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Gender equality in mathematics support

Day 2 – Parallel IV (11.15-11.45)

In 2011, a major nationwide survey of first-year higher education students was undertaken in Ireland by the Irish Mathematics Learning Support Network. Although the original aim of this survey was to ascertain students' evaluation of mathematics support, preliminary analysis of the data showed significant differences in engagement with mathematics support by male and female students. Given that there were 1633 responses from nine different HEIs, which offer a range of different supports in various ways and deal with a wide mix of students, this was an unexpected outcome and it was decided to further investigate this. Therefore, the data was further analysed with a view to looking at the engagement levels of male and female students in different disciplines, as well as the reasons they gave for either using or not using mathematics support during their first year of higher education. The impact of mathematics support reported by male and female students was also studied to determine any differences. Finally, the suggestions given by non-users of mathematics support, when asked what might encourage them to engage with the service if needed, are analysed to see if gender differences emerge. The aim of the investigation as a whole was to find out if current models of mathematics support seem to favour female students more than males and if there are any adjustments that could be made to optimise the support services we offer in order to provide the best service to all students who may need it.