NEWSLETTER

Issue 29: Autumn 2024

Editor's Note

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Firstly, I want to say an enormous thank you to everyone who has managed to find time at what I know can be a very busy time of year to contribute an item for this edition of the newsletter.

The articles cover a wide range of topics and are written by colleagues at different institutions across the British Isles and at various stages of their careers, demonstrating what a vibrant and inclusive community we are. There are also several mentions of international collaborations.

You will also see that there are many invitations to contribute to projects and events. I can vouch for the fact that working with Evi to plan the October **sigma** workshop has made the process very easy and I encourage you to volunteer to host a future workshop or coffee morning.

Alun Owen mentions below that he will soon be standing down as chair of the **sigma** Network and on behalf of the Steering Group I would like to thank him for his leadership over the past few years. The good news is that he is not leaving the Network and I know he will continue to provide valued support and advice to members.

I was lucky enough to visit the Alhambra in Granada in May so the extra photos in this issue are just a few of the (very!) many I took of the fascinating patterns there.

Finally, the views expressed in these articles do not necessarily constitute recommendations from the **sigma** Steering Group or any associated parties.

It has been a pleasure to put this newsletter together and I hope you will enjoy reading it.

Welcome from the Chair

Alun Owen, Chair of sigma Network and Head of Statistics Advisory Service | Coventry University

chair@sigma.network.ac.uk

Dear colleagues,

Wow - how quickly time passes! Is it really six months since I was reading the Spring Newsletter? The summer seemed to pass in the blink of an eye, but I hope you still managed to grab some well-earned down time ready for a busy Autumn term.

As ever I would like to start by saying that if you are relatively new to the **sigma**-Network I would like to welcome you. Please do consider writing a short piece to introduce yourself and tell us what you do and include a picture if you can. This newsletter is an ideal place to share that with everyone.

The **sigma**-Network has a Steering Group that has continued to work hard behind the scenes over the spring and summer months, ensuring our network continues to thrive and offers support and advice to colleagues across our network when its needed. The international reach of our network was very much in evidence with the most recent online coffee morning which took place on Thursday 26th September. This was a joint event organized by the **sigma**-Network and the FYiMaths (First Year in Mathematics) Group in Australia. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Don Shearman (UNSW Sydney, Australia, and a member of the FYiMaths National Steering Committee) and to Anthony Cronin (UCD, Ireland) for organizing and hosting this event. And as ever my thanks to Evi Papadaki (University of Bath) for making sure this event was planned so well. For more information about FYiMaths, please see Don's Workshop Report (written in collaboration with Amanda Shaker, la Trobe University) in the latest edition of MSOR Connections:

Shearman, D., & Shaker, A. J. (2024). FYiMaths NSW December 2023. *MSOR Connections*, *23*(1). https://doi.org/10.21100/msor.v23i1.1505

We already have more events in the diary, including an online workshop on 23rd October focusing on "Supporting each other in Statistics Support", which is being kindly hosted by Lois Rollings (Middlesex University). To register for this event please complete this registration form. If you have a request for the focus of a workshop or a coffee morning, or indeed would like to offer to host one, then please email Evi pp949@bath.ac.uk. Remember that organising or contributing to **sigma**-Network events are very much aligned with Descriptor 3 of the Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education 2023, which you can use as evidence for recognition as Senior Fellow of Advance HEA.

Work has also started to examine how we can improve and update our "creaking at the seams" website and I am indebted to Gareth Woods (Aston University) who has agreed to take a lead on this. If you have any thoughts or ideas for the website or would like to get involved with that, please email Gareth at g.woods@aston.ac.uk

Finally, I wanted to let you know that later this year I will be standing down as Chair of the **sigma**-Network Steering Committee, having been in the role for the last three years. This summer, I have reduced my working days and so had to reassess my external contributions outside of Coventry University to be fair to my colleagues here. I have very much enjoyed my time as Chair and it has been a pleasure to lead our network which consists of so many dedicated, hard-working, and caring people. The name of the next Chair of the Steering Committee will be formally decided at the next meeting of that Committee so watch this space 😊

I hope to see some of you at one or more of our upcoming events. But if ever you would like to get in touch with me about anything related to maths or stats support, I would love to hear from you, so please drop me an email at aa5845@coventry.ac.uk.

With very best wishes

Alun Owen

Chair **sigma** Network Steering Group

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sigma Events

Evi Papadaki, MASH Teaching Fellow & Events Secretary for sigma | University of Bath

pp949@bath.ac.uk

Future Events

See below for a list of the **sigma** events planned for the rest of this academic year, along with available slots for anyone interested in volunteering to host an event.

