Following on from the very successful sigma CETL programme, the sigma network project was officially launched in July 2010. Funded through the National HE STEM Programme and part of the Mathematical Sciences strand managed by the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications (IMA), the sigma network project focuses on disseminating good practice and information and stimulating the wider development of mathematics and statistics support provision based upon collaboration and the sharing of ideas.

The National HE STEM Programme recognised the success of support centres at Leeds, Bath and Sheffield Universities, initiated through sigma CETL pump-priming funding, as evidence of the effectiveness of this way of stimulating the development and adoption of student support. These three centres have been embedded into the Universities’ respective Teaching and Learning strategies and are now fully funded internally. Following a competitive funding call, sigma provided similar pump-priming funding for five more support centres at the Universities of York, Lincoln, Kent, Central Lancashire and London Metropolitan University. As a result over 700 additional students have been supported in the past year.

Alongside the new centres, sigma CETL’s successful regional hub pilot scheme has been developed into a wider Hub Network covering England and Wales. The original two hubs, South West and South Wales region led by Jane White (University of Bath) and the North East & Yorkshire hub jointly co-ordinated by Liz Meenan (University of Leeds) and Chetna Patel (University of Sheffield) have been joined by a further 4 hubs: the South East run by Martin Greenhow (Brunel University), the North West and North Wales hub co-ordinated by Sarra Powell (University of Liverpool), the Eastern England hub led by David Bowers (University Campus Suffolk) and the Midlands hub jointly co-ordinated by Duncan Lawson (Coventry University) and Tony Croft (Loughborough University). Each hub holds at least two events a year, develops and supports its constituency and contributes to the central sigma network.

sigma has worked with the Higher Education Academy’s MSOR Network to maintain the annual CETL-MSOR conference – held this year at Coventry University and attended by over 100 delegates. We have also continued the sigma award scheme for outstanding contribution to the field of mathematics and statistics support as we believe it is vital to recognise the hard work and effort of colleagues in this important field.

As well as continuing previous good practice, the sigma network is keen to provide as much strategic support to the community as it can. To do this, we have begun work to develop an evaluation framework that can be used by the community; we have developed a training course for postgraduate students who provide mathematics and statistics support; we run resource development workshops which provide colleagues with dedicated time and space to develop resources for use by the whole community; and, we are piloting an innovative project to support part-time students in their workplace.