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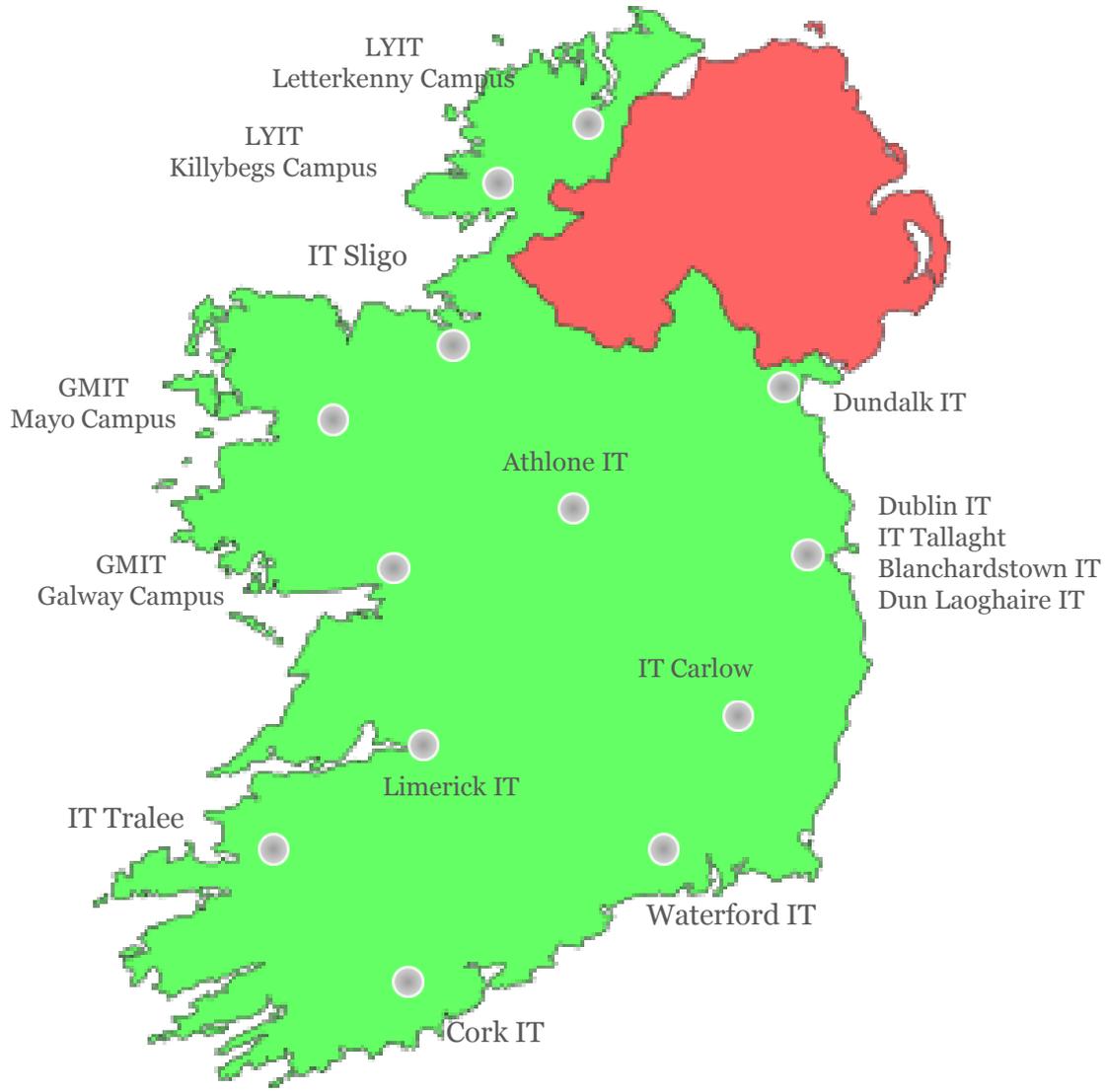
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Rationale for study

