Learning Enhancement Team,
Dean of Students' Office UEA

Report 2009-2011

About the Learning Enhancement Team
The Learning Enhancement Team (LET) works with students at various points of transition and development in their academic journey. Our aim is to empower students to become more independent and effective learners. Our tutors provide expert guidance in three key areas:

- study skills
- academic writing, including use of English
- the mathematical and statistical elements of courses.

We offer free and confidential advice to all students registered on UEA courses. This includes specialist expertise in supporting international students. We are available during term time and all holiday periods when the University is open.

The Learning Enhancement Team are currently:

Dr Jeremy Schildt, Head of the Learning Enhancement Team
Dr Robert Jenkins, Learning Enhancement Tutor for Mathematics & Statistics
Chris Bishop, Learning Enhancement Tutor
Zoe Jones, Learning Enhancement Tutor
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About the report
This report covers usage and activity over the period 1st September 2009 to 31st August 2011. It also makes reference to the period 1st September 2008 to 31st August 2009 as data not previously accessible for this period has recently become available.

The report sets out the nature of our contribution to the University's commitment to enhance the student learning experience and improve student retention and success. In doing so, it highlights a number of issues relating to learning and teaching at UEA. The findings are organised in three sections to reflect the three key strands of the service we provide.

Contents

Drop-ins and tutorials

> 'The tutor was exceptional. He was very helpful and brilliant at taking you through mathematical problems step by step.' *UG Science student*

Overview
A key aspect of our service is one-to-one appointments. These include drop-in hours during which students can find out more about our service and how we may be able to help them. Individual (and small group) tutorials offer more in-depth, personal support in developing particular skills. Further details can be found at www.uea.ac.uk/dos/let/tutorials.

The number of appointments delivered has increased significantly over the past three years. So, in 2010/11 the team delivered 2229 appointments, 130% more than in 2008/9. Over this period there was also an 85% increase in the number of individual students seen from 346 to 640 (or from around 2.6% to 4.6% of the total UEA population).

The demand for appointments now extends right across the academic year, including over the summer vacation (see Figure 1 below). At times students have experienced a wait of between one and two weeks for a tutorial appointment. The bunching of deadlines is a contributory factor here and staggering these may help to ease some of this congestion.

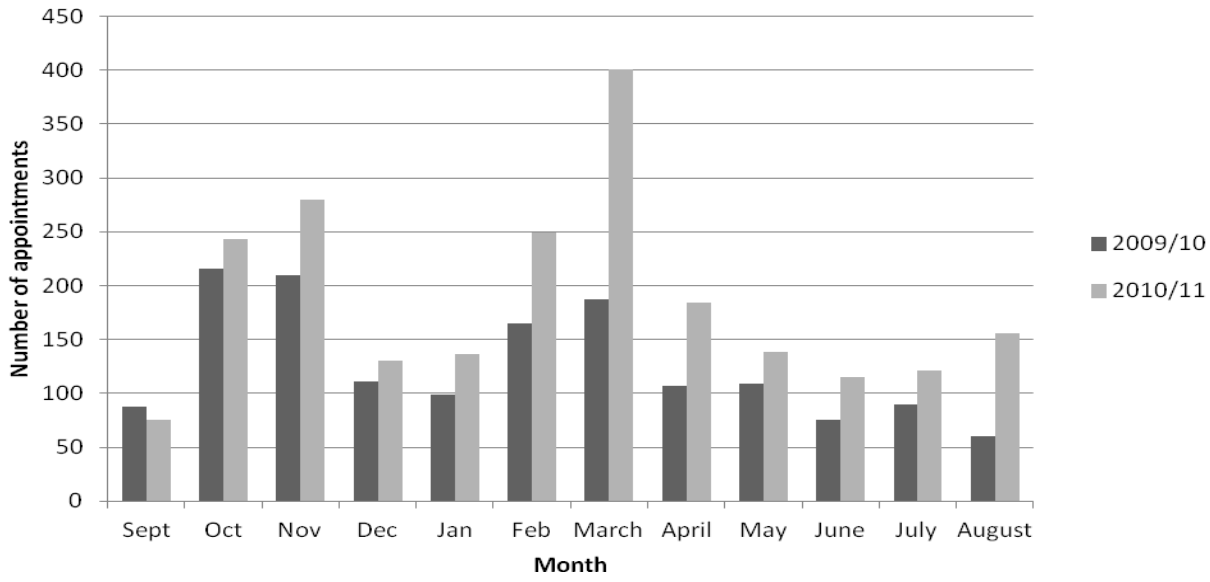

Figure 1: Number of LET appointments by month in 2009/10 and 2010/11

Who is attending LET drop-ins and tutorials?
Approximately two thirds of the appointments between 1st September 2009 and 31st August 2011 were delivered to women and one third to men, and nearly three quarters of the appointments were delivered to those aged 22 years and over. Compared to the UEA population we see a relatively low proportion of men and those aged 17-21 years.

