

Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme

Case study

As a way of capturing the detail and impact of your Learning & Teaching Enhancement Project, please complete the questions below, which align with the QAA Scotland reporting template. *Please answer all questions in 200 words or fewer.* Case studies may be published on the University's website and elements may be used in reports for QAA Scotland. Project teams may be asked to contribute a Blog or Podcast to help to share project activities and outcomes. Any questions, please contact cad@abdn.ac.uk.

Breaking the Ice: Removing Barriers to Accessing Stats Support

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Context

This section should provide brief details about the context of the project/activity, highlighting any specific challenges and/or strategies it intended to address.

Text in this section should not exceed **200 words**.

The Student Learning Service of the University of Aberdeen opened a Statistics Support Service in January 2025. It was anticipated that there would be a high volume of requests from Psychology and Social Sciences, in particular. The initial data, however, show lower engagement by undergraduate students than expected.

This is not a situation unique to our institution. Mac an Bhaird and colleagues (2013) identify two types of reasons for non-engagement with maths and stats support: practical (students do not know where and how to find support services), and emotional (students are overwhelmed by their difficulties and feel ashamed). Marshall and colleagues (2022) further identified that statistics anxiety can prevent students from asking for help.

In this project, we aimed to gain more robust knowledge on the reasons underpinning the low engagement of Psychology undergraduates with statistics support in our institution. We wished to measure how students' perception of statistics and their self-efficacy in statistics impacted on their engagement with stats support. We also wanted to assess whether embedding support initiatives within the course curriculum might encourage students to access the support service, as this has been shown to reduce barriers to using support (Mehbali and Roberts, 2017, Marshall et al., 2022).

Description of activity

In this section, you should provide brief descriptive details of the activity. Please include information on student engagement in the design and delivery of the activity here.

Text in this section should not exceed **200 words**.

We worked with the Level 2 cohort of Psychology students, and developed the following protocol of intervention for the Psychology course PS2518 Advance Psychology 2: a pre-survey to measure perceptions, confidence and awareness of support amongst the class, delivery of a 50 min embedded workshop linked to the course content, and a post-survey following the workshop to measure the perceived helpfulness of the workshop, confidence and support needs. We hoped to measure differences between pre- and post-survey results in confidence and perception of usefulness of statistics and statistics support.

Due to time constraint, the survey questionnaires were designed and the ethics application submitted before our student intern, Eleanor Matheson, was recruited. Once Eleanor joined the team, she had an opportunity to suggest edits to both questionnaires.

A first iteration of the workshop was offered mid-semester, before the Spring break. The workshop was delivered by the maths and stats support team, and observed by Eleanor. Due to poor attendance at this first workshop (see evaluation and impact), the team decided to run a second workshop after the Spring break. It was thought that the closeness of the exam diet would trigger better participation.

Evaluation and impact

This section should provide an analysis of evaluation and impact of the project.

To support evaluative activity, institutions are encouraged to use the [resources](#) developed by Professor Stella Jones-Devitt and Dr Liz Austen, particularly the Enhancement Themes Theory of Change model and the Universal Evaluation Framework (UEF).

Text in this section should not exceed **200 words**

The first workshop, which was offered during teaching week 7, was only attended by 3 students. This was despite advertising the session and pre-survey during tutorials and lectures. The teams decided to:

- Run a second workshop, closer to the exam diet, scheduled for teaching week 10.
- Advertise the workshop only during tutorials and lectures, to avoid confusion and overload of information. Opportunity to fill in the pre-survey would be given at the start of the workshop.
- Display posters advertising the workshop in the William Guild building, to give students an opportunity to register outside teaching sessions.

Only one student attended the second workshop, however.

Conversations with the four participants indicate that they found the workshops useful, but the low participation suggest that students may not want support in the form of scheduled workshops. Participants disclosed that:

- They wished to have access to more practice exercises outside classes. The

maths and stats support team added resources for PS2518 to the Achieve organisation in MyAberdeen.

- They favoured structured workshops rather than open-ended support sessions (such as drop-in and questions & answers sessions).
- They asked for direct links from the course page to the Stats Support service.

Lessons learned and next steps

In this section, you should reflect on the key learning points drawn from this activity for the institution. You might also consider what learning other universities or the tertiary education sector could take from this activity. If there is any planned follow-on activity, please provide brief details here.

Text in this section should not exceed **200 words**.

Our project underlines that students' preferences for support are changing. The literature on the benefits of embedded support relies on data collected before or immediately after the COVID pandemic. Longer-term effects of the pandemic, however, may be the normalisation of online, flexible and just-in-time support. Students may also now use AI as their first point of help, leaving in-person help as a final resort. This would need further investigation, but if confirmed, it suggests that in-person support must be adapted, clearly visible and available to the point of need, so students recognise it as a valuable, additional, support mechanism.

Following this project, we have created new online resources in Achieve for Psychology statistics. Over the past two months, 9% of the Maths and Stats Support resources visitors have already consulted these, showing students' interest.

While our focus was undergraduate students in this project, we have run a similar support workshop for postgraduate Psychology students and noticed a much greater engagement. This indicates that different forms of support would be appropriate for different cohorts.

We intend to examine this further, and collect and compare data on support engagement in undergraduate, postgraduate on online postgraduate students in a future study.

References

Mac an Bhaird, C., Fitzmaurice, O., Ní Fhloinn, E., O'Sullivan, C. (2013) Student non-engagement with mathematics learning supports, *Teaching Mathematics and its Applications: An International Journal of the IMA*, 32(4), 191–205. <https://doi.org/10.1093/teamat/hrt018>

Marshall, E., Riach, A., Shaker, A. J., & Haigney, D. (2022). Are students too anxious for statistics anxiety workshops?. *MSOR Connections*, 20(2), 94–105. <https://doi.org/10.21100/msor.v20i2.1287>

Mehbali, M., & Roberts, L. (2017). Maths Support provision through embedded classes at LSBU. *MSOR Connections*, 16(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.21100/msor.v16i1.632>

Dissemination:

Hutchison, J., Matheson, E., Bottomley, E. and Richard, M., Removing the barriers to accessing statistics support, contributing poster, 17th University of Aberdeen Academic

Development Symposium, April 2026

Matheson, E., Guliaeva, I., Chen, Q., Alexander, T. and Richard, M., Statistics Teaching and Support in Psychology, contributing talk, 17th Annual Meeting of the Scottish Maths Support Network, University of Dundee, June 2026