

# Increasing student engagement with library-led dissertation support

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Academic Engagement Team – Learning & Teaching



Nottingham Trent  
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Libraries and Learning Resources

# Who we are

- The Academic Engagement Team (AET) is one of the teams in the wider Library and Learning Resources department
- We work with both teaching staff and students to provide support with Academic Skills and Maths and Statistics
- Academics can request teaching sessions and drop-in sessions for their students
- Students can book onto lunchtime webinars and book one-to-one appointments



# Project Aim

- To explore new methods of increasing student engagement with services offered by the Library Academic Engagement Team (AET), in line with the NTU Widening Participation strategy.



# Success for all

- Brackenhurst is a beautiful campus in rural Nottinghamshire which houses the School of Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences (ARES)
- The school of ARES has large numbers of students from Success for All categories
- 36% of ARES students are from Widening Participation Groups
- 49% of ARES students declare a disability compared with 37% across the university





# Why final year students?

- Students are juggling a full-time final year undergraduate degree with part-time work due to the cost-of living crisis (Neves et al. 2024, Lewis 2023).
- This can also impact student continuation and outcomes (Office for Students 2024; Blackman 2018).

- Mental Health issues can impact the outcomes of final year undergraduates.
- Number of students reporting mental health conditions has increased (Office for Students 2024, Magier 2023, Campbell et al. 2022).

- Final year students value being able to 'check in' with staff.
- They value familiar, consistent and accessible support.
- They appreciate the library as a place to seek help and guidance during this challenging final year (Student 2025).

# Existing dissertation support 23-24

1:1 bookable  
appointments for  
academic skills, maths  
and stats

Term 2 in-person  
drop-in sessions for  
academic skills

Term 2 in-person,  
timetabled drop-in  
sessions for maths  
and stats

# Voluntary or timetabled

## Voluntary

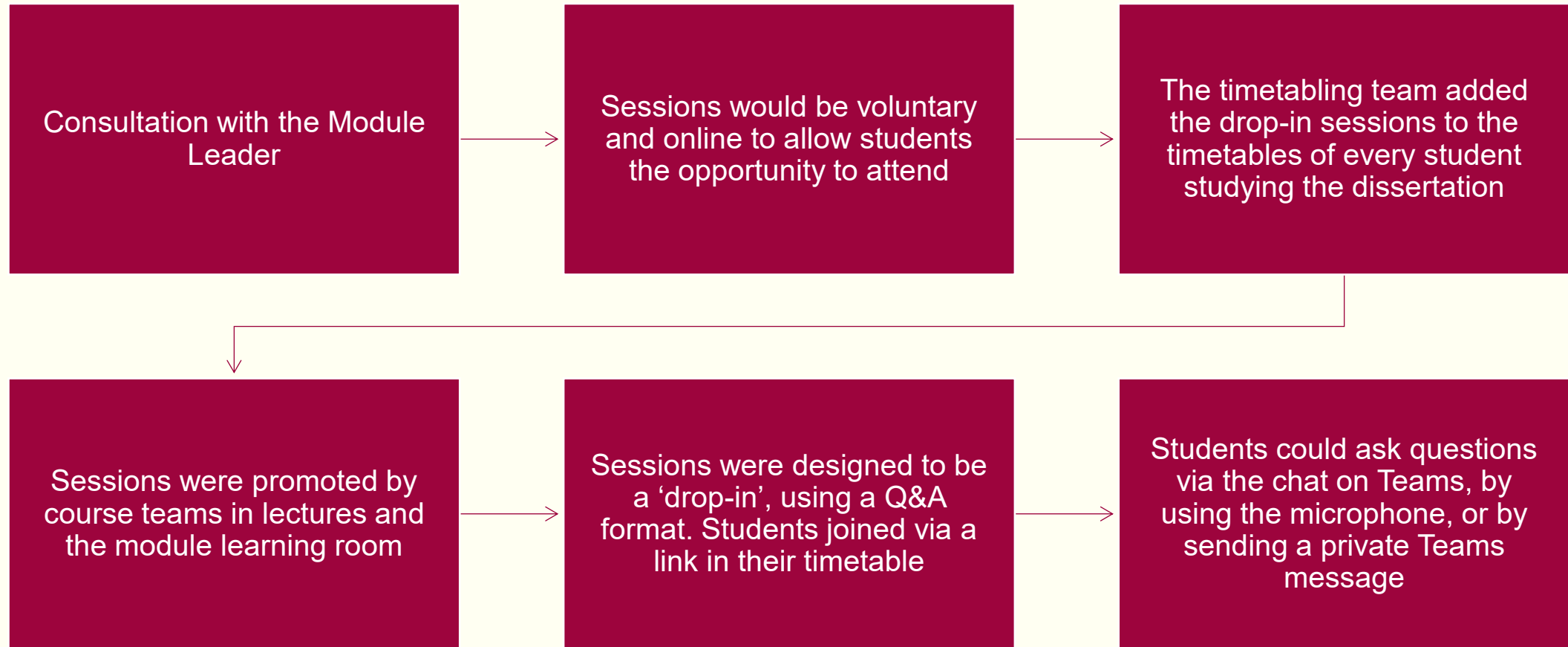
- Flexible
- Right support at the right time for them
- Improves motivation

## Timetabled

- Encourages engagement
- Ensures consistency of provision
- Ensures equity of access to resources and support

Does offering a timetabled option which is voluntary to attend increase engagement?