Date	Event Details	Organisers & Host Institution
Wednesday, Oct 23rd, 2024 2pm – 4pm	Workshop *Supporting each other in Statistics Support* (online)	**Lois Rollings** *Middlesex University*
Nov 2024 [Date TBC]	Coffee Morning *Utilising PGR students in Maths and Statistics support* (online)	**Liz Grant** and **Alice Batchelor** *University of Surrey*
Dec 2024 [Date TBC]	AGM & Workshop *GenAI* (online)	Open for volunteers!
Jan 2025	Coffee Morning (online)	Open for volunteers
Feb 2025	Workshop (online)	Open for Volunteers!
Mar 2025 [Date TBC]	Coffee Morning *Reading group.* (online)	**Evi Papadaki** *University of Bath*
April 2025	Workshop (online)	Open for Volunteers!
May 2025	Coffee Morning (online)	Open for Volunteers!
Jun 2025	Workshop (online)	Open for Volunteers!
Jul 2025	Coffee Morning (online)	Open for Volunteers!

Without presenters and hosts, we could not be the thriving supportive Network that you make it.

Support is provided by the **sigma** Network to organise things. All we ask is for you to be the host for the day and chair the event to ensure it runs to plan. Hosting, of course, means you are facilitating the developing of others' maths and stats support practice so could also be used as evidence to support applications for Senior Fellowship of Advanced HE.

If you would like to talk about possible ideas for presenting or hosting (or both 😊) and are not sure, then do email me (pp949@bath.ac.uk) for more information.

I look forward to seeing you at a future event.

Save the Date!! Burwalls 2025

Dr Vikki O'Neill, Senior Lecturer in Medical Statistics | Queen's University Belfast

 vikki.oneill@qub.ac.uk

Annual Conference for Teachers of Statistics in the Health and Life Sciences

Department of Health Sciences at the University of York, 10th – 11th June 2025

Overview: Our annual conference provides an excellent opportunity to share ideas with colleagues, discover the latest developments in other statistics groups, and form lasting connections and friendships within the field.

The Burwalls conference is a relaxed event aimed at motivating and supporting educators in statistics and evidence-based disciplines, including medicine, dentistry, nursing, veterinary science, and health. It is tailored for those teaching in Higher Education, the NHS, or similar organisations, offering valuable tools and insights to enhance their teaching practices.

https://sites.google.com/view/burwalls/events/burwalls-2025

The conference is kindly sponsored by Pearson.
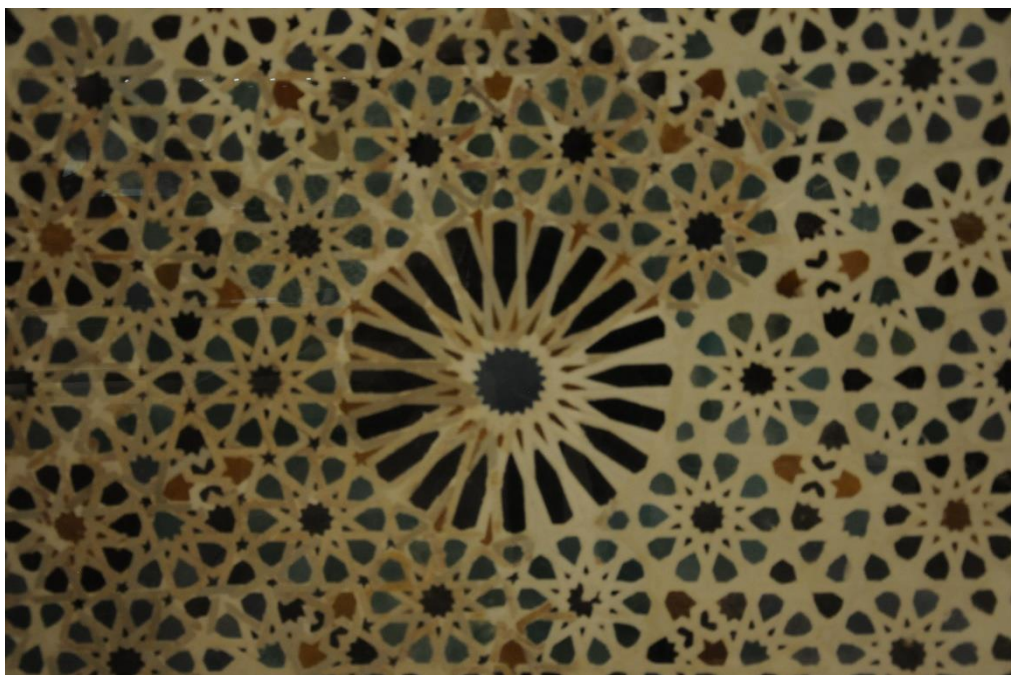
Recent sigma events

This is a list of **sigma** events that have taken place recently.

