Queen Mary
University of London

A REVIEW OF CENTRALLY-PROVIDED SUPPORT FOR STUDENT WRITING

Summary

This report responds to Student Support Strategy action point 4.1 by reviewing the range of centrally provided support currently available to students in relation to writing and, where possible, benchmarking this against the sector. It has been informed by two separate but related processes: firstly, a Higher Education Academy project to develop inclusive policies and practices in relation to student writing and, secondly, an external review of the Thinking Writing initiative. Reports on these are appended.

The review focuses primarily on the work of the Language and Learning Unit (LLU), but attempts to capture the range of provision from other central providers.

Most of the LLU's support is targeted primarily at international ES/FL (English as a Second or Foreign Language) students, although its provision is being adapted to meet demands from QM's increasingly diverse student body and it now caters for both native and non-native speakers. Generic courses are still the main mode of support, but a move to more specific provision, whether at the level of sector, department or discipline, has been a recent development.

A move towards greater inclusivity is seen as desirable on the grounds of fairness and equality of opportunity.

There is a need for coherent promotion of what is available from different units.

There is no formal system of referral of students to central support and departments do not receive data on their students' take-up of support.

Because central support for English language and for writing is located in the same unit, Queen Mary may be better placed than other HEIs to develop 'hybrid' courses that are responsive to departmental needs rather than to pre-set groups of students, such as international ESL students.

A key conclusion is that central support should be more specific, while at the same time catering for students who might otherwise struggle.

It is recommended that plans to enhance provision flow from a strategy on writing.

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A REVIEW OF CENTRALLY-PROVIDED SUPPORT FOR STUDENT WRITING

1. Background

The Student Support Strategy aims to ensure high quality support for all students in the development of generic and discipline-specific academic skills [SSS 4.1]. To establish a baseline from which improvements can be made, it was decided to review existing provision in learning support in the key areas of writing, mathematics and information skills and benchmark this against the sector. This review focuses exclusively on support for student writing.

2. The remit of the review

Support for student writing has a number of central providers: the Language and Learning Unit (LLU), Advice and Counselling, the Library, the Disability and Dyslexia Service, the Careers Service and Educational and Staff Development. The Students' Union also provides some support for student writing. Although this review will focus primarily on the LLU's provision, it will attempt to map centrally-provided support across the College and set this in the larger context of student writing development within the curriculum.

The latter aim has been supported by a cross-college consultation on student writing which has taken place under the auspices of a HEA project to develop and embed inclusive policies and practice in HE (afterwards referred to as the HEA inclusivity project). The project's key objective is to produce a writing strategy: this has implications for central providers as well as disciplinary staff. (See Appendix 1 for 'Student Writing in the Disciplines – Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policies and Practices'.)

The 'Thinking Writing' (TW) initiative is a distinctive QM activity mainly directed towards staff and curriculum development, which seeks to promote the heuristic role of writing as a way of exploring disciplinary knowledge, in addition to the development of writing as a skill. Although part of central provision, its focus on staff in academic departments and the development of disciplinary courses and curricula takes it outside the strict remit of this review. However, TW has recently had an external evaluation of its impact whose findings and recommendations are relevant and have been appended (Appendix 2 for TW external evaluation report).

3. Methodology of review

The review has been co-ordinated by the Language and Learning Unit under supervision from the HEA inclusivity project team. The approach has been qualitative, with quantitative data gathered where available. Interviews and focus group discussions were carried out with staff and students and input has been received from the other central providers. It is also informed by findings of the external evaluation of Thinking Writing, which took an ethnographical approach.

Benchmarking data on this type of provision is difficult to obtain: some has been gathered from the Learning Development in Higher Education Network (LDHEN)

database which covers a self-selected group of 42 HEIs[1]. However, the categories under which data has been submitted are broad and open to varied interpretation (e.g. service location & funding, embedded provision, collaborations, staffing). The absence of an up-to-date overview of writing development across the UK HE sector has been noted by specialists in the field as a gap in knowledge that needs to be filled[2]. It is clear that the field is growing, but it is not known what patterns are emerging.

4. Modes of support

The review has found that different modes of writing support are offered across QM. These include face-to-face teaching, ranging from short courses through workshops and one-off lectures to drop-in sessions and one-to-one consultations. Modest on-line resources are available, both stand-alone and 'blended'. The Library provides self-study resources, mainly in printed form, from its Study Skills Collection.

a. <u>Courses</u>

The LLU is the largest provider of taught courses through its Insessional English Programme, which includes courses in Academic Writing and Grammar and Vocabulary (see Appendix 3 for data on enrolment). As the title implies, this programme is primarily aimed at international students. There is, however, demand from 'home' ESL students and even from native speakers to join these courses. The number of home students is currently small (43 in 2007 – 08, less than 1% of the total), but it is growing. The big majority of students enrolled are postgraduates. Courses are offered during the two main teaching terms (October to December and January to March) and run for 10 weeks at 2 hours per week. Approximately 30 teaching groups are run every week with half of these devoted to writing.

b. <u>Workshops</u>

The LLU's Academic Study Programme offers workshops on generic communication and study skills[3]. It also provides a weekly drop-in class on Wednesday afternoons. These are aimed at any QM student, but take-up is poor (see Appendix 3). Workshops are offered three times a week in two-hour sessions during the two main teaching terms.

The Advice & Counselling Service run group sessions which address writing among other things. These include group therapy, support sessions for specific groups (e.g. postgraduates) and academic performance support groups.

The Educational and Staff Development Directorate (ESD) also runs workshops, largely one-off, on writing for postgraduate research students.

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[1] Four Russell Group, six 1994 group, including Queen Mary, the rest mainly post-92 universities.
[2] Ursula Wingate, ILT, KCL, has applied for government funding to research the provision of academic writing support at UK universities.
[3] Workshops related to writing include 'Academic Writing', 'Critical Reading and Critical Writing', 'Grammar, Syntax and Punctuation', 'Lecture comprehension and note-making', 'Reading, note-making and referencing', 'Exam techniques and revision planning' and 'CVs and personal statements'.

c. <u>One-to-one</u>

One-to-one consultations ranging from 30 to 60 minutes in length are on offer from the LLU, the Royal Literary Fund (RLF) Fellowship Scheme and, for students with diagnosed specific learning difficulties, from the Dyslexia Service. One-to-one is popular, but expensive to provide. The College is fortunate to benefit to the extent it does from the RLF Scheme (coverage every weekday during term time).

Advice and Counselling also provides a range of one-to-one support which sometimes relates to writing: this includes clinical interventions (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy and psychodynamic counselling) and interventions to empower students to manage the practical, financial and legal aspects of their lives. The Students' Union offers students one-to-one help with writing statements on such issues as extenuating circumstances and examination offences.

d. <u>On-line</u>

On-line support is provided through the Library in the form of guidance on referencing conventions and how to avoid plagiarism, some of it discipline-specific. The LLU provides links to a range of on-line resources from its intranet site.

e. <u>Self-study materials in print</u>

The Library maintains a Study Skills Collection which is subdivided into 'study skills' and 'English as a foreign language'. There is a dedicated Study Skills area on the first floor. It includes both generic and subject-specific study skills materials.

5. Level and credit

Some types of provision are intended for any level of student, whereas others are targeted at particular levels. The Insessional English Programme in theory caters for all levels, but in practice attracts more graduates than undergraduates and is therefore targeted at a kind of 'generic' level. The preponderance of postgraduates is explained by the largely international intake, where recruitment is heavily weighted towards taught masters courses. Both the LLU and ESD offer writing support targeted at postgraduates.

Where courses have been formally proposed and approved, such as the insessional modules, they are normally designated 'study only' at Level Zero (new Level Three). The 'Academic Communication for Business Management' (ACBM) course is a compulsory, credit-bearing module for all 1st Year Business students at Level One (new Level Four).

