

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

The STSM applicant submits this report for approval to the STSM coordinator

Action number: COST Action 15221 – We ReLate -- Advancing effective institutional models towards cohesive teaching, learning, research and writing development

STSM title: Writing Centre Exchange Project

STSM start and end date: 30.03.2019 – 05.04.2019

Grantee name: Dr Katrin Girgensohn

PURPOSE OF THE STSM

One of the goals of the COST Action We ReLaTe is to start and foster a global conversation around new models for the centralised support of teaching, learning, research and writing, for both staff and students. Those conversations should be based on shared reported findings on what leads to effectiveness, success and productivity of such centralised support units. Therefore, the aim of this STSM was to structure this conversation between participating European institutions in order to uncover what leads to the effectiveness and success of such centralised supports.

This STSM continued to provide an organised platform to structure the conversation between three European institutions about their centralised support models, in particular, for writing. The University of Gothenburg in Sweden, the University of Limerick in Ireland and the European University Viadrina in Germany all offer support for writing, teaching, learning and research within their writing centres. This visit was the third of three conversations between the three participating institutions. During this second visit, Katrin Girgensohn of the European University Viadrina and Ann-Marie Eriksson of University of Gothenburg visited Dr Íde O’Sullivan of the Regional Writing Centre at the University of Limerick.

Through three mutual visits and a collaborative, exploratory research approach, we strive to find out what leads to effectiveness, success and productivity of the centres. Furthermore, we endeavour to find out which challenges the centres face and how they deal with them. The goals of the research collaboration are to get outside perspectives on the work of each centre, to learn

from each other, and to develop more knowledge on the institutional work of central support units. Equally, it is intended to share the outcomes of this research with interested parties within the European higher education context.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSM

Background

Based on a model of institutional work of writing centre directors (Girgensohn 2017), this collaboration examines how writing centre teams in Sweden (Gothenburg University), Ireland (University of Limerick) and Germany (European University Viadrina) conduct institutional work in their writing centres. Institutional work is defined as “purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006, 215). According to Girgensohn’s research, institutional work in writing centres includes specific strategic action fields and uses collaborative learning as a tool to interact with stakeholders.

Research questions

The research collaboration asks how the local actors interact in their writing centres, with whom they interact and in which strategic action fields, related to teaching, learning, research and writing. A focus of the research is on the specific contextual conditions in the different local contexts.

Methods

Actors of all three universities visit each other’s centres to learn more about them and gain insights about strategic action fields and the ways of interacting with stakeholders and co-workers. One method of data gathering and analysing is a kind of “fishbowl” as a special form of focus group (cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishbowl_\(conversation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishbowl_(conversation))). The overall approach is explorative, oriented towards grounded theory methodology in the way that the ongoing findings influence the data gathering of the next visits. The locally gathered data is analysed after each visit, so that new data goes into the growing corpus.

Visit to the Regional Writing Centre, University of Limerick, Ireland

See Appendix I for an overview of the schedule.

On **Saturday 30th and Sunday, 31st of March 2019** writing sessions were conducted to prepare our Symposium at the upcoming EATAW conference and additionally the following topics were discussed:

- We had presented preliminary findings of our ongoing project at the Conference of College Composition and Communication in Pittsburgh and got feedback on the approach as well as additional references that might be included. We discussed how to proceed with these.

- We refined our methodological approach, discussing the boundaries of what we do with Institutional Ethnography and with Participatory Action Research.
- We discussed how the fishbowl method enriched our research question in the way that the fishbowl itself seems to become an strategic action field

On **Monday, 1st April 2019**, we got an introduction and a tour of the Regional Writing Centre.

To get a better understanding of the regional context, the Center for Teaching and Learning, as the unit that the RWC is part of, presented its work in several presentations, namely:

- Welcome and brief overview (Dean, Learning and Teaching)
- CPD (Mary Fitzpatrick)
- Graduate Diploma/MA Teaching, Learning and Scholarship (Íde O'Sullivan)
- Learner Centres (Richard Walsh)
- Student Engagement and Success (Sarah Gibbons)
- First Seven Weeks (Maura Murphy and Karen McGrath)
- Technology Enhances Learning (Sinéad Spain)

Afterwards, we got together with the RWC team and got a detailed introduction of the RWC organisation and activities. The visiting writing centers presented their structures as well. Equally, the schedule for the visit was finalised and the questions for each of the interviews with stakeholders were agreed.

