

## SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

**Action number:** CA15221

**STSM title:** Thematic analysis and mapping of existing centralised models which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing in higher education.

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### **Executive summary**

Between 15<sup>th</sup> January and the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2018 Management Committee members of COST Action 15221, *We Relate. Advancing effective institutional models towards cohesive teaching, learning, research and writing development*, were surveyed as part of the achievement of the third key objective of the COST Action – namely, to identify existing centralised models which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing in higher education. With the survey it was hoped to gather data on the existing models of support in partners' settings, and to get some sense of their place institutionally including their interconnectedness/interoperability.

This purpose of this document is to report the thematic analysis of that data which was conducted using the model described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The document is intended largely for an internal audience i.e. members of COST Action 15221. Because the analysis was completed as part of a Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) it is bounded by that which could be achieved within that time frame. As a result, it is important to note that this report represents initial analysis of the data and a presentation of associated findings. A more comprehensive analysis, and one contextualised in the relevant literature, would be desirable, however, that was an impossibility as part of this STSM.

These caveats notwithstanding, the findings of the descriptive quantitative analysis provide the following results:

- that almost half of the institutions have centralised support for teaching, learning and research;
- that approximately a quarter have no centralised support for teaching, learning and research;
- that the remaining quarter describe the situation as unsure or difficult to describe
- that the situation is markedly different with regards support for writing where only 14% of the MC institutions have centralised support, 57% do not have centralised support, and 28% declare the situation unsure or difficult to describe.

Initial analysis of the qualitative data was conducted using three variations of Braun and Clarke's approach, namely: inductive thematic analysis seeking semantic themes; inductive thematic analysis seeking latent themes; and, theoretical thematic analysis. Findings of that analysis suggest:

- That various centralized shapes/models exist and that within these practical support is enacted in a range of ways
- That equally there is variety in terms of the personnel involved in sponsoring, providing and receiving support
- That one of the valuable characteristics at the core of this work, across the four areas, is the notion of a learning community
- That there may be benefits to blurring the lines between support across the four areas and, indeed, of blurring the lines between the four areas themselves
- That one cannot ignore the influencers of support whether these are systems, strategies, agendas or key actors
- That there is some commonality in terms of the values that are cited as underpinning this work which include ethics, quality, diversity, collaboration and collegiality
- That in turn these values are layered upon by institutional purposes, which revolve around the pursuit of knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge towards the greater public, and often private, good
- That this work does not exist in a vacuum but that it is influenced by bigger ideas such neoliberalism, the ubiquitous nature of technology, globalization, the move to more homogeneity and uniformity across institutions etc.

During the STSM time was also devoted to comparing and where feasible combining the initial findings recorded in this document with the outcomes of the analysis of desirable models of support, as captured by Meyhöfer (2018) and with outputs from the MC discussion of existing models which occurred in Lisbon (2017). That exercise is captured in the draft matrices which are included as appendices 1-3 of this document. Taken together, and mindful of the invaluable peer review provided by Dr. Joaquín A. Mora-Merchán (documented in appendix 4) two important broader key outcomes are noted here which it is hoped will guide future work within the Action:

1. that the data gathering served as an excellent scoping exercise with regards existing models of support across the four areas of writing, research, learning and teaching. While some useful initial findings are noted as a result of the analysis presented within this document, one key outcome is the need for more comprehensive data gathering in the form of case studies which could be collated into a collection which would provide a snapshot of current provision and interoperability of centralized support in MC member institutions across the Action's countries;
2. that data generated in Lisbon (2017) and the thematic analysis provided here allowed, there is an outstanding need to capture the values, purposes, processes, and knowledge and skills which inform existing models. The combination of the theoretical thematic analysis provided in this report with the Lisbon data (appendix 2) provides foundational prompts which colleagues can use in the articulation of these elements with regards existing centralised support for writing, research, learning and teaching. It is proposed that this information be contributed by each MC member to a shared database.

## **Introduction**

In early 2018 Management Committee members of COST Action 15221, *We Relate. Advancing effective institutional models towards cohesive teaching, learning, research and writing development*, were surveyed as part of the achievement of the third key objective of the COST Action – namely, to identify existing centralised models which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing in higher education. With the survey it was hoped to gather data on the existing models of support in partners' settings, and to get some sense of their place institutionally including their interconnectedness/interoperability.

The MC data gathering involved a questionnaire which began with four descriptive quantitative statements which had three possible answers, namely, agree, disagree, unsure. These were followed by an open question where participants were asked to describe the centralised support that existed for teaching, learning, research and writing in their institutions and to comment on their interoperability.

The questionnaire had been piloted with the core group prior to distribution to the MC members.

In total 42 responses were recorded in the online questionnaire.

## **Findings 1**

In the first section, of descriptive quantitative data gathering, colleagues were asked about the extent to which support for the four key activities of the COST Action existed in their institution and the degree to which it was centralized. 'Centralised' was defined as 'an office or centre, which is managed by dedicated

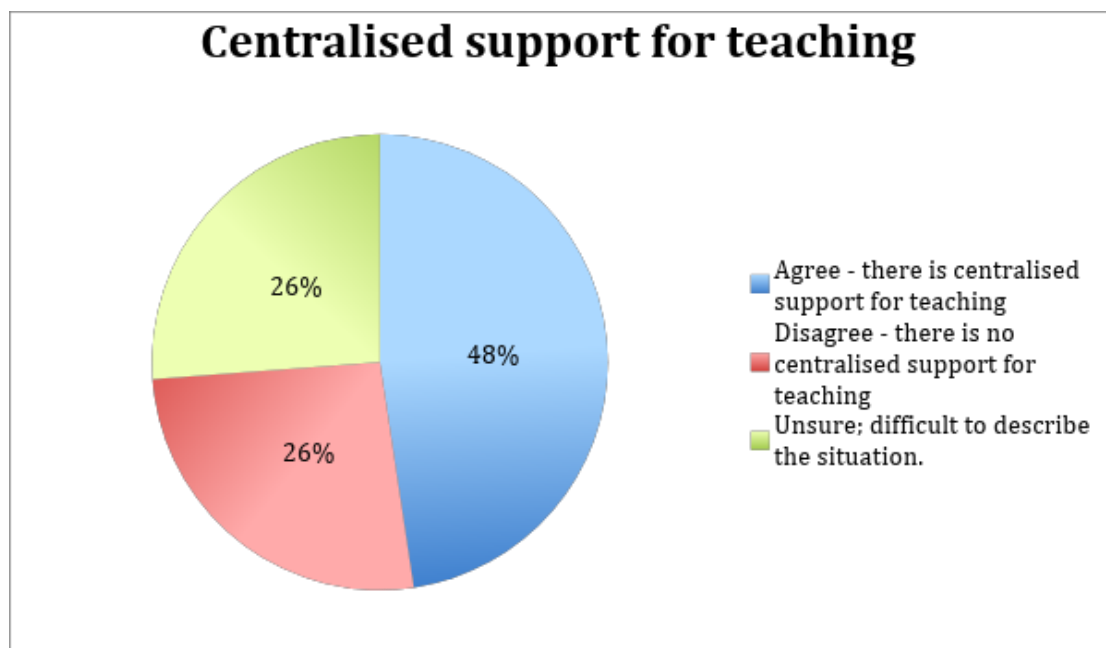
staff, whose primary role is to provide institution-wide support for the four key activities’.