There is no evidence to suggest that those from 'harder to reach' groups are failing to access the service. For instance, in 2009/10, 29% of our appointments were delivered to students from minority ethnic backgrounds. This figure rose to 40% in 2010/11. In the same year 14% of our appointments were delivered to students with a specific learning difficulty or other disability (approximately 6% of UEA students declared a disability in that year). While the majority of students with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia are supported by the DOS Dyslexia team, some students are referred for specialist guidance to the LET.

We continue to offer advice via email to those students working away from the University and who cannot attend appointments in person. In future, we hope to make use of web conferencing software such as Elluminate to extend the tutorial experience to such students.

In comparison with the UEA population our data shows that we see a disproportionately high number of international students (approximately 32% in 2010/11 compared with 14% across UEA). These figures reflect the fact that we have two Learning Enhancement Tutors with particular expertise in supporting students who are non-native speakers and/ or have little experience of UK academic conventions and expectations.

Analysis of our appointments data reveals a statistically significant variation in use by School. For instance, we saw a significantly high frequency of use by students from AHP in 2009/10 and from DEV in 2010/11. When we have noted a high demand from students from particular Schools we have endeavoured to work with them to develop School specific provision such as workshops, which has helped to address this issue.

Lastly, our appointments data provides clear evidence that over the last three years we have worked with students from across the full range of ability and levels of study. Approximately 35% of appointments were with students on postgraduate taught and research degree programmes. In 2010/11 7% of the University's postgraduate population had at least one appointment with a Learning Enhancement Tutor. This compares with a figure of 2.4% at undergraduate level. At that level, as Figure 3, below, shows, 65% of the students we saw went on to achieve an Upper Second Class or First Class degree classification.

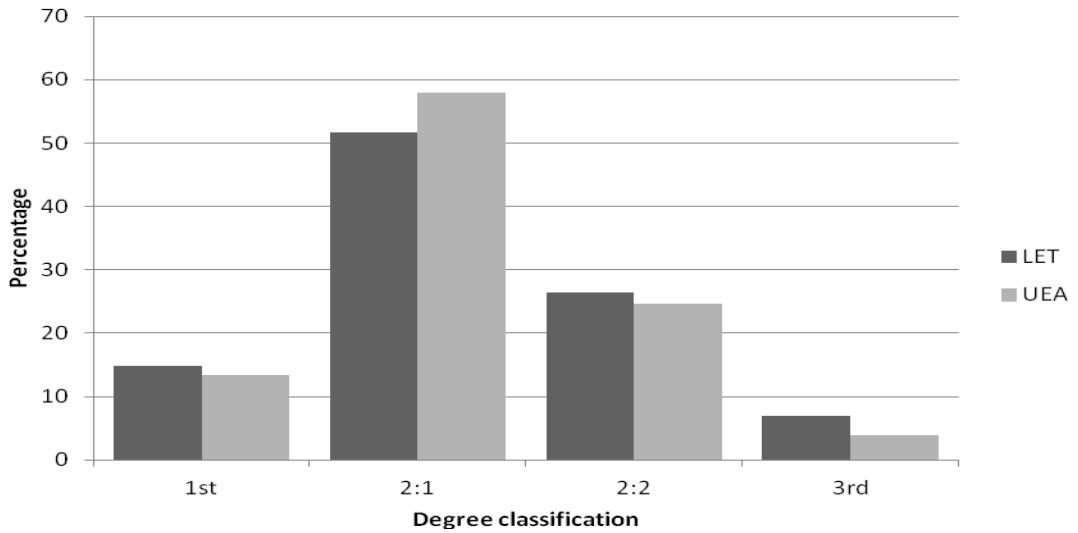

Figure 2: Final degree classifications 2008/9 to 2010/11*

What are we working with students on?
It is well known that students often experience transition and development difficulties around aspects of mathematics, academic writing and study skills. Between 1st September 2009 and 31st August 2011, 52% of appointments addressed study skills and academic writing, while 40% of appointments addressed topics in mathematics and statistics. Of the latter, 80% of appointments concerned topics in mathematics (numeracy, algebra, calculus and higher topics) and 16% in statistics.