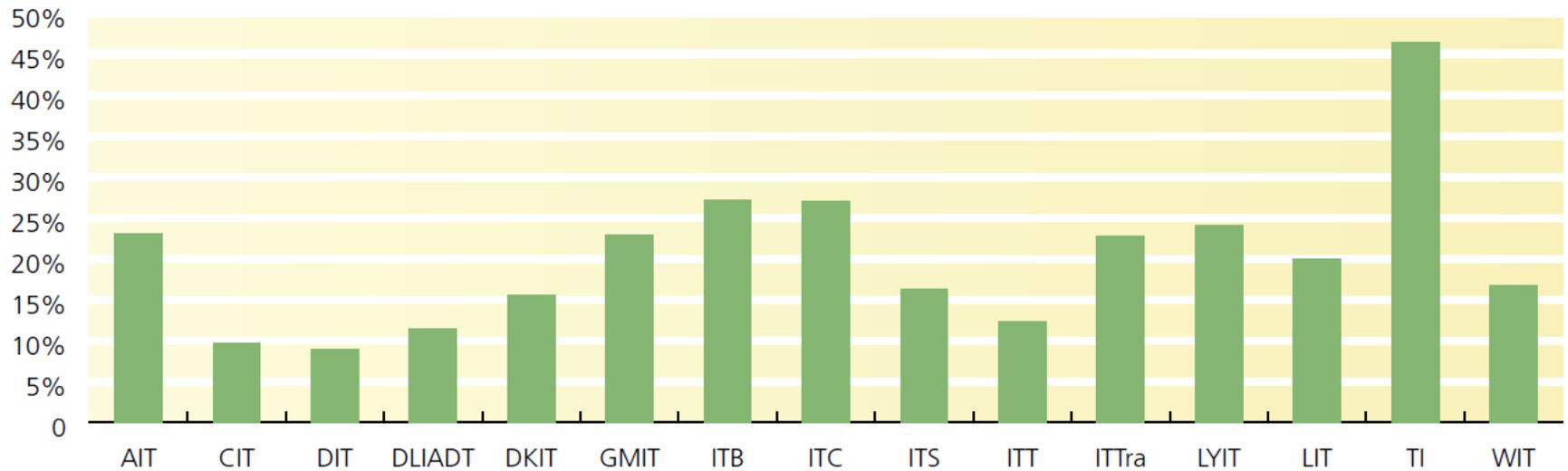
- To evaluate the use of an online learning package for study skills (Skills4StudyCampus) by comparing student and lecturer perceptions of its utility in an Institute of Technology and three feeder schools.
- **Skills4StudyCampus:** online interactive learning package for study skills, 6 modules. Embedded in VLE Blackboard:
 - Getting ready for academic study
 - Reading and note-making
 - Critical thinking skills
 - Writing skills
 - Referencing and plagiarism
 - Exam skills

Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI)

