objectives:

- Enhance and broaden students' ICT skill set
- Support students, teachers and academic departments in increasing retention rates within ICT-related courses
- Encourage active and student-centred learning in ICT disciplines
- Promote ICT as a career path to current and potential students
- Undertake research to evaluate and improve the ICT learning services and supports

The centre provides intensive support that seeks to engage students through innovative tutoring and learner-focused support, thereby augmenting existing teaching and learning activities within the curriculum. This is achieved in collaboration with academic staff members.

The ICTLC is overseen by two directors, Professor Hussain Mahdi and Dr Michael English, both of whom are academic staff members of the Faculty of Science & Engineering. The ICTLC is managed by Mr Clem O'Donnell.

For further information and details regarding the centre's activities, please visit our website at <http://ictlc.ul.ie>.

3.2 ICT Learning Centre Services

This section describes all services and activities provided by the ICTLC, particularly our supplementary academic learning supports (SALS) to undergraduate and postgraduate students.

3.2.1 Services for Undergraduates and Postgraduates

- **Drop-in sessions:** Experienced tutors are available at scheduled times to support students' learning of specific ICT subjects. See Appendix A for a list of the subjects supported during 2018/19.
- **ICT targeted module sessions:** Additional learning support sessions are scheduled to augment student learning in specific ICT modules that are deemed to be difficult. See Appendix A for a list of modules supported by targeted sessions during 2018/19.
- **Peer-learning initiatives – Peer-Supported Learning Groups (PSLG) and in-lab pair programming sessions:** PSLG is a proactive learning method that targets difficult modules. It fosters cross-year support between students on the same course and encourages cooperative learning under the guidance of trained student peers who are at a more advanced stage of related studies. The ICTLC utilises the PSLG model developed and supported by the Peer-Supported Learning Centre ([PSLC](#)). Over the

past five years, the ICTLC has introduced the collaborative learning method of pair programming into specific first-year computer programming labs.

- **Targeted skills workshops:** The centre runs specific skills workshops to introduce ICT skills, tool/application knowledge and appropriate learning support to various student groups as requested by departments and teaching staff.
- **Core programming training courses:** These are courses designed by the ICTLC to augment students' learning of the core taught programming languages. Fundamental and intermediate courses are scheduled each semester for students who need to refocus their engagement with the material.
- **Prepare and repeat (PAR) sessions:** Implemented in the spring semester, these sessions focus on difficult first-year, first-semester modules that have a follow-on module in the second semester. This support targets students who achieved a C3 or lower in the autumn semester. This additional support was designed to help targeted students gain a better understanding of the autumn semester module material and thus support their learning of the follow-on module in the spring semester. Each PAR session involves a review of a core subject concept followed by a tutor-guided practice lab exercise. In the final part of the session, with tutor support, students complete a number of related exercises independently, which are assessed by the lab tutors with immediate feedback provided to the students.
- **Summer support for students:** Drop-in sessions for students sitting the annual repeat exams were provided during the two weeks prior to the exam period.
- **Supporting students in competition:** An important part of engaging with our target student group is supporting students' involvement in ICT competitions. Participation in competitions enhances student motivation and enquiry, encourages students to engage with their peers in other third-level colleges, and facilitates networking with industry professionals. The centre provides mentoring to interested students and runs internal competitions to select the teams that will represent UL at these competitions.
- **Online learning support material:** The centre's [website](#) hosts a repository of ICT learning resources (including video and interactive content) specifically tailored to our students' learning needs. It also provides up-to-date details on the centre's services and related timetables and activities.
- **Study space and ICT learning library:** The centre offers a quiet supervised study space complete with 15 workstations running relevant software for our students. The centre has a reference library holding in excess of 200 relevant books.

3.2.2 Services for Second-level/Primary School Students

The ICTLC is actively involved in both raising awareness of ICT as a study path and providing insights into software and electronics subjects, including what they entail at third level. In partnership with the PSLC, the ICTLC runs workshops and ICT summer camps that focus on fostering problem-solving and teamwork within an ICT context.

- **UL Cybercamp:** The aim of the camp is to engage students between 13 and 17 years of age in ICT subjects. These three-day camps include introductory activity-based sessions on programming, robotics, electronics and music technology. The camps have been successfully running since summer 2010.
- **UL Cybercamp Plus:** Initiated in 2017, these two-day advanced camps introduce students between 13 and 17 years of age to both web and Java development. Cybercamp Plus is suited to students who have previously attended our Cybercamp.
- **Outreach workshops:** These are two-hour, problem-based learning workshops aimed at introducing both primary and post-primary students to computer programming, computer games development and robotics using LEGO® MINDSTORMS® robots.

3.2.3 Collaboration with Other UL Student Support Services

The ICTLC collaborates with the Mature Student Office, International Education Division, Admissions, Disability Support Services and Access Office. In 2018/19, this included delivering an introductory talk at the mature students' welcome programme and providing a workshop for second-level school pupils as part of the Access Office's Orientation Day programme. During the 2018/19 autumn semester, the ICTLC manager presented an overview of all the learning centres and their supports on both the open days to second-level school guidance councillors for the Admissions Office. A similar talk was co-presented for the International Education Division during the international partner week in the spring semester. The ICTLC continues to work with the other learning support centres in UL, particularly the PSLC, to maximise the type of learning support we offer to UL students.

The ICTLC is involved in UL's First Seven Weeks initiative, which targets first-year students. By recognising that successful early adjustment at college is linked to subsequent success, the programme's focus is to ensure that all new students to UL receive targeted support during their initial weeks at UL. Week 5 focuses on the learner support centres. During this week, the ICTLC further promotes and introduces new students studying ICT-related subjects to ICTLC supports and to those available in partner centres. As part of this week's activities, the ICTLC, in collaboration with the PSLC, provides evening workshops for first-year students on core software subjects.

3.2.4 Summary of ICTLC Centre Services

Table 3.1 summarises the ICTLC's services by mapping the objectives of the centre to the services and initiatives it provides.

Table 3.1: Services provided by the ICTLC and their correlation with the centre’s objectives

ICTLC services and initiatives	ICTLC objectives				
	Enhance and broaden students’ ICT skill set	Increase retention in ICT courses	Promote active, student-centred learning	Promote ICT as a career path	Performance evaluation and research
Drop-in sessions	✓	✓	✓		✓
Targeted module sessions	✓	✓	✓		✓
Peer-learning initiatives: PSLG and pair programming sessions	✓	✓	✓		✓
Targeted skills workshops	✓	✓	✓		
Core programming courses	✓	✓	✓		✓
Prepare and repeat sessions – retention focus		✓			✓
Summer support workshops		✓	✓		✓
Student competition support	✓		✓	✓	
Online learning support material	✓	✓	✓		
Study space and library	✓	✓	✓		
Co-op student placement	✓	✓	✓		
Services to second-level school students (ICT camps)				✓	
Gather and collate, analyse and evaluate data/feedback on the effectiveness of existing services and new innovations in ICT teaching and learning					✓

3.3 ICTLC Activities and Student Participation

In 2018/19, the ICTLC delivered in excess of 600 hours of its various learner enrichment and support schemes. This section provides details of all these activities along with data pertaining to students’ participation in them.

Table 3.2 gives the numbers of student visits and individual students who availed of any of the ICT retention initiatives run by the ICTLC throughout 2018/19.

Table 3.2: Student participation in 2018/19

Semester	No. student visits	No. individual students
Autumn	2,215	382
Spring	1,725	330
Summer	368	124
Total	4,308	

Table 3.3 gives a list of all programmes of study that have been supported by our ICT initiatives and the number of students engaged from each programme; the table highlights the wide range of ICT-related study programmes that have been supported by the centre’s

services. Further evaluation of the impact of our supplementary academic learning supports (SALS) on progression will be undertaken when the relevant data are available.

Table 3.3: Programmes from which students participated in ICTLC initiatives, 2018/19

Prog. code	Programme title	No. students
LM121	Computing Technologies (Common Entry)	91
LM110	Computer Games Development	75
LM116	Engineering Choice	56
LM118	Electronic and Computer Engineering	52
LM051	Computer Systems	51
LM124	Mathematics (Common Entry)	35
LM058	Financial Mathematics	26
LM122	Creative Media and Interaction Design (Common)	23
LM710	Higher Diploma in Software Development	23
LM000	Erasmus	13
LM083	Mobile Communications and Security	9
LM077	Aeronautical Engineering	8
LM338	MSc in Software Engineering	5
LM346	MEng in Computer and Communications Systems	5
LM123	Biological and Chemical Sciences (Common Entry)	4
LM634	MEng in Information and Network Security	4
LM050	Business Studies	3
LM114	Music, Media and Performance Technology	3
LM120	Aircraft Maintenance and Airworthiness	3
LM341	MA/MSc in Music Technology	3
LM037	Economics and Mathematical Sciences	1
LM045	BA in Language and Literature	1
LM060	Mathematical Sciences	1
LM113	Digital Media Design	1
LM805	MSc in Software Dev: International Systems	1
Total		497

3.3.1 Autumn Semester's Activities

There were 2,215 recorded visits to ICTLC SALS, which include drop-ins, PSLG sessions, targeted sessions and in-lab pair programming initiatives. A total of 382 individual students were supported during autumn semester.