In the area of mathematics support, 22% of appointments addressed basic numerical skills covering sub-GCSE content.[1] A further 30% of the mathematics support addressed topics in algebra at a level roughly equivalent to GCSE.[2] Issues with numeracy and low-level algebra are no longer restricted to NSC and some PHA students but are becoming more widespread in ENV, CHE and BIO. In contrast, 26% of appointments dealt with higher topics in mathematics.[3]

In the areas of study skills and academic writing 39% of appointments focussed on issues related to planning and drafting written texts. Many students view the essay (or report, or dissertation etc) as a product rather than as a process, and may be unaware that the skills they need to develop are not exclusively those to do with writing. Assessment that draws attention to the essay as a writing process involving also research, synthesis, analysis and critique could help here.

* The figures for LET show the degree classifications (as a percentage) achieved by the undergraduate students who accessed our service between 1st September 2008 and 31st August 2011 and who had graduated by November 2011. The UEA figures show the degree classifications (as a percentage) achieved by all undergraduate students in these years.
[1] Including addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, percentages, operations with fractions, decimal numbers, powers of 10, converting units, BODMAS.
[2] Including factorisation, expanding brackets, rearranging, simultaneous equations, straight lines, trigonometry, logarithms, algebraic fractions, quadratic functions/ expressions.
[3] Such as matrices, vectors, linear algebra, group theory, complex numbers, differential equations, hydrodynamics.

A further 20% of appointments addressed issues of writing style and grammar. These issues have taken increasing prominence, so that in 2009/10 10% of appointments in the areas of study skills and academic writing concerned style and grammar, rising to 26% in 2010/11. Here, it should be noted that guidance was given on English language issues and on academic style to both native and non-native speakers.

The broader issues that shape the nature of the demand for our service include the disjunction between post-16 education and Higher Education, of which many UK students are unaware and/ or are unprepared for. Here, we welcome the recent talks between UEA and the exam board AQA, especially the opportunity it has afforded UEA staff from across a range of subject areas to consider what it is we expect of students entering our programmes of study and what we mean by key concepts such as 'critical thinking'. Many international students still need to develop their English language skills concurrently with their full-time programme of study if they are to meet fully the demands of degree-level study in the UK; this challenge is particularly acute for Master's students. What is more, as recent research has indicated, the period taken to make the transition into Higher Education study can extend well beyond the first semester/ year.[4] For many students, being able to access an appointment or series of appointments with a Learning Enhancement Tutor is critical to their ability to manage this transition and to succeed in their studies.

[4] For a recent survey of this literature see Ed Foster, Sarah Lawther and Jane McNeil, 'Learning Developers Supporting Early Student Transition', in *Learning Development in Higher Education*, ed. by P. Hartley et al (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 79-90.

Workshops

> 'I structured my entire dissertation during the workshop. It was incredibly useful.' *UG Arts student*

Overview
Working in close collaboration with Library Services, Faculties and Schools, over the last two years we have established a full and varied programme of workshops that continues to expand.

In the areas of academic writing and study skills, 131 workshops were delivered in 2010/11, an increase of 30% on 2009/10. Our central programme, delivered in the Library and developed in collaboration with the Information Skills Librarian, is aimed at those on taught programmes. Over the last two years it has developed three strands:

- a series of weekly sessions on academic writing and study skills running through the Autumn and Spring semesters
- workshops on revision skills and exam technique beginning in February
- dissertation workshops beginning in May.

Further information is available at www.uea.ac.uk/dos/let/workshops.

In this period we also contributed to Faculty Personal and Professional Development programmes for postgraduate research students. The focus of our work here has been on helping international students make the transition into UK academic culture and English academic writing.