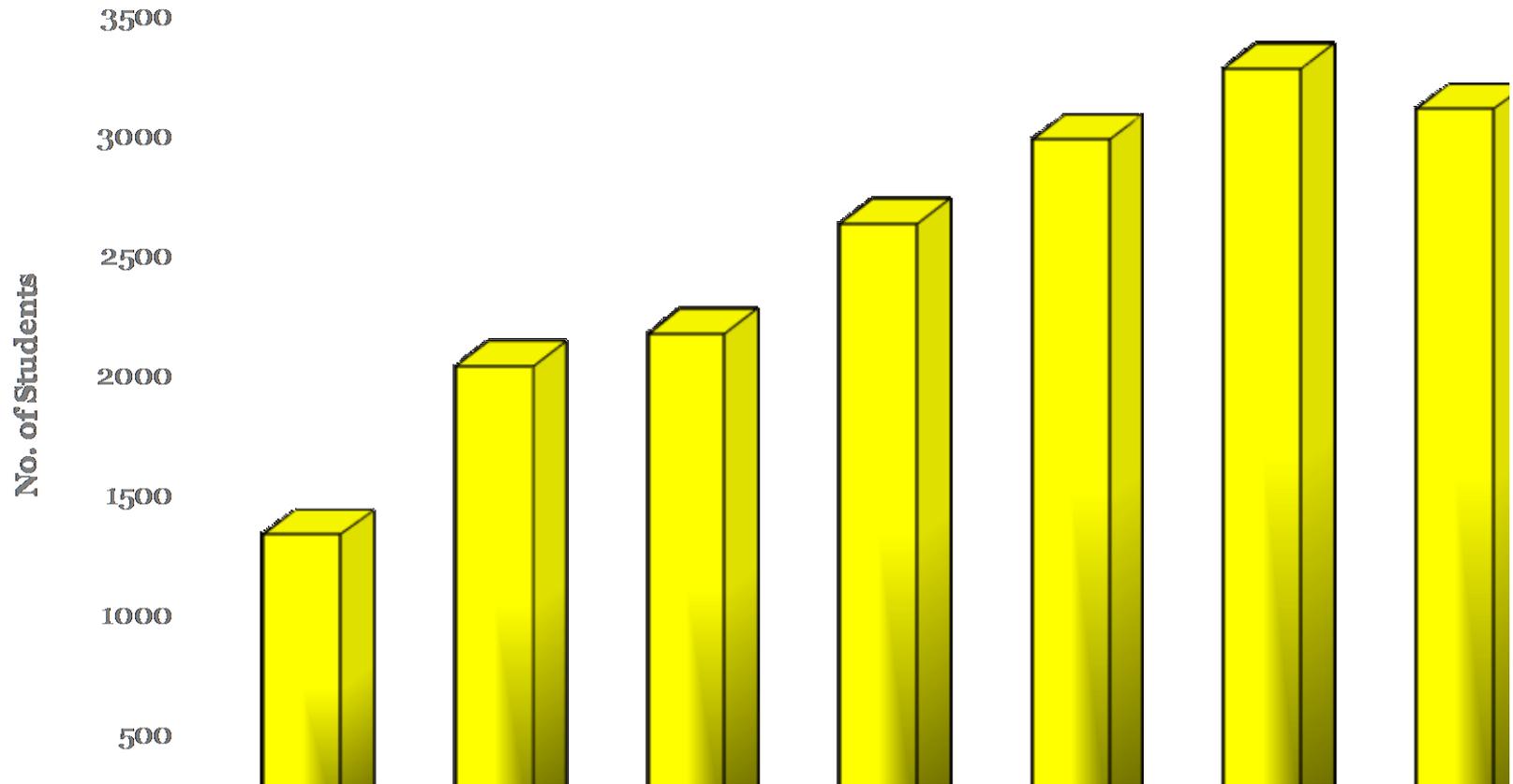


HEA – Higher Education Key Facts and Figures 2009/10

Figure 6.9 Full-Time Undergraduate Mature (23+) New Entrants for the Institute of Technology Sector



Student Enrolment



Programme Offerings

- Business Studies
- Law & Humanities
- Design & Creative Media
- Tourism
- Engineering
- Computing
- Science
- Nursing

Key points from the literature

- **VLE usage:** 2009 study of 8 HEI in Ireland found VLE's are now very frequently used by HE students (Cosgrave et al 2011)
 - Mostly used as a repository for course materials – few interactive learning activities – agreement among students that lecturers do not make good use of VLE's.
 - Broadband in rural areas may be an issue.
 - Effective e-learners need to be confident with technology, also independent learners with a positive attitude to learning, self-motivated with effective communication skills.
- **Skills development in 1st year HE:** importance of the 1st 10 weeks in HE and opportunities given to learn about and acquire generic skills (Torenbeek et al., 2011).
 - Higher order skills should be avoided early in 1st year as they are too complex for many 1st years.
 - Importance of fit, and transition ,between 2nd and 3rd level education.

Key points from the literature

- **1st year retention in HE and study skills:** ‘lack of preparation for and understanding of the type of learning that is required’ (Wingate, 2007)
 - Greater and more diverse student population needing a transition period.
 - The discipline based classroom is the most effective place to practice knowledge construction, discipline discourse and learning to learn.
- **Lack of academic skills :** often quoted by mature students as a reason for leaving HE, self-management and study skills by younger students (Goldfinch and Hughes, 2007). Some students enter HE very confident of skills only to find the skill set is different in HE.
 - Found over confidence in skills among students who failed the year, but under confidence in those who withdrew.
- **Gaps:**
 - Online generic study skills packages.

Methodology

- Students from three feeder secondary schools - introductory session to the package, and then access (no = 225).
 - Surveyed using SurveyMonkey, group interviews.
- Students on four different study skills modules in Lyit were given access to the package. One group were fulltime undergraduate (no = 570), the other were Access students (no = 150).
 - Surveyed using SurveyMonkey, group interviews.
- Four lecturers teaching on the above study skills modules were interviewed.