Drop-in times (18 hours per week for nine weeks) were available in the centre for core computer science and electronics subjects. See Appendix A (1) for a list of the subjects supported during drop-in times in 2018/19.

Targeted sessions (24 hours) catered for key software subjects, including Java Programming, C Programming and Operating Systems. See Appendix A (2) for a list of these sessions offered during 2018/19.

The centre hosted PSLG sessions (seven hours per week for eight weeks) for the core first-year and second-year CSIS Java Programming modules, with another first-year and second-year undergraduate programming module being catered for in our partner PSLC. The

collaborative learning method of in-lab pair programming (PP) was implemented in first-year programming labs in both CSIS and ECE. In total, 84 hours were delivered in first-year programming labs. See Appendix A (3) for a list of the modules on which PP and PSLG support were offered during 2018/19.

During Week 5 of the First Seven Weeks initiative, in collaboration with the PSLC, the ICTLC presented to new first-year Engineering students two 2-hour workshops that focused on the fundamentals of the Java programming language; 23 students attended. Five other support workshops were provided during the autumn semester, one for the ECE TY week (8 students) and four as a support initiative for early-stage ECE students (78 students) with a focus on the Java programming language.

The ICTLC manager presented an overview of the UL learning centres and their supports on both of the UL open days to second-level school guidance counsellors.

Table 3.4 shows the breakdown of student visits per ICTLC support type during the autumn semester.

Table 3.4: Student participation in ICTLC services during the autumn semester

Service	Student visits
Drop-in	1,238
Targeted sessions (including skills workshops and core programming courses)	242
Peer-supported learning groups and in-lab pair programming	735
Total	2,215

Figure 3.1 shows the distribution of students' attendance by year and programme of study for all initiatives provided by the ICTLC in the autumn semester. The data highlight the focus of these supports on early-stage students in a wide range of ICT-related study programmes.

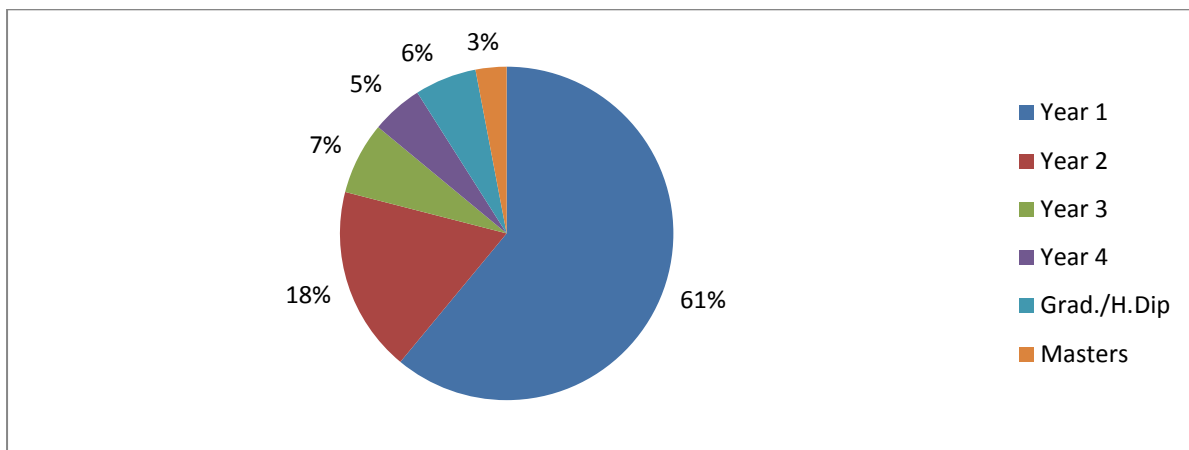


Figure 3.1: Student attendance by year of study, autumn semester

Our SALS services are primarily designed to address the academic needs of students on ICT programmes, particularly during the early stages of study. Figure 3.1 shows that during the autumn semester, 61% of the students who availed of SALS services were first-year undergraduate students enrolled in an ICT programme and that a further 18% were second-

year undergraduates, which shows the focus of the SALS services on early-stage students. While all UL students can avail of SALS, our services and resources focus on those students in core ICT programmes. During the autumn semester, over 78% of the students availing of SALS were enrolled in a core ICT programme, with the students from Computing Technologies (LM121), Games Development (LM110), Engineering Choice (LM116) and Computer Systems (LM051) making up over 62% of participants.

3.3.2 Spring Semester's Activities

There were 1,781 recorded visits to ICTLC SALS, which included drop-ins, PSLG sessions, targeted sessions, PAR sessions and in-lab PP initiatives. In total, 330 individual students were supported during the spring semester.

Drop-in times (18 hours per week for 10 weeks) were available in the centre for core computer science and electronics subjects (Appendix A).

Targeted sessions (19 hours) during the semester catered for key software subjects, including Java Programming, Event Driven Programming, Web Development and Data Structures and Algorithms (Appendix A).

The centre hosted PSLG sessions (five hours per week for nine weeks) for the core first-year CSIS Java Programming module, with another first-year undergraduate programming module being catered for in our partner PSLC. The collaborative learning method of in-lab PP was implemented in first-year programming labs in both CSIS and ECE. In total, 52 hours were delivered in first-year programming labs. See Appendix A (3) for a list of the modules on which PP and PSLG support were offered during 2018/19.

Additionally, 20 hours of lab-based, retention-focused PAR learning sessions were provided by the ICTLC to target the core CSIS programming module in the first semester of Year 1. In total, 29 students (69%) out of the 42 contacted availed of PAR learning support.

During January, in collaboration with the PSLC, the ICTLC ran two 2-hour 'Programming with Greenfoot' workshops as part of the *UL / Wish* campus week, which is designed to encourage young female students to pursue careers in STEM. Forty students attended the Greenfoot workshops.

In May, on request by the Access Office, we ran a 2-hour 'Introduction to Programming' workshop for an all-girls primary school; 32 students and 4 teachers attended.

UL students participated in two ICT-related skills competitions during the spring semester. At the 2019 National Robocode first-year programming competition, our team 'UL Countessa', which comprised Computing Technologies students, reached the overall final. The team members were selected and mentored after an ICTLC-run internal competition identified the best team from ICT-related courses. In addition, UL was represented in the 2019 Games Studio competition by our team 'Fruitoidal', which comprised four second-year BSc in Games Development students.

On request by the International Education Division, the ICTLC manager co-presented an overview of the UL learning centres and their supports during the International Partners Week to staff of partner institutions affiliated with UL.

Table 3.5: Student participation in ICTLC services during the spring semester

Service	Student visits
Drop-in	935
Targeted sessions (including workshops and retention/programming courses)	259
Peer-supported learning groups and in-lab pair programming	531
Total	1,725

Figure 3.2 presents the distribution of students' attendance by year of study and programme of study for all the initiatives that have been provided by the ICTLC in the spring semester. Again, the data highlight the wide range of ICT-related study programmes being supported by the centre's services and the continuing focus of these supports on early-stage students.

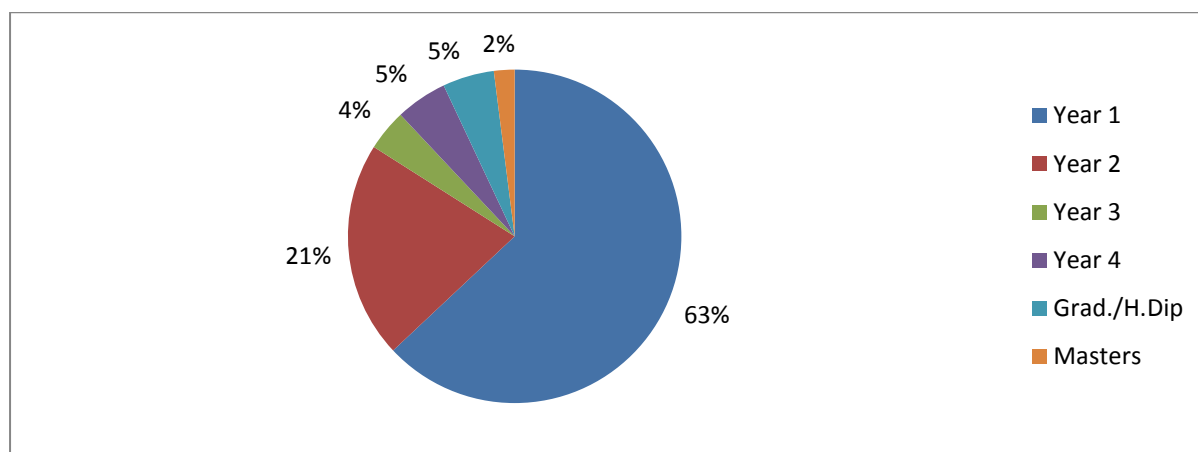


Figure 3.2: Student attendance by year of study, spring semester

Figure 3.2 shows that during spring semester, as was the case in autumn, the vast majority of students (84%) availing of our SALS services were either first-year (63%) or second-year (21%) undergraduate students enrolled in an ICT programme, which shows the continued focus in the second semester on early-stage students. Students from Computing Technologies (LM121), Electronic and Computer Engineering (LM118), Computer Games Development (LM110) and Computer Systems (LM051) comprised nearly two-thirds of SALS participants in this semester.

