NORMA SMURFIT LIBRARY

National College of Ireland is a not-for-profit, HEA-funded, independent HEI, delivering programmes to doctoral level to over 6,500 students across the areas of Business, Computing, Psychology and Education.

NCI's Norma Smurfit Library mission

At the Library, the goal is to always ensure that all learners can access the information they need in the right form. Crucial to every student's academic journey, the Norma Smurfit Library and Information Service provides access to a wide range of resources consisting of books (print & electronic), journals (print & electronic), case studies, training videos, guides, reference materials, study areas, computers, internet access, printing, and photocopying. It also offers research assistance, and information literacy to students and academic staff through the Library Help Centre. Seeking to bridge a traditional library service with online information sources, and with accessibility and diverse user needs in mind, NCI's Library is always striving to ensure the resources and online materials always keep the user in mind, making the library experience as accessible as possible for all learners.

Meet the Library Academic Support Centre team

Mary Buckley, Librarian: Mary Buckley brings over 38 years of experience in library and information services. She has worked at National College of Ireland since 1987, beginning her career as a Library Assistant, and has held the role of Librarian since 2000. During her time at NCI, Mary has seen the library grow from a 1-room service staffed by 2.5 people to a modern thriving team of 11. She has overseen the Library's successful relocation on two occasions. She plays an active role in the wider academic and library community and currently serves on several committees, including NAIN (QQI), LAI CPD Committee, NCI Academic Council and Learning & Teaching Committee; Academic Integrity Working Group.

Keith Brittle, Library Academic Support Centre Manager: Keith's background in retail and sales has been used effectively at NCI, having joined in 2010 while completing his MA in Library and Information Studies. He and his team provide academic support for all courses in NCI, both full time and part time assisting students and staff alike via bespoke classes, appointments and emails as well as creating and updating a range of online academic support and resource guides

Isobel Dunne, Library Academic Support Centre Assistant: Isobel joined NCI in 2023 and took her current role in the Library Academic Support Centre in 2024 after completing her master's in Library and Information Studies at UCD. She is responsible for assisting students with research, writing, and referencing, delivering classes and orientation talks, updating the library's social media profiles, compiling statistics, and editing library guides. She is a founding member of NCI's Anti-Racist Book Club and recently joined the Library Association of Ireland's Career Development Group committee. She is particularly interested in working with international students, having completed her master's capstone project on supporting international students in Irish academic libraries.

Shannon Mallon, Academic Support Librarian in the Library Academic Support Centre: Shannon's role is key to supporting undergraduate and postgraduate students with research, referencing and academic writing through appointments, email, and information literacy teaching. Her role includes developing instructional materials aligned with module and assessment requirements, creating and maintaining online resources such as the Referencing and Avoiding Plagiarism Guide and the Literature Review Guide, and co-authoring NCI's Referencing Guide (6th ed.). She also contributes to data collection and reporting, promotes Library Academic Support Centre services, and collaborates with academic and administrative staff to deliver student support. Shannon holds an MLIS from University College Dublin and a BA (Hons) in History and English from Maynooth University, received the 2023 NCI President's Award for Excellence in Education, and has professional interests in information and digital literacy, instructional design and lifelong learning, with current work focused on developing a new Research Guide for Postgraduate Students.

You can learn more about the entire team here.

What is the Library Academic Support Centre?

The Library Academic Support Centre provides a professional, friendly, and free service to all students in every discipline and at every level of academic study at National College of Ireland. The service offers one-to-one and small group support, both in-person and online, that focuses on helping students to become independent learners so they can succeed in whatever challenges they face throughout their time at NCI.

You can find the Library's NCI President's Award video about the support they provide here.

Why are services such as the Library Academic Support Centre so important?

The Library Academic Support Centre enhances accessible, inclusive navigation for all learners including neurodivergent students, connects digital and physical learning spaces in an innovative, student-centred way, and provides data-driven insights that improve space design, reduce overwhelm, and support diverse learning needs.

NCI's mission is to "change lives through education." As an institution, the College strives to make third level education accessible for all, especially for those from disadvantaged areas. The Library is a place where all learners need to be able to access; some will have never conducted research before. All learners have unique needs, and some may feel stressed or anxious about asking for help, particularly if they feel they do not know where to start.

