

**Learning Enhancement Team,
Dean of Students' Office UEA**

Report 2011/12

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

Nicholas Wright, Learning Enhancement Tutor

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About the report

This report covers usage and activity over the period 1st September 2011 to 31st August 2012. For comparison it also draws on data from the last reporting period, covering the academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11.

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

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Summary

Activity in 2011/12

- The number of appointments delivered increased for the fourth consecutive year to nearly 2500.
- There were around 4800 attendances at 350 hours of workshops in the autumn and spring semesters.
- We produced nearly 10,000 paper copies of our study guides on aspects of study skills, academic writing, mathematics and statistics.

Drop-ins and tutorials

'I really think I would have given up hope (and maybe even the entire course ...). Your support and input has been very valuable for me not only on an academic level.' *BSC Midwifery student*

A key aspect of our service is one-to-one and small group 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.

Table 1 charts the considerable year-on-year rise in demand for appointments with a Learning Enhancement Tutor since September 2008. The academic year 2011/12 again saw a rise in the number of appointments delivered and individual students seen (of 11% and 4% respectively).¹

| Year | Number of appointments* (Sessional tutor appointments) [†] | Number of individuals seen | Permanent tutors (FTE) | Number of appointments per full-time tutor |
|---------|---|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| 2008/9 | 970 (0) | 346 | 2.5 | 388 |
| 2009/10 | 1517 (66) | 523 | 2.82 | 514 |
| 2010/11 | 2229 (513) | 640 | 3.17 ² | 541 |
| 2011/12 | 2477 (712) | 668 | 3.5 | 504 |

Table 1: LET appointments 2008/9 to 2011/12

* Total number of appointments delivered.

[†] Total number of appointments delivered by sessional tutors (part-time temporary staff).

Demand for appointments 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 remains a contributory factor here and staggering these may help to ease some of this congestion.

¹ Relatively small increases were predicted in last year's report where we identified a limited capacity for growing the service further under current staffing levels.

² The post of Head of Team was vacant between December 2010 and March 2011.

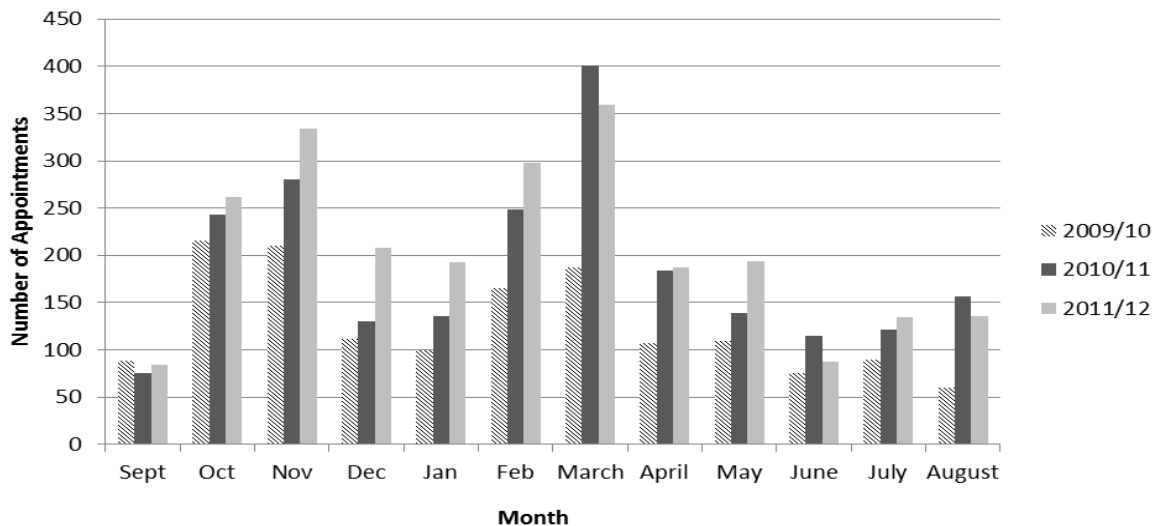


Figure 1: Number of LET appointments by month in 2009/10, 2010/11 & 2011/12.