There were four statements to which colleagues were asked to respond.

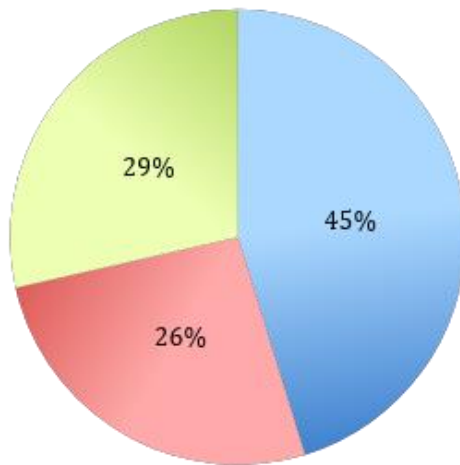
The following findings were recorded in this section.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
There is centralised support for <b>teaching</b> in my institution	20	11	11
There is centralised support for <b>learning</b> in my institution	19	11	12
There is centralised support for <b>research</b> in my institution	20	12	10
There is centralised support for <b>writing</b> in my institution	6	24	12

The responses are also illustrated in the below figures

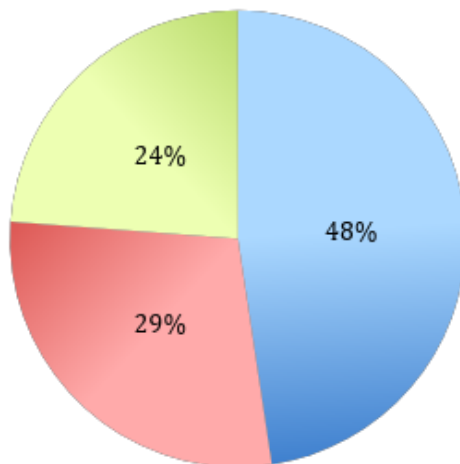


## Centralised support for learning

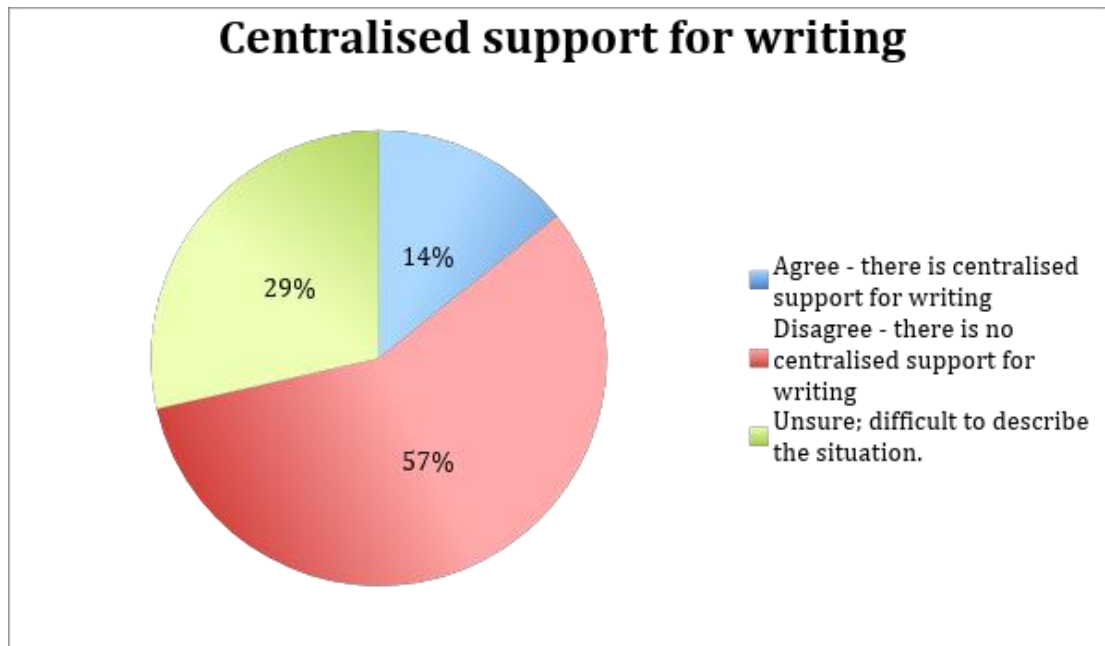


- Agreed - there is centralised support for learning
- Disagree - there is no centralised support for learning
- Unsure; difficult to describe the situation.

## Centralised support for research



- Agree - there is centralised support for research
- Disagree - there is no centralised support for research
- Unsure; difficult to describe the situation.



From this data we can see that:

- almost half of the institutions have centralised support for teaching, learning and research;
- approximately a quarter have no centralised support for teaching, learning and research;
- the remaining quarter describe the situation as unsure or difficult to describe.

The situation is markedly different with regards support for writing where only 14% of the MC institutions have centralised support, 57% do not have centralised support, and 28% declare the situation unsure or difficult to describe. The striking difference in terms of provision of central support for writing versus that for the other three areas raises a number of questions which merit consideration, including, what are the reasons behind the provision and the lack of provision, where (geographically) does the provision currently exist, would greater provision be desirable, what is preventing the occurrence of broader provision at present etc. The thematic analysis which follows begins to explore some of these questions.

## Findings 2

In the second part of the questionnaire colleagues were asked to describe the centralised support that existed for teaching, learning, research and writing, and to comment on the interoperability of these supports. This was presented as an open question with a guideline word count for the contributions of 300 words.

## Thematic analysis of the data – three approaches

The data gathered from this open question was explored using thematic analysis specifically the model described by Braun and Clarke (2006) which is employed

extensively in Education research. Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (79). They note the flexibility which thematic analysis affords, given its capacity to be used within different theoretical frameworks for different purposes, and they highlight key decisions which should be made as part of the analysis process. These include deciding on analysis for 'a rich description of the data set, or a detailed account of one particular aspect', 'inductive versus theoretical' analysis, and searching for 'semantic or latent themes' (83-84). As Braun and Clarke summarise, 'thematic analysis involves searching across a data set ... to find repeated patterns of meaning' (emphasis in original, 86). Practically the process involves six phases which guide the analysis back and forth in a recursive manner. The first phase in the process is familiarizing oneself with the data through reading and re-reading; this phase involves taking notes of initial ideas. Phases 2, 3 and 4 involve coding the data, searching for themes, and reviewing those themes, while phases 5 and 6 move through naming and defining themes, and reporting.