Learner Feedback

Usefulness of Package

- Overall both groups found it useful
- Some VLE issues
- Studyskills issues

Learner Feedback

Use of Strategies/ Advice

- “Getting ready for academic study” and “Reading and note taking” – simplistic and prior knowledge issues
- “Referencing and plagiarism” and “Exam skills” – seen as practical and useful
- “Exam skills” – timetabling and prior experience reflection piece were well regarded by all students
- “Critical thinking” – good introduction but need practical application
- “Writing skills” – access students/ second years discrepancy

Learner Feedback

Topics/materials not covered by Skills4campus

- Studying Maths might be included
- Presentation skills
- C.V. skills

Learner Feedback

Skills4campus as an on-line tool

- 80% satisfaction
- Access students hadn't used other tools for comparison
- Some technical issues with Blackboard

Learner Feedback

Format of the package

- Rated good or excellent
- Visually attentive
- Coherent
- Navigation – 95%.
- Some sections were wordy and lengthy to complete
- “Digital immigrants” issues
- “Preparing for Academic Study” – could benefit from a “living college life” element to make it more wholesome

Learner Feedback

Skills4campus “blend”

- 40% in class, 45% in class and independently
- Worked well as teaching tool as well as assessment tool
- Critical thinking module would have been impossible to deliver distinctly without follow-up and explanation in class

Learner Feedback

Accessing Skills4campus

- 50/50 split home/ college
- Raised some internet access issues

Skills4campus as a worthwhile tool

- 90% yes

Lecturer feedback

- Usage: level 7/8 (1st year study skills modules) and foundation level.
- All lecturers introduced the package during a supervised class and encouraged its use outside class time.
 - One continued supervised sessions to complete and summatively assess all modules. Generally positive about using package as a teaching tool.
 - Two required usage outside class time and summatively assessed all modules. Positive about using package as a teaching tool, but particular issues seem to arise from foundational level usage.
 - One encouraged use outside class but did not assess use. Generally negative about using package as a teaching tool.
- Two lecturers introduced all modules in a block, encouraging a blocked approach to usage. Two others introduced modules as appropriate during the study skills module (integrated approach).

Lecturer feedback

- Lecturer perception: students found the package easy to use in the supervised introduction. No negative comments witnessed, though some students were quicker to adapt to the package than others.
 - In blocked supervised sessions, some students worked more efficiently than others. But no general problems in completing and students were engaged.
 - Foundational students working at home did have access, confidence, and time management problems. Some struggled with the summative assessment. The struggling students needed class time to ask package related questions.

Lecturer feedback

- Those who used the package assessment as part of their module assessment (i.e. 3 out of 4) thought that this worked well. It increased attendance during the example blocked session.
- Lecturers thought the informational content was good and useful as a resource beyond 1st year.
- Perceived strengths: can be used remotely on an ongoing basis, provides an assessment opportunity that can be used as summative assessment, easy to use, can be used on a module by module basis as and when appropriate.
- Perceived weaknesses: good informational content, but skills need application too, students weaker in IT could miss click/hover links, and therefore information.

Lecturer feedback

- Suggestions for future use:
 - Staff training.
 - Potential for use in identifying student problems.
 - Foundational students seemed to have IT issues that made lecturer support around the package more important.
 - Summative assessment through the package seemed to work well.
 - The lecturer who used a blocked approach suggested use of a more integrated approach, but found that the supervised classes worked well.
 - Those who used the integrated approach were satisfied with how it worked.

Conclusions and the literature

Torenbeek et al., 2011

- The importance of study skills, active learning, and engagement in tutorial activities. This fits with skills4study campus particularly the model where it is completed in class, and feedback can be given by the lecturer, also use of the integrated approach.
- The study supported the idea that study skills training in 2nd level helped with student motivation and study behaviour in 3rd level. Though it was much more extensive than a generic study skills package, teaching patterns were shifted towards independent learning.
- The importance of fit from 2nd to 3rd level. In Ireland teaching at 2nd level is often quite different from 3rd level and transition can be difficult for students. Advisability of generic study skills support in the first 10 weeks, especially the basic study skills.

Conclusions and the literature

Wingate, 2007

- Transition period is vital to retention, and study skills training is an important factor i.e. learning to learn in 3rd level. Fits with usage in a sem 1 module.
- College cohorts have changed, there are a diverse range of students now, but the expectations of study skills from colleges are the same. Students need more support, fits with student profile at Lyit.
- The argument for discipline based skills courses. The skills4study campus in all cases studied is used as part of a discipline based study skills module.

Cosgrave et al., 2011

- Extends use of VLE beyond repository for notes.
- Lack of broadband may be an issue for Lyit students using skills4study campus outside campus. Particularly foundational students who did their assessment in their own time.
- Lack of confidence and recent study skills experience could make e-learning packages particularly difficult for Access students.

References

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