# Our intervention



Students can access 5 x 45-minute sessions with their dissertation supervisor, so this additional weekly support was welcomed by students and lecturers alike

# Attendance to-date

- A total of 16 students attended untimetabled dissertation drop-ins held in the library in 2023 term 2
- How do you think our journey has been since? Higher or lower?

AS  
untimetabled  
drop-in 2023  
(term 2)

MS  
timetabled  
drop-in 2023  
(term 2)

AS  
untimetabled  
drop-in 2024  
(term 2)

MS  
timetabled  
drop-in 2024  
(term 2)

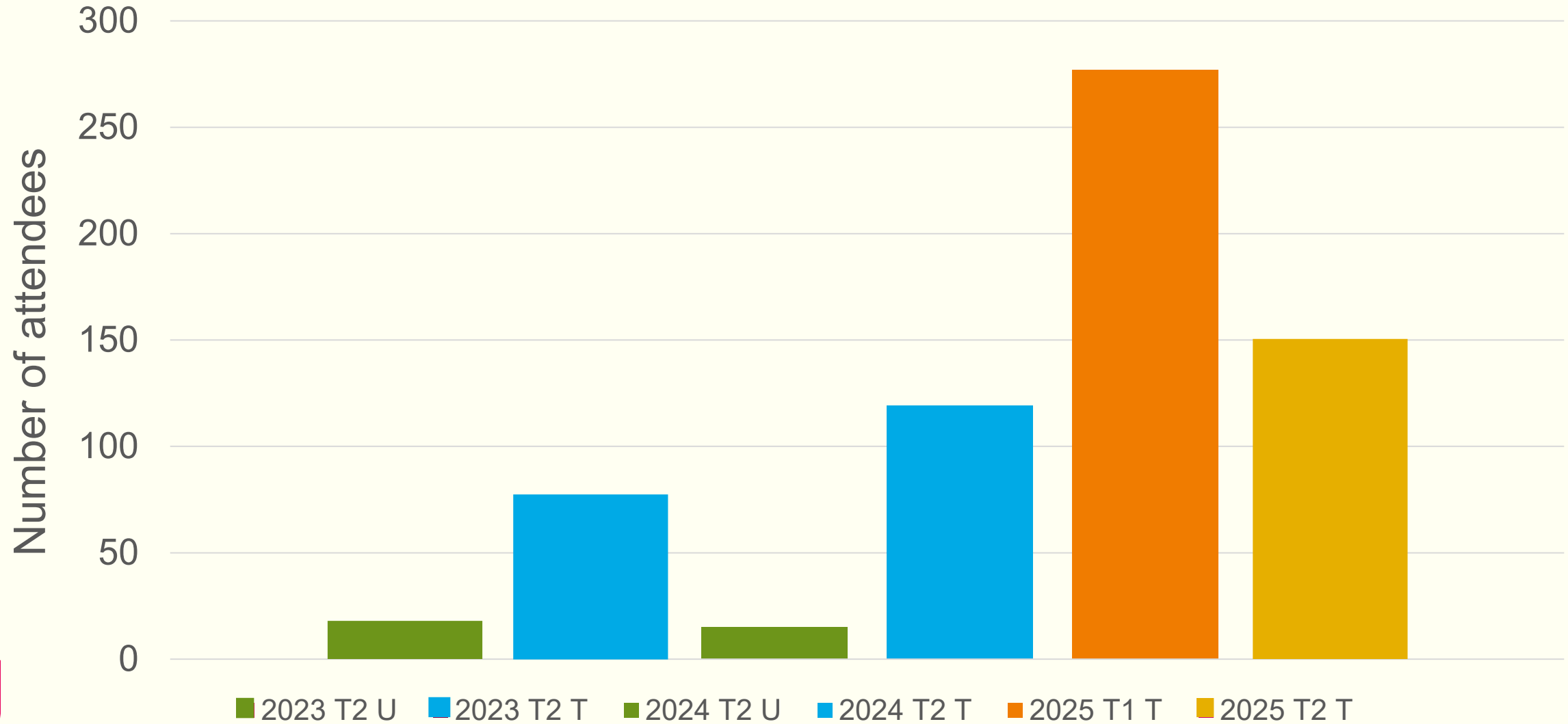
AS timetabled  
drop-in 2025  
(term 1)

AS and MS  
timetabled  
drop-in 2025  
(term 2)