The increase in demand for appointments needs to be seen in the context of a number of further developments:

- Increasing use of small group tutorials where appropriate to make more effective use of our appointment times.
- Continued expansion of the other core activities of the team (the preparation and delivery of workshops and the development of study resources).
- Provision of tutorial appointments in academic writing and study skills by Dyslexia Tutors in the Dean of Students' Office and Royal Literary Fellows (see discussion of UEA Study Advice in 'Future Developments', below).

Who is attending LET drop-ins and tutorials?

We provided appointments to students from all four faculties at UEA, from Foundation Year students to postgraduate researchers, part- and full-time, home and international students. In particular, compared with the UEA population we continue to see:

- A disproportionately high number of international students (26% compared with 18% across UEA)³
- A disproportionately high number of postgraduate taught and research degree students (32% compared with 24% across UEA). Approximately 7% of the University's postgraduate population had at least one appointment with a Learning Enhancement Tutor, compared with 5% at undergraduate level.
- A relatively low proportion of men and those aged 17-21 years (32% and 26% respectively, compared with 43% and 64% across UEA). In contrast, workshop

³ These figures reflect that we have 1.6 FTE tutors who, while offering appointments for all UEA students, have particular expertise in supporting students who are non-native speakers and/ or have little experience of UK academic conventions and expectations.

attendance by men and those aged 17-21 appears to be much higher (approximately 42% and 76% respectively).⁴

There is no evidence to suggest that those from 'harder to reach' groups are failing to access the service. As in 2010/11, the percentage of appointments delivered to students from minority ethnic backgrounds has remained at 40% and for students with a specific learning difficulty or other disability at 14%.⁵

Analysis of our appointments data reveals a statistically significant variation in use by School of Study. For instance, we continue to see a significantly high frequency of use by students from AHP, DEV, CHE, ECO and PHA, and a significantly low frequency of use by students from LAW, LDC and HIS. A number of factors may influence usage by School:

- Delivery of LET workshops e.g. we support compulsory classes in mathematics and statistics for undergraduates in PHA and students on the Science Foundation Year.
- Availability of alternative sources of support e.g. Royal Literary Fellows.
- Difficulties students may have with particular modules.
- Disjunction between post-16 education and Higher Education, especially in the Sciences and Economics.

We continue to work with Module Convenors, Teaching Directors and Heads of Schools where appropriate to address these issues.

What are we working with students on?

It is well known that students often experience transition and development difficulties around aspects of study skills, academic writing and mathematics. 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.

Around 62% of appointments addressed study skills and academic writing, while 38% of appointments addressed topics in mathematics and statistics. Of the latter, approximately 85% of appointments concerned topics in mathematics (numeracy, algebra, calculus and higher topics) and 15% in statistics.

- **Study skills and academic writing** 35% of appointments focused on issues related to planning and drafting written texts. A further 20% of appointments

⁴ These figures are based on the 2340 workshop attendances registered in our appointments system Appointments Pro (see footnote 9 below).

⁵ The majority of students with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia are supported by the Dyslexia Tutors in the Dean of Students' Office.

addressed writing style and grammar. Here, guidance was given on English language issues and on academic style to both native and non-native speakers.

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 a number of stages (e.g. planning, drafting, revising) and different skills (e.g. research, synthesis and critique) could help here. The New Academic Model offers an opportunity to explore this through formative assessment.