In order to glean as much information as possible from the data gathered three instances of thematic analysis were performed, namely, inductive thematic analysis searching for semantic themes, inductive thematic analysis seeking latent themes, and theoretical thematic analysis. With each of these approaches, phases 1 – 5 were conducted. This process involves becoming familiar with the data, coding the data, searching for candidate themes, reviewed the candidate themes and establishing - including defining and naming - main themes. The combined distilled findings of each approach provided the material for phase 6 of Braun and Clarke's model i.e. 'Producing the report' (87). At this stage in the analysis the goal was to 'tell the complicated story of [the] data' (93). In addition, the findings were mapped and combined with the group analysis and discussion of the data which took place and were captured during the COST Action meetings held in October/November 2017 in Lisbon, and with desirable models of support as suggested by MC members and distilled by Meyhöfer (2018).

### ***Inductive thematic analysis – semantic themes***

Phases 1 through 5 of the inductive semantic thematic analysis on our data resulted in the identification of the following themes:

- Shape/Model of support including practicalities of support
- Personnel involved in sponsoring, providing and receiving support

These themes prevailed in the analysis of the data presented below under the separate headings of teaching, learning, research and writing. This analysis is followed by a consideration of the responses in terms of interoperability. It concludes with a summary discussion of the analysis as a whole.

### *Writing*

Colleagues reported 'support for writing' along a continuum of no support to comprehensive support. Reflective of the aforementioned quantitative data, many responses noted an absence of centralized support for writing. And, though not specifically delineated in the questionnaire, colleagues frequently provided separate comments on support for student and support for staff writing. Responses with regards support for staff are reported first here.

In terms of models of support for staff writing, in one instance the support seemed wide-ranging. In this scenario support for staff as writers was centrally coordinated through the university writing centre (where such an entity exists), which also supported student writers, and was part of the centre for teaching and learning. Its activity included

support ... for faculty on writing for publication and scholarship/research activities (writers' retreats, writers' groups, etc.) alongside other teaching and learning activities. The Writing Centre also provides support for faculty on teaching writing and supporting students as writers.

At the other extreme where minimal or no support was noted it was qualified with statements such as writing being 'less clearly and systematically supported' than teaching, learning and research, not 'a distinct dimension in itself' and 'relegated to occasional non-centralised initiatives'. Indeed, in instances where there was an absolute lack of provision it was suggested, that this might have been due to a belief that academic colleagues are already expert writers, and hence in no need of support. Aside from these two ends of the spectrum other support on offer for staff, lay somewhere between these two models, and tended to be 'informal and provided by colleagues'.

With regards support for student writers this provision varied again from dedicated writing centre models, through support by faculty, to no support whatsoever. Examples of the writing centre models included a central provision (as part of a teaching and learning centre) and a model 'rooted in a discipline'. In these modes writing studies, research-active staff offer one-to-one writing consultations for students, writing workshops, writing-across-the-curriculum programmes and support for the enactment of writing-in-the-discipline amongst other activity. Moving from this dedicated writing centre model, writing support for students was offered through other centralized units including the careers office and the library. In other instances the *nature* of support was mentioned but the source of that support not recorded, for example, English language support, thesis writing help, anti-plagiarism advice, the provision of writing resources (including online resources), writing workshops, writing modules/topic specific support for students. The most common form of writing help noted for students was that which was provided by faculty members *within* an academic department. It was noted that writing is taught, and evaluated, in the disciplines in the 'classroom context' through the faculties, by lecturers and supervisors; in some cases there is also peer support and peer tutoring but the primary source of help outside of centralized provision is from lecturers.



A theme which also emerged was the lack of communication around what is on offer to staff and students.

### *Research*

A similar pattern could be noticed in terms of support for research where some responses noted no centralised support and others quite sophisticated and broad approaches to this area. The various models which do exist come under an array of titles such as 'Research and Innovations Department', 'The Research Authority', 'Pro-rector for Research, Arts and Co-operation', 'Research Office', 'Research and International Co-operation Centre', 'The Centre for Knowledge and Technology Transfer', 'Department of Research and Technology Transfer' etc.

While there was a good deal of similarity in terms of what these centres were offering, the greatest commonality was noted in terms of support related to funding e.g. advertising and providing information and guidance about available funding, sourcing funding, applying for funding, and administrating, approving and financial monitoring of external funding received. Other work with which these offices were engaged included:

- providing internal grants and scholarships
- support around ethics
- support for publication and to attend conferences
- research evaluation
- workshops and seminars on project management and research methods including statistics
- co-operating with industry
- communication about research in newsletters, through social media and information sessions
- researcher mobility
- development of research profile and personal research plans (including for early career researchers – masters, doctoral, postdocs).

One thing which was mentioned with regards research support, which did not emerge in comments on writing, was the link to national agendas through the 'Ministry of Education' (or equivalent). It also seemed that where an institution might have only one central support across the four areas, that would likely be for research, as noted in this comment: 'The only fully centralised support at my own University concerns research for which there exists an office with dedicated personnel ...' What was also recorded was that where there was no centralized support, help was provided by and between colleagues. This approach has notable advantages in and of itself which might be missed where there is a reliance or preferencing of central models. Colleagues remarked specifically on this in the following quotation:

Most research support is provided by the teaching/researching staff, individually or in group lecture sessions. It would be fair to say that the older professors mentor the younger colleagues and PhD students on various occasions and in various contexts. Due to the absence of a

centralized center, collaboration among the young researchers is stimulated and somehow, we may say, that this absence even boosts cooperation and idea exchange even more. Young researchers are very much connected in their work and there is a sense of mutual understanding, support and striving collaboration in publishing work together. Additional support is provided by the library resources and staff.

Unremarkably, the tight budgets of some central supports were also noted in some responses.

### *Teaching*

Again with regards teaching support there were noticeable differences in provision across contexts. The models which existed here were variously titled 'Interdisciplinary Centre for Higher Education Pedagogy', 'Centre for Teaching and Learning', 'Centre for Quality in Teaching and Research', 'Research Centre for Innovation in Learning Technologies'. The three most common offerings of existing central support were faculty development interventions (in the form of accredited courses, workshops and seminars, for new staff and as part of continuing professional development), teaching evaluation (generally through the use of student surveys), and support for Technology Enhanced Learning – TEL. In addition, centres offered guidance on curriculum design, managed teaching awards, provided online resources, supported teaching portfolio development and peer observation of teaching, ran teaching and learning projects, and were researching in the area of teaching and learning including TEL.

Other institutions provided no centralized support but faculty had taken on this role themselves as in these two quotations:

Academic teachers at some faculties organize their own methodological conferences and/or invite some leading scholars in their disciplines to learn from them.

There is no centralized support for teaching at my institution, however colleagues that are in the field of language methodology strive to organize different seminars and sometimes workshops that would suffice for the absence of this support. They frequently collaborate on the projects and events together and organize meetings to discuss the teaching practice at the institution and to decide on the support that is needed for the ultimate success in transferring and testing knowledge in various fields.