Tuesday, April 2nd till Thursday, 4th, the visitors from the University of Gothenborg and the European University met with key stakeholder in the institutions and with co-workers of the Regional Writing Centre. Interview were conducted with the following key stakeholders:

- Vice-president of Academic Affairs and Student Engagement
- Dean (acting), Teaching and Learning
- Mature Student Officer
- Manager, Centre for Teaching and Learning
- Head Library Information Services
- Assistant Dean of Faculty of Science and Engineering
- MBA Programme Leader Kemmy Business School
- Representative of International Education Division
- Co-director of the Regional Writing Centre
- 7 Peer tutors in Academic Writing
- Co-operative Education Administrative Assistance of the RWC
- Professor of Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Professor of Education and Health Sciences

The following was established during the interviews:

Questions for stakeholders:

- What is the mission of the RWC?

- What is the RWC doing well?
- Why does it work well?
- How does the RWC work (with you)?
- What challenges do you see?

Questions for co-workers:

- What is the mission the RWC?
- What is functioning well?
- Why are things functioning well?
- How is it to work in the RWC? Are there any challenges?
- Where do you see the RWC in ten years? And how did you get there when you look back in ten years? What needs to happen?

Each evening, Katrin and Ann-Marie transcribed the interviews with the stakeholders and the co-workers in the unit. The interviews were initially analysed thematically to establish the main themes emerging in relation to the questions posed. These notes were then used to establish the primary themes for discussion during the fishbowl activity.

On **Thursday, April 4th**, the fishbowl was prepared and conducted. It was recorded and will be used as further input into the data from the interviews that will be closely analysed following the visit.

Friday, April 5th was used for revisiting the research questions in light of the initial findings and in order to establish the strategic action field apparent in the working of the RWC.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The main results derive from all three visits and the research activities in between (data analysis using qualitative content analysis). They will be described in several scientific articles that we will submit for publication after presenting and discussing the collected results at the CCCC international conference in Pittsburg, USA and EATAW conference 2019. As preliminary first findings of the visit in Limerick, which were discussed during this fishbowl activity, we explored three categories that subsumed the impressions that were most interesting from our outsider perspective: 1) Workload in relation to resources 2) Integration of writing in the university 3) Visibility and Perception.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

This STSM consisted of the third out of three visits amongst the participating institutions. This STSM contributes to the COST Action by generating results that directly contribute to the action's goals, giving greater insight into the centralised supports for teaching, learning research and writing in three European institutions of higher education. Dissemination will be in the form of a presentation at the EATAW 2019 conference. Another practical outcome will be different articles:

Paper 1: EATAW comparative paper (EATAW symposium in 2019, followed by submission to Journal of Academic Writing)

Paper 2: Methodological paper (Journal yet to be decided on in 2019, probably FQS)

Paper 3: Extended article of findings and case study (Journal: Studies in Higher Education in 2020)

Paper 4, 5 and 6: Articles covering specific parts/elements of the research project and their sub-results

Appendix I

COST Action 15221 STSM:

Writing Centre Exchange Project (WCEP)

29/03/2019 to 05/04/2019 at the Regional Writing Centre, Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Limerick, Ireland

Working Schedule March 29 th to April 5 th 2019			
Date	Activity	Participants	Parallel Programme
Friday 29th March	Data analysis from WCEP visit to European University Viadrina	Ann Marie Eriksson and Íde O'Sullivan	
Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st March	Writing session to develop research paper for the EATAW conference based on the findings of the research and relating them back to Girgensoh's (2017) model of Institutional work of writing centre directors.	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn and Íde O'Sullivan	
Monday 1st April 2019			
10.00–10.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and introduction Tour of Regional Writing Centre 	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn, Anne Hsu Nilsson, Gregory Soulliere Íde O'Sullivan	
10.30–12.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amalgamate data from visit to the European University Viadrina and the University of Gothenburg Finalise research design for UL data collection process Revisit and finalise planned schedule 	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn, Íde O'Sullivan	11am: Visit to Language Learning Hub Anne Hsu Nilsson, Gregory Soulliere
12.00–13.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to Irish university system and the centre's organizational context Observations and reading documents to understand the institutional and local context 	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn, Íde O'Sullivan Anne Hsu Nilsson, Gregory Soulliere	
13.00–14.00	Lunch		
14.00–15.00	Meeting with the CTL team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and brief overview (Dean, Learning and Teaching) CPD (Mary Fitzpatrick) Graduate Diploma/MA Teaching, 	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn, Íde O'Sullivan Anne Hsu Nilsson, Gregory Soulliere	

