



Sustainability of a Writing Centre in a Third-level Institution where Political, Financial and Pedagogical Factors are often at Variance

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Outline

- The Regional Writing Centre at UL
- The context: the political, financial and pedagogical factors often at variance in UL
- Levels of sustainability
- Modules as a means of sustainability
- Evaluation of two modules
- Impact on sustainability



Regional Writing Centre at UL

The Writing Centre at UL offers a free and friendly place for all students (undergraduate and postgraduate) to come and address any aspect of their writing. This resource is dedicated to helping students develop strategies to become better and more confident writers. The Writing Centre practices a non-invasive, inductive approach to writing development, utilising peer-tutors and experts that work with both students and staff to identify their writing practices in order to assess and improve strategic effectiveness. The Writing Centre is also available to staff who are interested in developing their students' writing.



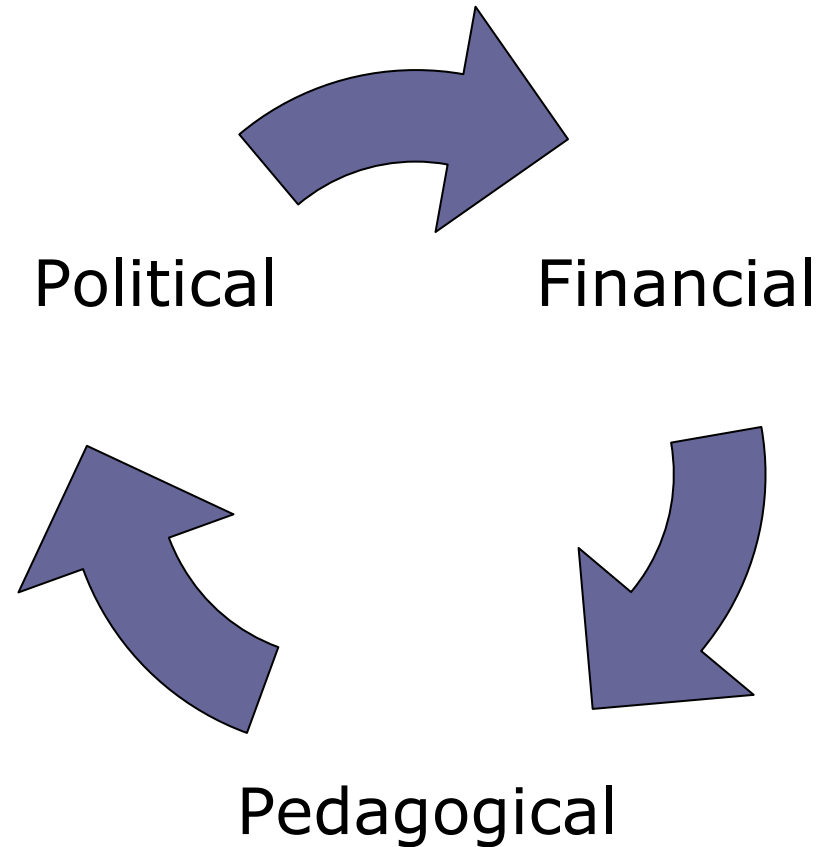
Regional Writing Centre at UL

- Systematic approach to the development of writing
- Coherent epistemology (Waldo 1993: 168):
 - One-to-one peer-tutoring in writing
 - Writing workshops
 - Writing interventions in disciplinary modules
 - Modules in writing
 - Staff development (WID/WAC/WTL)
 - Online resources