- **Mathematics** 15% of appointments addressed basic numerical skills covering sub-GCSE content.⁶ A further 23% of the mathematics support addressed topics in algebra at a level roughly equivalent to GCSE.⁷ Difficulties with numeracy and low-level algebra are now widespread among students in BIO, CHE, ENV, NBS, NSC and PHA. In contrast, 27% of appointments dealt with higher topics in mathematics.⁸

Workshops

'Very keen and committed tutor. Would recommend these workshops.
Wish I'd done some sooner in my Masters!
PG Film, Television and Media Studies student

The Learning Enhancement Team works in close collaboration with Library Services, Faculties and Schools to deliver a full and varied programme of workshops for UG, PGT and PGR students that continues to expand. In the year 2011/12 we recorded over 4800 attendances at these workshops.⁹

⁶ Including addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, percentages, operations with fractions, decimal numbers, powers of 10, converting units, BODMAS.

⁷ Including factorisation, expanding brackets, rearranging, simultaneous equations, straight lines, trigonometry, logarithms, algebraic fractions, quadratic functions/ expressions.

⁸ Such as matrices, vectors, linear algebra, group theory, complex numbers, differential equations, hydrodynamics.

⁹ 2340 workshop attendances were registered in Appointments Pro and the remaining numbers were drawn from class lists. 2011/12 was the first year in which we began recording workshop attendances across the team. We aim to use Appointments Pro more consistently for the future.

The bulk of our workshop activity takes place in the autumn semester and involves the development of tailored sessions that are 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 skills and academic writing** In addition to tailored sessions we continued to develop our central programme in collaboration with the Information Skills Librarian (see www.uea.ac.uk/dos/let/workshops) and to extend our contributions to Faculty Personal and Professional Development programmes for postgraduate research students. The focus of our workshops for PGRs has been on helping international students make the transition into UK academic culture and English academic writing. However, we also see home students at these sessions.
- **Mathematics** Week one of the autumn semester saw 400 workshop attendances and this figure did not drop below 100 until week 9. Across the semester there were over 1500 attendances at workshops embedded in particular modules in BIO, CHE, DEV, ECO, ENV, NBS and PHA for Foundation Year and Undergraduate students.

Study Guides and other resources

The Learning Enhancement Team produces a wide range of self-help resources covering many aspects of study skills, academic writing, mathematics and statistics. These resources are available in a variety of ways, for instance via QR codes, Prezi, Youtube, our website and in hard copy from the Dean of Students' Office.

- **Study Guides** Nearly 10,000 paper copies of our study guides were produced for students in this reporting period (approximately 7600 addressing aspects of study skills and academic writing, and 2350 on topics in mathematics and statistics). These guides were also available online and the webpages containing the study guides received over 5,500 page views. In 2011/12 considerable additions were made to the guides in mathematics and statistics, including the development of accompanying worksheets and model answers (see www.uea.ac.uk/services/students/let/maths_stats).
- **Interactive mind maps** The Learning Enhancement Tutor for Mathematics and Statistics has continued to make use of the online presentation tool Prezi to build interactive web based mind maps for topic areas in mathematics. In

2011/12 these resources received 1642 views (see, for example, http://prezi.com/yiwi94q8b_br/steps-into-algebra-mind-map/).

- **Videos** In summer 2012 we made a series of short films in which six current students talk about the problems they have faced with studying and the strategies they have used to overcome these. They were used successfully in talks and workshops in the autumn semester 2012 and have received over 250 views (see <http://www.youtube.com/uealet>).
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Other activities

- **Staff development** In 2011/12 our tutors developed and delivered workshops for CSED on 'Teaching International Students' and contributed to a session led by Jude Carroll (Oxford Brookes) on 'Cross-cultural Awareness and Communications in a diverse university'.
- **Learning & Teaching Day 2012** Chris Bishop (Learning Enhancement Tutor) delivered an interactive workshop entitled 'Engaging students through inclusive attitudes and approaches to English'.
- **LCS Public Lecture Series 2011/12** Annie Grant (Dean of Students), Judy Moore (Director of the University Counselling Service) and Chris Bishop presented 'Intercultural Communication in the Higher Education Context: a Case Study from the University of East Anglia'.
- **LCS-MC01 English, Communication and Culture** Chris Bishop convened this 20 credit module for students on the MA in Communication and Language Studies. Skills covered include seminar and presentation skills, note-taking, academic writing, self-directed study and research skills. An important aim of the module is to familiarise students with the conventions of English academic life and the environment of the university.
- **MTH-3D71 History of Mathematics** Robert Jenkins (Learning Enhancement Tutor for Mathematics and Statistics) is guest lecturer on this module for students on the Master of Mathematics course.
- **Sigma Mathematics Support Network** In March 2012 Robert Jenkins gave a presentation on 'Mathematics Support at UEA' to this association of staff and institutions providing mathematics and statistics support who are working together to share resources and experience.