3.3.3 Summer Semester's Activities

The main activities during this semester were:

- Applying for and securing external funding for our summer camps
- Running four UL Cybercamps and Cybercamps Plus
- Delivering 30 hours of 'Repeat Exams' drop-in sessions

UL Cybercamp and Cybercamp Plus 2019

Following a successful application to the HEA ICT Summer Camps 2019 programme by the ICTLC-PSLC team, we secured €9,000 for increasing the capacity of our summer Cybercamps in terms of the number of attending second-level school students and attracting more female participation. This was in addition to the €5,000 we secured from the HEA Internet Technology Investment Fund earlier in the year.

The two 3-day Cybercamp and 2-day Cybercamp Plus camps run by the ICTLC in June 2019 attracted 78 and 39 students respectively from 35 schools. Our active promotion of the camps during the year, particularly among all-female second-level schools in the region, resulted in a noticeable increase in female students' participation (over 33% of the total student intake this year were female students). For more information on the camps, visit <http://pslc.ul.ie/cybercamp/>.

Repeat Exams Drop-in

During August 2019, the ICTLC ran 30 hours of drop-in sessions for students sitting their annual repeat exams. The sessions attracted 56 individual student visits.

3.3.4 Research Activities

The ICTLC manager co-authored a paper in September 2018; see appendix B for details.

3.4 Outline of Plan of Activities for 2019/20

The plan for 2019/20 is to continue to offer the support services detailed in section 3.2. We will continue to provide these services with particular focus on improving our ICT students' transition, progression, development and retention.

3.4.1 Learner Support Services

While endeavouring to strengthen our learner support services, we will place an emphasis on the following in 2019/20:

- Carrying out the upgrade and expansion of the centre's physical resources, including the upgrade of the current workstations and the addition of six new workstations on a new central table. New seating will be procured and a suitable projector installed. This will enhance our capacity to service more students and potentially allow us to offer more places on our summer camps and outreach workshops.
- Ensuring our successful in-lab pair programming support is offered in both semesters for first-year students in the CSIS and ECE core programming modules
- Continuing the provision of our PAR support to first-year programming students on the BSc in Computing Technologies programme early in the spring semester
- Seeking to expand the successful PAR support model to offer support in other historically difficult ICT modules
- Presenting three sessions during UL's orientation programme for international students, thereby fulfilling part of our commitment to implement recommendations from the CTL's March 2018 quality review regarding supporting

our international students

- Ensuring that UL is represented successfully at both the 2019 National Games Studio competition and Annual Robocode first-year programming competition
- Continuing to promote our services to all target students in UL by making use of all available on-campus means, such as the First Seven Weeks and advertising media
- Working closely with the CTL to coordinate our service offerings with those offered by other UL learner support centres, such as the PSLC, MLC and SLC

3.4.2 Challenges and Proposed Action

Over the past number of years and despite the success of our SALS, there remain two ongoing issues that can have an impact on our ability to maintain the level and standard of the support we provide every year:

- The difficulty in identifying and acquiring able tutors from the undergraduate and postgraduate student groups
- Reaching the students that we feel are most in need of our services

We propose that both CTL and ICTLC staff liaise with the relevant academic departments to establish an agreed mechanism to address these challenging issues.

Appendix A: ICT Initiatives Offered by the ICTLC

1 Subjects Supported in Drop-in Sessions

- Programming language (all levels), including Java, C, C++, PHP, SQL, C# and Python
- Object-oriented design and development
- Web development
- Mobile application development in android
- Electronics subjects
- ICT media subjects, including MAX/PD, Processing, Arduino and Adobe
- Games development and graphics subjects, including OpoenGL
- Mathematics and statistic software, including Matlab, R and Lisp
- General ICT course subjects

2 Subjects Supported in Targeted Sessions

- Operating Systems (CS4023)
- Java Programming modules (CE4701, CE4702, CS4141, CS4222, CS5151, CS5052), including exam review sessions
- Introduction to Object Oriented Programming in Java Using Greenfoot workshops
- Data Structures and Algorithms (CS4115)
- Computer Graphics (CS4815)
- C++ Programming (CS4023)
- Event Driven Programming (CS4076)
- Introduction to Web Development (CS4082)
- Applied Economic Analysis (EC4044) – R language for statistical computing
- Java Fundamentals Programming (Core Programming Language Course)
- Java Intermediate Programming (Core Programming Language Course)
- PAR sessions – Java Programming (CS4141/CS4222)

3 Peer-Learning Initiatives

- Introduction to Programming (CSIS) – in-lab PP support (CS4141)
- Computer Software 1 (ECE) – in-lab PP support (CE4701)
- Software Development (CSIS) – in-lab PP support (CS4222)
- Computer Software 2(ECE) – in-lab PP support (CE4702)
- Introduction to Programming (CSIS) – PSLG (CS4141)
- Software Development (CSIS) – PSLG (CS4222)

Appendix B: Presentations

Toosi, F. G., O'Donnell, C., Wasala, A., Botterweck, G. and Buckley, J. (2018), 'Objectification using procedure-relational, matrix decomposition and synchronization dynamics', in *Proceedings of ECCA 2018 12th European Conference on Software Architecture Proceedings*, Madrid, Spain, September 24-28, 3241455: ACM, 1-7.



4. Regional Peer-Supported Learning Centre

Annual Report 2018/19

Foreword from the Director

The Regional Peer-Supported Learning Centre (PSLC) specialises in promoting proactive peer-supported learning schemes, particularly those related to UL's academic enrichment programme known as Peer-Supported Learning Groups (PSLG). PSLG is a group-based, student-led collaborative learner support scheme that targets difficult subjects/modules in all-study programmes offered by UL.

Over the last few years, the PSLC has been actively involved in setting up and maintaining a number of PSLG schemes every academic year. In 2018/19, the majority of the PSLG schemes (71%) targeted first- and second-year students in ICT-related courses. To this effect, the PSLC has been working closely with the ICT Learning Centre (ICTLC) in running PSLG sessions that focus on computer programming, software and electronics-related modules.

This report describes the academic enrichment and intervention programmes delivered by the PSLC over the two semesters of the academic year 2018/19. Seven PSLG programmes were run to support seven modules from the Science & Engineering and Kemmy Business School faculties, offering support to over 1,500 students. Other support services and activities related to student engagement, motivation, professional and transferrable skills development and outreach included a seminar series held for the Department of Electronics and Computer Engineering undergraduate and master's students on presentation and report-writing skills. This report also describes the centre's outreach activities, including our involvement with the UL Cybercamp and Cybercamp Plus and our collaboration with the Student Engagement & Success Unit and its Pathway to Progression – Peer-to-Peer programme.

The report provides data showing the impact of the described schemes on the academic performance and, hence, the progression of students who availed of the schemes compared to students who did not avail of any of the schemes on offer, with particular focus on first- and second-year students. Presented figures show that, overall, students who avail of the support schemes provided by the centres have a greater chance of achieving a C3 or higher grade in the module assessment. The report also details our plan for the coming academic year, reiterates challenges regarding recent student and staff participation in PSLG, and proposes an action plan to tackle these issues.

**Professor Hussain Mahdi,
Director, Regional Peer-Supported Learning Centre**

September 2019

Executive Summary

PSLC initiatives during 2018/19 to retain students included piloting new peer-learning programmes while supporting and maintaining existing programmes, offering targeted seminars and workshops and providing a quiet, informal study area for group meetings and discussions. Services for second-level school students included UL Cybercamp and Transition Year (TY) Week. UL Cybercamp was attended by 78 students from 35 schools, and UL Cybercamp Plus was attended by 39 students. Funding from the HEA enabled us to expand the number of places offered; not only did this increase the number of students attending overall but also the percentage of female attendees, in particular for the UL Cybercamp Plus, for which female participation rose from 22% in previous years to over 50%.

Seven PSLG schemes were run to support seven modules in the S&E and KBS faculties. To facilitate these schemes, the PSLC conducted two evening training workshops for eight additional PSLG leaders in the autumn semester. In Semester 1, 12 leaders conducted 16 sessions per week from weeks 4 to 12, and in Semester 2, 12 leaders conducted 19 sessions per week from weeks 4 to 12.

Those attending PSLG sessions for their supported module achieved a C3 or higher grade as their final grade for those modules. Students attending at least one session achieved a C3 or higher grade than their non-attending counterparts.

Three main seminars were run for ECE students (postgraduate and undergraduate). In addition, four sets of workshops on Java programming were offered to students both from UL and from primary and second-level schools in the area.

The PSLC continued to be used as a study area and a venue to practise presentations. On many occasions, the PSLC manager was available to listen and offer constructive feedback.