Factors at variance

- Paradoxes
- Tensions



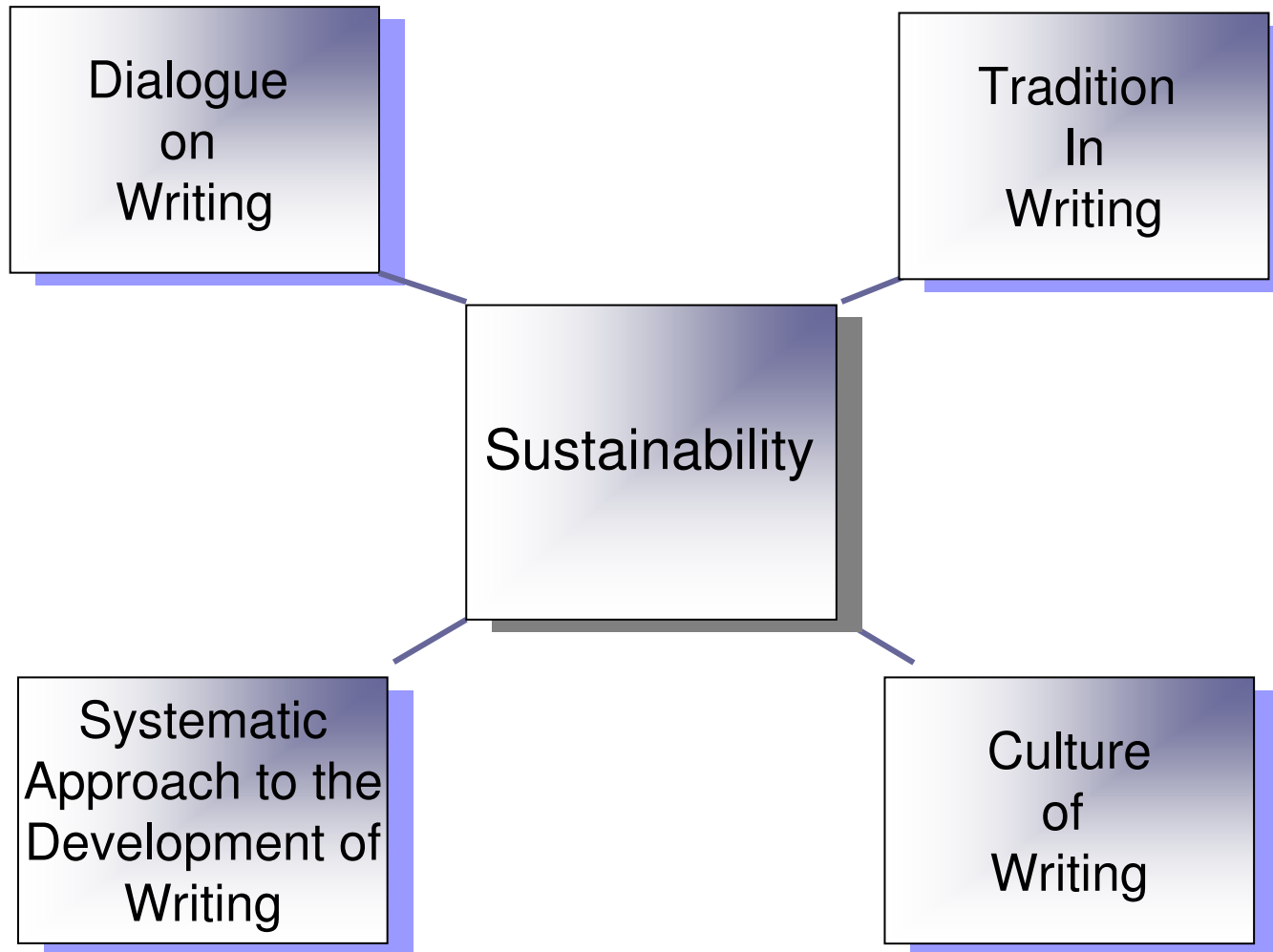


Levels of sustainability

- Longevity/preservation in terms of
 - recurring funding
 - resources
 - expertise
 - political representation