Consultation with student representatives indicates that students are more likely to be motivated to take up support if it receives some form of credit, which they feel shows that it is seen as significant in the institution.

6. Generic and specific

Although much of the support on offer can be described as generic, there is a continuum of provision from generic to discipline-specific. This sometimes corresponds to degrees of separation from, or embeddedness in, the core curriculum. There is, however, a trend towards increasingly specific support.

The Insessional English Programme, for example, offers mainly generic courses in Academic Writing, Grammar and Vocabulary, General English and Lecture Comprehension & Seminar Skills; it also runs sector-specific Research Writing Workshops for PhD students. An advantage of the generic approach is that all students have the same opportunity. Disadvantages are, however, becoming more noticeable: in their attempts to satisfy as many students as possible, generic courses are probably meeting fewer of the needs of individual students than in the past when the enrolment was exclusively international ESL students. Timetabling is a problem for many students, however many groups are run, because generic courses open to all students cannot take account of curricular timetables. Although multiple offerings of the same course at different time slots are arranged, many students cannot attend for timetable reasons. And such courses are perceived as removed from disciplinary learning and not always relevant.

The development of more specific support courses has been in response to demand from departments and to an extent is a response to some of these problems. A 'Legal Thinking and Writing Programme' (LTW) for the School of Law evolved from the systematic referral of LLM students to the Insessional Programme: closed Academic Writing groups for Law students were re-designed with discipline-specific content and a dedicated contact person was appointed within CCLS. Although LTW is not an assessed module of the LLM, attendance is strongly encouraged by the department and for international students whose English language qualifications fall just below the minimum criteria for entry, it is part of their condition of offer to attend. The programme is attended by 90% of LLM students and the cohort comprises both native and non-native speakers. It is regarded by the department as an 'enhancement' just as much as 'support'.

The School of Business & Management has also commissioned a specific course: 'Academic Communication for Business Management' (ACBM). This evolved from an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course for international students only into a compulsory module for all 1st Year Business students, the majority of whom are 'home' students. This move also entailed a re-think of teaching methods because an EAP approach is best suited to generic courses in English language and academic skills for international students rather than more discipline-specific courses for both native and non-native speakers.

A third 'specific' model is represented by the 'English for Biologists' course for SBCS. This is intended for any 1st Year student who falls below a threshold score on a diagnostic writing test administered at the start of semester 1. It is attended by ES/FL students, both 'home' and 'overseas'. The course is not for credit, but is 'compulsory'. The LLU provides the course in consultation with an academic contact in SBCS.

These 'specific' courses are centrally-provided, but depend for their success on high-quality collaboration with the client department. They complement the more embedded support that Thinking Writing offers to disciplinary teachers to develop their students' writing through the core curriculum. It should be noted, however, that sharing of expertise is time-consuming and can take teachers outside their comfort zones. Such 'hybrid' models of specific provision point to the increasing influence of TW ideas on central provision. For example, LLU Teaching Fellows, supported by TW staff, collaborated with disciplinary teachers in SMD to provide a series of writing workshops as an intervention in the Intercalated Degree programme.

The discipline-specific approach has proved motivating to students because of its clear links to the content of the curriculum. The tighter focus of such courses means

that the teaching can engage with disciplinary discourse and genres. A practical advantage of the specific model is that it makes timetabling easier from the student's point of view. Courses are timetabled to fit the requirements of a particular programme.

7. Inclusive or for particular groups?

As has been noted, the Insessional English Programme is targeted at international students (or, more precisely, at EFL/ESL students). The programme's funding model is predicated on the notion that international students require special support, but increasingly the diversity of the student cohort throws up needs which the 'overseas' / 'home' distinction does not satisfactorily address. Whilst it is evident that there are some groups of students who benefit from targeted support (e.g. ESL/EFL students who struggle with English, students with dyslexia), attempts to provide learning support by categorising students according to their backgrounds or other criteria have become problematic, both in practice and in principle. Fairness and equality of opportunity suggest that an inclusive approach is desirable, where reasonable.

Accepting this principle and trying to implement it throws up a number of issues, however. How will the College resource a more inclusive model of insessional programme? Will it continue to depend on overseas student fees? Currently, funding comes through the student load from a top-slice of overseas student fee income. How will resourcing take account not only of 'courses' (i.e. modules), but also of workshops and one-to-one tutorials? How will inclusivity be balanced against other criteria, such as the need to provide targeted support for students who would otherwise struggle?

8. Recruitment and referral

The distinction between 'overseas' and 'home' students is most evident in the recruitment of students onto Insessional courses and other types of provision. Overseas students from EFL/ESL backgrounds are usually aware that they need to improve their English and, either voluntarily or in some cases because it is a condition of their offer, they enrol on Insessional courses. The same does not apply to 'home' students. Whether because they are unaware of a need to develop their literacy, or because they are unwilling to admit to it, or because they do not know what support is available – or indeed because the most visible form of support, the Insessional Programme, is targeted at overseas students, few enrol on LLU insessional courses or Academic Study workshops.

There is no formalised process for referring students from departments to the LLU. Students are sometimes advised by their tutor to seek support; the student decides whether or not to follow this advice and there is no mechanism for letting the department know whether support was taken up. Occasionally, the LLU is asked directly by a tutor or supervisor to provide support for a student, usually because they are at risk of failing a course. This sometimes throws up a need for special provision at additional cost.

9. Promotion

Insessional support is promoted to departments and their students through induction and by sending information to departments. The College induction for international students and for new 1st years has included presentations on support from the LLU as well providing an opportunity for the distribution of LLU literature to students. Some course organisers in academic departments request input from the LLU in module-specific inductions, but this arrangement depends on the individuals concerned. The LLU also distributes information to academic and key central service departments in the form of leaflets, flyers and application forms. This is usually sent to departmental administrators both by email and in paper form. This information is also featured on the LLU's web site.

The review has shown that, with the exception of the overseas ESL student cohort, awareness of what the LLU offers is low, both among staff and students. For students this may result from a lack of profile for the LLU within their programmes of study, making it difficult to see the relevance of central support to their learning. It is possible that the non-credit-bearing nature of support courses contributes to this perception. For staff, as has been noted in the previous section, the lack of integration of central support makes it difficult to gain an overview.

10. Staffing

Queen Mary can call on a wide range of expertise to support student writing. Within the LLU, staff are formally qualified in teaching English as a foreign language to adults and most have substantial experience of teaching English for academic purposes and study skills in a university setting. The Thinking Writing team have specific expertise in academic literacy development and in supporting staff to develop the teaching and assessment of writing on their courses.

Advice and Counselling have expertise in dealing with the emotional dimensions of writing and, along with the Students' Union, help students with writing for practical purposes. ESD support postgraduates and staff with research writing. The Royal Literary Fund Fellows are established writers with a track record of publication in a range of genres who use their expertise to guide students in expository writing.

11. Benchmarking: how does QM compare with other HEIs?

a. Modes of support

The combination of modes of support available at QM is found at most other HEIs, although Insessional English courses are often provided by a different unit from that offering 'study skills' or 'learning development' to the student body at large: this is the case at Kings, Exeter, Lancaster, Leicester, Liverpool, London Metropolitan, Loughborough, Reading and Southampton. At Leicester, for example, where the 'Student Learning Centre' is part of a larger conglomeration called 'Student Support and Development Service', the English language teaching unit is separate. London Metropolitan has three separate units: a Writing Centre (the 'Write Now' CETL) offering one-to-one peer mentoring and working with academic staff in a 'writing in the disciplines' way; a learning development unit supporting study skills, including writing; and an English language programme, offering foundation, pre-sessional and other types of English courses. In these institutions, there are fewer opportunities for

the cross-over in skills and for adopting and diversifying what is already in place than at QM. Language and learning are separated.

b. <u>Generic and specific provision</u>

Law and Business are subjects which often have a 'language' component. Kingston University has an 'LLM Law with English' programme, although the English modules are on English for business rather than law. Hull also offers an LLB course with a foundation year in English language.

