

## NEWSLETTER

## Issue 30: Spring 2025

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### Editor's Introduction

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Lois Rollings, Senior Lecturer in Maths, Stats & Numeracy | Middlesex University

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It is my pleasure to introduce the Spring 2025 edition of the **sigma** Network newsletter. This will be my last as editor as I will be retiring in the summer.

I started working in maths support over a decade ago and have gained so much from being part of the **sigma** Network during this time. Like many of you I am part of a small team and having access to a much larger group of people who are so generous in sharing their time and expertise has been invaluable. I have also enjoyed being on the Steering Group and seeing some of the work that is necessary to keep the Network going; I would encourage you to think about joining. Despite the many problems facing Higher Education at the moment I know that the Network is in good health. (I was going to say 'good spirits' but that seems to be the phrase used when someone is otherwise rather ill.)

In this issue there are reports of recent events and details of those to come, Laura Lister discusses how to help colleagues with quantitative analysis and Mark Hodds describes the work done in Coventry.

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

I wish you all the best in the future as you continue the important work of supporting students with mathematics and statistics.



### Chair's Note

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Dr Mark Hodds, **sigma** Network Chairman and Assistant Professor (Research and Teaching) in Mathematics and Statistics Support | Coventry University

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Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the Spring 2025 edition of the **sigma** Network Newsletter and my first one as chairman. I have been chairman since October when I took over from Alun Owen but it certainly feels like a lot longer ago! I would once again like to thank Alun as the outgoing chair for his hard work over the past three years but also for his support in my first few months as chair. We are fortunate to have had fantastically hard-working chairs since the network became self-sustaining and it is a privilege to follow in their footsteps. For those of you who don't know me, my background is in Maths Education and I have been working in the Maths and Stats Support Centre at Coventry University since 2014. I am interested in supporting students improve their understanding of both maths and stats, reduce their anxiety, and, most importantly, increase their enjoyment of the subject.



If you are relatively new to the **sigma** Network I would like to welcome you and encourage you to consider writing a short piece to introduce yourself and tell us what you do, including a picture if you can. This newsletter is an ideal place to share that with everyone. Indeed, our network is a brilliant way to share ideas and support each other so please do get involved with all the events we have to offer. Speaking of events, we have some gaps to fill over the coming months so if you have any ideas on what you would like to see, or (better still!) would like to offer to host an event please do get in touch with either myself, Evi, or any of the Steering Group. I would like to take this opportunity also to thank the Steering Group for all their hard work behind the scenes – there have been several teething issues that have needed to be addressed which we are now on top of and have some exciting new developments to share with you in the coming months. There will however be some vacancies to fill on the Steering Group going forward into the next academic year so if you are interested in this, please do get in contact with myself, or have a look at the details on the website here: <https://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/about/the-sigma-network-hubs/>. You will also have seen the call for speakers at CETL-MSOR 2025 to be held in Liverpool, details are available here: <https://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/cetl-msor/cetl-msor-2025-call-for-submissions/>. It would be great to have as many speakers from our network as possible. We will also shortly be calling for nominations to the UK and Ireland Maths and Stats Support Networks Awards for 2025 so please do consider nominating colleagues for these awards.

With best wishes,

Mark Hodds  
Chair of the **sigma** Network Steering Group

## sigma Events

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

[pp949@bath.ac.uk](mailto:pp949@bath.ac.uk)

This is a list of events organized by the **sigma** Network this academic year.

Events		
Date	Event Details	Organisers & Host Institution
Thursday, Sep 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2024	Coffee Morning <i>sigma-Network/FYiMaths coffee and cocktails: Sharing Experiences – Australia, Ireland and the UK</i> (online)	<b>Donald Shearman and Anthony Cronin</b>  <i>University of New South Wales, Australia University College Dublin, Ireland</i>
Wednesday, Oct 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2024	Workshop <i>Supporting each other in Statistic Support</i> (online)	<b>Lois Rollings</b>  <i>Middlesex University</i>
Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2024	Coffee Morning <i>Utilising PGR students in Maths and Statistics support</i> (online)	<b>Liz Grant and Alice Batchelor</b>  <i>University of Surrey</i>
Friday, 13 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2024	AGM & Coffee Morning (online)	<b>Emma Cliffe and Ed Southwood</b>  <i>University of Bath</i>
Wednesday, 15 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2025	Coffee Morning Speed dating (online)	<b>Sue Pawley</b>  <i>Open University</i>
Friday 28 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2025	Coffee Morning (online)	<b>Mark Hodds</b>  <i>Coventry University</i>
Wednesday, 19 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2025	Coffee Morning <i>Reading group.</i> (online)	<b>Evi Papadaki</b>  <i>University of Bath</i>
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!