Date	Event Details	Organisers & Host Institution
Wednesday, Apr 24th, 2024 2:00pm-4:30pm	Workshop *How do maths and stats support centres help students to prepare for examinations?* (online)	**Sue Pawley** *Open University, UK*
Thursday, May 23rd, 2024 8:30-10 am BST and 5:30pm-7:00 Australian Eastern Standard Time	Coffee Morning *Sharing Experiences - Australia and the UK* (online)	**Ellen Marshall** and **Amanda Shaker** *Coventry University, UK* *La Trobe, Australia*
Thursday July 4th, 2024 10:00 - 11:30 am	Coffee Morning *Discussing the role of AI within Maths & Stats support.* (online)	**Monica Cristiana-Hess** and **Noel Parnis** *Brunel University London, UK*
Aug 29th - 30th, 2024	CETL-MSOR 2024 Conference (face-to-face)	**Local:** Olivia Fitzmaurice (Chair), Aoife Guerin, Patrick Johnson, John O'Donoghue, Niamh O'Meara, Richard Walsh *University of Limerick, Ireland*
Thursday, Sep 26th, 2024 8:30-10 am BST and 5:30pm-7:00 Australian Eastern Standard Time	Coffee Morning *sigma-Network/FYiMaths coffee and cocktails: Sharing Experiences – Australia, Ireland and the UK* (online)	**Donald Shearman** and **Anthony Cronin** *University of New South Wales, Australia* *University College Dublin, Ireland*

See below for reports on some of them.

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Summary of the 4th July Sigma Network Coffee Morning Event

Dr Monica-Cristiana Hess, Academic Skills Adviser in Statistics and Research Methods | Brunel University London

Monica-Cristiana.Hess@brunel.ac.uk

On 4th July 2024, Dr Monica-Cristiana Hess and Dr Noel Parnis, both Statistics Advisers within the Academic Skills (ASK) team at Brunel University London, hosted an online **sigma** Network Coffee Morning event on Microsoft Teams (MT). The online Coffee Morning events have been developed to give **sigma** members the opportunity to exchange ideas, opportunities and challenges with regards to Mathematics and Statistics support.

This event focused mainly on the use of AI within Mathematics and Statistics support. Four invited guest speakers gave talks related to this topic. Dr Farhana Gokhool and Dr Steve Briggs, both from University of Bedfordshire, started off the series of presentations with a talk on creating Maths revision resources for Nursing students using Generative AI. This was followed up by Tom Goodale, from Liverpool John Moores University, who presented on using Generative AI in order to create resources for teaching or supporting Mathematics and Statistics. Next, Carol Calvert, from The Open University, gave a talk based on a case study that had encouraged students to use Generative AI responsibly. Finally, Dr Luis Alfredo Sanchez Andalco and Dr Alun Owen, both from Coventry University, gave a presentation on the integration of AI tools, such as chatbots and open-source LLM models, within teaching and learning processes related to Mathematics and Statistics support.

Throughout the event, presenters gave live demos and small group discussions, in virtual breakout rooms, took place. The event concluded with all attendees exchanging views on the future use of AI within Mathematics and Statistics support, including its opportunities and challenges. With more than 40 participants from various countries, including the UK, Ireland and Germany, actively engaged in the use of AI debate, the event was deemed a success.

[Editor's Note: A link to a recording of this event was circulated on the jiscmal list at the end of September.]

How do maths and stats support centres help students prepare for examinations?

Susan Pawley, Senior Lecturer and Director of eSTEM, the OU STEM centre for scholarship & innovation | The Open University

susan.pawley@open.ac.uk

On Wednesday 24th April 2024, The Open University hosted the online event "How do maths and stats support centres help students to prepare for examinations?", organised by the **sigma** Network, attended by 27 colleagues representing 18 different HE institutions.

