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Learning to Learn: Embedding Peer Support as a Core Learning Skill at Third Level

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Learning to Learn: Embedding Peer Support as a Core Learning Skill at 3rd Level.

Peer Learning Event, Manchester 10th June 2015

Gerard Ryder

Philip Russell

Martha Burton

Institute of Technology Tallaght

Background

•Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT Dublin) - range of courses / 4725 FTEs

•Non-traditional students

•Peer learning – student-centered instructional strategy

- Strategic Plan (2009-2014)
- Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy (2011)
- National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (2011)

Learning to Learn (L2L) at Third Level

•**Rationale**

-learning skills deficit
-first year retention issues

•**Launched September 2012**
– mandatory 5 credit module for all first year students

•**Modules aims**

-help students adapt to a third level educational environment
-engage students - reflective, independent learners

•**Delivery -** first semester across all disciplines

L2L

Learning Outcomes

Identify and engage in the learning process / create a personal learning plan

Study effectively as an independent learner / work collaboratively in a team

Manage time efficiently - plan and organise learning tasks

Use critical thinking / analytical skills to solve a variety of problems

Recognise importance of academic integrity, avoid plagiarism through good practice and referencing

Assessment

Learning journal: students reflect on their learning programme of study 40%

Project or group project, including a written research-based report and presentation 40%

Online assessment quizzes from the Library SCORM tutorials (integrated with Moodle to facilitate grading) 20%