QM appears to be ahead of the field in terms of collaboration between discipline specialists and writing experts, although benchmarking data is difficult to find. Coventry has well-developed embedded provision where disciplinary courses feature writing in ways that follow similar 'write to learn / learn to write' principles to QM's Thinking Writing initiative. In general, however, QM appears to be unusual among pre-1992 universities in developing an institution-wide move towards embedding writing in the disciplines.

Because QM does not have a separated-off EFL unit but combines English language teaching with learning development, study skills support and Thinking Writing, it is more strongly placed to develop hybrid courses that are responsive to departmental needs rather than to pre-set groups of students (e.g. international EF/SL students only).

c. <u>Inclusivity</u>

This is another area where QM is probably taking a lead among pre-1992 universities. The location of the Insessional and Academic Study Programmes within the same unit, as noted above, supported by the Thinking Writing initiative and the HEA inclusivity project to develop and embed inclusive policies and practices put QM in a strong position. The collocation of Insessional English and the Academic Study Programme can be perceived as both an opportunity and a potential problem: it allows the synergy between the two areas to be exploited and more inclusive courses to be developed, but because the Insessional English Programme was set up to cater for the distinct needs of overseas ESL/EFL students, there is also a risk that courses will attempt to cover requirements that pull in different directions.

12. Conclusions

Demand for writing support from the centre is growing. Both generic and discipline-specific provision has increased over the past 5 years (Appendix 3). Nevertheless, consultation with departments has shown that writing development that is embedded within disciplinary study is more valued by both students and academic staff than generic support from the centre.

There is a point, however, where disciplinary specialists feel ill-equipped or unable for lack of time to deal with the issues that students present and where central support can play an important role: e.g. English language support for overseas ES/FL students, language support for a relatively small percentage of 'home' students from ESL or under-represented backgrounds who would otherwise struggle, and specialist support for students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties.

A rapid increase in the diversity of the student cohort requires a re-think of how both central and embedded support is most effectively conceived, organised and delivered. The consultation coordinated by the HEA inclusivity team has investigated issues around embedded provision and recommendations for a strategic approach have been made (Appendix 1). This review of central provision has been informed by the findings of the College-wide consultation process and should be guided by the recommendations for strategy coming out of it. It therefore seems premature to reach strong conclusions about the enhancement of central support at this time, as the next stage of the college-wide consultation exercise on student writing will seek input from senior management and heads of departments in response to this report.

One message, however, is clear: that although support may be centrally provided, the more it takes account of disciplinary study, the more staff and students are likely to perceive it as relevant and useful. An approach which sees writing simply as a 'study skill' is no longer tenable since it tends to restrict teaching to the technical aspects of writing: grammar, punctuation, spelling and 'the most visible of academic conventions, such as simplified representations of text structure and citation practices'[4]. Nevertheless, the needs of the minority[5] of students who are likely to struggle because of their writing must also be catered for and they may need support in 'technical' skills. This suggests that central support needs to be targeted in two directions: firstly, towards supporting all students through interventions that are as specific to their disciplinary studies as possible, and secondly, towards supporting students likely to struggle in more generic ways. It is also worth noting that academic staff did not usually single out particular groups (e.g. international students) as needing special attention, but referred to the student body as a whole.

A range of models of 'semi-integrated' support have been developed for different departments. It is not clear that one is more effective than another or that the collaborations that have taken place have been aided by having 'language experts' located in the LLU rather than embedded in the academic department, although this may have facilitated the sharing of expertise[6]. The underpinning of Thinking Writing has generally been acknowledged to be helpful.

The lack of a referral process and feedback loop to departments of take-up of support has implications for student retention.

Because insessional courses are seen as additional support and are therefore 'study-only' and not formally assessed, there is no feasible method of making attendance compulsory, even if this were desirable.

The cross-college review (Appendix 1) shows that academics often do not know where to refer students for appropriate support: the LLU, the RLF Fellows, Advice and Counselling, the Disability and Dyslexia Service, the Library? Students may be referred to a service that a particular academic knows and then need referring on to a more appropriate service. They may get lost in the system or simply give up seeking support. There is a need for better awareness and coordination not only among academics on what is available, but also among the providers of the different central services. Whether greater coherence implies fewer providers is open to discussion, but it is important that students should have a clear idea of where to go for support.

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[4] Lillis, T. (2001) *Student writing: access, regulation, desire* (London: Routledge)
[5] Consultation with departments suggested a rough figure of 10% to 20%, although two departments thought it was higher than this.
[6] A study conducted by SMD on interventions in the Intercalated Degree Programme showed that students found them beneficial.

13. Recommendations

1) The enhancement of central support should be informed by a strategic, college-wide approach to writing. A lead on this is coming from the HEA inclusivity project (Appendix 1). The LLU notes the views of discipline specialists and students coming out of the college-wide review and plans to pilot modest enhancements to its insessional provision from existing resources in 2008 – 2009 with a view to taking on board a more complete set of recommendations for change in 2009 – 2010.
2) A strategy on writing should address the tension between a more inclusive approach towards writing support and how best to meet the needs of students who are likely to struggle. It should also consider the issues of referral and feedback to departments.
3) Consideration should be given to the resourcing of central support for writing. Currently, resource comes through the student load when students enrol on courses. This could be supplemented by a mechanism which funds workshops and one-to-one consultations.
4) Consideration should be given to how greater coherence between central services can be achieved and how the support offered can better serve students and academic departments. A cross-college group could be formed to co-ordinate this.
5) Central support for writing needs better promotion. It should be clear what the LLU offers, what is provided by other services and when to go to which central service for support.

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Student Writing in the Disciplines – Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policies and Practices

Document purpose

This is a consultation document based on work undertaken in the College over the past year on student writing in the disciplines. It proposes advanced academic literacy as an appropriate Graduate Attribute for the College and suggests the kinds of experiences students should be entitled to in order to achieve that goal. Further it makes recommendations for structures and practices at departmental and institutional levels. Data generated through the project and drawn on in making its recommendations are included in appendices.

Introduction:

This document arises out of the work of the 'Widening Participation and Student Writing in the Disciplines' project supported during 2007-8 by the Higher Education Academy's programme 'Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policies and Practices'.

The project takes as axiomatic the central importance of written language in students' learning experiences and learning outcomes. It recognises the real significance for retention and success of difficulties experienced by some under-represented groups in this area (Lillis 2001; Cameron 2004; Boughey 2000). However it does not consider writing development to be the preserve of these groups alone. Instead it considers that all students can benefit from policies and practices around 'literacies' development that are inclusive and embedded (Warren 2002; Medway et al. 2003)

The project builds on significant awareness of writing issues amongst academic teachers and departments across Queen Mary, as well as practical experience of embedding writing pedagogies within curricula. Since 2001, much of this work has been supported by the College's Thinking Writing initiative, an External Evaluation of which has recently been conducted (see Appendix 2).

The stated aims of the Widening Participation and Student Writing in the Disciplines project are:

- To develop a coherent (and responsive) set of approaches across the institution to the development of students' language, academic literacy and professional communication skills within their curricular programmes.
- To produce a strategy document and identify staff development and resource implications that will support the implementation of these approaches.

In 2007-8, the project group has moved towards these aims through:

- Reviews of centrally provided support for writing
- Consultations with academic departments – see appendix A
- Consultation with student representatives – see appendix B
- A deliberative workshop with staff with written feedback – see appendix C
- An external evaluation of Thinking Writing

These sources inform the thinking below.

Towards a strategy:

A goal for university education

One of the most important goals of a university is to develop individuals who have advanced literacy skills in their discipline: people who can participate effectively by critiquing information and ideas and by contributing with rigour and creativity to new insights and knowledge, who are self-aware as learners, and who are rhetorically versatile, confident communicators able to adapt and contribute to the demands of employment and life in a changing society and wider world.