The first part of the event comprised of short presentations where members from 4 different institutions shared their practice. Lesley Davis from Leicester University shared her experience of working with the School of Business to deliver online revision sessions; Cath Brown from The Open University spoke about how she supported students to prepare for remote open book examinations; Sue Russell from the University

of York spoke about her revision workshops in collaboration with student wellbeing and Isaac Oppong described the discussions he holds with students on three interwoven maths skills for exams.

After the break we held an open discussion on topics raised during the presentations and other issues relevant to examinations. This highlighted the crucial role of maths support centres within universities in supporting the wellbeing of students during this stressful time. Some of the topics covered included the interaction between maths support centres and other parts of the universities, how to attract more students to take advantage of support offered and the challenges involved in setting online examinations. A significant proportion of the discussion concentrated on how the personalised support offered by centres provided a safe and trusted environment which students used to openly discuss their anxieties and concerns over examinations. Students are often unwilling to share these directly with the faculties and so we explored potential methods of how we could maintain the delicate balance of keeping the student's confidence whilst using their insights to advise on how the examination process could be improved.

Colleagues at the event.

UK and Ireland Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Statistics Support 2024

Michael Grove, Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education Policy & Academic Standards)| University of Birmingham

M.J.Grove@bham.ac.uk

At CETL-MSOR 2024 the winners of the 2024 Mathematics and Statistics Support Networks Awards were announced. The awards, which also include the prestigious Lawson-Croft Award, recognise the achievement and excellence of mathematics and statistics support practitioners and are supported by the three UK and Ireland Networks (**sigma**, SMSN, and IMLSN).

Five presentations were made for the UK and Ireland Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Statistics Support which celebrate the achievements of practitioners working in mathematics and statistics support across the UK and Ireland, as well as colleagues from overseas who are members of the networks. The 2024 winners were:

Ben McGovern (University of Bath): Ben is a teaching fellow within the Mathematics Resources Centre (MASH) with his work focusing upon e-assessment and the use of the NUMBAS system. He has developed 'Training Spaces' for students at Bath, collections of interactive questions that provide detailed feedback to help students understand where they need to improve their mathematical knowledge and skills relevant to their course. The Training Spaces have proved very popular: since their first release, over 4000 Training Space 'exams' have been completed by almost 1800 students.

Sarah Parsons (Harper Adams University): Sarah has held the role of Harper Adams Mathematics Support Tutor, alongside lecturing in engineering, for over 20 years. As the inaugural post holder, Sarah has led the institutional development of mathematics and statistics support provision establishing small group and one-to-one mathematics support and delivering a range of modules at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Her contributions have been recognised by two Harper Adams Teaching Fellowship awards, an NTF Rising Star nomination, and five recent Aspire Excellence Scheme nominations.

Sundeep Sehmbi (Coventry University): Sundeep had previously worked for **sigma** as an hourly paid tutor before joining as a substantive member of the team in January 2023. Her skills with students, particularly with those who are nervous, are highly regarded as one student noted: "*If mathematics makes you nervous then the person you want to see is Sundeep. I started the session with a high level of nervousness but* [through her] *amazing teaching methods, I was able to grasp the areas of concern and I can definitely say I finished the tutorial with a new found confidence*". Since joining the team on a full-time basis Sundeep has taken responsibility for developing much of **sigma's** publicity, including establishing a greatly expanded and more impactful social media presence.

Teodor Ramba (Coventry University): Teodor has worked as a student proctor in **sigma** for the last two academic years and had previously undertaken two summer internships in 2023 and in 2024. As one of only two returning proctors, he has willingly acted as 'senior proctor', helping new proctors understand the nature of their new role and provided mentorship and guidance. His internship projects have led to a range of successful outputs including producing transcripts for all of **sigma's** workshop videos, creating online tests, and developing a range of self-learning resources in discrete mathematics for computer science.

William Morgan (University of Sheffield): Will joined the MASH team in September 2022, having previously worked in secondary education, resources development, consultancy and private tuition. In addition to acting as a line-manager to the centre's postgraduate tutors, he has revolutionised the way students are introduced to the mathematics support service at the start of the academic year. Having noted that some diagnostic tests provided previously to departments were intimidating to some students, he led on the creation of Skills Audits for Maths and Stats (SAfMaS). These are formative exercises tailored to the needs of the course with students only completing those which have value for them. It is anticipated 4000-4500 students will be offered a SAfMaS this academic year; nearly half of the new students across the university.

Congratulations to all winners and a big thank you to Mark Hodds (Coventry University) for his work to organise these awards on behalf of the mathematics and statistics support community, to colleagues from the Networks who formed part of the awarding panel, and to all those who nominated.