NCI offers a supportive, inclusive, and welcoming environment. With that in mind, the Library Academic Support Centre helps each student one step at a time. The Library Academic Support Centre bridges the gap between second and third level education, making that transition smoother by offering support with understanding what resources are available and how students can access them. The Library Academic Support Centre offers students assistance on how to efficiently search for information (with bespoke strategies based on their assignment or topic) and guidance on how to conduct projects like a literary review. Moving beyond prep, the Library Academic Support Centre also offers guidance on how to understand feedback from lecturers and on how to continually improve academic writing so that students become more equipped with each assignment.

For a student who may be feeling overwhelmed, this support can make settling into college life much easier. Alongside helping students feel more confident with their academic endeavours, the Library Academic Support Centre also offer supports that all learners (and staff), no matter how experienced, can turn to if they need a refresher on referencing and citing sources, ensuring that all work avoids plagiarism. As learners are working in an increasingly digital environment, the Library Academic Support Centre also offers support on how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used ethically and with transparency.

Challenges: Balancing the workload of a busy team
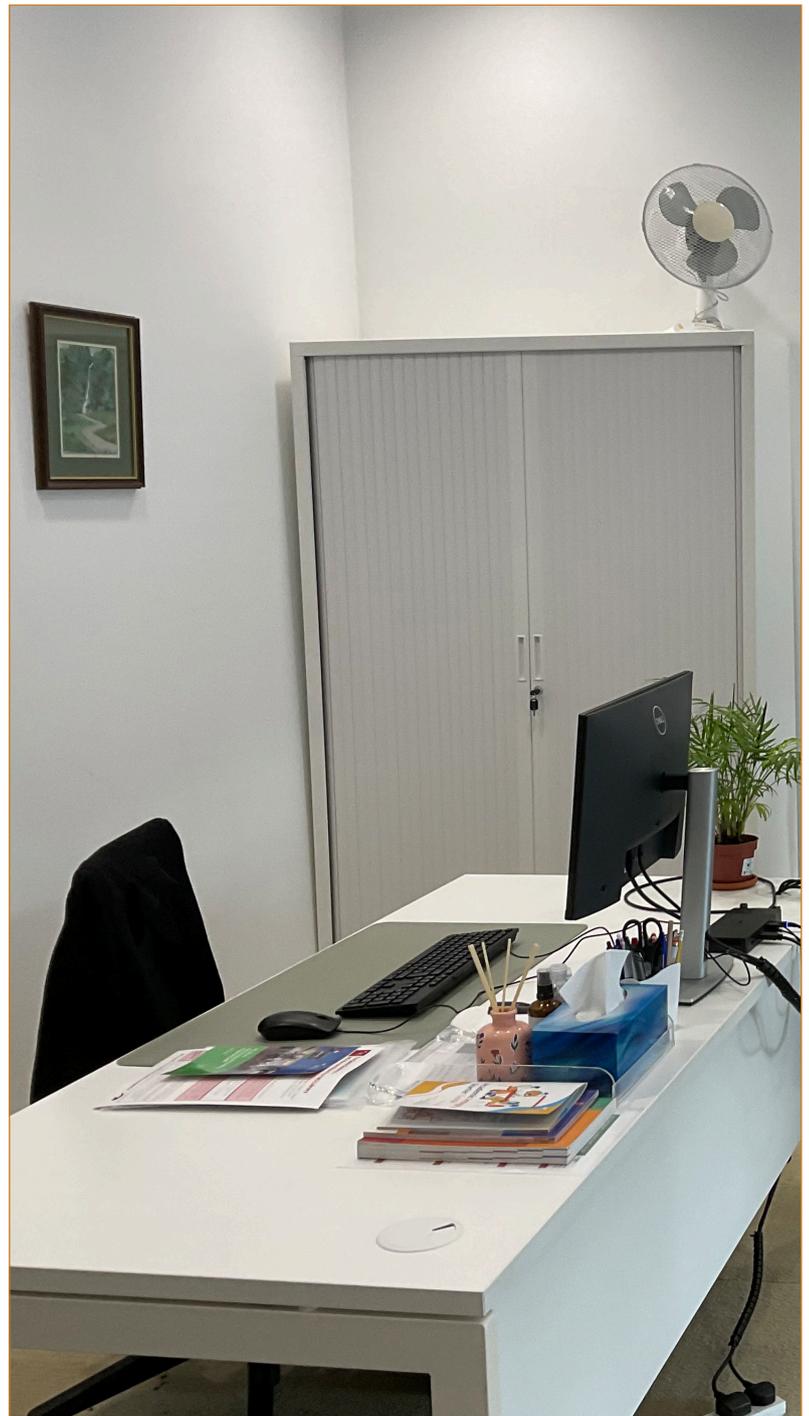
The Norma Smurfit Library is an extraordinarily busy place, and the department, despite not being a large team, is as equally passionate as they are busy, which is how projects like this come to fruition alongside balancing regular duties, deadlines, and time restraints.