For undergraduates advanced level academic literacy should be a key Graduate Attribute. The goal as articulated here, however, is equally applicable to students undertaking postgraduate study.

Celebrating achievement

In order to reinforce the value that the College places on student writing as a mark of 'graduateness', it makes sense explicitly to celebrate the expertise, style and passion that the best disciplinary writing displays. The College and/or departments should therefore consider options such as a book publication and prizes that would raise the profile of excellent and varied writing in the disciplines. At the same time this move would counter negative perceptions of 'student writing' that predominate in the media and elsewhere.

The student experience

Opportunities to develop advanced literacy skills should take place within students' mainstream disciplinary programmes and should be available to all students as part of their learning experiences. Writing, reading and critical information handling are strongly embedded in discipline-specific practices and are not skills that can be effectively learnt separate from content. Similarly, content cannot be meaningfully learnt without practising skills of selection, explanation, argument, critical analysis, synthesis and transformation - skills which can be powerfully, though not exclusively, exercised through writing.

To graduate with advanced literacy skills, it is desirable for students to have the following kinds of opportunity:

- Through reading, writing and explicit instruction, to learn about the typical structures, modes of reasoning, styles of address and social functions of texts in their subject area, and, where appropriate, to critique and adapt them.
- To develop rhetorical flexibility by writing in a range of genres for different purposes and audiences.
- To use writing for learning: that is, as a way of engaging with the content of their discipline, whether to raise questions, explore connections, explain a concept or process, or argue a position.
- To receive and respond to timely feedback from readers, based, where appropriate on clear criteria. Readers may be peers as well as teachers, employers and professionals in the field. Students should have opportunities

> to develop perceptions of feedback as an interactive and responsive process (thus contributing to learning) and less as simply a means of providing grades.
> - To develop their writing – and their confidence as writers - through revision and practice, and through educational experiences that are motivating and give writing an authentic purpose.

These opportunities will be most meaningful and motivating to students where they are properly embedded in mainstream course and programme design and in the pedagogic repertoires of their teachers. Many of them currently exist at Queen Mary.

Since students arrive at university not fully or equally equipped to meet the literacy demands of their course of study, it is likely that departments will focus particular attention on how students can effectively bridge the transition into the literacy practices of the discipline. However, these efforts should enhance and not detract from the main purpose of *engaging students with their discipline* in meaningful and motivating ways; that is, they should be an integral part of learning and not taught as adjunct study skills. Departments will also recognise that students' disciplinary writing needs to continue to develop over the course of study and that there are other transitions, for example, from essays to independent dissertations, that need to be attended to in course and programme planning. Again there are a number of examples of this work already taking place at Queen Mary.

Sharing and enhancing educational practice

Designating advanced level academic literacy as a Graduate Attribute will require some level of coordination within departments and across the College.

A departmental role/position should be created, responsible for monitoring the ways in which degree programmes progressively support the development of students' disciplinary literacy, disseminating practice inside and outside the department and ensuring dialogue with and awareness of centrally-provided support for student writing.

There should be a cross-College group of departmental representatives to take forward this work, in addition to opportunities for existing experience and expertise to be disseminated and discussed. The work of departmental representatives should be valued as a substantial contribution to the aims of the College and recognised in promotion.

To be completely embedded in the College's aspirations for its students, attention to academic literacies should be an integral part of *professional development programmes* for those involved in teaching and facilitating learning. Academics recognise writing as a key indicator of their students' successful construction of knowledge and therefore should be equipped to use writing for teaching and learning and to help their students develop as writers. This should be a core dimension of developing a disciplinary teaching repertoire.

Support for departments and staff in the form of consultations, resources and collaboration is currently provided via Thinking Writing and will need to continue if practice is to develop further and be supported by research and evaluation.

Student support

It is recognised that student writing develops most meaningfully within the context of disciplinary study and that feedback from disciplinary tutors is highly valued by students as a gauge of their progress. However it is also clear that such totally embedded learning is not wholly sufficient for all students at all times. Additionally there may be aspects of support for writing that discipline-specialist teachers cannot effectively give.

Students may at times benefit from specialist insight, support or teaching in aspects of writing; for example, in grammatical sentence and text construction, developing a formal register, overcoming writers' block. For some students (or groups of students) such support may need to be concentrated in the first year; for others it may be useful towards graduation when writing demands change and pressures increase.

There need to be strong lines of communication (including referral and perhaps reporting) between academic teaching departments and the services in the college which offer specialist support. Specialist support services also need to be clear in their respective roles and to cooperate and communicate clearly. Practices in each area need to be, as far as possible, mutually informing.

If students seek or are referred to extra support for their writing, they should be able easily to identify, understand and access the range of available options, and to expect the support of their lecturers in doing this.

Summary of Recommendations

The College (where appropriate, through departments) should

1) Recognise high level literacy as a Graduate Attribute and show how it can be achieved through study at Queen Mary.
2) Publically celebrate student achievement in writing in the disciplines.
3) Ensure that degree programmes progressively support the development of advanced disciplinary literacy.
4) Monitor and disseminate progress in embedding academic literacies work through a network of departmental representatives.
5) Ensure staff's work in developing this area is valued.
6) Provide opportunities for all staff to disseminate and discuss current approaches, including approaches to assessment and feedback.
7) Ensure that academic literacies is an integral part of professional development programmes for those involved in teaching and facilitating learning.
8) Continue support for staff in developing this area of their teaching and course design.
9) Become better informed about the literacy development needs of all students and ensure effective support where necessary.
10) Coordinate and make accessible the contributions of central services, including the English Language and Study Skills Unit, Royal Literary Fund Fellows, Advice and Counselling and the Dyslexia Service..

Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policies and Practices

Document prepared by Sally Mitchell, Thinking Writing Coordinator, Language and Learning Unit on behalf of the Inclusion project team.

Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policies and Practices

References

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Annex A

Departmental accounts of student writing
The project team conducted consultations with the following academic departments - Biological and Chemical Sciences, Business Management, Drama, Electronic Engineering, Engineering, English, Geography, Graduate Schools, Languages, Linguistics and Film, Law, Mathematical Sciences, Politics. In total 72 staff participated.

Full agreed notes of each department's consultation meeting can be obtained from Sally Mitchell, s.mitchell@qmul.ac.uk

Participants were asked to describe the kinds of writing their students were required to do throughout their programmes, to articulate expectations of students at graduation, to identify any sub-disciplinary differences and different modes through which learning takes place, to describe the support they give to writing including through assessment and feedback practices. They were also asked to say what problems they encounter with students' writing and with supporting its development, to identify particular groups of students if any, and to talk about links they might have with any central services in relation to writing.

1.   Value and nature of writing

In nearly all subject areas, staff expressed a strong commitment to writing and linked it to the development of thinking and understanding. Writing was not thought of as a generic transferable skill but as discipline-specific. In some subjects (e.g. Law) students needed to write in different kinds of ways to rehearse different kinds of sub-disciplinary thinking and purpose.

Students comment on the unexpected depth required in their thinking once forced to offer verbal explanations (Maths)

Writing short explanatory reports shows whether the students have understood what they have been taught, shows the limits of their understanding. (Computer Science)

Writing focuses the student in depth on a subject or area of thinking and allows them to develop argumentative skills. (Politics)

Writing, thinking and learning are intimately connected (Languages, Linguistics and Film)

Writing reveals clarity of thought. If thought isn't clear you can't write clearly. There's a connection. (Engineering)
Writing is a fundamental part of the learning process – it takes students deeper into the material; it's the way in which they become really engaged with arguments and evidence. (Geography)

Note that the comments above emerge from discussions in mathematics and engineering as much as from those in English and politics. There was near consensus despite the fact that in practice the *extent* to which students write and the dominance of writing as a mode of learning differs in these different subject areas.