To maximise its support to students, the PSLC continues to collaborate with UL support services such as the Mature Student Office, Disability Support Services, the Student Engagement and Success Unit and the Access Office.

4.1 Overview

The Regional Peer-Supported Learning Centre (PSLC) specialises in promoting proactive peer-supported learning schemes, particularly those related to UL's academic enrichment programme known as Peer-Supported Learning Groups (PSLG). PSLG is a group-based, student-led collaborative learner support scheme that targets difficult subjects/modules in all-study programmes offered by UL.

The objectives of the PSLG sessions include:

- Nurturing independent learning
- Encouraging cooperation among students
- Facilitating students to develop long-lasting study groups and learning communities
- Helping to build a student's confidence and self-esteem (something of particular importance for first-year students)

The PSLC director is Professor Hussain Mahdi and its manager is Mr James Murphy. For further information and details regarding on the centre’s activities, please visit our website at <http://pslc.ul.ie/>.

4.2 PSLC Activities and Student Participation

4.2.1 Services for Undergraduates and Postgraduates

Supporting and Maintaining Existing Programmes

During AY 2018/19, seven PSLG schemes were run to support seven modules in the S&E and KBS faculties. To facilitate these schemes, the PSLC conducted two evening training workshops in Semester 1 for eight additional PSLG leaders. For Semester 1, 12 leaders conducted 16 sessions per week from weeks 4 to 12, and for Semester 2, 12 leaders conducted 19 sessions per week from weeks 4 to 12 for all modules except AC4001 and AC4002, which ran from weeks 5 to 10 in each semester. Details of the modules supported and the departments of origin are given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: List of modules supported by PSLG programmes in 2018/19

Module code	Module title	Department	Faculty	Year
CE4702	Computer Software 2	ECE	S&E	1
CE4703	Computer Software 3	ECE	S&E	2
CS4013	Object Oriented Development	CSIS	S&E	1
CS4141	Introduction to Programming	CSIS	S&E	1
CS4222	Software Development	CSIS	S&E	1
AC4001	Principles of Accounting	A&F	KBS	1
AC4002	Managerial Accounting	A&F	KBS	1

ECE = Electronic & Computer Engineering; S&E = Science & Engineering; CSIS = Computer Science & Information Systems; A&F = Accounting & Finance; KBS = Kemmy Business School

Figure 4.1 presents the modules supported during 2018/19, with the percentage achieving a C3 grade or higher for each group by module (those attending and not attending PSLG). These data are based on end-of-semester results only and do not include repeat grades. Normally we expect an increase in the number of students achieving a C3 or higher grade after the repeat exams have been sat.

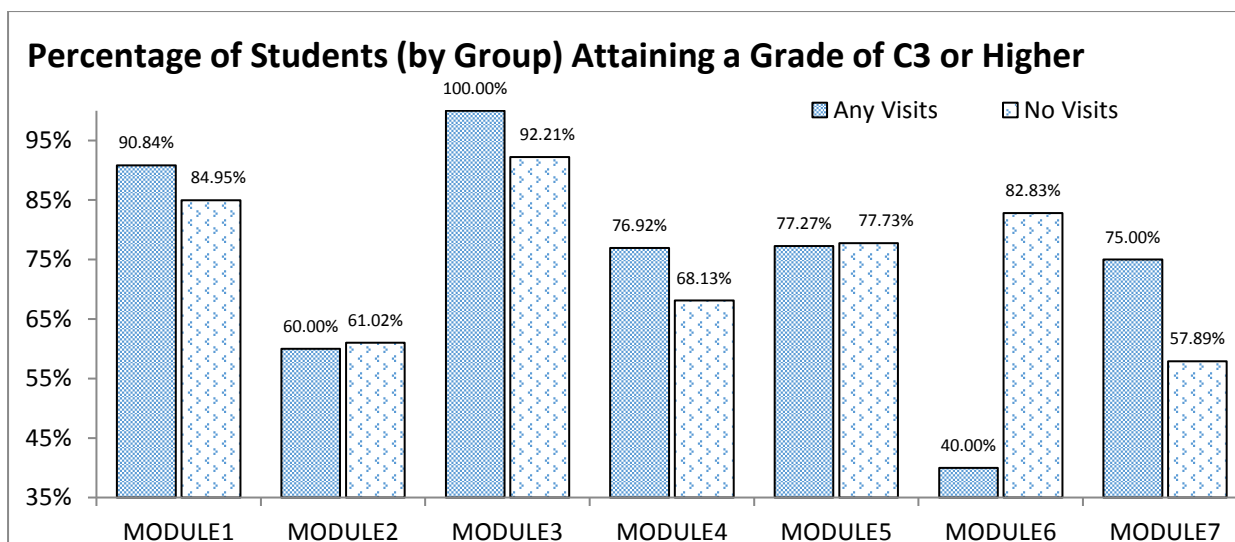


Figure 4.1: Comparison of students attaining a grade C3 or higher for those attending PSLG versus those not attending by module

The overall trend for the entire year, as per previous years, is that those attending PSLG sessions for their supported module achieve a C3 or higher grade as their final grade for those modules. Students attending at least one session achieve a C3 or higher grade at ~3.1% higher rate than their non-attending counterparts. The corresponding rate in 2017/18 was ~6.4%. However, we also made the following observations:

- a) While we have managed to maintain the number of students attending at least once, the trend showed a reduced rate of students attending multiple sessions. In 2018/19, approximately 80% of those attending did so between one and three times with ~63% of these students attending once only. This is similar to last year's results: 83% attended between one and three times (with 64% of these attending once only). This, we believe, is one of the factors that has affected the rate of attending students achieving a C3 grade or higher in 2018/19, as reported above. While we have endeavoured to increase attendance rates at sessions, there is obviously further work to be done. To this end, we intend to undertake a focus group of students from 2018/19 and the new 2019/20 classes to identify why they are not attending, or if attending, why not more often.
- b) When surveyed, students continue to mention timetable issues as one of the main reasons for not attending more sessions. While we will continue to work with the faculty and staff to encourage students in targeted modules to attend the sessions to improve both the number of students attending and their rate of attending, we believe that help from the CTL and academic bodies may be required to solve the problem. We continue to believe that mainstreaming the supports into the first-year timetable will have a significant impact on attendance at and the impact of the PSLG programmes on supported modules.
- c) Uptake of new modules is at lecturers' discretion, and current means of reaching out to academic staff members do not appear to be working. In 2018/19, the number of programmes supported stabilised at seven programmes; however, our increased

efforts in contacting department and staff members to recruit new modules to support seems to have paid dividends, and two new programmes are coming on-stream in 2019/20. We will continue to work on this.

Seminars and Workshops

In 2018/19, three main seminars were run for ECE postgraduate (PG) and undergraduate (UG) students. This is an ongoing seminar series that is held to give students the necessary skills to present and write technical reports for their future careers, with a particular focus on how to use these skills to help with FYP reports and presentations.

For the UG students, two seminars were held (one in Semester 1 and one in Semester 2) for final-year ECE students on report writing and presentation skills:

- Semester 1: A seminar on presentation skills: how to create effective PowerPoint presentations, tips on what makes a good slide, how to effectively use images and tables, tips on general presentation skills, tone of voice, how to get the audience's attention, how to combat nerves, etc. Twenty students attended, with feedback indicating that all found it 'very helpful'.
- Semester 2: A seminar on writing technical reports with a particular emphasis on writing the FYP report. The seminar covers the general structure of technical documents, layout, using Endnote to make citations easier to implement, practice on writing abstracts and introductory sections. Again, 20 students attended, with feedback indicating that just under 95% found the seminar 'very helpful' while the remainder found it 'helpful'.

A recurring negative comment relating to Endnote presented itself again: students stated that they would have liked more time to practise it during the seminar. Physical space and resources limit our ability to facilitate this in the seminar itself, and attempts at running a short additional seminar on Endnote proved difficult to organise due to time constraints. We are looking at introducing a short workshop on Endnote in the autumn semester of the coming year to address this issue.

For PG students undertaking master's programmes, a seminar was held in Semester 1 to assist with writing technical documents, the content of which was adapted from the UG Report Writing Skills seminar. All 16 PG students attending found the presentation to be 'very helpful'.

Study Area

The PSLC continued to be used as a study area for students; 120 students made use of the room in 2018/19. A total of 429 visits were logged for the year. The area was also used by students to practise presentations, and the centre manager was frequently available to listen to the presentations and offer constructive feedback.

4.2.2 Services for Second-level School Students

The centre continued its partnership with ICTLC, ECE, CSIS and Lero in running UL Cybercamp – an informal three-day workshop series that teaches second-level students

various ICT concepts, from Java programming to robotics. It runs in UL each June for two weeks.

Funding of €9,000 secured from the HEA ICT Summer Camps 2019 in addition to the €5,000 secured from the HEA Information Technology Investment Fund earlier in the year enabled us to expand the number of offered places to increase both the number of total students attending and the number of female attendees. As a result, the UL Cybercamp Plus saw the female participation rate increasing from 22% to over 50%. Seventy-eight students from 35 schools around the country attended the UL Cybercamp and 39 students attended Cybercamp Plus. For more details on Cybercamp, visit <http://pslc.ul.ie/cybercamp/>.