In the areas of mathematics and statistics, in 2010/11 125 workshops were delivered with 853 attendees, a rise of 56% and 45% respectively on the previous year. In this period, in consultation with tutors in NSC, the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Mathematics and Statistics developed a live interactive numeracy test for the new intakes of Nursing and Midwifery students. This test provided, for the first time, a detailed measure of mathematical skill and numerical competency at the level of the individual student and the cohort. In the School of Mathematics, we continued to support the peer-guided group learning initiative for the first year module, 'Analysis and Algebra', providing training for new peer mentors.

The bulk of our workshop activity involves the development of tailored sessions for particular Schools. These sessions are developed through close collaboration with members of academic staff and embedded in particular degree courses or modules. In July 2011 we received requests for around 350 hours of workshops to be delivered in 2011/12 from eighteen Schools (AHP, AMS, BIO, CHE, DEV, ECO, EDU, ENV, FTV, LCS, LDC, MED, MTH, NBS, NSC, PHA, PSI, SWP).

Study Guides

The Learning Enhancement Team study guides are self-help resources covering many aspects of academic writing and study skills and a wide range of topics in mathematics and statistics.

During 2010/11 we explored new ways of presenting these resources that offer important advantages in terms of pedagogy and accessibility. Using the online presentation tool Prezi, the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Mathematics built interactive web-based mind maps for the 'Steps into Algebra' and 'Steps into Trigonometry' guides.[5] Each of the study guides was recorded as a web-cast and embedded into the Prezi via Youtube. A path was created that provides students with the option to be guided through the content. This approach helps to reveal the underlying connections between groups of topics and makes the content available in a variety of ways. In this instance, in addition to the paper copy, study guides were available via QR-codes, Prezi, Youtube and the LET website as a pdf or an mp4 video. Importantly, these developments help to ensure equality of access to our resources for students with specific learning difficulties and those who may only be able to access the service out of office hours, including part-time students and those working away from the University.

[5] See http://prezi.com/yiwi94q8b_br/steps-into-algebra-mind-map/ and http://prezi.com/xx9s9ksxtenl/steps-into-trigonometry/.

Conclusions and future developments

This report has charted the considerable rise in demand for the service we offer across a three year period, for which there are clear resource implications. As the table below shows, the size of the permanent tutor team grew from 2.5 FTE in 2008/9 to 3.17 FTE in 2010/11. In addition, since August 2009 we have made increasing use of a small group of sessional tutors.[6] Notwithstanding these important increases in staffing, a full time equivalent LET tutor saw an increase in his/her appointments workload of 39% between 1st September 2008 and the 31st August 2011.

Year	Number of appointments* (Sessional tutor appointments)†	Permanent tutors (FTE)	Number of appointments per full-time tutor
2008/9	970 (0)	2.5	388
2009/10	1517 (66)	2.82	514
2010/11	2229 (513)	3.17	541

Table 1: LET appointments 2008/9 to 2010/11
* Total number of appointments delivered.
† Number of appointments delivered by sessional tutors.

What is more, this increase in demand for appointments and in tutor workload must be seen in the context of three further developments:

- The demand for appointments now extends right across the academic year, including over the summer vacation, making it increasingly difficult to find sufficient time for development work.
- Pressure on the service is particularly acute in the areas of mathematics and statistics which are now relatively under resourced.[7]
- The other core activities of the team, including the preparation and delivery of workshops and the development of study resources, have also expanded appreciably over this period in response to increasing demand. In addition, in 2010/11 we assumed responsibility for the administration of the University's English Language Support Programme, as well as agreeing syllabuses with colleagues from INTO, who deliver the classes.[8]

[6] Part-time temporary staff recruited to expand the capacity and flexibility of the service. Sessional tutors are involved in all aspects of the service, from the delivery of tutorial appointments and workshops to the development of study resources.
[7] In 2010/11 40% of LET appointments addressed topics in mathematics and statistics. In comparison, only 28% of the permanent tutor FTE is able to provide support in these areas.
[8] This aspect of the work of the LET will be separately reported later this semester.

The team has worked increasingly efficiently and flexibly to respond to the rising demand for our service. Looking ahead, under current staffing levels, there is limited capacity for growing the service further. In order to help address this issue our future priorities include:

- To continue to make use of small group tutorials where appropriate.
- To continue to utilise sessional tutors effectively.
- To work closely with Schools to carefully plan embedded workshop activities.
- To expand the range of study guide materials presented online and in a variety of formats.
- To investigate the possibility of establishing further peer mentoring initiatives.

Jeremy Schildt, January 2012.