2.   Writing as an integral part of teaching and learning

Participants largely see the development of their students' writing as their responsibility and part of the challenge of teaching. They are self-questioning and proactive in finding ways to address students' writing. In the course of discussions they often reflected on things they as a department could review or improve (particularly in relation to assessment and feedback practices), as well as highlighting areas of innovative and engaging practice that they felt worked well. Some strongly expressed the view that writing development should be designed into the curriculum.

Before we say that students can't write, should we question whether they are given enough opportunities to write? (Politics)

Do we set our expectations/standards high enough – recognising that they often have ability but are unmotivated (i.e. do we send out the wrong messages?) How can we also give them the developmental skills that will help them achieve highly? (Engineering)

We're trying to tackle the view that either you can do it or you can't, to 'educate rather than abandon them', to nurture those who don't have the enthusiasm, ability or experience. (Engineering)

3.   Writing as a separate activity, divorced from content

However, participants reported that some of their colleagues didn't see the teaching and assessing of writing as their role. Such staff were generally not present in the consultation meetings but were referred to by colleagues

Variations in students' attitudes towards writing were also reported, often in terms of disciplinary difference and linked to views of what and how knowledge is constituted in a field, for example, hard learnable facts, procedures rather than challengeable theories and arguments

4.   Supporting transitions between levels

Many departments recognise the first year of undergraduate study as a significant transitionary phase for students involving changed practices and expectations and have found ways of supporting the transition. Explicit emphasis on writing was most likely in the first year, where a number of approaches are employed, including:

- Core content courses in which writing development is integrated through task setting and explicit teaching. (e.g. English, Politics)
- Significant use of Postgraduate Teaching Assistants as a teaching resource in some departments (e.g. English, Politics)
- Tutorial-based courses which enable students to receive rapid and timely feedback on pieces of writing (e.g. Geography, Biology)
- The practice of breaking down large writing goals into smaller incremental assignments (e.g. Politics, Engineering)

- Finding space in course design for workshop-style sessions where writing can be practiced. (English, Computer Science)
- Separate courses focussing on writing run within the department or provided by LLU (Law, Business Management)

It was noted that joint honours students could escape provision when writing work was concentrated in as single course.

The second year was generally acknowledged to be content heavy with a consequent fall off in attention to writing. However where the second year was seen as needing to form a transition towards final year independent research, there were examples of continued attention to writing. For example, developing short incremental writing tasks across a number of Engineering course

Third year writing was seen to constitute a step-up in criticality and independence. Students could expect close supervision and some had workshops to support their writing

5.   Assessment and Feedback practices

Practices in this area were not consistent within or between departments. There was overall uncertainty about minimum standards of writing and a range of views on whether the quality of writing itself was assessed – some departments and individuals were more willing to overlook problematic writing than others. It also seemed to be a matter of individual practices and beliefs as to whether spelling and grammar was considered in assessment and made the subject of feedback to the student.

Feedback was recognised as a crucial part of developing students' writing, however staff were conscious that they were often hampered in this role by large student numbers and lack of time. In addition, it was recognised that assessment itself could hamper feedback because it directs students' attention to grades rather than learning.

There was some, but not extensive use of unassessed writing, and of peer review.

> Detailed feedback (if the students pay attention to it) is effective in bringing students forward. Sitting down one-to-one or in small groups works tremendously well. As does letting them know that what they are learning will be relevant.
>
> In *Film* staff have developed a standardised form with criteria that relate to marking and also space for commentary. It is an attempt to be more rigorous and use clear, plainer English. Student prefer it to just written feedback.
> In future all feedback will be recorded on WebCt, so that it can be referred to in personal development planning.

6.   Problems with writing

It was common for staff to confess to feeling extremely challenged, frustrated and sometimes helpless when they encountered some student writing. Staff felt in some cases uncertainty about how far they should concentrate their efforts as teachers and markers on 'correcting' errors in written work, sometimes finding the extent of these

overwhelming. In other cases they were clear that this kind of attention to writing was not their work, part of their professional role. Sometimes this was their own view, sometimes it was attributed to absent colleagues

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We've had to step back a few paces to give time to the basic writing skills students lack. The time spent can be enormously beneficial but it detracts from where we might want to be in developing Geographical writing. (Geography)

I feel I'm banging my head on a brick wall because there is so much that needs to be done (Languages, Linguistics and Film)

Is correcting the apostrophe or sentence run-ons part of the duty of a lecturer? (Drama)

There is little coherence, students just write what comes into their mind. As a teacher, I don't know what to say to students about this. (Languages, Linguistics and Film)

There's view amongst the profession that teaching grammar is not what they signed up to do (low status, thin end of wedge) but also ignorance of how to go about it (basic skills). (English)

Writing is part of our background and practice, but we'd nonetheless make a distinction between discipline specific writing and teaching basis things. (Biology)

Problems in developing students' writing extended across a broad range and were often complexly interrelated: they included 'basic' language issues, discourse issues, study skills issues, attitudinal and epistemological issues.

It was rare for participants to make distinctions between groups of students unless pressed to do so. Most striking was the identification of students with difficulties in writing as predominantly home students many of whom are further described as 'local', East Enders or E2L. European students were singled out as often being better prepared to meet university expectations. Where international students were singled out as having difficulty these were Asian students, particularly Chinese, and particularly at the post-graduate level.

Departments suggested variously that between 5 and 15% of students have difficulties with writing that cannot be adequately addressed through unsupported disciplinary teaching.

Students experiencing serious difficulties were often also thought to be those ones with other motivational and study skills problems (including an overly carefree attitude of getting away with it). Students who overcome these kinds of obstacles can make rapid progress.

At the same time staff tended to agree that most students' writing needed to improve and that it did so over the course of the degree. This was partly through the 'old-fashioned' process of socialisation but also through measures that they had tried in their teaching and course and assessment design.

7. Reasons for Problems with Writing

7.1. Many of the students' difficulties were put down to social/cultural/linguistic backgrounds and educational experiences.

7.2.   A-level assessment regimes came in for particular criticism. A level was not generally seen as giving good preparation for university. This was sometimes based more on supposition than firm knowledge of what happens in schools and there was some desire expressed for better communication with partner schools.

7.3.   Staff widely complained that students appeared to have developed no habit of reading. What reading they had done appeared to be confined to text books and they had had little exposure to literary, academic or good journalistic style. Similarly they had not been exposed to enough models of student writing.

7.4.   They felt that previous experience seemed to have equipped students with few methods, techniques for writing. They were not used at school to doing long pieces. One department commented that it was no longer able to set 'Innovate or Die' type questions, replacing them with shorter multi-part questions in exams.

7.5.   Staff also felt that students unwillingness to be critical may have resulted from being trained to pass exams with facts and to employ 'cut and paste' as a research technique.

7.6.   Other reasons for students' difficulties were located in the way departments themselves structured students' learning (i.e. departments were taking some responsibility). In Mathematical Sciences there was explicit recognition that contemporary students learn in a variety of ways often in ways that differ from how the lecturers themselves learnt.

In Drama staff identified that placing the assessment deadline at the end of the holiday rather than the end of term meant that the writing task was disengaged from the learning process – they therefore moved the deadline earlier and supported students writing process in classes.

In Engineering staff reviewed their programme and identified that opportunities to practice writing and receive support for writing diminished considerably in the second year, leaving students ill-equipped for the big writing tasks required of them in the third year. They are trying to address this by introducing supported writing tasks throughout the second year courses.

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8.   Current use of central support

Comments on central support were almost entirely focussed on the Language and Learning Unit (LLU) and overall there was a lack of clarity about the services it offers and a related perception that these services were not fully used.

Some departments made a point of referring to the LLU in induction and /or in student handbooks, but this was not the case in all departments.

Some perceived it as a place for international students and not a place which home students would go to.

Difficulties for students were identified: clashes with timetabling, navigating the website to identify appropriate help.

