CETL-MSOR Conference 2015

Nuala Curley and Maria Meehan: Tales from an intensive eight-week qualitative data collection process in an Irish Maths Support Centre.

The Maths Support Centre (MSC) in University College Dublin (UCD) is well-established and for the last few years has received an average of 5,000 visits per annum. Data pertaining to each student visit has been recorded on a database since 2009. In 2013 we attempted to analyse the qualitative data recorded in order to determine the most common mathematical and statistical difficulties that students presented with. However the data was too vague and inadequate for this purpose. Therefore in 2013-2014 we embarked on a project to develop a process of recording accurate qualitative data on each student visit to determine the topic for which each student sought support, and to identify any basic mathematical difficulties the student was experiencing. We undertook a six-week data collection pilot study in semester 2 2013-2014, and from this an initial set of codes was developed. We presented on this at CETL-MSOR 2014.

Following on from this, during the first semester 2014-2015 we undertook an extensive eight-week qualitative data collection. We worked intensively with over 20 tutors to have them record and code not only the topic for which the student sought support, but any basic mathematical difficulty that was impeding the student's progress. This eight-week data collection period resulted in qualitative entries recorded and coded on over 2,000 student visits to the MSC. These visits were from students from 135 modules across all seven Colleges in UCD and from access through to masters level. In this talk we will describe in detail the nature of this data collection process and the efforts taken to ensure the robustness of the data-set.

We will also present and describe the refined codes, and discuss the most prevalent areas of mathematical and statistical difficulty that have arisen from our analysis.