

Learning Enhancement Team

Annual Report 2015/16



The Learning Enhancement Team currently are:

Head of the Team

Dr Jeremy Schildt (1fte)

Tutors for Mathematics and statistics

Dr Gordon Collins (0.2fte) Dr Luciana Davila-Smith (0.6fte)
Athina Thoma (0.4fte)

Tutors for academic writing, study skills and international students

Chris Bishop (1fte) Zoe Jones (0.6fte)
Dr Judith Stewart (0.1fte) Jacqueline Wild (0.1fte)
Dr Nonia Williams-Korteling (0.2fte)

Tutors for Specific Learning Difficulties

Dr Simon Andrews (0.9fte) Calvin Hoy (0.9fte)

Tutor for Peer-led learning

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Overview

This report sets out our contribution to the University's commitment to providing the highest quality teaching and to supporting and enhancing the student learning experience.

Working with students at all levels of study, our role provides exposure to all disciplinary perspectives and contexts. Learning Enhancement Tutors work with students in the areas of academic writing and study skills, and mathematics and statistics, and have specialist expertise in supporting students from a range of educational and cultural backgrounds, and those with Specific Learning Difficulties, and in peer-led learning. Appendix 1 sets out some of the key principles underpinning our work.

Who did we see?

In 2015/16 Learning Enhancement Tutors saw around 18% of UEA's undergraduate and taught postgraduate students and 10% of UEA's research students.¹

Attendance at appointments and workshops by²:

- *Fee status* 74% Home/EU and 18% International (compared with 78% and 20% respectively at UEA).
- *Gender* 33% male and 62% female (compared with 39% and 61% respectively at UEA).

¹ In 2015/16 we recorded 7185 attendances at tutorials and workshops by 2701 individuals, compared with 6478 and 2375 respectively in 2014/15.

² Note: details of fee status and gender were missing for some of the students we saw in this reporting year (8% and 5% respectively).

- *Age* 48% 17-21 years (compared with 60% at UEA³).
- *Level* 74% UG, 22% PGT and 4% PGR (compared with 75%, 18% and 8% respectively at UEA⁴).

What did we work on with students?

- Nearly three quarters of appointments addressed academic writing and study skills.
- Just over a fifth of appointments addressed mathematics and statistics. The proportion addressing basic numerical skills remains low at 6%. Difficulties with numeracy remain widespread but support in this area is focused around workshop delivery – 31% of workshops addressed numeracy. Appointments focussed on calculus and higher topics (49%), Algebra (24%) and statistics (19%).

Resource development

In this year we continued to produce [self-help resources](#) covering a wide range of aspects of academic writing and study skills, and mathematics and statistics. Development of these resources helps us to meet growing demand, supports the delivery of workshops and tutorials, and provides students with choice over when, where and how they learn.

³ UEA 2014/15 figure.

⁴ UEA 2014/15 figure.

Appointments [\(drop-ins and tutorials\)](#)

It is clear that the opportunity to work one-to-one and in small groups with Learning Enhancement Tutors plays a key role in many students' academic development at UEA. Students tell us that the service we provide is vital in helping them to build confidence and independence, and to improve their performance. In 2015-16 we saw 783 individual UG students in appointments (excluding workshops); of these students 176 completed their degree in that year and 89% achieved Good Honours.

Student feedback

'My last essay was only 50% and the most recent one was 85% so you have helped so much with me being able to get better marks.' *UG SCI*

'The Learning Enhancement Team [...] enlightened me on how to think critically, which is at the heart of academic study in the UK [...] 'how to think critically' is the most valuable treasure I have gained from UEA.' *PG HUM*

'I began group tutorials for maths [...] with a strong sense of fear and stress about one of my mathematical modules. [...] The tutor's] enthusiasm about what he was teaching us made me enjoy, rather than fear, learning it, and I began to look forward to the sessions.' *UG SCI*

'I've written my very first critical analysis [...] using all that you taught me about planning my work, criticism and essay structure. I'm pleased with my work and I hope the marker will be too.' *PG PSY*

Appointments by Faculty

Figure 1 (overleaf) shows the proportion of LET appointments by Faculty:

- Proportions for the Faculties of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, and Science remained consistent with 2014/15
- We continued to see a disproportionately high number of appointments taken up by students in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMH). However, this proportion fell from 34% in 2014/15 to 31% in 2015/16.
 - o As in 2014/15, just over 90% of FMH appointments were for students in the School of Health Sciences (HSC) and over 60% of HSC appointments addressed aspects of academic writing.