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The Lawson-Croft Award for Outstanding Achievement in Mathematics and Statistics Support 2024

Michael Grove, Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education Policy & Academic Standards)| University of Birmingham

M.J.Grove@bham.ac.uk

At CETL-MSOR, **Dr. Ciarán Mac an Bhaird** from Maynooth University was announced as the 2024 winner of the prestigious Lawson-Croft Award for Outstanding Achievement in Mathematics and Statistics Support. This prestigious annual award, named after Professor Duncan Lawson MBE and Professor Tony Croft in recognition of their work to initially establish the UK-wide mathematics and statistics support community, is awarded to an individual for outstanding achievement and excellence across a sustained period.

Under Ciarán's leadership, the mathematics support centre at Maynooth University has grown to be, in terms of student visits, one of the busiest in Ireland or the UK, celebrating its 200,000th student visit in 2022. He places great emphasis on appropriate and regular tutor training and recently, he was part of an international collaboration that contributed to the development of MSC tutor competency training mapped to sector-level frameworks for higher education pedagogy. This training provides tutors, many of whom are postgraduate students, with a tangible record of their participation in the form of digital badges.

Ciarán's prestige within the mathematics support community is evidenced through an extensive, and growing, publication record. Specific aspects of his research have influenced both policy and practice. He was a co-author of perhaps the first published report on a large-scale multi-institutional student evaluation of mathematics learning support. He is a founding member of the Irish Mathematics Learning Support Network (IMLSN), and a member of **sigma** since 2008. He is also the Irish representative on the steering committee of the annual CETL- MSOR conference which has been responsible for overseeing its continuation as a community endeavour since 2018.

In 2010, Ciarán won the Network for Excellence in Mathematics and Statistics Support 'Rising Star' award for early career mathematics support academic staff. In 2016, he won a 'Teaching Hero' Award from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and the Union of Students in Ireland. In 2018, he received an individual Maynooth University Teaching Award and in 2024 the mathematics support centre received a Maynooth University Team Teaching Award. He now wins the Lawson-Croft award in recognition of a career currently spanning over 15 years in mathematics and statistics support!

Congratulations to Ciarán on such a very well-deserved award!

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New Open Access Publication: A scoping literature review of the impact and evaluation of mathematics and statistics support in higher education.

Claire Mullen, PhD student I University College Dublin

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Emma Howard, Assistant Professor I Trinity College Dublin

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Anthony Cronin, Associate Professor | University College Dublin

anthony.cronin@ucd.ie

We are delighted to announce that our scoping literature review of mathematics and statistics support (MSS) evaluation has been published open access in the journal of Educational Studies in Mathematics. This paper investigates how MSS researchers evaluate the impact of support on students and what that impact is by systematically reviewing the literature. Through a two-round screening process, 148 publications were identified and included. Data extraction from these publications allowed MSS evaluation research to be quantified in a new way. For example, the included image shows the number of publications published in each year grouped by the countries the research was conducted in. Ten formats of MSS, seven data sources (e.g., surveys), and 14 types of data (e.g., MSS usage data) with a wide range of analysis methods were identified. The synthesised results of this review, indicating the mostly positive effect of MSS, and discussion highlighting future directions for MSS evaluation will be of interest to anyone involved in MSS practice/research or mathematics and statistics education more generally. The reference including the open access link is:

Mullen, C., Howard, E., & Cronin, A. (2024). A scoping literature review of the impact and evaluation of mathematics and statistics support in higher education. *Educational Studies in Mathematics, 117,* 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10649-024-10332-6
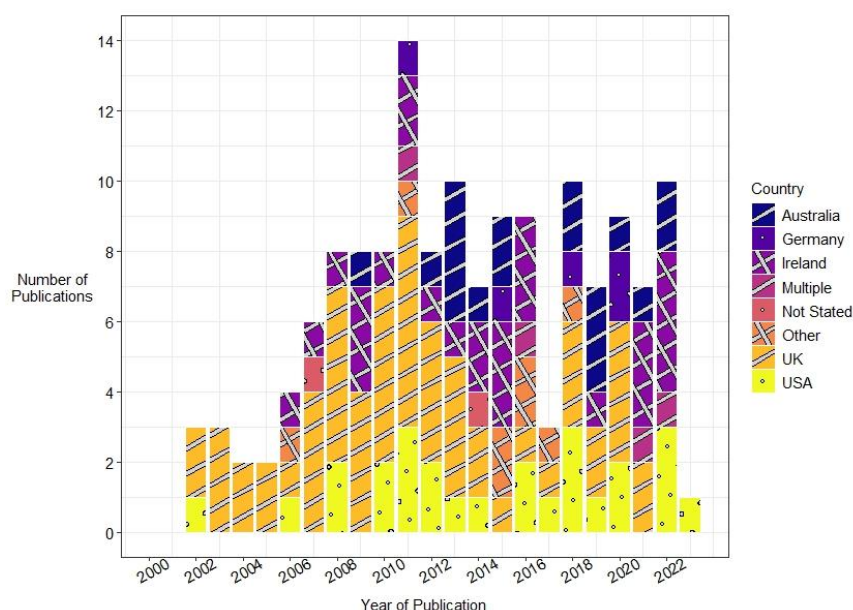
The number of included publications per year grouped by country