Delivery

Lectures / in-class exercises

Group discussion

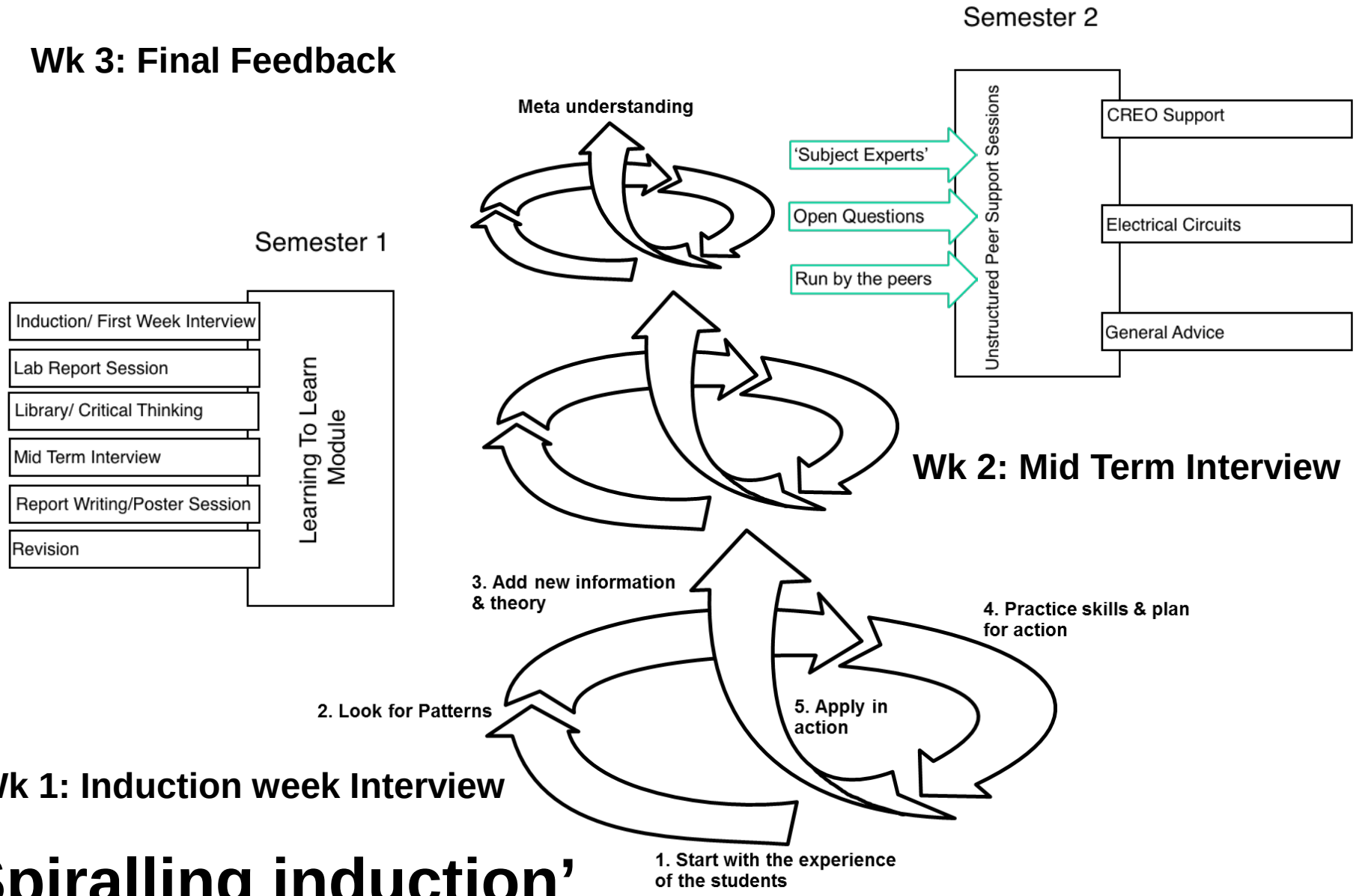
Small group tutorials