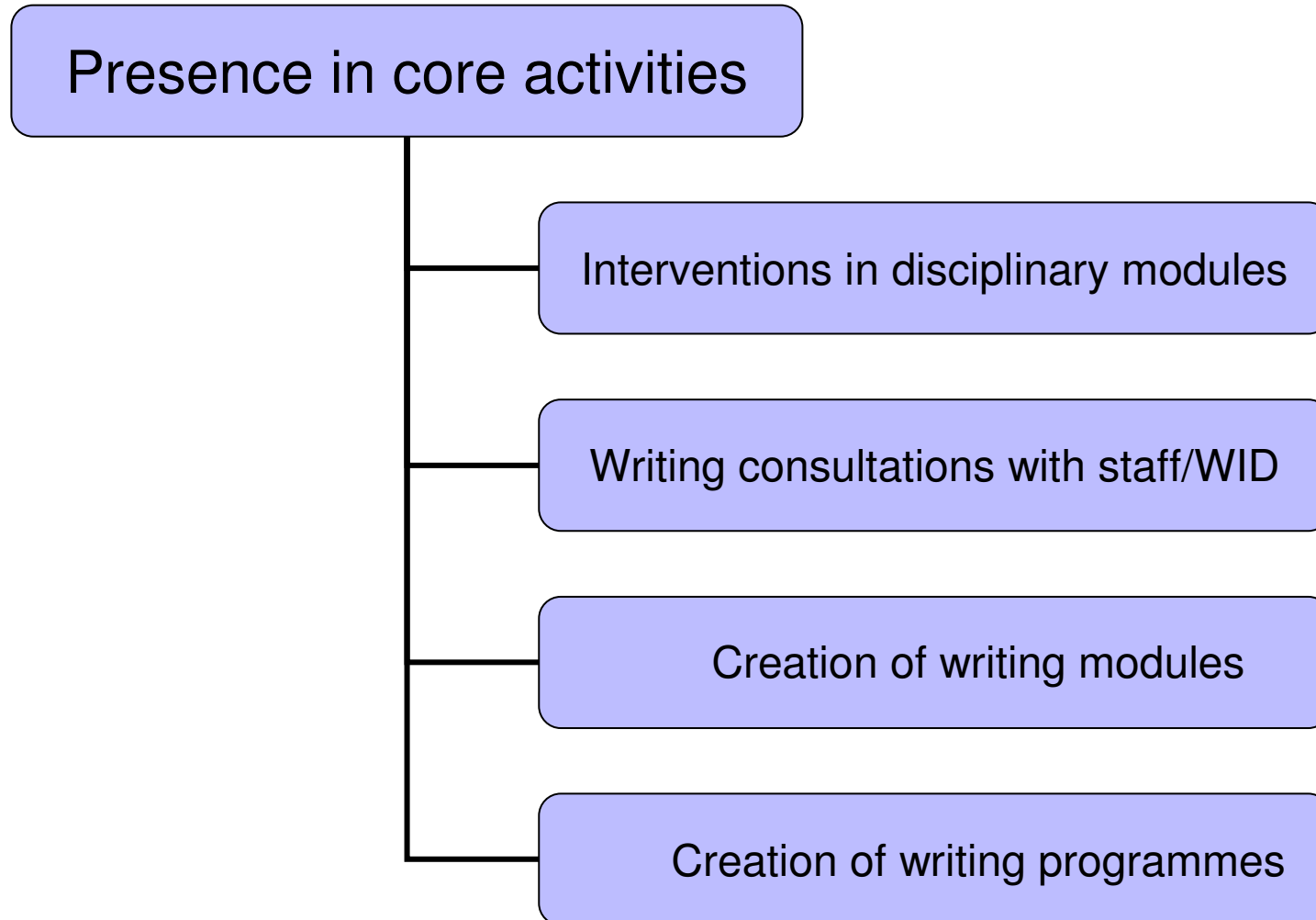


A cultural context that would sustain us



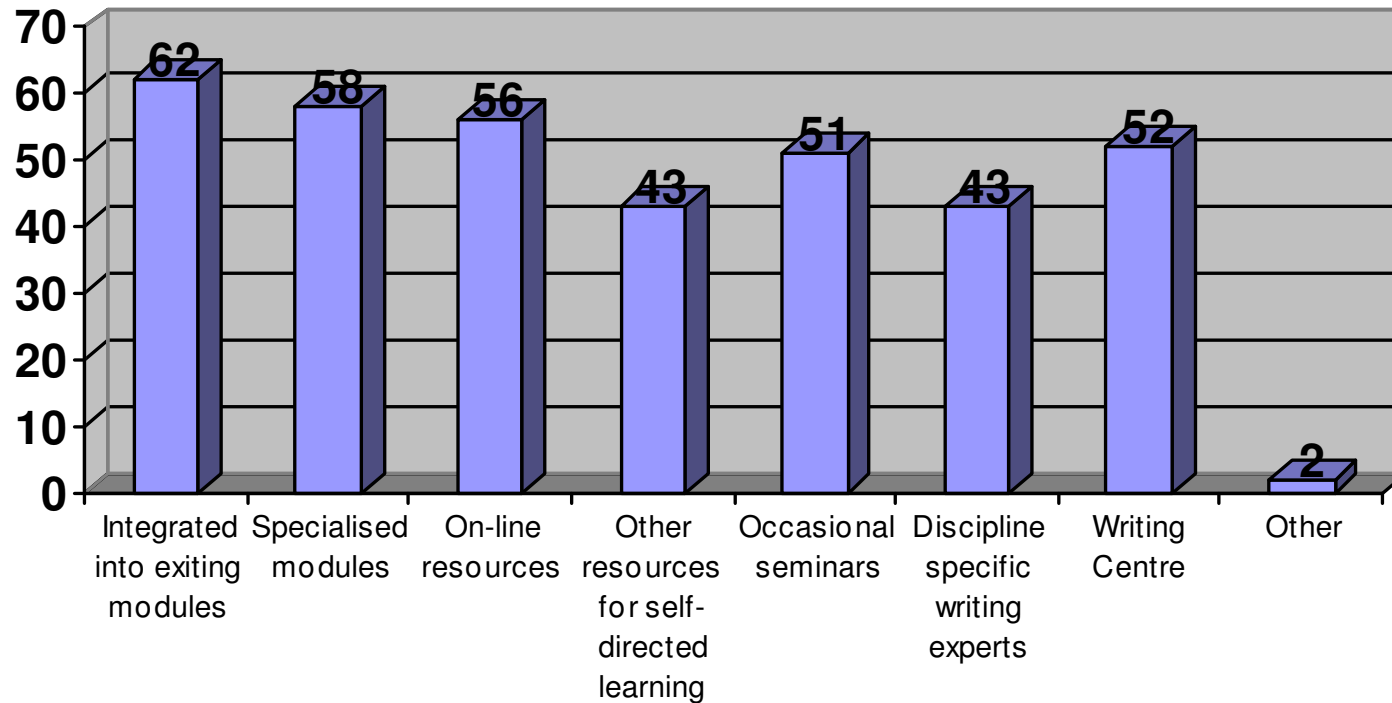


A political/financial context that would sustain us





Staff questionnaire





Potential of writing modules

- Teach writing in a strategic way
- Target all students (non-remedial)
- Teach the skills in the context of their discipline
- Help students acquire the necessary literacies to advance in their discipline(s)
- Reach large numbers of students

(Skillen 2006)



Writing modules

- Writing modules
 - *Peer-tutoring in Academic Writing (AW4006)*
 - *Academic Literacies 1 & 2 (AW4001 and AW4002)*
 - *Thesis writing (AW6002)*
 - *Pre-University Access Programme (AS2342)*
 - *Research Planning and Preparation (TL5001)*
 - *Scholarly Presentation and Dialogue in Research and Academic Writing (TL5011)*
 - *Advanced Technical Communication for Engineers (ME6051)*



Student evaluation: Peer-tutoring

- “Better grades! I’m pretty impressed with how well I am doing this semester. A little reflection goes a long way.
- An appreciation of the writing process...
- Enthusiasm to work collaboratively.”



Student evaluation: Academic Literacies

- Process approach to writing
 - Outlining, planning
 - Drafting
 - Editing
- Feedback on writing
- Peer support/Peer writing buddies
- Academic conventions
- Presentation skills
- Active learning in labs



Staff evaluation

- Impact on student writing
- Improvement in student writing
 - Better structure
 - Better introductions
 - Better critical thinking