Some colleagues suggested that the reason the central support did not exist was because it was undervalued by the institution:

the institution does not appear to be aware of what supports teaching and learning staff provide or indeed, that it is an area of valued

scholarship. As a result, the facilitation to avail of continued professional development is undervalued and as a result, not built into staff time.

In some of the responses there was a sense of regularization and supervision with regards teaching. Again, the influence of national policy and approaches, and of the 'Ministry' was mentioned, as was the idea of 'Centralised support shared among several institutions'.

### *Learning*

Models of learning support which were mentioned were typically student facing. There was again different iterations of central units including 'Centre for Students with Learning Disabilities', 'Academic Counseling and Study Guidance', 'Graduate Academy as part of Student and Academic Affairs and Professional and Organizational Development'. This work seemed a lot less discrete and stand-alone and much more likely to have some links and indeed co-existence with other services and supports such as career development, IT support, the library, academic counseling, language centre, placement centre, international office, multi-media centre, student reps schemes etc.

Specific interventions that were mentioned with regards student learning included dedicated support for students with disabilities, orientation/transition programmes, and training programmes on key competencies. Support was offered through centres, personal advisors and peer mentors. Again lecturers and discipline specific help, including that which is provided through faculty office hours, was noted as a key element of student learning support.

### *Interoperability*

Given how different the contexts are, the stages in development, the available budgets, the traditions, the age and scale of the institutions, national priorities etc. it is unsurprising that interoperability has a unique appearance in each setting.

Some colleagues noted that there was 'No interoperability' with units 'working quite independently'. Obviously, interoperability is not even a possibility where no supports exist for any of the areas:

Since there are no four distinct systems or offices of support for teaching, learning, research and writing, it is impossible to speak about their interoperability.

In other instances, there was a lack of 'interoperability among these different fields of support, although in reality many activities take place to enhance teaching, learning, research and writing'.

Looking at the data, when one moves from the situation of no interoperability one observes a host of variations in terms of how the four supports interact.

Where connections do exist one might assume that they would most likely appear between teaching and learning, and between research and writing. But this does not predominate in the data with one respondent noting 'even some incompatibility between support for teaching and for learning'. Indeed, all manner of combinations were identified. For example, one colleague remarked with regards research and teaching that in that institution they were 'often considered as one and the same thing'. Whereas another participant recorded that

There is close interoperability between the Centralised Support for Teaching and the Centralised Support for Writing (e. g. common workshops or conference trips, informal and formal meetings), [but] no interoperability between Centralised Support for Research and the others and due to a lack of resources very little interoperability between the one person doing learning support and the others'.

In another case,

While connections are evident between the supports for teaching, learning, and writing –which to some extent are offered by the same units – the support for research is disconnected. It is focused solely on helping scholars seek funding and write better funding applications, not on other ways of developing scholars' research competences.

A similar approach to this was reflected in another contribution which noted that

Support for learning and for writing belong to the same institution and interact closely. They report to the vice president for teaching and learning. Support for research is a whole different institution that reports to the vice president for research.

Instances of interoperability did emerge through joint workshops/sessions, meetings, and open days, through the shared institutional strategic plan, and through central units which connect all four areas such as the library. And it was noted that 'the need for more efficient integration of teaching, learning, research and writing is often discussed' and that at 'all levels of higher education the teaching models are closely connected to research and writing and partly to learning'.

In addition, the old chestnut of the privileged status of research over all other university activity reappears; here one colleague notes:

My impression is that the research unit does not see interrelations because their clients are researchers and the clients of the learning and writing support are students and teachers. However, all researchers at our university are also teachers and students should learn how to become

researchers. Thus, there should be much more common ground ... it is ... related to status -research has higher status than teaching.

A potential way to draw these areas together was noted by one colleague who remarked that 'Lately, there has been a somewhat more sustained effort for T&L and R to reinforce each other through research-informed innovative teaching'. Whereby another colleague commented that there is organizational interoperability between the four areas in his/her university:

The support for learning, teaching, research and writing at our University is centralized in a form of a Rectorate. The Rectorate consists of the Rector and Pro-rectors (Vice-rectors) who have a specialized field of activity. The Pro-rector (vice-rector) for students, educational programmes and cooperation follows the activities related to the organization of teaching and students ... new study programmes ... the quality of students' life ... the quality system at the university. The Pro-rector for technology transfer, innovation and cooperation covers the activities related to international cooperation for students and employees ... Research and writing are under the responsibility of the Pro-rector for research, arts and cooperation ... monitors the publishing activities ... follows the researchers' mobility ... cooperates with other research institutions within the country and abroad. As previously mentioned, each of the Pro-rectors has a specific sphere of activity, but they complement their activities and cooperate intensively through meetings at least twice per week. Their shared interest is focused on introducing new programmes and strategies necessary for the development of the university according to current market needs.

### ***Inductive thematic analysis - latent themes***

Most colleagues chose to respond to the open question by writing about support in each area separately. They wrote about the connections between them when they responded specifically to the notion of interoperability. In the inductive thematic analysis seeking semantic themes it made sense to report the findings under the four topic headings, in keeping with semantic theme identification. However, where one examines these findings in a deeper way seeking latent themes, and with a view to drawing out commonality *across* the four areas, other ideas prevail which are addressed in the next section.

### ***Learning Community***

The notion of a learning community percolates through the findings. It is conspicuous where units of support work with both students and staff, albeit in different ways, but it also appears quite strikingly where respondents noted how support for the four areas is integral to the higher environment and that it occurs in the relationships between staff, and between staff and students. This can be seen in comments around models of support as being 'informal and provided by colleagues' and support being provided in the 'classroom context'. One

respondent quoted in the Findings section openly acknowledges that perhaps one of the advantages of not having centralized support is that it encourages collaboration, 'boost cooperation and idea exchange', provides opportunities for mentoring, nurtures a sense of 'mutual understanding' and allows connection to flourish. Where it is a centre's function to provide support colleagues may feel disempowered and may choose not to step forward with other versions of support. Whereas with a lack of a centralized model our data suggest that colleagues could and do step in and build a grassroots version of support which has its foundations firmly in collegiality and the university as a learning community. These grassroots efforts also draw heavily on traditional approaches to support which typically sit within the departments as part of the everyday work of faculty. Indeed, the link with disciplinary origins is also reflected in units of support which are based in the schools e.g. in the Arts, in Health Sciences etc. While it is extended in interdisciplinary models where there is a central support but one which is made up of colleagues drawn from across departments to make up a 'consortium'.

### *The benefits of blurring*

Another theme which exists in the data is the idea that there might be some value to be found in deliberately blurring the boundaries across the four areas. Though one colleague noted that support for writing was not 'a distinct dimension in itself' the blurring of support across areas is probably much more reflective of the reality of the synergies that exist between them than the artificial, though granted at times practical, delineation across four topics (mind you, such artificiality is also reflected in the lines between the disciplines, a tradition that is especially deeply ingrained despite noises and initiatives around interdisciplinarity).