Referral to LLU: A number of departments /teachers said they informally recommended students to use the LLU, but whether students did so was voluntary and departments didn't know whether students attended or not. This appeared to be the case even where departments used diagnostic tests in the first year as the basis

for recommending students to the LLU (an exception is the specially tailored arrangement between Biology and ELSS)

The general sense was that students do not act on a recommendation to go to the LLU. Students view ELSS classes as extra effort and separate; some are resistant to taking a test.

There was a lack of awareness of possible insessional support for Masters level students who are not entitled to enrol on ESD research writing courses. LLU support for PhD students was also unclear.

9.   Suggestions

(It was noticeable that many of the ideas put forward by staff did not single out particular groups (e.g. international students) but were aimed at the student body as a whole.)

The overwhelming impression was that the *departments wanted support for writing that was as discipline or department specific as possible*; at the least it should be faculty specific. Ideas put forward for this support were:
- o   Embedding a 'writing guru' in the department/school who would get to know the courses, assignments and students and would tackle basic problems that are not within the academic's teaching remit.
- o   In-school, student-focussed workshops or workshop course based on kinds of actual student errors (including grammatical), and including work on the purpose of academic essays and how to structure them. These might be credit bearing, but should be well-timed and use feedback on actual writing as a way of learning. (In these ideas staff seemed to be getting at something between a clinic (focussed on the individual) and a writing course (divorced from content courses)
- o   A faculty-based drop-in shop
- o   Regular seminars highlighting elements of grammar and punctuation – faculty based (or cross-College) and advertised to students via emails
- o   Self-led resources for students to complement the kinds of workshop topics mentioned above, perhaps including exemplars of different kinds of writing
- o   A webpage listing all possible sources of help

Other suggested models were: a first year writing course following the US liberal arts model; a course focussing on critical thinking and writing (one geared to the Arts and Social Sciences; another to Science, Engineering and Maths)

Centrally, staff suggested:

- o   Greater care with admissions, so that students with insufficient proficiency do not gain entry. IELTS 6.5 was not felt to be an accurate indicator of speaking and writing ability in all cases.
- o   Making ability in writing part of the credit framework and a requirement for passing the first year.
- o   Separate provision for students whose ability in writing falls below a certain level. This might be in the form of pre-university courses for students to get up to speed.
- o   An easy to use service for spotting plagiarism that staff and student could use. (Staff are currently unclear who is responsible for this at QM)

Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policies and Practices

o Training for Postgraduate TAs in teaching and marking writing
o Help for international lecturing staff who require extra support in their English communication skills and teaching development.

Annex B

Student views

The Student Union organised a consultation meeting with student course representatives. This is a summary of what they said

- Each course is different in its writing demands; there are different kinds of questions, different terminologies to grasp…
- Lecturers should make their expectations clear (e.g. on referencing)
- Support for writing is best when it comes from your tutor or is part of the curriculum
- Individual and small tutorial groups are effective, as is practice in writing
- Single courses on writing can create a 'done with that' reaction.
- Any extra work on writing needs to count
- Everyone knows someone who is suffering because their writing isn't good enough
- Lecturers need to take an active role in getting these students help. Coordination is needed.
- Perhaps we should scare people by showing that good writing translates into good grades and vice versa
- But we also need to reward improvement and not just good performance.

Annex C

On May 2nd a deliberative workshop was held at the Robin Brook Centre with c. 40 staff to review findings from the consultations and consider draft proposals for moving forward. Participants produced written ideas and feedback during the event and subsequently.

There were 2 papers for consideration.

Paper 1. This put forward 3 scenarios for discussion organised according to the degree of central coordination of writing development activity:

Scenario 1: Low   Ad hoc, locally managed (department/school level) initiatives to develop undergraduates' writing.
Scenario 2: Middle   Some central coordination. A requirement on departments/schools to have in place a strategy to develop undergraduates' writing, but no compulsion as to the nature of the strategy. Some centrally managed initiatives to develop undergraduates' writing.
Scenario 3: High   Great degree of central coordination. A college-wide English language testing regime with streaming of students to remedial and ordinary tracks. Remedial track taught and managed centrally and ordinary track taught at department/school level (or jointly at faculty level) to college-wide specification.

The paper contains detail of how each scenario might be manifested and discusses strengths and weaknesses of each.

Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policies and Practices

Paper 2. This proposed a number of elements that a 'joined up writing development strategy for QM' might contain, summarised as:
- Ensure training and professional development of those involved in teaching/facilitating learning
- Ensure that degree programmes support learning to write
- Provide support for course and programme development and evaluation
- Mesh student writing support into departments
- Maximise resources and feedback to writers
- Celebrate achievement in student writing in the disciplines
- Create a co-ordinating group for writing development across the College to oversee the strategy

Full documents can be obtained from Sally Mitchell, s.mitchell@qmul.ac.uk

Feedback from the participants suggests that they favoured:

College and Departmental levels
1) An approach broadly in the middle level of co-ordination.
2) The creation of departmental writing tutors/representatives who would liaise with central services and across departments. These people would act as a focal point and a champion for College-wise initiatives within their own departments, and would collate and disseminate best practice and case studies. This would need to be resourced.
3) Together representatives would form a College-wide committee/ group concerned with student writing development, periodically reviewing practice
4) More joined-up thinking within departments. For example, all lecturers to meet and coordinate assessment across all years of a programmes, checking the fit with the learning strategy, identifying challenges for students and liaising with LLU for support; conscious attention to how writing will be used in the learning process at the moment of module and programme design; discussion of, for example, how expectations of writing change at PGT and PGR and how this is explained to students; how writing skills are acquired for academic and employment purposes
5) More incentives for staff to develop good practice in this area, including recommendations from HoDs, greater number of smaller rewards than is currently offered, equal value to pedagogical practice in promotion
6) Improved resources for development of student writing within departments
7) Further opportunities to learn from colleagues in other departments
8) A departmental strategy that is followed and monitored for appropriateness by the faculty.
9) Further opportunities to consult on a basic strategy taking elements of paper 1 and much of paper 2

Students
10) Prizes for student writing as a way of motivating students (something to put on C.Vs) and showing that writing is important to success. Publication also a good idea though involving a lot of coordination, a judging committee etc. and therefore having resource implications.
11) Finding out more about student experiences and attitudes, bringing them into the conversation
12) Exploring possibilities of student mentoring

Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policies and Practices

Central Services

13) The possibility of redirecting resources from central services to departments to support departmental writing tutors

14) Having support come to departments rather than sending students out to get support

15) A standard procedure for referring students without making them feel like failures, and taking a carrot rather than stick approach

16) A proactive approach from LLU and Thinking Writing – going out to departments and speaking to staff/running workshops

17) Organising all student support under one umbrella and making communication clear

18) More staff development in helping students with writing, including giving feedback and identifying dyslexia and specific learning difficulties

Teaching and Learning

19) Finding and disseminating ways of helping students be more creative and experimental in their writing

20) Opening up assessment to wider range of criteria, broadening the notion of 'work'

21) Balancing the concentration on writing with attention to other modes of learning and expression

22) Attending not just to disciplinary writing but to writing beyond the discipline

Thinking Writing Evaluation: Queen Mary UL

Final Version 3 July 2008

Executive Summary

Evaluation Team*: Brian Street; Tracey Costley; Marta Firestone (King's College London)*

The aim of the evaluation was:

- To review the original aim and objectives of the Thinking Writing (TW) initiative and assess the degree to which they have been realised.

- To provide recommendations for the future.

Sources of Data:

The Team attended Focus Groups and a Department Away Day and met with key individuals as well as being provided with a range of documentation. The Team's perspective was an ethnographic one more than a judgemental one; that is we tried to capture 'what is going on', to listen to what people had to say and to report this; so although we make recommendations at the end, they are qualified by the complexity and variety of the data and point mostly in the direction of what knowledge and understanding is necessary in order to make strategic decisions.

Organisation of Evaluation Report:

The Report is organised under four headings: Writing re Learning and Teaching; Resources and Strategies; Responses to Questions Raised; and Recommendations.