Future developments

New initiatives 2012/13

- **Study Skills Toolkits on Blackboard** In July 2012 we purchased a one year licence to use some high quality online resources to help students develop their academic study skills. All students and academic staff can access these resources via the Academic Tab of the UEA Portal, under the module 'DOS-LET: Learning Enhancement Team'. Our aim during 2012/13 is to gather feedback from those who have used the resources, so that the university can review the case for investing in them longer term. Feedback from students and staff on these resources can be emailed to dos.help@uea.ac.uk.
- **UEA Study Advice** In January 2013 a group was formed of UEA staff who provide academic support to students and are based outside of the Schools of Study. Currently, this group includes Learning Enhancement Tutors, Mentors and Dyslexia Tutors within the Dean of Students' Office, Royal Literary Fellows and the Information Skills Librarian. Our aim is to improve communication and referral across our various services, and to share data, resources and best practice to enhance the support we provide to students.
- **Assessment and feedback** One very simple way of enhancing the quality and usefulness of feedback to UEA students is to link it more closely to our study guides. We have recently created a list of direct links to guides that address key areas of academic skills development so that colleagues can cut and paste links into the feedback they provide where appropriate. We are working with the Academic Director of Taught Programmes to distribute this document.
- **Writing groups for postgraduate research students** Jeremy Schildt (Head of LET) and Lydia Pell (Mental Health Co-ordinator) have recently been awarded a UEA Teaching Fellowship to set up writing groups for PGR students at the University. Work will begin on this project in September 2013. More information is available from Jeremy or Lydia.
- **Work experience in the communication of mathematics** In July 2012 three current UEA students began 24 week paid work experience placements with LET in the communication of mathematics. The first 12 weeks entailed project work focused on developing paper and web-based support materials. The second 12 week period overlapped with the autumn 2012 semester and involved the post holders working with LET tutors to help deliver workshops and tutorials.

Learning and teaching issues

- Substantial impact could be made on student retention and achievement by addressing at a strategic level the **numeracy** and **English language** support in place for students registered on UEA courses. We are keen to engage the University in a full review of support in these areas.
- In 2012/13 we have seen the use of **diagnostic tests** at UEA addressing certain academic skills in order to identify students needing remedial support. Support is then offered to those students scoring under a certain percentage mark (for whom attendance is compulsory). Whilst we recognise the potential value of such tests, we are keen that they are used to help students assess their competency and self-refer to support sessions. In our experience, support that fosters a spirit of inclusivity, that is offered on a voluntary basis and is not remedial is much more effective at creating a positive learning environment in which students can build their confidence.

LET staffing 2013/14

- **Mathematics and statistics** Pressure on the service remains particularly acute in the areas of mathematics and statistics, which are relatively under-resourced. In 2011/12, 38% of appointments addressed topics in these areas. In comparison, only 26% of the permanent tutor FTE is able to provide support in mathematics and statistics. Investment in an additional tutor in this area is essential if the University is to address the growing need for support in mathematics and statistics to enable students to access the curriculum effectively.
- **Sessional tutors** The service has become increasingly dependent on a small number of highly qualified and experienced sessional tutors who are involved in all aspects of the service. In 2011/12 sessional tutors delivered 29% of appointments (up from 23% in 2010/11 and 4% in 2009/10). The bulk of the budget for sessional tutors has come from external funding that comes to an end in July 2013.

Jeremy Schildt (Head of the Learning Enhancement Team) January 2013.