With regards learning, specifically, lines of support disintegrate further with assistance being provided by a range of units and centres which when taken together suggest a holistic interpretation of the student rather than a viewing of them as just a learner with solely intellectual concerns and challenges.

In addition, one can observe physical places where these boundaries blur, particularly, for example, the library which in itself provides us with an alternative model of what institutional but not disparate support might look like.

### *Influencers of support*

The motivation around the provision of support which bubble up in the data also require some consideration not least in terms of who influences the supports that exist and to whom are they answerable. Across all areas there is an accountability agenda which persists. This is seen, for example, in the preponderance of evaluation, largely through student surveys, with regards support for teaching and learning, the links with national agendas for research, and the necessity to publish in writing. It is also evidenced in the impact of institutional strategic plans on activity on the ground and in faculty development, for new staff and as part of Continuing Professional Development

(CPD). Connected to the need to be accountable, a regard for which no one could reasonably object to in a publicly funded system, is the tension that exists between this accountability, and institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Government influence in this matter cannot be ignored and where national (and indeed international) education agencies choose to put their energies and resources has a significant impact on what happens within our institutions across the four areas.

### ***Inductive thematic analysis (semantic and latent) – key findings***

As a result of inductive thematic analysis of the data the two practical themes, of models of support and personnel associated with support, were identified. Within these themes the type of help which facilitates the theory and evidence-informed practice of teaching, learning, research and writing was outlined with reference to the people involved, at various levels, with this support. When subjected to inductive thematic analysis for latent themes three deeper and more complex ideas were discerned from the data, namely: the importance of the learning community, the effects of blurring the boundaries between the four areas, and the influencers of support for the areas. These latent themes prompt us to consider the complexity of the four areas in terms of their distinctiveness *and* their synergistic nature. Undeniably, people - staff and students and indeed other stakeholders – are at the centre of all four areas as actors and sponsors of the work, but systems e.g. national education systems, or ideas, e.g. institutional strategic plans, are also key influencers in what happens. The complexity of the work, professional desires, and various agendas are key motivators behind the existing models.

Given the complexity and variety of the situations, it was hoped that further exploration through theoretical thematic analysis of the data might reveal further insights into existing models of support. Phases 1 – 5 of this work is described next.

### ***Theoretical thematic analysis***

Our COST Action has its foundations in the belief that there are higher education colleagues who are particularly effective across the four areas of teaching, learning, research and writing. In our Action we want to explore how these colleagues work in terms of their processes, purposes, values, skills and knowledge, and to see if this examination will help us to suggest better centralized models of support.

With this intention in mind, the following theoretical analysis of the existing models data is conducted through the lenses of processes, purposes, values, skills and knowledge. Because colleagues in responding to the open question were not prompted specifically to be mindful of these lenses or perspectives, this analysis of the data taps into tacit knowledge to a greater extent than might be achieved with a deliberate direction to look at these five things. The approach also facilitates looking at the data as whole, across as opposed to within the four

areas, and as such the analysis is presented using the lenses as a guiding structure.

### *Purposes*

In considering 'purposes' we are really seeking to begin to identify the why or the intentionality behind existing models. Analysis of the data reveals that motivation to support these four areas is driven by a combination of 'needing' and 'wanting'. From the data it can be seen that there is a demand from predominantly national public funders that staff meet certain requirements, competencies and standards. These may be explicitly articulated by a government department and/or they may connect to international obligations e.g. European directives; while some may see this as part of accountability, other colleagues remark on it as 'controlling'. Other purposes behind central supports are connected to the 'knowledge' goals of higher education, including the goals to develop new knowledge and new approaches, and to share that knowledge through scholarship of various kinds. In some instances, capitalizing on this new knowledge meant the development of new programmes, which potentially creates new markets, and which might push innovation more broadly. Thus, the creation of knowledge has a fiscal benefit which echoes the 'growth' purposes behind many of the four areas and the securing of additional funding, resources and people (staff and students) to sustain that growth. Aside from the institutional purposes, the work of centralized support also looked to enhance the work situation for colleagues particularly where there was a desire to provide, and or create, professional and career development opportunities for staff.

### *Values*

Given that respondents has not been asked to comment specifically on values it is intriguing to see how values seep into the responses and how they underpin what is being said, and indeed not being said. The values that prevail in the data are those of collaboration, collegiality, diversity (including disability), openness, ethics and quality. It would be difficult to argue against any of these in terms of their appropriateness within a higher education setting, particularly where it is intended as a public good. In the data, these values can be seen to translate into purposes, for example, in terms of the desire for quality assurance and improvement, the necessity to be ethical, fair and honest in our work, and the emphasis on diversity. Collaboration, which is noted as featuring in existing models, is essential to the achievement of higher education purposes, not least because of the complexity and scale of some of our work which would be singularly unachievable as a solo pursuit. And it is reassuring to see that collegiality is still held in high regard especially when the emphasis on competition in higher education more broadly is becoming more prominent.

### *Processes*

When we look to examine the data in terms of processes we are seeking to see not the 'why' but the 'how' of central models in terms of supporting writing,



research, learning and teaching. The responses here could be categorized under two headings, namely 'ways of working' and 'practical approaches'. With regards the former, the ways involve working in a strategic manner, in a blended manner (with some face-to-face activity and some online), in a research-informed and evidence based way, formally and informally, within the discipline and across disciplines, one-to-one and in small/large groups, with geographical variety which might be locally/nationally/internationally, within and outside of higher education, and within and across career stage. With regards the latter, practical approaches that were noted included workshops, symposia, accredited programmes, seminars, conferences, publications, consortia and networks, systems (including those for communication, quality and evaluation) and opportunities for mobility.

### *Skills and knowledge*

These final two categories are presented combined as they appear from the analysis of the data to sit well together. Colleagues noted broad headings where support across existing models involved bolstering extant skills and knowledge, and facilitating new skills and knowledge. Unsurprisingly, technology proved pervasive under these headings and involved a number of subcategories such as multimedia, digital information literacy skills, technology enhanced learning, measuring and tracking research etc. Aside from technology there were specific skills and knowledge mentioned which more clearly relate to the four areas than that which one can say about purposes, processes and values. Respondents noted that central supports provide knowledge and skills around the enterprise of research e.g. finding funding, applying for grants, managing grants, project management, entrepreneurship etc. Associated with this is support in technical/professional writing (for bidding and reporting), research methods, subject/discipline specific knowledge/skills, and English language support with a view to publishing in English. Support is also provided with regards the theory and practice of teaching in higher education including 'the methodology, management and strategies of teaching and learning', achieving teaching qualifications, curriculum design, supervising students and accommodating and celebrating diversity.

### ***Theoretical thematic analysis – key findings***

Examining the data from the perspective of purposes, processes, values, skills and knowledge provides us with a different lens through which to look at the responses and ideally, therefore, some fresh perspectives and maybe previously overlooked insights.