<u>Writing re Learning and Teaching</u>

The participants presented a number of views and perspectives on the nature of student writing and how 'problems[7]' might be dealt with. The Team have organised these under the following headings:

> *Generic and Specific*: whether the issues were general to all students or specific to disciplines/ areas of study.

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[7] Throughout this report we use single quotation marks to signal ideas or concepts that we introduce from the literature (such as 'embedded', 'generic/ specific') or from wider sources than QMUL (such as the notion of 'problems' and 'explanations' in relation to student writing, many of which we consider to be somewhat problematic, hence the distancing offered by the single quotation marks). We use double quotation marks to highlight quotes from participants at the QMUL focus groups.

'Problems': different definitions of what constituted a 'problem' with student writing were offered, ranging from narrow linguistic features to broader discourse issues and that of 'plagiarism'.

Explanations: again there was a wide range of 'explanations' for 'problems' identified with student writing. Different explanations of the 'problem' generally became associated with different solutions. Recognising the range of both definitions and solutions is a key requirement for further policy moves which we have organised under the following headings: *The Internet, Confidence, Experience, Preparation, Appropriateness, and Interconnections*.

Differences in writing requirements: it was recognised that there might be differences across disciplines and across years in what is required in student writing, a finding that has implications for whether 'generic' solutions can be found.

Pedagogy: TW had demonstrated for many tutors the complexity and variety of teaching methods appropriate for supporting student writing. One implication of this is that policy and resources need to be directed to tutors themselves and not just to students deemed to have 'problems'.

Resources and Strategies

All of the above definitions and consequent 'solutions' entail allocations of resources. Participants responses to resource issues and how these might be addressed ranged in a number of ways, such as: credit for 'writing' courses; a 'trade off' between time and resources allocated to 'content' courses and to writing inputs*;* 'buy ins' and 'buy outs', and TA training**.** Strategic discussions also looked outwards to broader College positions, such as the College Strategic Plan**,** the Student Support Strategy. A key issue for future consideration was the enhancement of dialogue between departments and the writing and language tutors. The continuing role of the TW initiative was deemed to be crucial by most participants.

Responses to Questions Raised

The 'impact' on student writing of the TW approach seen through the eyes of the discipline tutors was highly positive, with an overwhelming sense that "TW raised the profile of writing and improved the product."

In all the Focus Groups a feeling of "momentum" was expressed. Many expressed a desire to see some sort of "commitment" at the College level to the future of this work.

One of the major questions now is how such understanding and involvement might be extended to others.

A clear message was that Thinking Writing is not an initiative that 'fixes students' but one that has an invaluable and ongoing role to play in staff and student development.

Recommendations

These were organised under the following headings, reflecting to some extent the findings from consultations but also bringing them together at a strategic level. The Evaluation team recommend that:

The University maintains and enhances the momentum and enthusiasm that has been fostered through the work that has taken place in the TW scheme, through developing the following areas:

Links across units: Work in supporting students' writing needs to take place in dialogue with departments and units. *TW-type support was not something that should only target students or new lecturers but is appropriate and necessary development for **all** staff. However, whilst there is a need for a Central Strategy, this should **not** be framed in terms of Central Control: the "ground-up" approach currently in action was generally favoured.*

Identifying need: the relationship between needs of international students, 'non-traditional' home students, 'native/ non-native' speakers and others could be explored further and the boundaries might be weakened.

Indicators: Whilst recognising the importance of 'Indicators' that such programmes were making a difference, the Evaluation Team were sceptical of technicist or regulatory approaches, as in other sectors of HE, and would recommend a more 'formative' and interactive approach.

Publicity: the principles that TW and more broadly LLU initiatives have addressed and the skills and knowledge developed need to be recognised and made available across the College Involvement in and consultation with other University-wide initiatives, is key here.

Expansion: Spreading the TW perspective beyond a somewhat narrow band of enthusiastic members of staff to the majority of faculty is probably the next big move.

Thinking Writing Evaluation: Queen Mary UL

Final Version 3rd July 2008

Evaluation Team*: Brian Street; Tracey Costley; Marta Firestone (King's College London)*

Terms of Reference

The original aim of the TW initiative was:

To enhance the development of student writing through supporting staff and departments in the piloting of new discipline-based writing-intensive courses and through the dissemination of good practice.

The aim of the evaluation was:

- To review the original aim and objectives of the Thinking Writing (TW) initiative and assess the degree to which they have been realised.

- To provide recommendations for the future.

Sources of Data:

The Evaluation Team attended four Focus Group meetings (Wed 7th May; Fri 9th May; Thurs 15th May; and Tuesday 10th June) at which 34 members of QM were present, from 16 different Departments. Discussions were lively and interactive, all participants having much to say, so that the sessions lasted up to two hours. Notes on the topics raised were taken by all three of us and voice recordings were taken of the sessions. In addition we were provided with manifold documentation from the TW programme and from the LLU, including the findings of the HE Academy "Widening Participation and Student Writing in the Disciplines" project, in which TW played a key role along with others, and reports based on consultations with the Departments involved.. In this report we will mainly call upon the Focus Group meetings, referencing the written data as appropriate, and we conclude with some responses to the questions raised. We also met Professor Morag Shiach, the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching on Tuesday 10th June and have taken account of her comments.

The Team's perspective was an ethnographic one more than a judgemental one; that is we tried to capture 'what is going on', to listen to what people had to say and to report this; so although we make recommendations at the end, they are qualified by the complexity and variety of the data and point mostly in the direction of what knowledge and understanding is necessary in order to make strategic decisions.

Focus Group perceptions of the role of Thinking Writing:

We have addressed these perspectives, as they arose in the Focus Groups, under four general headings: **Writing re Learning and Teaching; Resources and Strategies; Responses to Questions Raised; and Recommendations** (although there is, of course, considerable overlap and these are not comprehensive).

Writing re Learning and Teaching

Generic and Specific

The relationship between *Generic and Specific* responses to student writing difficulties was a major theme running through all of the discussions. It was recognised that responses to 'problems' with student writing depend on how the relationship between writing and 'content' knowledge is conceptualised. It was felt that for many academics – though mostly not those in the Focus Groups – writing is seen as a set of generic skills separate from the thinking and conceptualising required in a particular discipline. There was also concern amongst those we met that what some termed a "narrow view of the writing process" was pervasive across the University with academic staff and tutors tending to highlight issues such as "misuse of the semi-colon" as 'problems' and that it was often difficult to get beyond these somewhat surface level features. Responses to this conceptualisation of the 'problem' included the provision of writing courses by a central unit - where students might be 'fixed'. In discussing the distinctions between 'generic' and 'specific' provision, views put forward from the LLU were that these were not necessarily separate things but "different sides of the same coin" or "different points on a continuum". Members of this unit felt quite strongly that it was important to view writing as a process which is often long and difficult for many students. The notion of 'quick fixes' then was seen as inherently problematic.

Both the LLU and members of disciplines in the Focus Groups felt that there is a need for HEIs in general to recognise that the 'students can't write' view is misleading and that schools operate and work with different models of 'writing' than universities. As a result there is a need to recognise that all students will need to be guided through the transition from school and also through the different years of their degree programme. The perspective put forward in the Focus Groups (closely associated with Thinking Writing ideas and approaches) was that the act of writing, for all disciplines, requires an ability to conceptualise, to "see with new eyes" both the

processes and purposes of writing. A number of participants evidently shared the TW recognition that writing is instrumental in and shaped by disciplinary ways of thinking and we refer to them here as 'TW enthusiasts' to distinguish this approach from others who remained more sceptical and for whom therefore the discipline's tutor did not necessarily have such strong obligations to support their students' writing. For the 'enthusiasts', then, it was recognised that there were different ways of writing between and within different disciplines and subject areas – reports, essays, technical summaries were all signalled as kinds of writing that involved discipline specific ways of thinking and expression. From this perspective, then, it was felt that provision for student support in writing needs to be 'integrated' in disciplines and in content courses. How this might be achieved was not yet certain but the TW input had firmly set this process in motion through possibilities such as courses taught by both content tutors and a writing specialist.