As part of the S&E TY in the autumn, the PSLC offered a seminar on presentation skills and/or Java programming to the attending students. Eight students attended the session, during which they were introduced to programming and shown how to build a simple Java game using the Greenfoot IDE. Feedback from the group indicated that it was one of the sessions they most enjoyed during their time in UL.

The centre offered a number of workshops on programming last year in collaboration with the ICTLC. These were as follows:

- First Seven Weeks workshop – 23 students attended
- ECE first-year programming workshops – a total of 78 students attended at least one of the four nights of support
- *I Wish* – two workshops offered to 40 female second-level school students
- Outreach to St John's Girls and Infant Boys School, Limerick city – workshop for 32 female primary school students

We believe these workshops, while time-consuming, offer value to the centre and its brand by informing current and prospective UL students about the help that is available to them and how to contact us.

4.2.3 Collaboration with Other UL Student Support Services

The PSLC collaborates with UL support services such as the Mature Student Office, Disability Support Services and the Access Office to maximise its support to students. At the beginning of each semester, we contact and are contacted by these offices regarding supports we are offering and enquiries about help for particular students.

The centre also works with the other learning support centres in UL, particularly the ICTLC, to maximise the type of learning support we offer to students. One part of this collaboration is the First Seven Weeks initiative for first-year students each autumn semester. Week 5 focuses on the learner support centres. During that week, the PSLC actively promotes and introduces new students to a range of subjects, from accounting to engineering, to the centre's supports and to those available in partner centres.

The PSLC partnered with the Student Engagement & Success (SES) Unit during the year to help with its Pathway to Progression – Peer-to-Peer (P2P) programme. The centre offered advice on setting up and implementing the programme and provided training to some of the

student leaders involved. The programme offered help with one computer science module. The PSLC will continue to support this partnership with SES and help it to expand and grow the P2P programme.

The PSLC contributed to an International Education Division initiative to promote UL and its learner centres to international affiliate institutions.

4.2.4 Feedback from Students and PSLG Leaders

The PSLC conducts two feedback surveys per semester – one with students attending the session and the other with students leading the sessions.

The attendees' survey examines how the students interacted with the PSLG programmes and how they felt the programmes impacted them in the areas of performance, developing peer groups of friends, understanding the module material and developing module independent skills such as problem-solving, communication skills, study techniques, presentation, group work and critical thinking. With just 16 students of the attending student population replying, feedback from the attendees was low.

The results from the survey, however, were very positive. Of the 16 students:

- 81% found PSLG to be 'very helpful', and 19% found it to be 'helpful'.
- 87.5% thought they would achieve a higher result in their final exam as a result of attending the PSLG sessions.
- 81% felt they now had a better understanding of the module material after participating in the scheme.

The survey comprises Likert-scale quantitative and open-ended qualitative questions. To the open-ended question *What did you think were the strengths of the PSLG sessions?*, the responses from the students included the following (all direct quotes):

- "The instructor was so kind and helpful and answered any questions we had"
- "Smaller groups tackling targeted content yields great results"
- "More attention given to individuals"
- "Learning in a smaller group and at students' pace"
- "Approachable tutor. Content matching material in lectures/labs. Asked to help solve problems but not pressured"
- "Was easy to learn from another student who had already finished the module"
- "Being able to ask more questions"
- "The flexibility"
- "Smaller groups"
- "Helpful and clear"
- "Working in small groups with focused feedback was very helpful"
- "I was able to go over course content"
- "The teacher was very confident in what they were doing"

To the question *How would you describe the PSLG sessions to future students?*, the students' responses included (all direct quotes):

- “Go. They are really so helpful and give you practice that you most likely are not doing on your own”
- “Essential”
- “Very helpful and worthwhile”
- “Great space to learn or solve difficult problems”
- “Excellent, well worth attending. Excellent teacher”
- “Help understanding a module from another student who has completed that module”
- “They should definitely attend as it is invaluable help”
- “A good way of improving and helping to understand the module”
- “Only helpful if you have specific questions, not if you need general help”
- “A very useful small-group environment to get you from good to great”
- “It's definitely worth going or even to use the facilities as a study space”
- “Brilliant if you're struggling”

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, to the binary question ‘*Would you recommend PSLG sessions to other students?*’, 100% of the respondents indicated that they would.

The survey of the leaders follows a more reflective model – the leaders were asked to reflect on the positives and (if any) negatives of their participation in the programme, to make suggestions on potential improvements, to state whether or not they would be interested in continuing with the programme and to promote participation among their peers. In 2018/19, 100% of the leaders completed the survey and all indicated that they would continue to act as leaders in the future, where possible to do so. The third year of many of the courses supported involved a Cooperative Education (‘Co-op’) placement for one or other of the academic semesters, and this was the main barrier to the leaders’ continuation. The leaders’ sole negative comment related to student attendance at the beginning of the semester, although attendance, in the main, improved as the semester went on.

Here are some of the positives responses (all direct quotes):

- “Seeing people understand concepts better after class was very rewarding”
- “It has helped me with talking in front of people and organisational skills”
- “The training was very effective in teaching how the class should be run and helped with my anxiety”
- “Enjoyed the experience, will do again”

4.3 Outline of Plan of Activities for 2019/20

The plan for 2019/20 is to continue to offer the support services detailed in section 4.2 of this report. We will focus on strengthening our learner support services, promoting our programmes and further developing our research activities.

4.3.1 Learner Support Services

While endeavouring to strengthen our learner support services, we will place an emphasis on the following:

1. Refurbishing our centre to accommodate the upgrade of operating systems in the university from Windows 7 to Windows 10. Eight new machines will be added to replace existing older machines. In addition, the centre's seating area and furniture will be updated to allow more room and accommodate larger groups.
2. Continuing to work with faculties, departments and academic staff to expand our offering of proactive, collaborative and student-centred learning initiatives in order to nurture independent and engaged learners and promote social inclusion.
3. Introducing a social-media-based online community as part of our efforts to enhance the effectiveness, reach and impact of PSLG in creating a learning community. This, we believe, will make the PSLG sessions more attractive and interactive in the coming year for two sample modules – one in computer science and the other in business.
4. Piloting a new 'Buddy Club' programme for international students. The programme is an academic and social integration scheme that offers support to students acclimating to a new country.
5. Continuing and expanding the promotion of our services to all target students in UL and making use of all available on-campus means, such as the First Seven Weeks initiative and advertising media. We hope to increase the number of visitors to both our website and Facebook pages to increase our reach to students and to deliver information to them more efficiently.
6. Continuing to collaborate with SES on the P2P programme in line with our objective of promoting active peer-learning and support across the institution.
7. Continuing to expand and develop our outreach activities in relation to targeting second-level school students to get them excited and informed about computing and ICT-related fields, such as our work with our collaborating partners on the UL Cybercamp Plus.
8. Continuing to work closely with the CTL to coordinate our service offerings with those of other UL learner support units, such as the ICTLC, MLC and SLC.

4.3.2 Challenges and Proposed Actions

Our PSLG performance analysis reported annually over the last number of years has shown the beneficial impact of participation in PSLG on students' academic performance and progression rates. For both those who are doing well in the module and those who are struggling, PSLG helps students to better understand the module material for exam purposes and to develop a host of soft and transferrable skills, such as time management, organisation, communication, team building, teamwork and leadership. In addition, PSLG offers an avenue for creating course-related study communities, which helps speed up the integration of students into the wider university community.

Over the last few years, the PSLC has been experiencing some challenging issues that affect its ability to maintain the level and standards of the peer-learning support it has offered in the past. The main challenges are:

- a) **Student and staff participation:** The levels of student attendance at PSLG and staff recruitment were both challenging in 2018/19 and, consequently, had a negative impact on student success and progression levels. While the centre has been dealing with these issues on its own and will be offering support to two additional modules in the School of Allied Health in the 2019/20 autumn semester, we continue to believe that actions driven by the CTL and other associated academic bodies will be crucial in reducing or eliminating these problems and helping to ensure the sustainability of this successful programme. We therefore reiterate our request for a discussion with the CTL and academic bodies along the lines of the following proposed actions:
- Active involvement in identifying modules that would benefit most from our peer-based support and assistance in bringing associated academic staff on board to set up new PSLG programmes
 - Mainstreaming PSLG support into the student timetable for these modules, and introducing an 'opt-out' approach instead of the current 'opt-in' model
 - In the meantime, we will continue to work with academic staff to promote our PSLG programmes to students of all ability levels and will encourage all students to attend so that they can gain the most benefit from the programme and from each other.
- b) **Closing the feedback loop:** We believe our findings and those of the other learning centres presented in this annual report and our observations and day-to-day interactions with students can play an important role in the development and review of associated academic programmes with a view to tackling challenges relating to students' learning, recurring difficulties, progression and retention. We believe these tools are currently being under-utilised and, therefore, propose that the information and data presented in this annual report become part of future data-analytics processes for the development of academic programmes at department, faculty and intuitional levels.



UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

**REGIONAL
WRITING
CENTRE**

Get on the 'write' track

5. Regional Writing Centre

Annual Report 2018/19

Foreword from the Co-directors

The Regional Writing Centre (RWC) helps students to develop their academic writing skills. Forms of support include one-to-one peer tutoring in writing, writing workshops, writers' groups and online resources for writers.

One-to-one peer support is one of the RWC's defining features. Our peer tutors talk to students about writing assignments in progress and can address any aspect of writing or the writing process in a session. RWC peer tutors have proven writing abilities and have received training in peer tutoring to enable them to mentor undergraduate and postgraduate students by helping them to identify and improve their academic writing.

The RWC is a centre for learning, not a proofreading or writing service. Peer writing tutors help writers to understand their writing situation and to examine their unique writing process – what they do from the time they receive an assignment until the time they hand it in. The tutors help writers to identify strategies they can employ. Peer writing tutors help writers evaluate the contribution made by those strategies and, when it is determined that they are not working, identify and choose strategies that are more productive. The RWC improves writers, not writing. We believe that everyone can write.

The RWC is also available to academic staff to (a) help them develop their students' writing and (b) help support them in their own writing. Forms of support for academics include discussions on integrating writing as a learning tool into their curricula; provision of learning-development initiatives in academic writing, including writers' groups, one-to-one consultations and PhD writers' week; and online resources for writers.

The RWC organises and participates in a number of activities and events centred on writer development and support, including:

- UL One Campus, One Book initiative
- How I Write, Ireland interviews
- Learning Centres Week, First Seven Weeks
- National Secondary School Essay-writing Competition
- Writing-talk (blog)

**Dr Íde O'Sullivan and Lawrence Cleary,
Co-directors, Regional Writing Centre**

September 2019

Executive Summary

The RWC provides support through peer-to-peer meetings, workgroups and tutorials to undergraduates, postgraduates and staff across the disciplines.

Fourteen peer-to-peer tutors undertook 848 consultations. The quick-query facility was used to answer 69 questions. Tutor training and induction took place in both semesters as well as a workshop for writing tutors' continuing professional development (CPD).

Non-discipline-specific workshops as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative catered for 344 students. Writing interventions for specific disciplines as part of the Writing in Disciplines initiative provided workshops for 1,854 students. The time spent on Writing in Disciplines consultations amounted to 416 hours. Modules in writing designed and delivered by the RWC were attended by 335 academics, researchers and students.

Through the Irish Network for the Enhancement of Writing (INEW), the RWC collaborated with the directors/coordinators of Irish academic writing centres/writing support providers and hosted a three-day European Writing Centre Association (EWCA) Summer Retreat.

Innovative approaches to writer development included One Campus, One Book (featuring Melatu Uche Okorie's *This Hostel Life*); How I Write, Ireland; First Seven Weeks (in collaboration with the other UL learning centres); and the eighth annual National Secondary School Essay-writing Competition.

RWC co-directors Dr Íde O'Sullivan and Lawrence Cleary continue to contribute to the research agenda of the RWC by engaging in academic discussions on writing in academic contexts and writing centre development.

5.1 Overview

The Regional Writing Centre (RWC) is available to all students (undergraduate and postgraduate) who seek support to enhance and develop their academic writing skills. The RWC is also available to academic staff both to help them develop their students' writing and to support them in their own writing.

The RWC's co-directors are Dr Íde O'Sullivan (also CTL Senior Educational Developer) and Lawrence Cleary (also CTL Educational Developer), and its Co-operative Administrative Assistant is Jordan Lynch. RWC tutors are all peer tutors and are just that – undergraduate and postgraduate students specialising in their own studied discipline. They provide feedback on written work and help writers establish a structure as well as giving tips on strategies for writing. Specific tutors are available by appointment.

In addition to peer-to-peer tutor support, the RWC offers discipline-specific and generic workshops on essay, report and FYP writing tailored for a specific audience; group workshops and seminars; writers' groups; and online resources.

Our writers' space is available Monday to Wednesday from 09.00 to 13.00.

5.2 Key Highlights of RWC Activities in 2018/19

- Fourteen peer tutors in academic writing facilitated 848 one-to-one peer-tutoring consultations in academic writing for 578 students. (See Appendix A for details.)
- First-year uptake increased by more than threefold in 2018/19.
- Sixty-nine online quick queries (questions requiring 10 minutes or less to answer) answered online.
- Fifty-two hours of 'Writing Across the Curriculum' workshops were delivered, facilitating learning for 344 undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- The RWC co-directors devoted 416 hours to working with academic staff to develop 31 'Writing in Disciplines' activities, integrating writing into modules, impacting 1,854 students (undergraduate and postgraduate); these hours are significantly up from the previous year.
- The RWC continued to provide supports for the MSO, Access and first-year students.
- Modules designed and delivered by the RWC were attended by 335 academics, researchers or students.
- The sixth annual UL One Campus, One Book initiative featured Melatu Uche Okorie's *This Hostel Life*. A collaboration between the RWC's UL One Campus, One Book and Dr Christina Morin (Lecturer in English, School of English, Irish, and Communication) resulted in a reading by Danny Denton. The UL One Campus, One Book activities attracted participation by 75 people.
- The eighth Annual National Secondary School Essay-writing Competition attracted 69 entries from across Ireland. Three students from Cork and students from Donegal, Dublin, Roscommon and Galway travelled with their families, principles and English teachers to UL to receive awards for best entries.
- Twelve PVA (President's Volunteer Award) students assisted the RWC with the National Secondary School Essay-writing Competition and the Writing-talk initiatives,

volunteering 90 hours of their time to judge essays and to reflect on their writing-for-academic-assessment experiences.

- During the review period, Dr Íde O’Sullivan presented at two international conferences and Lawrence Cleary published a chapter in a book on writing centres (see details in Appendix B).
- Through the Irish Network for the Enhancement of Writing (INEW), the RWC collaborated with the directors/coordinators of Irish academic writing centres/writing support providers and hosted a three-day European Writing Centre Association (EWCA) Summer Retreat.
- Dr Íde O’Sullivan continued in the role of course director for the Graduate Certificate, Diploma and MA programmes in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship.

5.3 Details of RWC Activities in 2018/19

5.3.1 Peer-Tutoring in Academic Writing Initiative

Peer Tutoring Consultations in Academic Writing

- A total of 848 one-to-one peer tutoring consultations in academic writing took place in 2018/9 (see Appendix A for demographic details).
- A threefold increase in first-year student uptake was recorded.

Quick Query

- Uptake this year: 69 quick queries addressed by RWC peer writing tutors, a slight drop from last year.
- The method of eliciting and responding to requests for quick questions about writing was modified in the spring of 2019 to accommodate GDPR requirements.

Tutor Training

- Peer-tutoring induction (autumn): 12 participants
- Peer-tutoring induction (spring): 11 participants
- Peer-tutoring training day (autumn): 12 new peer tutors
- Peer tutor training day (spring): 2 new peer tutors
- Peer tutor training module AW4006 (spring): 17 participants
- Peer-tutoring debrief (autumn): 9 participants
- Peer-tutoring debrief (spring): 11 participants
- Writing tutors’ continuing professional development (CPD): 14 participants

5.3.2 Writing for Publication/Professional Progression

Table 5.1 lists initiatives to support staff and postgraduates in their own professional writing: writing for publication/professional progression.

Table 5.1: Initiatives to support writing for publication/professional progression

Initiative	Uptake
Faculty writers' retreat	8 participants for 3 days
Faculty writers' group	7 participants for 75 hours
MA in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship Writers' Group	8 participants for 144 hours
PhD writers' weeks	August 2018: 8 participants January 2019: 8 participants June 2019: 8 participants
PhD writers' group	Semester 1: 10 participants Semester 2: 13 participants Met weekly for 4 hours for a total of 142 hours
Writers' space	42 visits for 86 hours

5.3.3 Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiatives are non-discipline-specific workshops.

Table 5.2: Writing Across the Curriculum initiatives and numbers of students attending

Writing intervention	No. students
SEMESTER 1	
Academic Writing Workshops	41
Language Centre Workshop on Integrity	65
Writing for Academic Assessment	38
International Students Writing Workshop	4
Grammar Workshops	40
Getting 'A's on Academic Papers: What's the Trick?	29
Total number of students for Semester 1 interventions	217
SEMESTER 2	
How to Get an A on Your Paper	32
Writing for the FYP	40
Academic Writing Workshops	21
Writing at Third Level	20
Kickstart Your Summer Writing – Postgraduate	8
Kickstart Your Summer Writing – Faculty	6
Total number of students for Semester 2 interventions	127

WAC Summary

- Semester 1: 24 hours of workshops attended by 217 students
- Semester 2: 28 hours of workshops attended by 127 students
- Total hours = 52
- Total impact = 344 students

5.3.4 Writing in Disciplines Initiatives

Writing in Disciplines (WID) initiatives are collaborations between writing and subject specialists.