The shape of analysis reflects the areas one might consider in a strategic planning process. There is an underpinning with the now largely commonplace higher education values of ethics, quality, diversity, collaboration and collegiality. These are layered upon by the purposes, the goals if you like, of higher education institutes which revolve around the pursuit of knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge ideally towards the greater public and often private good.

As with all strategic planning consideration is given to how the contemporary university will achieve its goals, in line with its values, and this is captured in the processes which include ways of working and practical approaches, both of which call for the maintenance of existing knowledge and skills and the development of new knowledge and skills.

Not least because of how easily this data fit into a strategic planning mold, unsettling questions seem to bubble under the surface of this mapping. Its neoliberal guise is difficult to ignore, as its commercial look and feel, its embracing of technology and globalization, its appetite to disseminate and profile, and its homogeneity across institutions. Rightly or wrongly, the uniformity not only of provision but of desire and intention is striking. There is little in the data that suggest that any one institution is seeking to be unique in terms of what it believes, to what it aspires, and how it intends to go about achieving its goals. While there are obvious reasons that explain the singular nature of this striving, should we be a little concerned by the lack of variety and the lack of space for originality which goes beyond local colour?

### ***Group analysis and discussion of data towards Mapping Existing Centralized Models (Action Working Groups Lisbon 2017)***

#### *Context*

In October 2017 the Management Committee of COST Action 15221 met and discussed the same data set that this analysis has examined. Within that discussion, colleagues were directed to consider the data in terms of values, skills, processes and purposes. Knowledge and scholarship was also a consideration for these discussions but the groups considered that both of these were seen to underpin all of the other four areas and therefore they were not drawn out specifically as themes for the group discussions that occurred.

The outcomes of those discussions is captured in a separate document. The following sections draw out the key points from that document, again in order to inform our analysis of the data set on existing models of support. They are reported in a manner which best reflects the shape of the discussions which moved beyond the data set. As such the document on which this next section is based is a reflection of a discussion on the data set, rather than a strict analysis of the data set per se.

#### *Values and purposes*

With regards values, in the discussions 'diversity' was highlighted as a value and captured in the notion of 'access' and 'widening participation' particularly. It was linked with 'quality' not least in terms of how one manages to hold both values of 'quality' and 'diversity' equally where the diversity of the student population can have implications for progression, retention and support for student learning. The need for ethics emerged again from the discussion hand-in-hand with the emphasizing of academic freedom and respect. This same idea

of respect echoes the diversity focus and a welcome interpretation of international diversity of the student population as a move away from internationalisation in a commercial sense towards intercultural understanding, communication and celebration.

These same discussions articulated the embodiment of values in action which links directly to purpose. In this regard, the conversations revisited the purpose of higher education and the difficulty with it being called on to be so many things to so many people. This is epitomised, for example, in the very real challenge for higher education to manage the employability agenda, while also answering the call for our students to be rounded, responsible, global citizens. The potential shifting in values was observed in neoliberal models driven by 'market imperatives rather than societal needs'. In addition, within our institutions there are also tensions between research, and teaching and learning, and between the faculties not least because of the over-emphasis on STEM. One antidote to this first debate was the stressing of research impact, the insistence on communicating research outside of the university and the work on research led teaching.

### *Processes*

One of the illuminating comments by the group considering processes was 'that existing models of support for teaching, learning, research and writing are sporadic, ad hoc and context specific'. Much of the processes previously recorded, in the analysis reported earlier in this paper, emerged again here but three which are apart from the data also came up in conversation, namely, the need to consider 'both bottom-up and top-down approaches', the consideration of 'independent funding', and 'Incentivisation and reward based on performance and output'. These were noted as existing in some contexts and desirable in others.

Other strands of the discussion captured the difficulty associated with achieving our purposes as this connects closely with processes. They recorded that 'purposes/goals ... are ... affected by contextual factors and the localization which influences the feasibility of the achievement of purposes'. They stressed that the purposes and the processes should be driven by the needs of the institutional learning community as a whole, provided with the appropriate support for achievement, underpinned with values, shared and articulated.

The changing nature of the higher education landscape was also observed in the positive move to seeing students as partners in learning and indeed in research, but in also in the negative tone of discussions which wrangled over 'homogeneity versus heterogeneity/pluralism', the 'technological revolution' and associated 'impact on the literacies of our students, in particular, *digital literacies* and *new literacies*'.

## *Skills*

In the group discussions about skills the dialogue centred more around what might exist rather than what did exist. As recorded by the rapporteur, 'It should be noted that few countries stated that writing/learning/teaching/research centres exist in their institutions'. Hence, the discussion revisited ideas around what might be desirable. These are noted in the document from that meeting and not reproduced here owing to their similarity with the analysis already contained earlier in this paper with the exception of leadership skills which was not recorded elsewhere (perhaps because it genuinely does not exist elsewhere but was considered desirable).

## **Phase 6 - reporting**

### ***Presentation of findings - matrix mapping***

As with all work of this nature, it is difficult to capture succinctly the findings of this research. As with the work on desirable models, the key findings with regards existing models are noted in a matrix which is included as Appendix 1 to this document. In addition, a matrix of this data analysis and the outcome of the Lisbon discussions is included as Appendix 2, and a combined mapping of existing models, Lisbon data and the outcomes of the desirable model data is included as Appendix 3.

### ***Presentation of findings - key outcomes and recommendations***

The findings of the descriptive quantitative analysis provide the following results:

- that almost half of the institutions have centralised support for teaching, learning and research;
- that approximately a quarter have no centralised support for teaching, learning and research;
- that the remaining quarter describe the situation as unsure or difficult to describe
- that the situation is markedly different with regards support for writing where only 14% of the MC institutions have centralised support, 57% do not have centralised support, and 28% declare the situation unsure or difficult to describe.

Initial analysis of the qualitative data was conducted using three variations of Braun and Clarke's approach, namely: inductive thematic analysis seeking semantic themes; inductive thematic analysis seeking latent themes; and, theoretical thematic analysis. Findings of that analysis suggest:

- That various centralized shapes/models exist and that within these practical support is enacted in a range of ways
- That equally there is variety in terms of the personnel involved in sponsoring, providing and receiving support

- That one of the valuable characteristics at the core of this work, across the four areas, is the notion of a learning community
- That there may be benefits to blurring the lines between support across the four areas and, indeed, of blurring the lines between the four areas themselves
- That one cannot ignore the influencers of support whether these are systems, strategies, agendas or key actors
- That there is some commonality in terms of the values that are cited as underpinning this work which include ethics, quality, diversity, collaboration and collegiality
- That in turn these values are layered upon by institutional purposes, which revolve around the pursuit of knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge towards the greater public, and often private, good
- That this work does not exist in a vacuum but that it is influenced by bigger ideas such neoliberalism, the ubiquitous nature of technology, globalization, the move to more homogeneity and uniformity across institutions etc.