	<p>Learning and Scholarship (Íde O'Sullivan)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner Centres (Richard Walsh) • Student Engagement and Success (Sarah Gibbons) • First Seven Weeks (Maura Murphy and Karen McGrath) • Technology Enhances Learning (Sinéad Spain) 	CTL team	
15.00-16.00	<p>Meeting with RWC Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing institutional contexts: Short presentation from each writing centre director • Detailed introduction of the RWC organisation and activity • Identify obvious differences and commonalities between centres 	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn, Anne Hsu Nilsson, Gregory Soulliere, Lawrence and Íde	
16.00-17.00	Document transcription and notes of observations and interviews for the day		
Dinner	RWC hosted dinner	All	
Tuesday 2nd April 2019			
Morning	<p>Meetings and interviews with key stakeholder at the University of Limerick</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10.00: Dean (acting), Teaching and Learning (Dr. Mary Fitzpatrick) • 10.45: Mature Student Officer (Rhona McCormack) • 11.30: Manager, Centre for Teaching and Learning (Maura Murphy) • 12.15: Head Library Information Services (Michelle Breen) (Library Building) 	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn,	<p>Observe Academic Writing Workshop 10-11.00 (A1-052)</p> <p>Meeting with Lawrence Cleary (Digital resources in the RWC) 11.00 to 13.00 RWC, C1-065</p>
13.00-14.00	Lunch (Market)		Market lunch with Catherine Martin (module leader Academic Literacies)
14.00-16.00	<p>Meetings and interviews with key stakeholder at the University of Limerick (Faculty)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14.00: Faculty of Science and Engineering (Dr. Reena Cole, Assistant Dean) 	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn	<p>Observe module AW6002 (Academic Literacies 2) 14-16.00 (D1-050)</p> <p>Observe AW4006: Tutorial</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14.45: Kemmy Business School (Catriona Burke, MBA Programme Leader) 15.30: International Education Division (Janet Clifford) 		16-17.00 (B1-005)
16.00–17.00	Document transcription and notes of observations and interviews for the day		
Wednesday 3rd April 2019			
Morning	<p>Interviews with unit RWC co-workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10.00: Co-director, Regional Writing Centre (Lawrence Cleary) 10.00: Peer tutors in Academic Writing (Áine O’Keeffe & Aisling Ross) 10.45: Co-operative Education Administrative Assistance (Rachel Beck) <p>Meetings and interviews with key stakeholder at the University of Limerick (Faculty)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10.45 Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (Prof. Margaret Harper) 11.30: Faculty of Education and Health Sciences (Dr. Sandra O’Brien) <p>Peer tutors in Academic Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12.00: Tara Giddens and Rachel Cahalane 12.00: Chris Fitzgerald, Caoimhe Regan and Sophie Sabherwal 	<p>Ann Marie and Katrin</p> <p>Anne and Greg</p> <p>Anne and Greg</p> <p>Ann Marie and Katrin</p> <p>Anne and Greg</p> <p>Ann Marie</p> <p>Katrin</p>	
12.30	Lunch		
13.00–14.00	Peer tutor CPD/Coffee session with visitors	All	
Afternoon	Document transcription and notes of observations and interviews for the day		Observe peer tutoring sessions in the RWC
Thursday 4th April 2019			
08.15	Breakfast meeting and interview with Vice	Ann Marie Eriksson,	

	President Academic Affairs and Student Engagement (Prof. Kerstin Mey)	Katrin Girgensohn Plassey House	
9.00-12.00	Visitors analyse and discuss findings from interviews and observations Visitors elaborate research design: develop research questions for fishbowl activity	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn, Anne Hsu Nilsson, Gregory Soulliere	
12.00-13.00	Lunch		
13.30-15.00	Fishwol	All	
15.00-16.00	Debrief following fishbowl activity Recording observations form the fishbowl activity	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn, Íde O'Sullivan Anne Hsu Nilsson, Gregory Soulliere	
16.00-17.00	Document transcription and notes of observations and interviews for the day		
Friday 5th April 2019			
Morning	Discussion with all research collaborators about findings Preparation of findings for presentation at EATAW 2019 Preparation of report for COST	Ann Marie Eriksson, Katrin Girgensohn, Íde O'Sullivan	
12.00	Depart UL		