 - Greater intertextuality
- Expect more of students now that the module is in place



Sustainability: Peer-tutoring

- Nurturing/developing expertise in writing
- Provides the WC with peer tutors
- Perpetuates the dialogue on writing
- Interdisciplinary (ambassador)
- Cost effective
- University strategic goals (human capital)



Sustainability: Academic Literacies 1 and 2

- Core module
 - Recurring funding
 - Visibility
 - Political representation (reporting)
- Peer support v WC fire-fighting; module nurtures a culture in academic writing from an early stage in the students' academic careers.
- Quality reviews
- ECTS requirements



Making the modules work

Peer-tutoring

- Optional nature of the module

Academic Literacies

- Relevance of writing
- Perceived value/importance of the module
- Compulsory nature of the module
- Relevance of self-evaluation: Learning journals
- Workload
- Contact time: lecture v lab



Challenges

- Sustaining the pedagogy with increasing financial constraints
- Sustaining the expertise to cope with the increasing demand
- Sustaining the pedagogy in the vast variety of disciplines



Conclusions

- Modules have helped ensure our presence in core.
- Writing Centre core funded
 - Visibility
 - Political representation
 - Financial, political and pedagogical longevity to a certain extent
- But it has brought new challenges...



Future direction

- Writing in the Disciplines
- Writing consultation
- Writing Fellows Programme
- Shared service model
- Writing Programme