Table 5.3: WID initiatives and numbers of students attending per semester

Faculty	Writing intervention	No. students
SEMESTER 1		
AHSS	BA in Contemporary Dance	7
	BA in Arts (HP4001 Preparing for Success)	422
	Total students from AHSS	429
S&E	BSc in Environmental Science	37
	BSc in Technology Management	32
	MEng. Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering	22
	BEng. (Common Entry) ME4001 Introduction to Engineering	254
	Total students from S&E	345
EHS	Grad. Dip./MSc Nursing and Midwifery	92
	School of Allied Health (MSc Programme Orientation)	78
	School of Allied Health (MSc Programme) (Year 2)	68
	BSc in Paramedic Studies (Practitioner Entry)	25
	BSc in Paramedic Studies (Year 1)	18
	MSc PhD in Psychology	10
	BSc Psychology (Year 1); BA Psychology and Sociology (Year 1); BA Joint Honours (Year 2)	84
	BSc Physiotherapy (Year 4)	30
	GEMS MSc in Health Profession Education	7
	GEMS MSc in Health Profession Education	7
	BMBS Graduate Entry Medical Programme	99
	BSc in Education (Year 1)	246
	Total students from EHS	764
KBS	MSc Project Management	38
	Total students from KBS	38
CPE	Spec. Dip. in Continued Airworthiness and Maintenance Management	15
	Total students from CPE	15
Total students over all faculties, Semester 1		1,591
SEMESTER 2		
AHSS	CU6032 Thesis Writing: Language, Literary and Cultural Studies for the MA in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies	2
	Final-Year Project Research Skills modules (PA4002, PA4027, RM4002, RM4006)	55
	Total students from AHSS	57
S&E	FYP for Engineers workshop	89
	Total students from S&E	89
EHS	BSc Physiotherapy (year 1)	28
	MSc Human Nutrition and Dietetics	11
	Professional Masters in Education	14
	GEMS	4
Total students from EHS	57	
KBS	Faculty WID Development Workshop: Assessment, Grading and Reflective Writing for MBA and MSc Project Management	16
	Total students from KBS	16
CPE	IE 2011 Project Module for Specialist Diploma – Information and Network Security	13
	BA in Applied Policing and Criminal Justice (online)	12
	IE2011 Project module for Embedded Systems Engineering	19
	Total students from CPE	44
Total students over all faculties, Semester 2		263
TOTAL STUDENTS FOR 2018/19		1,854

Key: AHSS = Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences; S&E = Science & Engineering; EHS = Education & Health Sciences; KBS = Kemmy Business School; CPE = Continuing & Professional Education

Table 5.4: WID hours invested and numbers affected by discipline

Faculty	WID hours invested	No. of students impacted
Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences	141	486
Science & Engineering	160	434
Education & Health Sciences	68	821
Kemmy Business School	4	54
Continuing & Professional Education	43.25	59
Total	416.25	1,854

WID Summary

- WID initiatives: 31 (as listed in Table 5.3)
- Students in attendance: 1,854 (Tables 5.3 and 5.4)
- Hours invested in WID activities: 416.25 (Table 5.4)

5.3.5 Design, Delivery and Development of Modules in Writing

Table 5.5 lists the modules per faculty, including the number of credits they are worth, the semester in which they took place and the numbers of students attending.

Table 5.5: Module and number of participants attending

Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences	
AW4006: Peer-Tutoring in Academic Writing (6 credits) (Semester 2)	17
Science & Engineering	
ME6051: Advanced Technical Communication for Engineers (3 credits) (Semester 1)	22
ME4001 (Mini module): Introduction to Engineering (Semester 1)	261
Interdisciplinary/CTL	
TL6001: Teaching, Learning and Scholarship in Higher Education – Dissertation A (Semester 1)	2
TL6002: Teaching, Learning and Scholarship in Higher Education – Dissertation A (Semester 1)	2
TI5091: Preparing an Effective Research, Writing and Publication Strategy (Semester 1)	14
TL8013: Developing Ideas and Arguments: Writing Into Academic Communities (3 credits) (Semester 1)	36
TL5122: Writing for Publication: Scholarly Dialogue and Presentation (6 credits) (Semester 1)	35
TL5132: Feedback and Revision in Scholarly Writing (9 credits) (Semester 1)	9
Total student numbers	398

5.3.6 RWC Initiatives in Collaboration with Others

- Irish Network for the Enhancement of Writing (INEW), December 7, 2018, meeting of the directors/coordinators of Irish academic writing centres/writing support providers to discuss practices and innovations, DCU, St Patrick's Campus, Dublin.
- Lawrence Cleary attended the Summer Writing Institute for Teachers (SWIFT) at Maynooth University and conducted an interview with a team of second-level school students on how writing is accommodated in the new Junior Cycle.

5.4 Innovative RWC Approaches to Writer Development

5.4.1 UL One Campus, One Book

The sixth annual UL One Campus, One Book initiative 2018/19 featured Melatu Uche Okorie's *This Hostel Life*, from which Melatu gave a reading on 21 November. The reading was attended by 75 fans from both within and outside the university. For details, see: <https://ulsites.ul.ie/rwc/one-campus-one-book-2018-2019-melatu-uche-okorie>.

5.4.2 How I Write, Ireland

How I Write, Ireland interview, 13 March 2019: In a live, public interview attended by 80 people, Lawrence Cleary spoke with Melatu about her writing process and strategies. The video and transcripts of the interview can be accessed at <https://ulsites.ul.ie/rwc/creative-writers-how-i-write-contributors>.

5.4.3 First Seven Weeks Initiative

In collaboration with other UL learning centres to promote student uptake, the RWC facilitated 'How to Get an A on your Paper' workshops during Week 5 (Learning Support at UL) of the First Seven Weeks. The workshops were attended by 56 first-year students.

5.4.4 Eighth Annual RWC National Secondary School Essay-writing Competition

The RWC held its eighth Annual National Secondary School Essay-writing Competition for Transition Year and fifth-year second-level school students.

The competition required students to explore and take a decisive stance on the following prompt in an essay of 800 to 1,000 words:

The media often places a heavy emphasis on the Millennial generation, on what they are doing right and wrong. However, we don't often hear about the teens of today, Generation Z. Moreover, as pointed out by Natalie Gil in her Refinery 29 article, when we do hear about Generation Z it is often with someone else speaking on their behalf. Subsequently in his article John Quiggan argues that the constant categorising of people by generation does more harm than good, and is quite short sighted.

Is it healthy to categorise people according to their generation? What are the advantages or disadvantages of doing so?

Twelve students volunteered a total of 90 hours to judge and select the best essay in each category. Their hours counted towards their pursuit of a President's Volunteer Award.

From Transition Year: Overall winner – Caoimhe MacCarthy, St Aloysius, Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork; runners-up – Fiona Hourigan, St Mary's High School, Midleton, Co. Cork and Lenora Murphy, St Cuan's College, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway

From 5th Year: Overall winner – Isabel Azu, Kishoge Community College, Lucan, Co. Dublin; runners-up – German exchange student Clara Buchwald, Coláiste Chiaráin, Athlone, Co. Roscommon and Ava Moore, St Catherine's Vocational School, Killybegs, Co. Donegal

Dr Ross Anderson, Associate Vice President Academic Affairs and Student Engagement (Acting), opened the ceremony and introduced UL President Dr Des Fitzgerald, who greeted the winners and handed out the awards. Essays and photographs can be found online at <http://www.ulsites.ul.ie/rwc/201819-0>.

5.4.5 Writing-talk Advocates

Writing-talk UL (a PVA initiative) was launched in spring 2017 on studentvolunteer.ie, a blog that invites students and staff alike to help others write, not by telling people how to write but by sharing their own experiences of writing. With only one contribution, RWC staff changed the location to Tumblr (<https://writing-talkadvocatesul.tumblr.com/>) and are rethinking how to attract users and increase interaction.

One entry was accepted onto the blog this year, which was worth three PVA hours for the contributor.

5.5 External Consultation

- Íde O’Sullivan delivered a Writing for Publication workshop for academic staff at LIT Thurles on 24 October 2018 and postgrads at the Institute of Technology, Tralee on 6 November 2018.
- The co-directors participated in a workshop for INEW directors/coordinators of Irish academic writing centres/support providers hosted by DCU members at the St Patrick’s Campus.
- Lawrence Cleary was interviewed by a student as part of an assignment for Coventry University’s Writing Centre and Writing Programme ‘Development and Management’ module for postgraduate students on CAW’s online/blended learning MA/PG Diploma ‘Academic Writing Development and Research’ and PG Certificate ‘Academic Writing Development’.
- Visit/consultation from Georganne Nordstrom, Associate Professor, Director of the Writing Center, Department of English, University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, Honolulu, 28 February 2019. Georganne was visiting on a Fulbright at NUIG, had heard about the RWC and wished to visit to speak with us about potential future collaborations.
- In March and April 2019, the RWC became the subject of a cross-national study on the organisational perspective of writing centre work by the Writing Centre Exchange Project (WCEP), of which Íde O’Sullivan is a participant.
- The RWC was visited on 9 May 2019 by parents of students considering enrolling through the Access programme.
- Twenty students and two teachers from the Presentation Secondary School in Limerick visited UL and participated in a Writing at Third-level Workshop, 14 May 2019.
- Íde O’Sullivan organised a reflective writing workshop for the KBS conducted by Rachel Riedner and Jessica McCaughy of George Washington University, 14 May 2019.
- Lawrence Cleary met with Suzanne Warsinsky of Bordeaux University to discuss

possible collaboration on a research project on writing English mediated courses in Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries, 14 May 2019.