NTU

Dissertation deadline: 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025

# Attendance



# The numbers

| AS drop-in<br>2023 (term 2) | MS timetabled<br>drop-in 2023<br>(term 2) | AS drop-in<br>2024 (term 2) | MS timetabled<br>drop-in 2024<br>(term 2) | AS timetabled<br>drop-in 2025<br>(term 1) | AS and MS<br>timetabled<br>drop-in 2025<br>(term 2) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 16                          | 77                                        | 15                          | 119                                       | 277                                       | 149                                                 |

- A chi squared test yielded a p-value of  $<0.01$  ➡ Highly significant
- We can be confident that timetabling the sessions caused the higher attendance figures

# Mid term feedback

## Students requested:

- Specific topics in some sessions.
- Maths & Stats support.
- In-person sessions

## Our response:

- Sessions were delivered on literature searching, methodology, abstract writing, formatting a dissertation.
- Sessions were lengthened to two hours and a specialist Maths & Stats Academic Skills Tutor attended for some of the session.
- In January 2025, the first hybrid online/in-person session was held.



# Term 2 – what did we do well?

Cover  
different  
topics

Regular  
weekly  
support

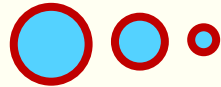
Get quick  
answers

Helps with  
structure

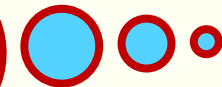
Walk through  
topics step by  
step

# Term 2 – how can we improve?

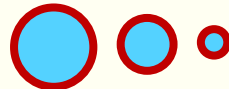
Add session  
topic to  
timetable



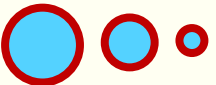
Run on a  
different day



Run in-person  
support  
sessions



Send  
reminders  
about weekly  
topic



# Feedback from dissertation module report

- Dissertation grades similar to previous years
- No students failed the dissertation module
- Feedback to the course team was 'very positive'
- Confident that this model should continue next year



# 2025-26 plan

 Provide online drop-ins in Term 1 but then move to online and in-person in Term 2

 Promote 1:1 appointments for students who want more specific support

 Provide a list of topics and dates on module learning room

 Record topic sessions for students unable to attend

# 2025-26 schedule

| Week | Date W/C   | Event                                       | Additional info  |
|------|------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1    | 22/09/2025 | Introduction to module                      | Term 1 starts    |
| 2    | 29/09/2025 | Project management                          |                  |
| 3    | 06/10/2025 | Structuring your dissertation               |                  |
| 4    | 13/10/2025 | Advanced research                           |                  |
| 5    | 20/10/2025 | Writing your introduction/literature review |                  |
| 6    | 27/10/2025 | Writing a systematic literature review      |                  |
| 7    | 03/11/2025 | Writing your methodology                    |                  |
| 8    | 10/11/2025 | Introduction to Excel                       |                  |
| 9    | 17/11/2025 | <b>Writing retreat 3hr session</b>          |                  |
| 10   | 24/11/2025 | Introduction to R                           |                  |
| 11   | 01/12/2025 | Introduction to Minitab                     |                  |
| 12   | 08/12/2025 | Q&A                                         | Term 1 ends 12th |

# Key take-aways

Adding optional Academic skills support to the timetable is a successful strategy

Collaboration with schools and course teams ensures that library support remains focused and relevant

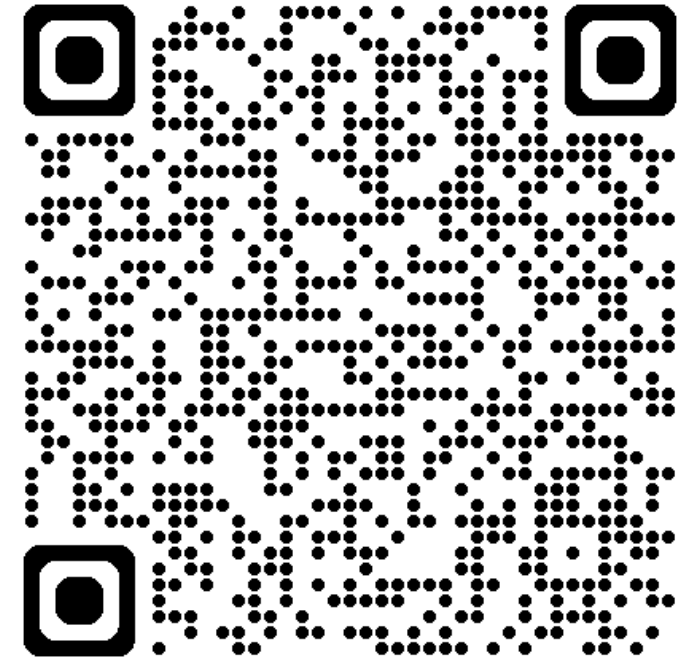
Listening and responding to student feedback ensures that library services are a trusted and valued source of support



**Small changes - big difference**

# Can you suggest ways to increase engagement in your area?

- Scan the QR code
- Add your suggestions to the Padlet





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# Thank you