

## **CETL-MSOR Conference 2015**

### **Maura Clancy, Anthony Cronin, Cormac Breen, Diarmuid O'Sé and Jonathan Cole: Mathematics Learning Support in Ireland in 2015.**

*You can't be a big dreamer if you don't know where you are going. You can't know where you are going unless you first know where you are. [Israelmore Ayivor]*

The Irish Mathematics Learning Support Network (IMLSN) was established in 2009 to act as an informative community of practice for all those with an interest in the provision of mathematics and statistics support at third-level education in Ireland. The IMLSN constantly seeks to maximize the benefits of the IMLSN to maths learning support (MLS) practitioners. In order to inform the way forward it was felt that a comprehensive picture of the extent and nature of MLS provision at third-level in Ireland in 2015 was needed. An online survey was conducted to gather this data; the ultimate aim of the survey is to benefit all maths support practitioners in Ireland, in particular those in third-level institutions who require further support to enhance the mathematical learning experience of their students.

Particular contacts were identified in 32 institutions, including universities, institutes of technology and further education and teacher training colleges, and invited to complete an online survey. There was a 97% response rate – 31 out of the 32 institutions responded - so the survey provides a very accurate picture of the current situation.

An initial analysis shows that 84% of institutions have some form of MLS with a lack of funding being the main barrier for those without. Interestingly, in almost half (45%) of those institutions with a MLS centre, the centre is subject to annual review.

Securing and retaining enough suitable tutors is an issue for many practitioners. When asked how their MLS could be improved 41% of respondents said more tutors/permanent tutoring staff/tutor training. In fact, only two out of the twenty-five responses to this question listed “more funding” ahead of “more tutors” as the priority for improvement. This issue was not confined to adequate tutor numbers, but rather securing and retaining well-trained tutors. It was suggested in several responses that tutors be given permanent contracts and a better salary so as to “encourage the good tutors to stay longer and see it [MLS] as a viable career”.

There was a wide range of responses describing centre opening hours and forms of support available, but one-to-one support was by far the type of support most frequently used by students; 21/23 responses (91%) listed one-to-one as the number-one support type most frequently used by students.

The results of this survey provide a comprehensive picture of the state of MLS in Ireland in 2015. More importantly, it provides a detailed road map for development in the years ahead. This talk will present some findings of the survey in more depth and discuss how best to help practitioners into the future.