Introductory IT workshops

Moodle VLE

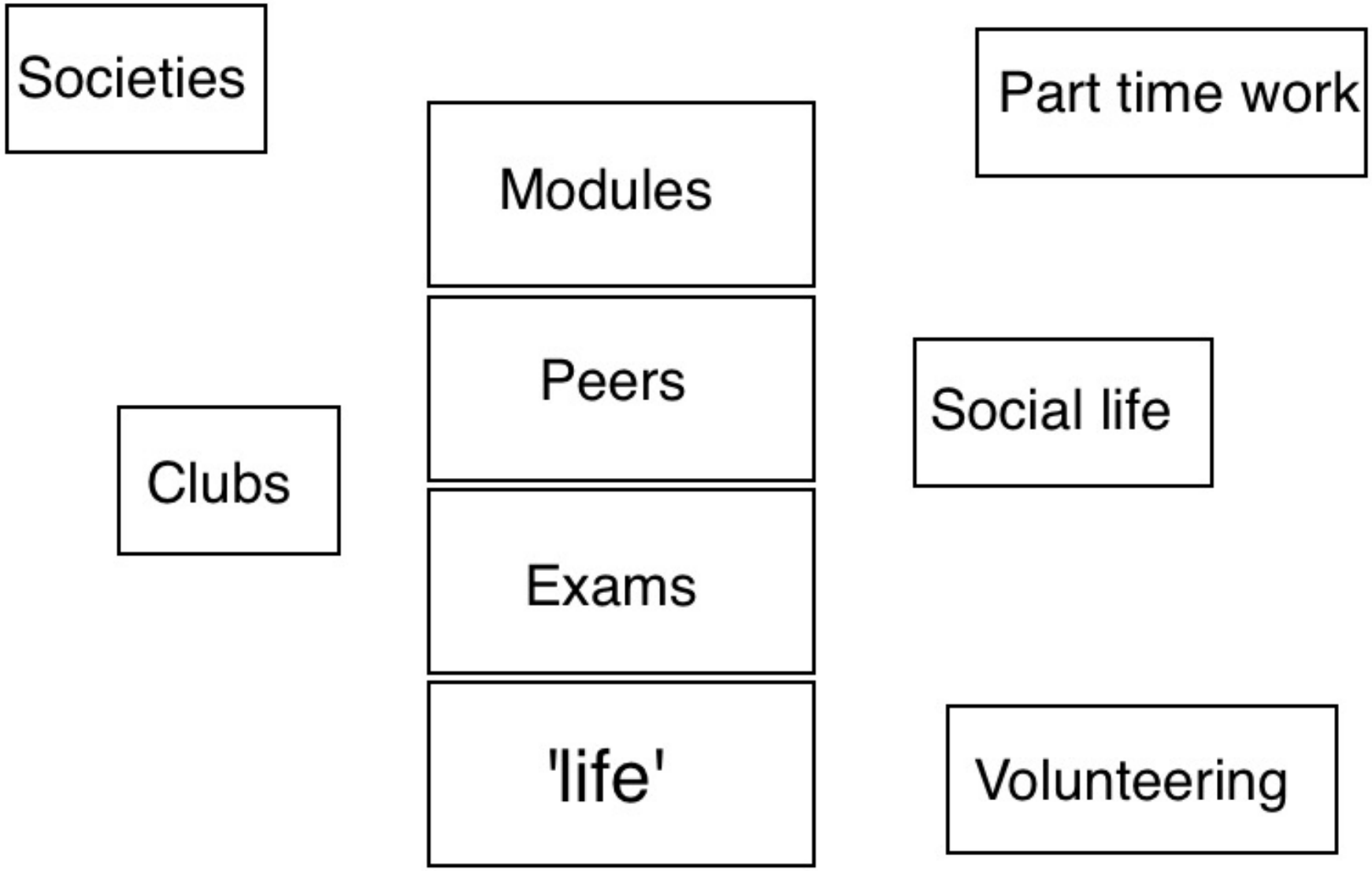
Online library tutorials

Peer Support: 2 different approaches