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Collaboration in maths and stats support

Lucy Deacon, PhD student & Maths support tutor| Coventry University

deaconl2@uni.coventry.ac.uk

When a student engages with a maths and stats support centre, what resources do they have access to? This depends on the centre in question, but for the most part it could be summarised as the tutors, the online/printed resources (worksheets, video tutorials, etc.), and the space itself as an environment that encourages mathematical and statistical learning.

However, this list misses out one key resource that students in a support centre have: each other. When I worked in the Maths Learning Centre in Dublin City University, many specialist maths students and engineering students would use the support centre as a social learning space. They worked together in groups to figure out their assignments and lecture notes, only sometimes calling upon a tutor for help.

When I moved to Coventry and started working in the **sigma** maths and stats support centre, I saw a similar phenomenon. Students would often come to the centre in twos and threes, to seek help from tutors to understand their lecture notes and work through sample problems.

These are just my own anecdotal experiences, but from conversations with other practitioners and from some smaller scale studies they certainly do not appear to be unique!

As part of my PhD research, I am interested in finding out more about this phenomenon as it currently exists. If this sounds interesting to you and you are willing to be interviewed, please consider emailing me to take part. I am very interested in learning about the diverse perspectives of anyone working in maths and stats support. Many thanks!

Students' Perceptions of Generative AI and Using it as a tool to Learn Statistics: A Joint Study between the UK and Australia

Dr Alun Owen, Head of Statistics Advisory Service | Coventry University

aa5845@coventry.ac.uk

Dr Luis A. Sanchez A., Lecturer in Statistics Support | Coventry University

ae2436@coventry.ac.uk

Greetings, everyone. We're excited to share updates from the **sigma** maths and statistics support centre at Coventry University on a fascinating project we've been working on. Alongside maths and stats support colleagues from the UK and Australia, we've been exploring how students engage with generative AI to enhance their learning, particularly in statistics. The project, titled "Investigating Students' Perceptions and Awareness of Using Generative AI Tools to Support Their Learning of Statistics in Higher Education in the UK and Australia," aims to understand how these tools shape student experiences and whether they help with the challenges of learning statistics. We look forward to sharing more about AI's impact in this space as we progress.

What's the Project About?

Our team at Coventry University (Dr Luis Sanchez Andalco, Dr Alun Owen and Ellen Marshall) has partnered with a group of researchers: Dr. Amanda Shaker (La Trobe University, Australia), Dr. Jo-ann Larkins (Federation University, Australia), Dr. Karol Binkowski (Macquarie University, Australia), and Dr. Tjun Hoh and Dr. Tom Honnor (University College London). Together, we are evaluating students' familiarity with AI tools and whether they help boost confidence in learning statistics—an area many find challenging.

We're focusing on three main research questions:

1. How aware are students of Generative AI's potential to support learning?

2. How do students currently use Generative AI?

3. Is Generative AI associated with anxiety or confidence with learning statistics or help seeking behaviours?

How Are We Gathering Data?

We'll very soon be launching an online survey targeting students across the UK and Australia. It will explore their experiences with Generative AI, how they incorporate it into their studies, and whether it's helpful in learning statistics. The survey is nearly ready, having received ethical approval at all the partner universities and now just awaiting completion of piloting before distribution begins across several universities.

Want to Get Involved?

If you would like to be involved in this project, please email Luis at ae2436@coventry.ac.uk or Alun at aa5845@coventry.ac.uk with an expression of interest and we will send you further details of how to get involved, including the link to the survey and participation information sheet etc.

What Have We Been Up To?