During 2015/16 LET and HSC staff worked closely to explore ways of managing this demand more effectively and proactively. We

- o established regular meetings between LET staff, the HSC Teaching Director, assessment leads and module organisers;
- o reviewed formative assessment tasks and summative assessment guidelines;
- o developed workshops and learning resources for key assignments including using examples of student work to improve students' assessment literacy and self-efficacy;
- o identified new CPD initiatives for academic staff.

Implementation will be focussed on the 2016/17 and 2017/18 cohorts and will be reported in future LET reports.

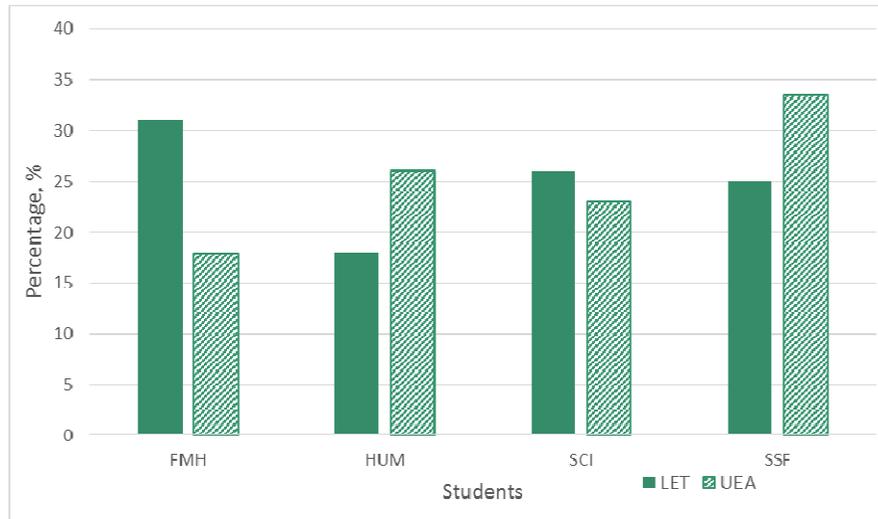


Figure 1: Proportion of LET appointments by Faculty, compared with proportion of UEA student population by Faculty.

Workshops

In 2015/16 we recorded more than 3600 attendances at workshops from more than 1800 individual students across all four UEA Faculties. In this period attendances at workshops accounted for half of our engagement with students; this figure rises to 75% for mathematics support.

Most of our workshop delivery uses an **embedded model** that involves co-design and co-teaching in close collaboration with programme and module staff across sixteen Schools of Studies. These workshops are context-specific and curriculum-integrated.

'One of the great things about the LET approach is how it can be tailored to match a particular School [using] bespoke activities which speak directly to students' interests.' *DEV*

'The space these sessions afford students for individual discussions within the framework of a structured class programme is very beneficial.' *PPL*

'As a result of their [LET] input, the MA students have improved their performance and have gained considerably on a number of skills and competencies.' *EDU*

Embedded workshops: feedback from academic staff

We also deliver a [programme of academic skills workshops](#) open to all students on taught programmes. For postgraduate research students we provide [writers' groups](#) and contribute to personal and professional development programmes in the areas of writing development, critical thinking, time management and presenting, cross-cultural communication, and the supervisory relationship.

In addition, we oversee the University's [Peer Assisted Learning scheme](#) and commission the delivery of the [English Language Support Programme](#) by INTO UEA.

Staff development

Learning Enhancement Tutors provide a range of workshops for staff at UEA to explore and enhance areas of teaching practice:

- Teaching International Students
- Supporting students with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and ADHD
- Teaching Writing
- Teaching for Critical Thinking
- Helping students concerned about memory difficulties

'Thank you – extremely beneficial – gone away inspired! Lots of ideas to try in practice.'

'A really stimulating approach [...] which will yield improvements in my techniques.'

Participant feedback 2016

Learning and Teaching Enhancement

We develop a range of initiatives that are research-led and aimed at improving the quality of teaching and enhancing the student learning experience at UEA.

1. Writing self-efficacy and wellbeing

In 2016 Universities UK launched a new programme of work to encourage universities to address mental health and wellbeing across all areas of teaching and support. In the area of writing development, research shows that university students may experience feelings of writing anxiety, alienation and isolation

(Huerta *et al.* 2016; Bowstead, 2009). We have developed a range of responses that are designed to help foster writing self-efficacy and nurture a sense of wellbeing. These practices acknowledge that "academic writing is a social and cultural act" (Clughen and Hardy, 2012: xii) and provide physical and mental spaces for producing writing that are collaborative, creative and student-led.