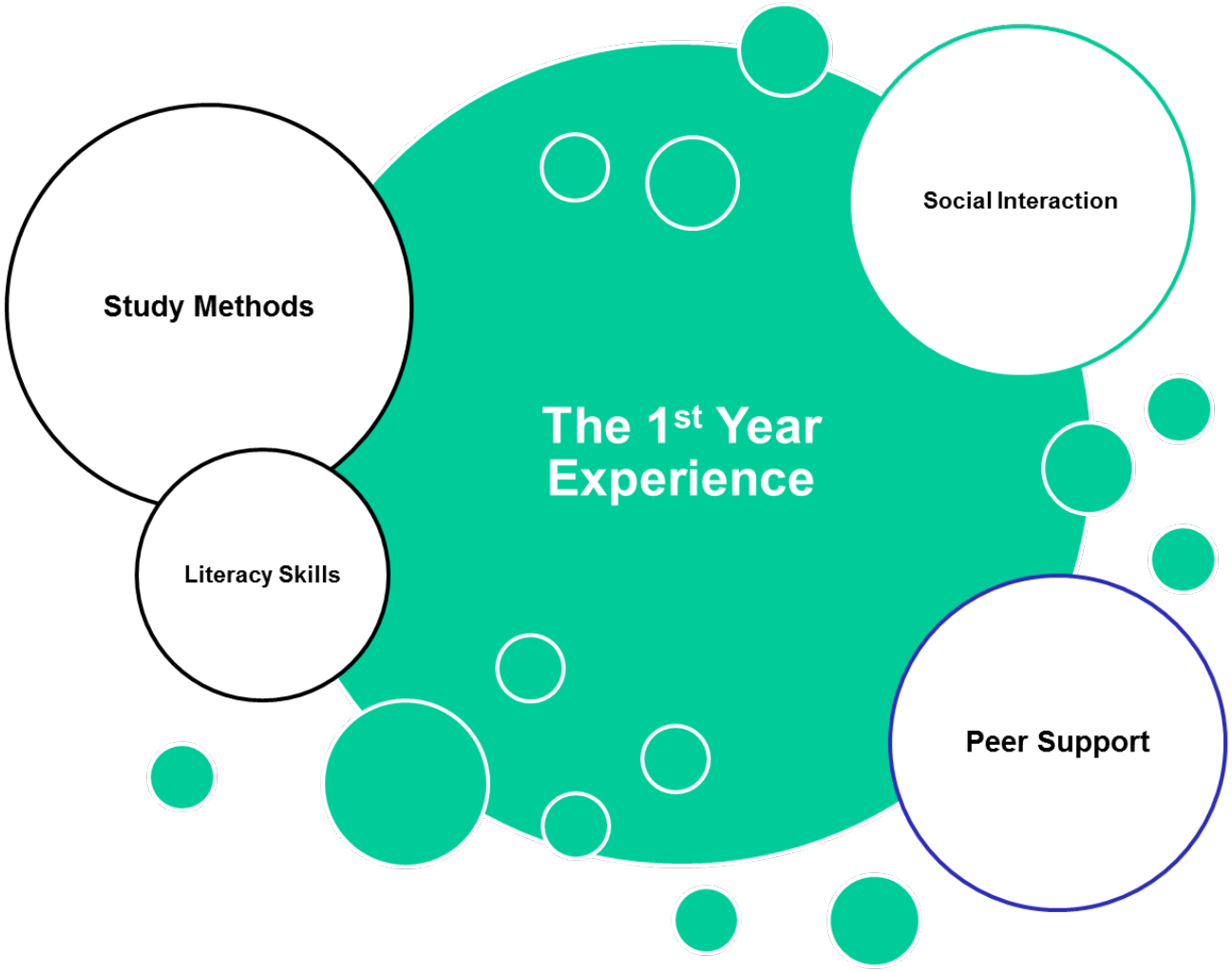


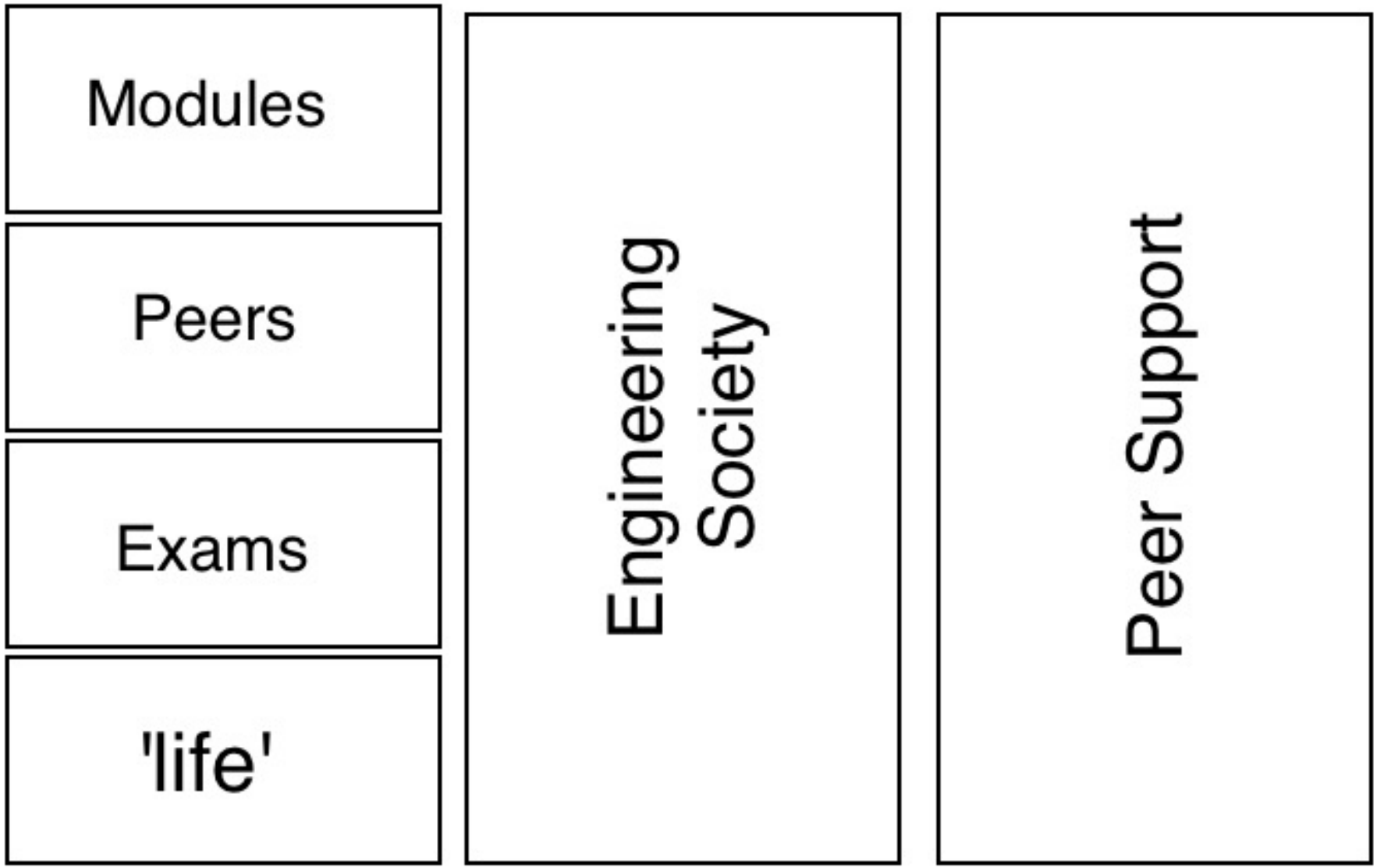
'Spiralling induction'