A key development has been the decision to use a single Jisc survey for both UK and Australian students. This ensures consistency in data collection and analysis, making it easier to compare results between the two regions.

What's Next?

Once the survey goes live, we'll begin analysing the data to understand how students are engaging with Generative AI tools. We're eager to see if these tools improve confidence in learning statistics. We'll continue to share updates, and we hope this research will offer valuable insights into how Generative AI can make learning statistics more approachable and less stressful. Stay tuned!

How do you target and extend Maths & Statistics support across the University?

Karen Symons, Senior Lecturer in Maths Support | De Montfort University

Karen.symons@dmu.ac.uk

Here at De Montfort University, we have seen large numbers of students struggle with the mathematical and statistical content of their course last year. As a result, we sent out a very brief survey (April 2024) to all academic members of staff to try to gain a better feel for the extent of this 'Maths problem' in order to offer more embedded support for the forthcoming academic year.

You may be interested in some of our findings (I have highlighted key findings in yellow):

50 staff responded.

ADH – Art, Design and Humanities; BAL – Business and Law; CEM – Computing, Engineering and Media; HLS – Health and Life Sciences.

1. **Which faculty do you teach in?**

● ADH	7	14%	
● BAL	10	20%	
● CEM	8	16%	
● HLS	25	50%	
● Other	0		
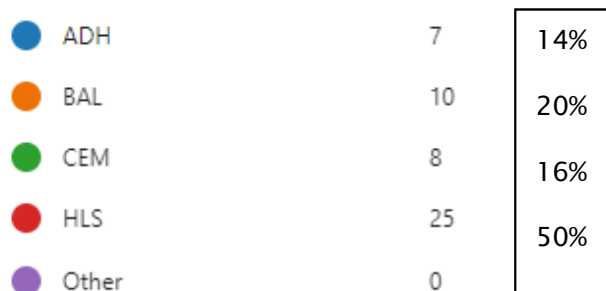
Interestingly the greatest response rate came from HLS (which reflects our greatest number of student-users); there was a surprisingly low response rate from CEM lecturers. We would expect many more modules in CEM to contain mathematical content with which students struggle.

1. **Do any of your modules involve any Maths or Statistics?**

● Yes	39	78%
● No	11	22%

The majority of responses that said there was no maths or stats involved in their module came from ADH.

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2. Do any of your students struggle with the mathematical/statistical content of the module?

🔵	Yes - a few	12	31%
🟠	Yes - a lot	25	64%
🟢	No	1	2.5%
🔴	Not sure	1	2.5%
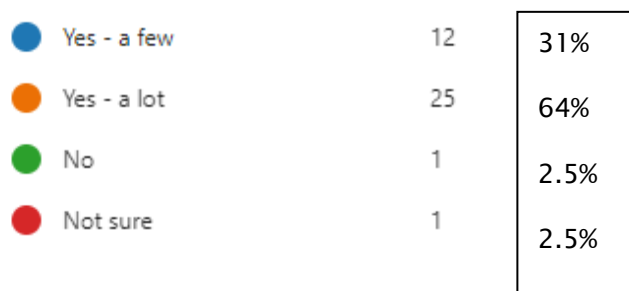
==For those that taught on a module that involved any maths or statistics, 95% reported that students struggled with the content.== This reflects what we see in practice.

3. Would you like any extra Maths/Statistics support for your students – or for yourself? *You can click in more than one box*

🔵	Yes please - Maths	15	29%
🟠	Yes please - Stats	27	52%
🟢	No thanks	4	8%
🔴	Other	6	12%

*The 'other' category included those that wanted support with BOTH maths and stats.

==92% of respondents requested additional maths/stats support for themselves or their students.==

We have met individually with all academics who have requested support. They range from those teaching Knitwear, Creative Enterprise, Policing, Game Art, Cryptography and Cyber Security to Pharmacy, Nursing, Forensic Science and Health & Wellbeing.
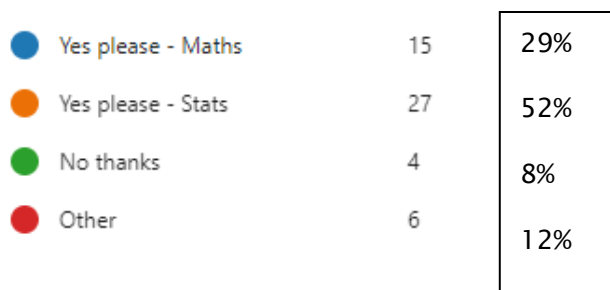
==Pleasingly, some of the requests were for support for the lecturer== – to help them refresh their maths and in particular their statistics skills; to review their teaching materials and programmes of work; and to suggest ways in which they could improve their teaching of some difficult concepts.