During the STSM time was also devoted to comparing and where feasible combining the initial findings recorded in this document with the outcomes of the analysis of desirable models of support, as captured by Meyhöfer (2018) and with outputs from the MC discussion of existing models which occurred in Lisbon (2017). That exercise is captured in the draft matrices which are included as appendices 1-3 of this document. Taken together, and mindful of the invaluable peer review provided by Dr. Joaquín A. Mora-Merchán (documented in appendix 4) two important broader key outcomes are noted here which it is hoped will guide future work within the Action:

1. that the data gathering served as an excellent scoping exercise with regards existing models of support across the four areas of writing, research, learning and teaching. While some useful initial findings are noted as a result of the analysis presented within this document, one key outcome is the need for more comprehensive data gathering in the form of case studies which could be collated into a collection which would provide a snapshot of current provision and interoperability of centralized support in MC member institutions across the Action's countries;
3. that data generated in Lisbon (2017) and the thematic analysis provided here allowed, there is an outstanding need to capture the values, purposes, processes, and knowledge and skills which inform existing models. The combination of the theoretical thematic analysis provided in this report with the Lisbon data (appendix 2) provides foundational prompts which colleagues can use in the articulation of these elements with regards existing centralised support for writing, research, learning and teaching. It is proposed that this information be contributed by each MC member to a shared database.

## ***Reporting - discussion of the findings***

While the data set considered in this paper is not a large one, when analysed and compared and/or combined with other data and discussion documents we can begin to see what the current situation looks like in terms of centralised models of support across the sector. In addition to the findings outlined throughout the document, and noted in specifically in this reporting section, there are a few comments which this author would like to make; these will be necessary brief and not as deeply considered as one might like owing to the limited time associated with this work (as defined by the STSM).

The following appears noteworthy to the author:

- that we need to begin (again) with our values when considering models of support; that this starting point should take precedence over strategic direction and/or agendas
- that we need to remember that we are about education, about people and about becoming more human - that we are about making and finding meaning
- that how we enact our work says a great deal about that work - that we need to be mindful of deep approaches to development and not to focus on quick fixes or on just-in-time learning
- that it is absolutely essential that we value and live diversity
- that we need to be incredibly careful of instrumentalism in our work
- that ethics, quality and openness need to be at the heart of what we do and how we do it
- that we need to be mindful of technology and its impact on our work
- that we need to recognize the value and privilege of working in education.

**Appendix 1 COST Action 15221: Matrix of existing models of centralised support for teaching, learning, research and writing**

	<b>Purposes (What to do? Goals/Intentions)</b>	<b>Processes (How to? Action)</b>	<b>Knowledge and scholarship</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Values</b>
<b>Teaching</b>	Faculty development Quality assurance/improvement – evaluation of teaching Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Responding to national and/or international agendas – including standards and competencies	Accredited programmes Workshops/seminars Teaching awards Provision of online resources Teaching portfolios Peer observation of teaching T&L projects Researching in T&L Evaluation of teaching	Curriculum design (including new programmes)	Initial and CPD for teachers in pedagogy and methods TEL skills	Diversity Collaboration, Collegiality, Openness Quality.
<b>Learning (student)</b>	Supporting diversity/access	Across units and in dedicated units Personal advisors Peer mentoring Dedicated programmes e.g. orientation Dedicated modules e.g. critical skills/competencies		Critical skills Transition skills English language skills Technology	Diversity – access and participation
<b>Writing</b>	Publication and dissemination (staff) Securing funding (staff) Assessment of learning (students)	Offered to all – staff and students One-to-one consultations Group – retreats, workshops, writing groups Through a variety of units e.g. careers, Library, Provision of resources and dedicated modules Peer support/tutoring	WAC/WID Writing studies	Writing for publication Writing in the discipline English language support Thesis writing Avoiding plagiarism	Collaboration Collegiality Quality
<b>Research</b>	Source, secure, manage funding Support colleagues professional and career development as researchers (inc. mobility) Ensure ethics Communicate research Connect with external stakeholders (inc. industry/business) Respond to national agenda	Internal grants and scholarships Research evaluation Workshops/seminars	Information around the ‘enterprise of research’ including funding Impact - knowing what ‘counts’ in research	Grant preparation and managing funding Project management Research methods	Collaboration Collegiality Ethics Quality

Appendix 2 COST Action 15221: Matrix of existing models of centralised support for teaching, learning, research and writing – additions from Lisbon noted in blue

	Purposes (What to do? Goals/Intentions)	Processes (How to? Action)	Knowledge and scholarship	Skills	Values
<b>All areas</b>	‘driven by the needs of the institutional learning community as a whole’ Predominance of STEM	‘sporadic, ad hoc and context specific’ Incentivised Bottom-up and top-down ‘provided with the appropriate support for achievement’ students as partners		Leadership skills	‘underpinned with values, shared and articulated’ challenge of ‘homogeneity versus heterogeneity/pluralism’
<b>Teaching</b>	Faculty development Quality assurance/improvement – evaluation of teaching Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Responding to national and/or international agendas – including standards and competencies	Accredited programmes Workshops/seminars Teaching awards Provision of online resources Teaching portfolios Peer observation of teaching T&L projects Researching in T&L Evaluation of teaching	Curriculum design (including new programmes)	Initial and CPD for teachers in pedagogy and methods TEL skills	Diversity Collaboration, Collegiality, Openness Quality Respect
<b>Learning (student)</b>	Supporting diversity/access Quality (in light of diversity and mindful of retention and progression) Holistic development (responsible global citizenship) Employability – market/economic imperatives	Across units and in dedicated units Personal advisors Peer mentoring Dedicated programmes e.g. orientation Dedicated modules e.g. critical skills/competencies		Critical skills Transition skills English language skills Technology - technological revolution’ and associated ‘impact on the literacies of our students, in particular, digital literacies and new literacies’.	Diversity – access and participation Respect
<b>Writing</b>	Publication and dissemination (staff) Securing funding (staff) Assessment of learning (students)	Offered to all – staff and students One-to-one consultations Group – retreats, workshops, writing groups Through a variety of units e.g. careers, Library, Provision of resources and dedicated modules Peer support/tutoring	WAC/WID Writing studies	Writing for publication Writing in the discipline English language support Thesis writing Avoiding plagiarism	Collaboration Collegiality Quality



<b>Research</b>	Source, secure, manage funding Support colleagues professional and career development as researchers (inc. mobility) Ensure ethics Communicate research Connect with external stakeholders (inc. industry/business) Respond to national agenda	Internal grants and scholarships Research evaluation Workshops/seminars	Information around the 'enterprise of research' including funding Impact - knowing what 'counts' in research	Grant preparation and managing funding Project management Research methods	Collaboration Collegiality Ethics Quality
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COST Action 15221, May 2018  
Data drawn from Farrell 2018 and from Lisbon 2017