The First Year Experience: Our students lives are complex



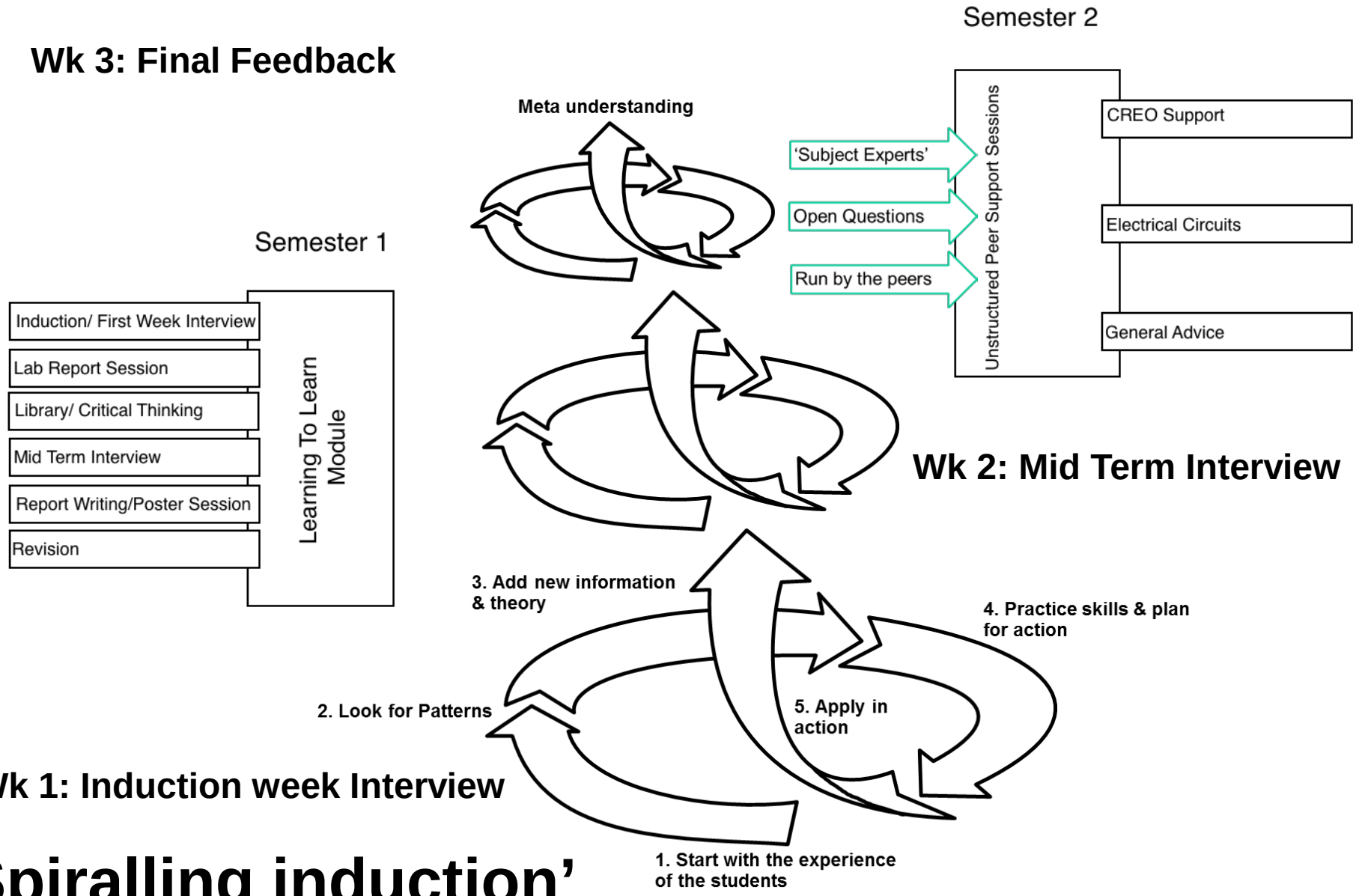
The First Year Experience





The Peer Assisted Learning Programme

Peer Support: 2 different approaches



'Spiralling induction'

Literacy Skills

Social Interaction

Study Methods

Students line up for the trebuchet Challenge. The project for the Learning to Learn Module.

