

CETL-MSOR Conference 2015

Anthony Cronin and Maria Meehan: Lecturers' views on the nature and relevance of qualitative feedback collected at a Maths Support Centre

The Maths Support Centre (MSC) in University College Dublin (UCD) is a busy centre with almost 6,000 student visits recorded in 2013-2014. Over the last 18 months we have been attempting to develop a data collection system that captures, for each visit, the mathematical difficulty for which the student sought help. One aim for collecting this qualitative data is as part of a PhD research project aimed at identifying and categorising the areas of basic mathematics that are causing students difficulty, and to source or develop appropriate supports as a result. A colleague will present on this project in another talk.

A second aim that we have for collecting this qualitative data is to provide feedback to lecturers on the types of issues their students are visiting the MSC with. To this end, the (anonymised) feedback is uploaded in real time to a dedicated page of the MSC website where it is organized by module code, and can be accessed via a personal password by the lecturer of the module. We wanted to find out whether lecturers of large first and second year groups found this MSC feedback useful, and in particular, if this feedback had, or had the potential to have, an impact on their practice.

During the first semester of 2014-2015, thirteen lecturers from the School of Mathematical Sciences and the School of Business agreed to participate in a research project that involved them accessing the feedback regularly and each taking part in three one-to-one interviews, held during weeks 4, 9 and 15 of the semester. In this talk we will present an analysis of these 39 interviews. We will discuss how these lecturers viewed the MSC feedback in the context of the other types of feedback that they reported receiving from students, and their thoughts on whether or how this feedback might impact their practice.

We will also discuss what level of detail they believe is needed in such feedback in order for it to be useful to them. This has important implications for our MSC in the future – we want to record qualitative data on each student visit that not only allows us to take an evidenced-based approach to support provision, but is also relevant to the lecturers. In a busy centre it is imperative that we can explain to tutors exactly what it is we would like them to record as succinctly as possible and to assist them in doing it as efficiently as possible. We will also give a description of a data-collection system we have developed and trialled in the first half of 2015 in order to help us achieve both of the above goals.