Appendix 3 COST Action 15221: Matrix of combined functions of centralised support for teaching, learning, research and writing: **common**, **desirable**, existing (drawn from Farrell 2018 and Meyhöfer 2018)

	Purposes (What/Why? Goals/Intentions)	Processes (How to? Action)	Knowledge and scholarship	Skills	Values
<b>Teaching</b>	<p>Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)</p> <p>Needs driven (individual and institutional)</p> <p>Faculty development</p> <p>Quality assurance/improvement – evaluation of teaching</p> <p>Responding to national and/or international agendas – including standards and competencies</p>	<p>Evaluation</p> <p>Scaffolded and progressive</p> <p>Reflective</p> <p>Blended</p> <p>Incentivised, recognised and rewarded</p> <p>Accredited programmes</p> <p>Workshops/seminars</p> <p>Teaching awards</p> <p>Online resources</p> <p>Teaching portfolios</p> <p>Peer observation</p> <p>T&amp;L projects</p> <p>Researching in T&amp;L</p>	<p>Research (including theory) informed</p> <p>Mindful of technology</p> <p>Curriculum design (including new programmes)</p>	<p>Initial and CPD for teachers in pedagogy and methods</p> <p>TEL skills</p> <p>Sharing knowledge with colleagues (communities of practice)</p>	<p>Freedom/Openness</p> <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Autonomy</p> <p>Diversity</p> <p>Collegiality, Quality.</p>
<b>Learning</b>	<p>Collaborative</p> <p>Self-directed</p> <p>Integrative of technology</p> <p>Core skills and critical thinking</p> <p>Needs driven</p>	<p>Across units and in dedicated units</p> <p>Personal advisors</p> <p>Peer mentoring</p> <p>Dedicated programmes e.g. orientation</p> <p>Dedicated modules e.g. critical skills/competencies</p>		<p>Technology</p> <p>Enquiry based</p> <p>Independent learning</p> <p>Critical skills</p> <p>Transition skills</p> <p>English language skills</p>	<p>Diversity – access and participation</p> <p>Individualised</p>
<b>Writing</b>	<p>Focus on quality and on diversity of output (genre, style and publication)</p> <p>Embedded</p> <p>Far-reaching and transcending of borders</p> <p>Publication and dissemination (staff)</p> <p>Securing funding (staff)</p> <p>Assessment of learning (students)</p>	<p>Offered to all – staff and students .</p> <p>Tailored - one-to-one</p> <p>Group – retreats, workshops, writing groups</p> <p>Through a variety of units e.g. careers, Library,</p> <p>Provision of resources and dedicated modules</p> <p>Peer support/tutoring</p>	<p>Mindful of discipline specific requirements and of discourse communities/Writing in the Disciplines</p> <p>Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)</p> <p>Writing studies</p>	<p>Writing in the discipline</p> <p>Writing for publication</p> <p>English language support</p> <p>Thesis writing</p> <p>Avoiding plagiarism</p>	<p>Free creation and sharing – open access.</p> <p>Freedom</p> <p>Autonomy</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Time and support</p> <p>Equality of opportunity</p> <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Collegiality</p> <p>Quality</p> <p>Ethics (research)</p>
<b>Research</b>	<p>Supporting research communication, collaboration, connection and exchange: within and beyond the institution</p> <p>Support colleagues professional and career development as researchers (inc. mobility)</p> <p>Source, secure, manage funding</p> <p>Ensure ethics</p> <p>Respond to national agenda</p>	<p>Supervision and assistance</p> <p>Mindful of time and resources</p> <p>Internal grants and scholarships</p> <p>Research evaluation</p> <p>Workshops/seminars</p>	<p>Clarity around performance indicators and impact – knowing what ‘counts’ in research</p> <p>Information around the ‘enterprise of research’ including funding</p>	<p>Support re funding and grant preparation and management (including systems and admin)</p> <p>Expert and visible support for publishing and presenting research</p> <p>Mentorships</p> <p>Project management</p> <p>Research methods</p>	
<p>Underpinning desirable characteristics: proactive; evidence and expertise based; synergistic and context sensitive; collaborative and communicative.</p>					



## Appendix 4

### SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM)

**Action number:** CA15221

**STSM title:** Thematic analysis and mapping of existing centralised models which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing in higher education.

**STSM start and end date:** 22/05/18 – 26/05/18

**Grantee name:** Dr Alison Farrell, Maynooth University, Ireland

**Host colleague:** Dr. Joaquín A. Mora-Merchán, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain

#### Report on peer review of work in progress

A work-in-progress version of the thematic analysis and mapping of existing centralised models which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing in higher education was sent to Dr Mora-Merchán by Dr Farrell, during her STSM, on the 24<sup>th</sup> May. Both colleagues met on 25<sup>th</sup> of May to discuss the document where Dr Mora-Merchán provided a valuable peer review of the work.

Dr Mora-Merchán began with an overview remark that, as with all writing, the audience needs to be considered with regards the piece. There will be different requirements if the piece is for an internal audience i.e. Action members and in fulfillment of the Action objectives, or if it is for a broader readership. Similarly, the nature of the piece will vary depending on its genre e.g. if the final output is to be a report or a journal article. Dr Mora-Merchán noted that in his opinion there could be potential for a journal article from or related to the work. Dr Farrell agreed with this assessment and will bring this idea back to the MC under the topic of publication at its next meeting.

Dr Mora-Merchán continued the meeting with specific comments on the work which included the following:

- That some development might be useful on the comment in section 'Findings 1' with regards the lack of writing provision. More contextual information would help here and some consideration of why this lack exists.
- The document would benefit from greater detail with regards the methodology, specifically the coding which resulted in the extraction of the themes.
- Greater inclusion of quotations from the data would help to back up the identified themes
- A deeper discussion of the implications of the findings would be useful. What does the data suggest?
- It might be useful to present some of the data as a table
- There was a question over why the learning section is so short

- It would be useful to provide more information about the data gathering and about the respondents, noting particularly that the data reflect respondents' perspectives and not institutional opinions.

In terms of directions for the paper from here the following was noted:

- If this work is to provide the basis or some element of a journal article then there is a need for more contextual work at the beginning of the piece which would include information on existing models which might be considered examples of 'good practice'.
- It would be interesting to link the models to countries or areas. With the current data set this may not be possible but this is a useful comment to consider as we look to publications from the Action more generally, especially those that might include case studies.

Finally, it was noted that given that this piece is associated with a COST Action it needs to contribute to the fulfillment of that Action. But, it may also have possibilities in terms of other publication beyond that which is required by the Action. We need to be mindful of both elements with regards this and other outputs from the Action.

Dr Farrell noted her gratitude to Dr Mora-Merchán for his comprehensive review of the work and more generally his hosting of her visit. Dr Farrell will respond to the Dr Mora-Merchán in the redrafting of the doc and will bring the comments relevant to the Action's MC when they next meeting.

May 2018.

Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology,  
Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3:2, 77-101