Social Interaction

The 3D Print Challenge night. Representatives from the 3D Printing shop in Rathmines Dublin and others from DCU, UCD, HP stood in to judge team designs. Part of the social dimension provided through the Engineering Society

The peers and project team from left to right: Philip Russell; Conor Farrell; Brian Conlan; Gerard Ryder; Paul Quinn; Sarah Talbot; Clinton McCurdy.

Study Methods

Literacy Skills

Peer Support

Student apply what they learn in the Learning to Learn Module to communicating their progress in the Trebuchet project.

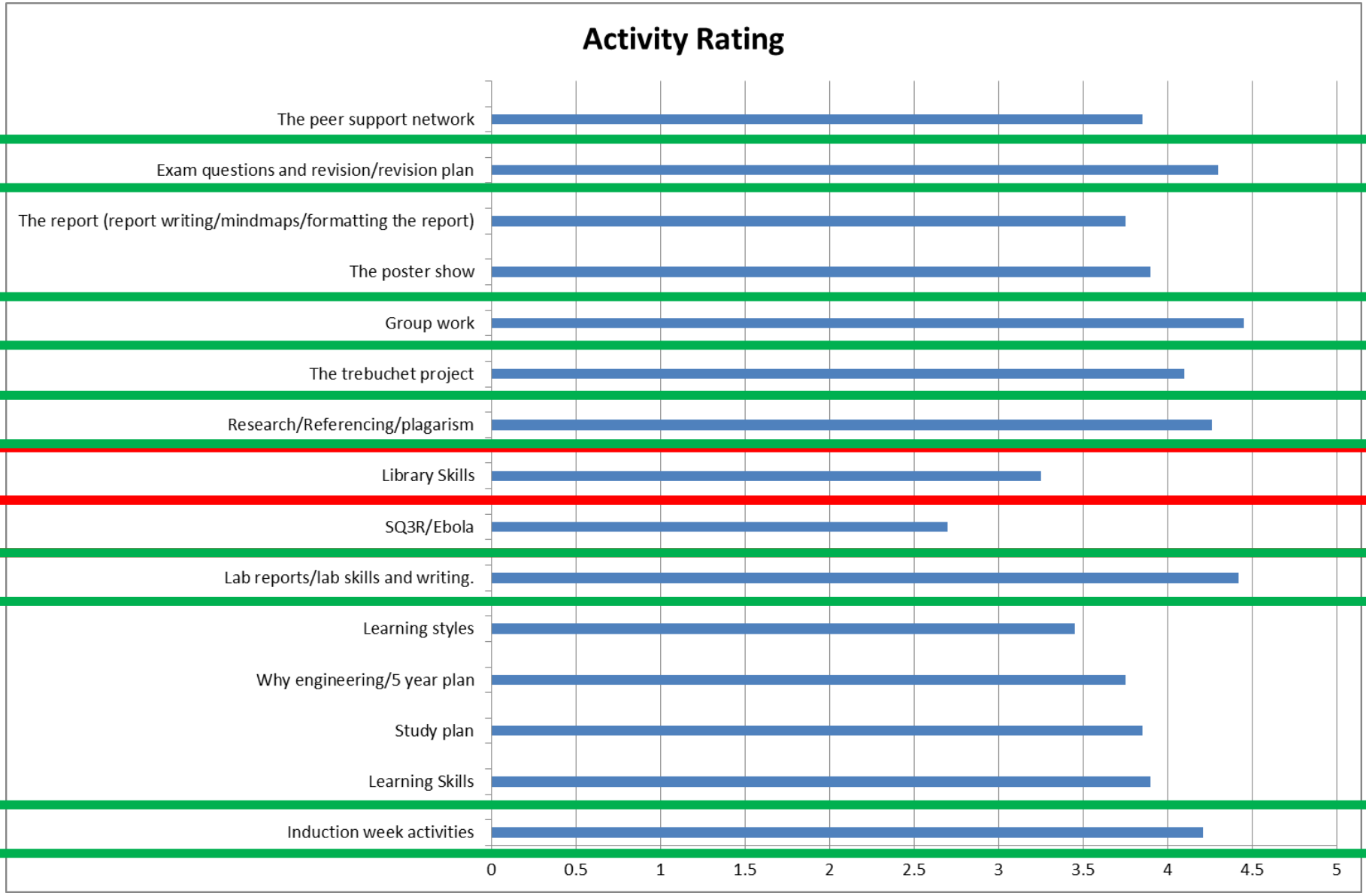
Study Methods

Peer Support

Peer Support during the Learning to Learn module helps student get to grips with the skills they need to succeed in their academic studies.

Semester 1 – Embedded Peer Support

Feedback


Activity Rating
The peer support network
Exam questions and revision/revision plan
The report (report writing/mindmaps/formatting the report)
The poster show
Group work
The trebuchet project
Research/Referencing/plagarism
Library Skills
SQ3R/Ebola
Lab reports/lab skills and writing.
Learning styles
Why engineering/5 year plan
Study plan
Learning Skills
Induction week activities
0
0.5
1
1.5
2
2.5
3
3.5
4
4.5
5

Student Comments

Did you find the peer assisted learning activities useful?
Yes, because it helps students who are struggling with their subject to come up with an idea or ideas of how to solve a problem or how to get the answers to the questions
Yes, it was great to get to know each other and to integrate with others in the class
Yes, it helped me understand the college system better and what was in store for me in the future of the course. The peers were very helpful in answering any questions that the class had about the course and its modules
Yes, it was good as it gave us more help from people who had just gone through the same thing.
Yes, you can find the answers to questions without necessarily having to go to a lecturer

What were your impressions of the PAL programme?
Very good creates a link between all engineering students.
Very good idea, good motivation to help fellow engineering students, have a better chance than you did and make their studies much less stressful.
Fantastic Opportunity for myself and the upcoming first year class to socialise, learn and engage together.

What support do you need as a PAL volunteer?
Linking contact between our year and years ahead of us; discuss project ideas and formats with them.
Maybe try to get a link between 2nd Year and 3rd Year