2. Assessment & Feedback

Using exemplars to develop students' assessment literacy

Many students lack familiarity with university-level assessments and research suggests that written descriptions of criteria can be difficult to understand (O'Donovan *et al.* 2004). The use of exemplars is considered good practice in helping to make clear for students what is expected of them and, it has been shown, can lead to improved understanding of criteria and standards, increased self-efficacy and higher achievement (To and Carless, 2015; Hendry *et al.* 2012; Rust *et al.* 2003). We have developed an approach to using exemplars that combines opportunities for peer-to-peer and teacher-led discussion of examples of student work in class with subsequent online access to short videos containing tutor commentary. This approach is being trialled with undergraduate students at different levels and on a range of degree programmes. It is a collaborative project led by Dr Jeremy Schildt and involving members of the Learning Enhancement Team, the Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning and academic staff.

What makes feedback learner-centred?

Improving student satisfaction and engagement with feedback has become a priority at UEA and many other HEIs in recent years. Research has emphasised the importance of feedback as an inclusive, learner-centred process (Nicol, 2010). We addressed this theme in our UEALT16 session, developing an exercise and set of resources for exploring what makes feedback learner-centred.

'Great insights into student perspectives on feedback.'

'Will make changes to the feedback process, certainly.'

'I'll rethink my assessment feedback instruments.'

'After exercise in group have found way to [...] make my assessment have more learner specific feedback.'

Participant feedback UEALT16 'What makes feedback learner-centred?'

3. Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)

Oversight of [the University's PAL scheme](#) moved to the Learning Enhancement Team in August 2016. PAL is a student-led initiative in which current students work in participating Schools of Studies as PAL Officers and PAL Mentors to support undergraduate students in their first year at university. Our tutor for Peer-led learning is currently developing an evaluative framework for PAL that links closely to the research of national and international peer learning networks, and conducting a mapping exercise of other peer learning initiatives across the University.

Continuing professional development

In 2015/16 LET staff were active members and participants of a range of UEA committees including the Learning and Teaching Committee, Taught Programmes Policy Group and ISD Education Board, the organising committee for Learning and Teaching Day, and the Supporting Academic Transitions group.

We continued to engage with wider professional communities through a range of national and international associations and networks, including the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education, the Sigma network for excellence in mathematics and statistics support, the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing, the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes, the Writing Development in Higher Education network, and the Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties.

LET staff achieved recognition in this year for the professionalism they bring to teaching and support for student learning with Higher Education Academy Fellowship.⁵

Dr Jeremy Schildt, January 2017

⁵ Zoe Jones FHEA and Chris Bishop SFHEA.

Reference list

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Appendix 1: Learning Enhancement at UEA

Units such as UEA's Learning Enhancement Team are recognised as an important part of the increasingly diverse HE landscape, providing a field of practice and research dedicated to supporting and enhancing learning for all students. Working with students at all levels of study, our role provides exposure to all disciplinary perspectives and contexts at UEA. Learning Enhancement Tutors work with students in the areas of academic writing and study skills, and mathematics and statistics, and have specialist expertise in supporting students from a range of educational and cultural backgrounds, and those with Specific Learning Difficulties, and in peer-led learning.

Academic writing and study skills

We aim to build student confidence in their ability to reach their potential and to empower them to take responsibility for their own learning. Importantly, we demystify the University and its practices in order to be inclusive to all students, whatever their personal, cultural and educational background. Starting from where students are and what they can already do, tutorials follow an exploratory approach aimed at equipping students with strategies and tools to help them to take their work further on their own.

Mathematics and statistics

Our approach is inclusive for tutors, lecturers and students. New workshops are created after consultation with lecturers with the models of delivery chosen to best suit the needs of students. Existing workshops are refined after feedback from students and tutors. Resources are made in a highly collaborative way and topics are chosen due to student demand or to support new workshops. Tutorials are led by students and the work or topic areas they bring along.

Specific Learning Difficulties

Our tuition creates a supportive learning space for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) that reflects their particular ways of working and offers strategies that are paced to build confidence and motivation. We follow a pedagogic strategy enshrined in the SpLD literature and community that pays particular attention to the areas of phonological skills, memory and processing speed. Our approach encourages self-awareness and makes use of multisensory methods to fully engage students with the materials offered.