## Looking 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 to me about possible ideas for presenting or hosting (or both ☺) and are not sure, then do get in touch ([pp949@bath.ac.uk](mailto:pp949@bath.ac.uk)) for more information.

I look forward to seeing you at a future event.

## FUTURE EVENT

### EAMS Conference 2025

**Christian Lawson-Perfect, Learning software engineer, School of Mathematics, Statistics and Physics | Newcastle University**

The seventh international conference on E-Assessment in Mathematical Sciences (EAMS) takes place between 16th and 27th June 2025.

The conference aims to bring together researchers and practitioners with an interest in e-assessment for mathematics and the sciences. It will consist of a mix of presentations of new techniques and pedagogic research, as well as workshops where you can get hands-on with leading e-assessment software.

EAMS 2025 is an entirely online conference, with a mix of live sessions and web-based activities, and plenty of opportunity for discussion and collaboration.

Live talks will take place over Zoom at 09:30 - 10:30 and 15:30 - 16:30 BST (UTC +1) each weekday, with recordings available later. The online format and longer timescale allow participants to engage more deeply with the material presented.

We're actively seeking to increase the diversity of our attendees and speakers, and particularly encourage speakers from groups under-represented in previous editions of EAMS to submit proposals.

To attend the conference, please register for free at [eams.ncl.ac.uk/register](https://eams.ncl.ac.uk/register).

**E-A×M+S 2025**   
16th - 27th June, online

The international conference on E-Assessment in Mathematical Sciences is an academic conference organised by Newcastle University.

The conference aims to bring together researchers and practitioners with an interest in e-assessment for mathematics and the sciences. It will consist of a mix of presentations of new techniques, and pedagogic research, as well as workshops where you can get hands-on with leading e-assessment software.

EAMS is an entirely online conference, with a mix of live sessions and web-based activities, with plenty of opportunity for discussion and collaboration.

<b>Developer updates</b> from the people responsible for popular systems.	<b>Talks</b> on a variety of topics to do with e-assessment in mathematical disciplines.	<b>Try out</b> the latest software with experts on-hand to answer your questions.
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**Register:**  
[eams.ncl.ac.uk](https://eams.ncl.ac.uk)



# E-A×M+S 2025

## REPORT

### Supporting each other in Statistics support

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Lois Rollings, Senior Lecturer in Maths, Stats & Numeracy | Middlesex University

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On 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2024 we were pleased to host an online **sigma** Network workshop on *Supporting each other in Statistics Support*. Many maths and stats support practitioners work in small teams and a principal aim of the workshop was to provide time to share some of the challenges of supporting students with data analysis.

Thirty colleagues from across the British Isles (along with one from Spain) attended the event. We heard short presentations from colleagues from different institutions. These were from a wide variety of perspectives, outlining some of the issues involved in providing statistics support and ways in which they could be overcome. There was also time for further discussion in small groups.

During the afternoon many resources were recommended and there was agreement that it was time to update the resources available to statistics support practitioners. As you will have seen Alun Owen and Ellen Marshall have since sent out a survey to find out more about the current landscape of statistics support with a view to relaunching the Statistics SIG and updating the Statistics Tutor's Pocket Book Guide.

Feedback was collected afterwards. One participant commented, '*Can't over-emphasise how useful this event was.*' and another '*it was encouraging to hear that other unis have similar challenges to our team.*'

Several commented that it would have been good to have more time in the break-out rooms and to have some particular questions to discuss. Feedback like this is really helpful when planning future events.