Possibly we need more preparation and more set questions rather than being handed an exam paper and asking – 'What questions are you struggling with'
Plan is good, i.e. weekly meeting to assign tasks etc. Good feedback and preparation Set up a block for study between peer and tutors for practice and advice.

Peer tutor Comments

Issues Identified

- Organisation of the sessions, finding a common time in the timetable was a serious issue. This needs to be sorted out at the start of a semester through the timetabling process.
- First years needed most support when peers were unavailable.
- Very poor attendance, 3 or 4 max present but mostly 1 or 2.
- Good contact between first & second years.
- Second years needed support in this semester.

What support do you feel you gave to the first year students?
Personally I focussed on the Solid Modelling side of the support as I feel that Solid Modelling is one of my strongest subject areas. This support was provided by simply allowing the student to meet me once a week in order for them to ask me questions regarding the software. The students would come with issues that they had developed from the class time and then hopefully I would be able to tell or show them how to fix the problem or how to go about a certain problem. **– Paul Quinn**
I supported the first years in problems they were having with Electrical Engineering. This module deals with the basic structures of DC and AC motors and generators. I attempted to answer any questions they may have had, as well as working them through tutorial questions and exam papers. I felt I gave the first years the opportunity to come to me with any questions or concerns they may have had throughout the year, be it with Electrical Engineering and other academic work, or with general college questions and problems. **– Sarah Daly**

How could the scheme be developed next year?
Possibly some support on methods to convey an idea across to other students. Sometimes I feel that what I am trying to explain is rather complex and I feel that maybe some pointers in how to convey these complex explanations in a simple way would be extremely beneficial. **– Paul Quinn**
If at the very beginning of the year, possibly through the induction week, the PEER supporters could assess the free time slots available to them. Once the format of the programme had been established for that particular semester, push the advertisement and awareness for the whole programme – Facebook, through the Engineering Society, posters, Moodle Forums etc. **– Sarah Daly**

Peer tutor Comments

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