This has been an extremely valuable exercise as it has helped us build connections with 'new' programmes, rekindle 'old' relations and develop and offer bespoke support packages and staff development workshops according to need; ultimately benefitting many more students.

Enhancing Student Engagement Through Timetabled Drop-in Sessions (TDS) at the Learning Development Centre

Pinar Ozbeser, Mathematics Teaching Fellow | Aston University

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In response to declining student engagement with academic support at the Learning Development Centre (LDC), worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, Timetabled Drop-in Sessions (TDS) were introduced to encourage regular student interaction with LDC resources. Initially piloted in the 2021/22 academic year with first-year Business School students and second-year Engineering students, the sessions were integrated into students' timetables to increase accessibility to academic support.

The TDS format provided structured support, beginning with short recaps of key concepts, followed by adaptive tutorials and collaborative group work. This approach allowed students to engage with learning materials at their own pace and fostered a supportive peer-learning environment. Feedback from students and Module Leaders (MLs) indicated that TDS effectively reduced barriers to accessing academic support, leading to increased confidence and engagement.

The sessions significantly impacted academic performance, with analysis showing a 9.8% improvement in final grades for students who participated regularly. As a result of this success, the initiative was expanded to additional programmes, including Nursing and Audiology, with staff being mentored to adapt the sessions for the modules' specific needs.

TDS has strengthened collaboration between MLs and the LDC, resulting in more integrated and targeted academic support strategies across the university. It has also been recognized for its alignment with Aston University's mission to provide equal access to resources and improve student retention. The success of this initiative was presented at the EERN 2024 conference, further highlighting its impact on student engagement and academic outcomes.

EERN 2024 Conference

Call for Applications for the role of Editor of *MSOR Connections* (Two Vacancies)

Alun Owen, Head of sigma Statistics Advisory Service | Coventry University

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Tony Mann, Director Greenwich Maths Centre | University of Greenwich

A.Mann@greenwich.ac.uk

The Editorial Board of *MSOR Connections* invite applications for the role of Editor, from colleagues working in any area of learning, teaching, assessment, and/or the support of mathematics, statistics, and operational research (MSOR) in higher education.

MSOR Connections continues to attract contributions from across the globe and has a broad and diverse readership. We therefore are especially interested in applications that would broaden the diversity of the editorial team to better reflect the journal's readership. Applications from outside the UK are welcomed.

MSOR Connections is a practitioner journal that aims to publish peer-reviewed articles by and for those involved in learning, teaching, assessment and support of mathematics, statistics, and operational research in higher education. The language of the journal is English and the website for the journal can be found at https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/msor

Further details, including an estimate of the expected time commitment as well as an outline of the role and its responsibilities, can be found at MSOR Connections Editor Vacancy Call.pdf

To apply please provide an up-to-date CV along with a personal statement of no more than 500 words summarising how your skills and experience meet the demands of the person specification below. Please email both documents to Alun Owen at aa5845@coventry.ac.uk

The deadline for applications is 8th November 2024.

For an informal discussion about the role please contact one of the current editors, either Alun Owen at aa5845@coventry.ac.uk or Tony Mann at A.Mann@greenwich.ac.u
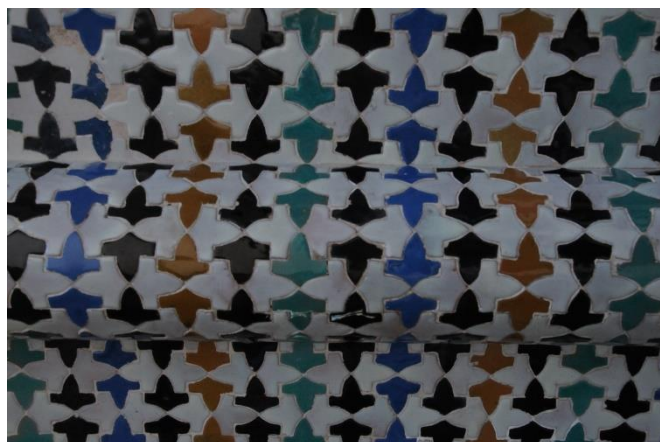
Steering Group Membership - Autumn 2024

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Ellen Marshall, Sheffield Hallam University
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