- Sheila Walsh of the Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) consulted with the two RWC directors on making a case for establishing a writing centre at CIT, 30 May 2019.

5.6 Research Projects

COST Action: Íde O’Sullivan is actively involved in the Core Working Group of COST Action 15221, We ReLaTe: Advancing Effective Institutional Models towards Cohesive Teaching, which seeks to address ‘the challenge of creating synergy among the increasingly more specialised and centralised supports for four key higher education activities – research, writing, teaching, and learning – which frequently fail to capitalise on their shared territories and common ground’ (COST Action 15221, 2016).

Writing Centre Exchange Project: Íde O’Sullivan secured grants to participate in two Short-term Scientific Missions (STSMs) at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and the European University Viadrina, Germany. The STSMs were funded by COST Action 15221. Íde subsequently hosted an important research visit from these same universities. The outcomes of this research exchange will be presented at EATAW 2019.

Appendix A: Peer Tutoring in Academic Writing (Demographics)

Autumn 2018 paper stats	Undergraduate Students						Taught Postgraduates					Postgraduate Research Students					Staff	English First Language		Mature		INTN'L	First Years	
	Total	Traditional	Mature	Total	L2	INT	Traditional	Mature	Total	L2	INT	Traditional	Mature	Total	L2	INT		Total	Yes	No	Yes			No
	AHSS	167	91	28	119	14	2	9	34	43	15	26	0	5	5	1		1	0	167	30			258
KBS	89	25	11	36	7	5	8	43	51	20	21	0	4	4	2	2	0	91	29	58	31	28	7	
EHS	90	39	19	58	8	8	8	18	26	5	4	0	6	6	2	2	0	90	15	43	47	14	29	
S&E	68	38	14	52	3	3	7	7	14	10	12	0	2	2	1	1	1	68	14	23	45	16	21	
Sub-Total	414	193	72	263	32	18	32	102	134	50	43	0	17	17	6	6	1	414	88	191	223	67	91	
MSAC	4	0	7	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	7	-3	0	0	
EXC/SA	4	20	0	2	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	4	4	
ERASM	16	13	3	16	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	16	3	13	0	0	
Total	438	226	82	54	54	22	0	0	0	0	63	0	0	0	0	6	0	436	110	392	92	91	91	

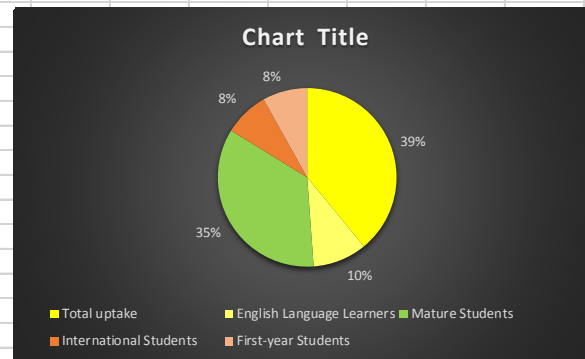
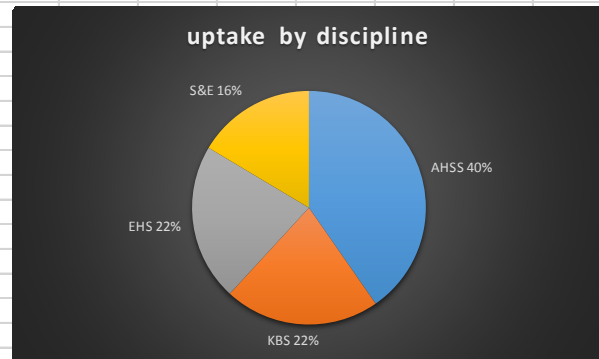


Figure 1 Peer tutoring statistics for autumn 2018

Spring 2019 Paper Stats	Undergraduate Students						Taught Postgraduates						Postgraduate Research Students						Staff	English First Language		Mature		INTN'L	First Years
	Total	Traditional	Mature	Total	L2	INT	Traditional	Mature	Total	L2	INT	Traditional	Mature	Total	L2	INT	Total	Yes		No	Yes	No			
AHSS	136	91	17	108	16	8	3	20	23	6	11	0	5	5	1	1	0	113	23	42	94	20	24		
KBS	80	38	13	51	8	4	4	24	28	13	13	0	1	1	1	1	0	58	22	38	42	18	3		
EHS	73	28	8	36	4	2	11	18	29	4	7	1	7	8	3	3	1	62	11	33	41	12	12		
S&E	64	38	6	44	6	7	4	9	13	6	9	0	7	7	3	2	0	49	15	22	42	18	2		
Sub-total	353																	282	71	135	219	68	41		
MSAC	10	3	7	10	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	2	7	3	1			
STUDY ABROAD	18	14	4	18	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	5	4	14	0			
ERASM	29	29	0	29	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	25	0	29	0			
Total	410	241	55	296	66	22	22	71	93	29	40	1	20	21	8	7	1	307	103	146	265	69	41		

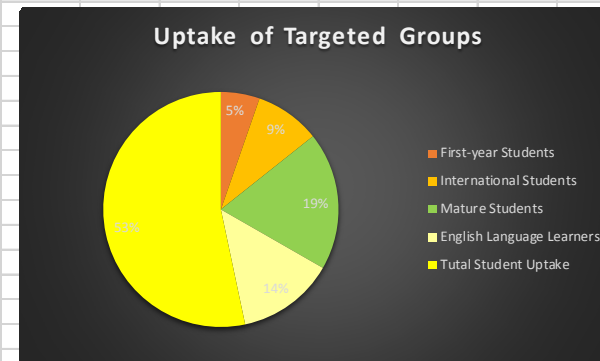
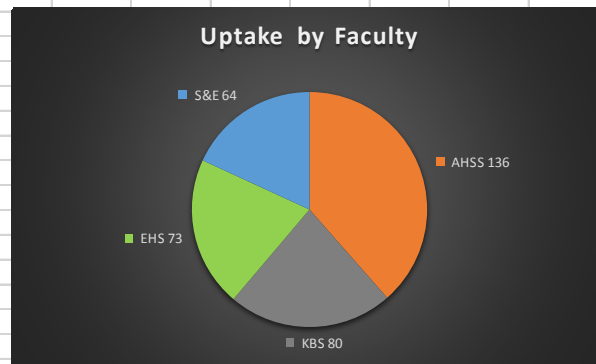


Figure 2 Peer-tutoring statistics for spring 2019

Appendix B: Publications and Presentations

Publications

Cleary, L. (2019) 'At the centre of changing contexts: a writing for life centre' in Essid, J. and McTague, B., eds., *Writing Centers at the Center of Change*, New York: Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429425158> [accessed 01/10/2019].

O'Sullivan, Í., Tighe-Mooney, S., Lenihan, A. and Farrell, A. (2018) 'An introduction to tutoring in the writing centre', *AISHE Academic Practice Guidelines no. 06*, available: <http://www.aishe.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/6-Tutoring-in-the-Writing-Centre.pdf> [accessed 01/10/2019].

Presentations

Fitzpatrick, M., O'Riordan, F., McAvinia, C., O'Sullivan, Í., Rísquez, A. and Keane, M. (2018) 'Motivations, outcomes and implications of structured professional development for academic developers: a collaborative approach', presented at *23rd SEDA Annual Conference*, Birmingham, 15-16 November.

Girgensohn, K., Eriksson, A-M. and O'Sullivan, Í. (2019) 'A cross-national view on the organisational perspective of writing centre work: the Writing Centre Exchange Project (WCEP)', presented at *EATAW 2019 – Academic Writing at Intersections*, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2-4 July.

O'Riordan, F., Fitzpatrick, M., O'Sullivan, Í., Rísquez, A., McAvinia, C. and Keane, M. (2018) 'Structured professional development for academic developers: a collaborative approach', presented at *International Conference on Engaging Pedagogy (ICEP)*, Dublin City University, Dublin, 14-16 December.

O'Sullivan, Í., Girgensohn, K. and Eriksson, A-M. (2019) 'WCEP: writing centre exchange project', presented at *International Writing Researchers' Consortium: Co-Exploring International Writing Research and Rehearsing Scholarly Performances, Conference on College, Composition and Communication's Annual Convention*, Pittsburgh, USA, 13-16 March.

O'Sullivan, Í., Girgensohn, K., Gustafsson, M., Leijen, D., Ganobcsik-Williams, L. and Farrell A. (2018) 'International writing centre pedagogy within different institutional contexts: mapping institutional models of support for writing across Europe', presented at *EARLI SIG Writing Conference*, University of Antwerp, Belgium, 29-31 August.