The Library Academic Support Centre presents specific challenges related to time and to people.

A team of three (primarily Keith, Shannon, and Isobel, with Mary) runs the Library Academic Support Centre, a small but mighty team as they manage an immense workload. While the service is designed to be student focused/people focused, when working with a substantial amount of people, it can be difficult to accommodate all requests. The Library Academic Support Centre provides an all-encompassing service, so striking that balance between when to say yes and when to say no has been a challenge to navigate. There are always brilliant ideas and varying projects that the team wishes to work on, but when the key student-facing demands of the Library Academic Support Centre service take priority, the natural consequence is that some ideas are put on hold until a later date. Creating balance is an ongoing mission so that the Library Academic Support Centre and the other general Library duties and activities of the team can run smoothly.
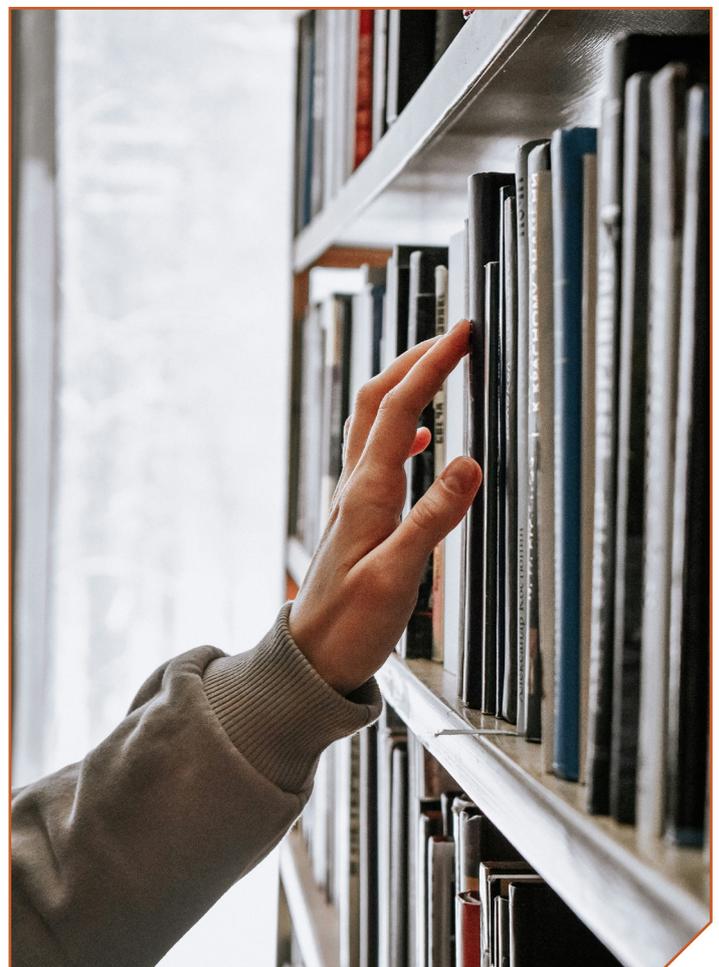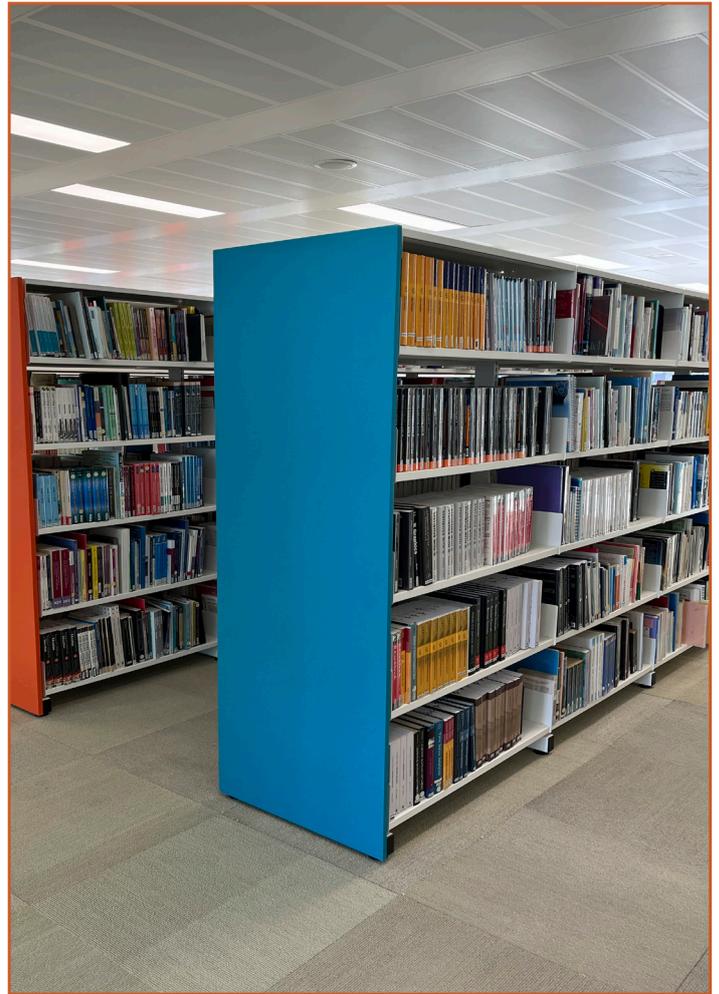
The 2025/2026 Library Academic Support Centre statistics and further updates alongside some photos can be found here.