Thank you to Evi Papadaki for helping me to organise the event and collecting feedback and to Jason Yip for helping me to host it.

## REPORT

### March sigma Coffee Morning: Reading group

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

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I was beyond excited to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> **sigma** reading group meeting on March 19th. This was a milestone for me, as it was my first time leading one of our informal gatherings.

The paper we discussed, *Sustainable multi-disciplinary mathematics support* (Jackson, 2020), offered fascinating insights into the expansion and success of a cross-disciplinary mathematics support model. It highlighted how this model significantly boosts student confidence, skill, and pass rates across various disciplines. Our conversation was vibrant and thought-provoking. The paper became our platform to discuss several key points:

- The sustainability of Maths and Stats support in relation to changes in senior management
- How to raise the profile of Maths and Stats support
- Utilising testimonials
- Cross-institutional collaborations

- How to utilise maths centre resources
- Adapting to changes in the way students learn and engage with feedback

The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. One attendee shared, "It was inspiring to see how others do and think about the math support." Another noted, "It was very useful to contemplate the discussion paper and to think of possible future directions and to be reminded of work that has been done on service evaluation." Others appreciated the motivation to read about ideas that work, while acknowledging the fragility of support services built on personal contributions. There was also a strong emphasis on making use of existing **sigma** maths and stats resources and raising their profile among students, as well as the need to continually demonstrate the impact of our services to senior management.

Hosting this event was a rewarding experience, and I am grateful for the enthusiastic participation from all attendees – your contributions were invaluable. A special thanks to our colleagues from Australia who joined the meeting despite the late hour for them.

I would love to see the conversation continue and perhaps lead to some positive changes in our day-to-day operations.

### References

Jackson, D. C. (2022). Sustainable multi-disciplinary mathematics support. *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology*, 53(6), 1343–1362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020739X.2020.1819572>



## SMSN Winter Workshop 2025: Maths Support for Data Science

Jenny August, Maths Adviser (Student Learning Development) | University of Glasgow

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On Friday 17<sup>th</sup> January, the Scottish Maths Support Network (SMSN) hosted their annual Winter Workshop with the theme of 'Maths Support for Data Science'. The goal of this online event was to begin building a maths toolkit for students starting out on data science programmes by bringing together maths and stats support practitioners along with data science programme coordinators. There were 29 attendees from across 15 different HE institutions.

The event began with a talk from Professor Rachel Hilliam from the Open University who, amongst holding many other roles, is the inaugural chair of the Alliance for Data Science Professionals. Her presentation introduced participants to the world of data science, describing the professional standards expected of graduates, the accreditation available to both individuals and universities, and the implications these have on the support that students are likely to need.

The talk was then followed by a panel discussion, where the panel was made up of data science programme coordinators from universities across Scotland: Professor Marco Thiel and Professor M Carmen Romano from the University of Aberdeen, Dr Kevin Bryson from the University of Glasgow and Dr Pierre Le Bras from Heriot-Watt University. Following questions from participants, discussions centred around what the panel members feel are the essential mathematical and statistical skills needed for Data Science and what gaps in these skills they are noticing most often.

The event then finished with participants splitting into four breakout rooms to begin building lists of the topics that should feature in any maths toolkit for these students. Each breakout room had a different focus – maths requirements for undergraduate data science students, maths requirements for postgraduate students, inferential statistics and probability requirements, and more advanced maths topics needed for some data science courses.

Overall, we hope the event allowed maths and stats support practitioners to gain a better understanding of the support needed by data science students, at the same time as raising the profile of maths support and providing a networking opportunity with those teaching data science.

Link to the event webpage: <https://www.scottish-msn.org.uk/events/2025>



## The Need for Quantitative Evaluation Skills Amongst WPSM

Laura Lister, Mathematics and Statistics Skills Officer | University of Southampton

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Support for mathematics and statistics at Southampton sits inside the Academic Skills team, which in turn sits inside WPSM (Widening Participation and Social Mobility). New APP (Access and Participation Plan) guidelines require WPSM departments at universities to publish their evaluation work and findings frequently – first of all to evidence their work, and secondly to share ideas and experiences. However, something quickly became apparent: staff generally do not possess the right skills or confidence required for undertaking quantitative evaluation.