Looking to the future: Adapting and expanding

As new students join the College and current students become more aware of the support offered by the Library Academic Support Centre, the team is looking ahead to consider the next steps that can be taken to makes some of the more challenging aspects easier, and to continually anticipate what students and staff will need.

A key area of growth lies in looking at the use of AI. One of the Library Academic Support Centre team's goals is to get ahead of the curve in terms of researching and analysing AI tools; students, particularly younger cohorts, are entering third level education in an age where using AI as a tool is becoming increasingly standard. The Library offers supports for students around Academic Integrity, but with AI becoming more prevalent, the team wishes to be proactive in gaining knowledge about these tools so that they can provide the most accurate support regarding plagiarism and how if AI is to be used as a tool, it must be used ethically and transparently. Revising digital supports is an ongoing task.

Another key goal is to look at ways the team could expand. With a bigger, more diverse team, specific duties can be assigned to specific team members while others dedicate their time to other tasks. Moving into 2026, the Library is taking an even more integrated approach to interacting with students. For example, a Research Methods Workshop was recently conducted in conjunction with NCI's School of Business and Social Sciences. There will be more of these integrated workshops moving forward which will result in the Library services impacting an even wider range of students. In turn, this will mean that more students will be benefitting from the Library Academic Support Centre, so as awareness grows and the use of the services continues to rise, looking at how to expand the team and share the workload further will become increasingly important.

Keith Brittle, Library Academic Support Centre Manager, shares that, "The accelerated growth of the Library Academic Support Centre has seen it develop into the premier academic support service in NCI, making an outstanding contribution to NCI's success. We aspire to continue to make an outstanding contribution to NCI's excellence, maximising our services and online guides to further reinforce our academic support for students and lecturers in the College."

Mary Buckley, Librarian, shares that, "What began as a small library support initiative has grown into the Library Academic Support Centre, a core element of NCI's student support framework. Staffed by three full time library professionals, the Library Academic Support Centre provides inclusive, responsive, and expert academic support through one-to-one, online, team-based and classroom delivery. The centre plays a vital role in supporting students' academic writing, referencing, research skills, feedback literacy, and study skills, contributing significantly to student confidence, progression, and academic success."

6,600
students including apprentices and tertiary degree students 4 staff

278
in-person appointments

245
online appointments

110
drop-ins

549
emails

595
assistance docs

127
hours of class time

34
hours of orientation