An unserious conversation with wider WPSM colleagues led to a serious consideration about offering upskilling sessions in statistics. Questionnaire results indicated that what staff would be most interested in for this include:

- data analysis for evaluations, and
- how mathematics fits into their own lives and jobs.

The new APP requirements mean that upskilling sessions are needed in not only performing quantitative analysis but also in interpreting others' findings, and since these were in line with what staff were interested in, I recruited our Evaluation Manager to bring upskilling to life.

Our idea includes some recommended reading before four hybrid-delivered workshops, which will involve both theory and opportunity for practice. The workshops will be:

- Visualising Data
- Working With Survey Data

in May, then

- Understanding Published/Dashboard Data
- Hypothesis Testing

later in June. Following these will also be group coaching sessions, coordinated by our Evaluation Manager, to keep colleagues' skills up.

I intend to write about the upskilling project and how successful the experience was for colleagues. In the meantime, I am left considering this: is the correct attitude to adult learning – in mathematics, statistics or otherwise – one where individuals should learn only to meet the requirements of the situations they find themselves in? Or, can a general suggestion of upskilling in mathematics and statistics to adults be met with uptake and success?



## How Coventry University's Maths and Stats Support Centre is Helping Students in 2025: A Holistic Approach to Learning Support

Mark Hodds, Assistant Professor in Mathematics and Statistics Support | Coventry University

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Coventry University's Maths and Stats Support Centre has been a crucial resource for students for many years, offering personalised assistance to enhance academic success. Continuously evolving in 2025, the Centre integrates innovative tools, such as generative AI for statistical support, and works closely with various student services, including wellbeing and success coaches.

### Investigating the Impact of Social Learning Through a PhD Project

A notable initiative is the Centre's PhD project exploring the impact of social learning on student engagement and success. The research examines how collaborative environments can boost mathematical and statistical understanding. Early findings suggest that social learning fosters a sense of belonging, enhancing both individual and group performance, and improving academic confidence.

### Utilizing Generative AI to Support Statistics Queries

To meet the growing demand for tech-driven support, the Centre has incorporated generative AI to help students with statistics queries outside regular hours. The AI-powered system provides immediate, accurate, and relevant assistance, allowing students to learn at their own pace.

### Improving the Learning Environment for Neurodiverse Students

The Centre is also focused on improving accessibility for neurodiverse students. It offers personalized services, including one-on-one tutoring and quiet study areas, and collaborates with neurodiversity experts to develop resources addressing challenges like focus and organisation. This ensures that neurodiverse students receive tailored support, promoting equal academic opportunities.

### Connecting with More Services to Improve Student Support

Additionally, the Centre has strengthened partnerships with other student services to provide holistic support. By collaborating with teams such as Student Support and Wellbeing, the Centre ensures students receive both academic and personal assistance, particularly in managing stress and building resilience.

In conclusion, Coventry's Maths and Stats Support Centre leads in student support by embracing social learning, AI, and inclusivity, offering comprehensive services that empower students to succeed both academically and personally.

### Steering Group Membership - Spring 2025

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#### Steering group

- Alison Loddick, University of Northampton
- Ellen Marshall, Coventry University
- Emma Cliffe, University of Bath (Vice-chair Technical)
- Gareth Woods, Aston University
- Lois Rollings, Middlesex University (Newsletter Editor)
- Mark Hodds, Coventry University (Chair)
- Peter Hart, University of Sheffield (Mailing List Co-ordinator)
- Rob Wilson, Cardiff University
- Safa Elsheikh, Loughborough University (Secretary)
- Sue Pawley, Open University (Vice-chair Operations)
- Tony Mann, University of Greenwich (Treasurer)

#### Co-opted:

- Ed Southwood, University of Bath (Membership secretary)
- Evi Papadaki, University of Bath (Events Secretary)

#### Representatives:

- George Kyritsis (SMSN)
- Duncan Lawson (IMA)
- Ciarán Mac an Bhaird (IMLSN)