Many however voiced concerns that students raised about such an approach – students might have chosen subjects such as Maths or Engineering precisely to avoid writing, and courses/modules which attempt to focus explicitly on writing, or which are writing intensive, may be met with resistance by these students. Similarly, other students may have chosen subjects such as English in order to do more creative/ literary writing and students may not recognise these components in discipline-based courses, such as Thinking Writing in English Studies.

In a number of cases, the writing required for assessment at the end of a course might be different from what had been done during the course itself – essays for instance might be required for a final grade whilst notes, reports and shorter pieces of writing had been required during the course itself. A strategic question arose here as to whether one response to student 'problems' with writing might be to change the writing requirements rather than to change the students – this was not explored in great depth but there was a general sense in the discussions that the university and professional associations (e.g. in Engineering, Dentistry, etc.) had set out requirements and the task of tutors was to prepare students for these, rather than to question them! This also serves to highlight the fact that writing support needs to be 'embedded' in disciplines because what constitutes writing is defined and indeed regulated within and across disciplines.

A number of participants were more sceptical of the 'embedded' approach and not convinced that it was their role as discipline tutors to also support student writing, which could perhaps be better handled by 'writing experts' and dedicated courses, such as those developed in the USA under the generic heading 'College Composition'. Some tutors believed their role was "to improve students' general

knowledge", but were adamant that it was not their role to deal with "remedial" issues such as punctuation and spelling, firmly believing that this was not "what they had signed up to do". Many felt that this was an important issue in terms of recognising the need for more resources to be made available for those students "at the bottom". The points raised in the discussion, from whatever perspective, indicate a larger need to work to develop, at both a subject/discipline level and at a wider college level, a common understanding of what role writing is considered to play in teaching and learning at different stages of university study. Different definitions and explanations of what constitutes writing (and the 'problems' associated with it – see below) were associated with different solutions.

'Problems'

The issue of what is identified as a 'problem' in a student's writing has clearly been raised by the TW presence and has implications for how responses are designed and resourced. Some of the ways in which the issue was articulated include the perception that students' writing suffered from problems with:

- language features such as poor grammar and spelling
- more discourse-defined issues such as logic, order, explicitness
- different 'cultural' understandings of writing
- referencing – knowledge as to how to cite references both in the text and in
    bibliographies
- difficulties with taking notes
- plagiarism was frequently cited as an issue (see 'explanations' below)

The percentage of students who were seen as having serious 'problems' with writing was frequently – though not uniformly – cited as 10-20%. Throughout the meetings a cross cutting theme was that of "responsibility" and "whose job" it is to work on issues relating to students' writing. Many tutors felt that it was not "their job" to "fix" students language, i.e. poor grammar, spelling and punctuation. For some tutors, the belief that "writing is an intuitive skill you either have or you don't have" was mentioned as a reason for tutors not to get on board. Similarly, there was some disagreement on whether the 'problem' is located in students or in the actual writing requirements. Students might be asked, in the course of the degree programme, to do quite different pieces of writing. For example, in Engineering, students are required to write

in a range of different genres such as laboratory reports, annotated bibliographies, group reports, and extended essays. These pieces of work require the students to write in a number of different ways for different purposes and audiences each presenting their own challenges for students. Some discussion ensued as to whether these 'problems' were disconnected from content work or embedded within it, again raising the notion of responsibility. TW was highlighted in these discussions as being a key starting point from which such discussions have been possible. TW was credited with helping departments to reflect on the nature of writing tasks students are required to do and, as a result, highlighting areas in which "disciplines were not supporting students" as fully as they perhaps could. It would seem that TW has played a significant role in helping to unpack the idea of 'problems with writing'. In looking more closely at what students are actually being asked to write, the relationship between task and outcome becomes more apparent – the tasks themselves may indeed be part of the problem.

Explanations

Discussion of explanations for students' 'problems' were wide ranging and included both the views of those present and reports on the views of their colleagues. The latter were particularly cited as reproducing general stereotypical accounts of the kind frequently cited in Times Higher reports ('standards are falling', schools are 'failing us', tutors are 'disturbed'/'shocked' at student 'problems'; students 'shouldn't have been accepted in the first place', etc.). Those present often cited subtler issues, such as tutors' own reflective accounts of knowledge about and difficulties with writing – some suggested that whilst tutors can write themselves they don't necessarily know how they do it and this makes it difficult to pass this knowledge (often tacit) on. From the perspective of the LLU, this could be described more precisely as a "lack of language" and "confidence" amongst academic staff with which to talk about what they might be looking for, expecting and hoping to see in students' writing. This was suggested as a possible explanation for the difficulties some students encounter in writing and for the lack of feedback some students complain about.

The main issues raised in the discussions, in relation to student writing were:

- ***"The Internet":*** (just this phrase led to raised eyebrows and a general frisson of shared knowledge of the 'problems'), many students' experience of the internet led them to "cut and paste", to import "chunks" of text from online sources, to reference only Wikipedia; to write as they may do in blogs or in text messages. Writing "responsibly, "with depth and appropriateness of knowledge", was a key theme for many tutors.

- **'Confidence':** many students, especially those in Science subjects and Maths, were anxious about writing, had images of what 'good' writing involved that they felt inadequate to measure up to (and indeed chose subjects to "avoid" having to write like this).

- **'Experience':** many students whether 'home', 'overseas' and/or 'non-traditional' are viewed as arriving with limited experience and understanding of what is required in academic writing, this combined with difficulties with English was seen as having a significant impact on their writing abilities and development. "Cultural differences" were brought up in two Focus Groups; some tutors (e.g. from Engineering) highlighted differences between European and Asian students in terms of cultural beliefs/educational backgrounds and their implications for writing requirements in UKHE.

- **'Preparation':** schools fail to prepare students for university; some wondered whether such preparation was the job of schools given that the majority of school students do not go on to HE, but the overall feeling was that some at least of the responsibility for academic literacy lies with schools. For instance, many felt, or cited their colleagues as feeling, that schools simply teach writing as regurgitation of facts, "with no critical thinking involved". Most of those attending, however, were not entirely committed to this view, although it wove through many of the discussions.

- **'Appropriateness':** many participants felt that knowledge representation may be changing and that tasks students are required to do may need to better reflect this. It was felt that the "ways of doing things" may be different than when tutors were students themselves: for example, technology, the working environment, communications.

- **'Interconnections':** the relationship between writing and *study skills* more broadly, i.e. how these are connected and what and how an appropriate balance is struck and by whom: for example, library support focussed especially on referencing and different components of a text rather than on writing as an overall activity.

Differences in writing requirements

It was recognised that there might be differences across disciplines and across years in what is required in student writing. Again the TW input seems to have attuned tutors more sensitively to such issues. For instance, there are different writing styles and traditions in Physical and Social Geography and, whilst Maths has specific needs in writing such as sequence, logic, and explicitness, these may be different from Engineering, with its concern for technical report writing. A Year 1 course designed to

"compensate" for school and to provide a foundation for university writing might be quite different from a Year 2 course that is likely to be more content heavy, and therefore to require specific writing support rather than simply relying on the Year 1 support to be remembered in Year 2. The US model of Freshman Writing courses for all, before discipline work began, was generally seen as not relevant in this country, partly for these reasons. Likewise, in Year 3, preparation for longer essays/ dissertations might require different support than that provided in earlier years. There were differences as to whether subject disciplines and tutors could/ should provide support in all of these ways, but it was increasingly recognised that, as the conceptual issues became clearer and stronger – partly through input from TW and experience of working with TW tutors –, then the relationship between writing requirements and resource implications might need to be re-balanced. If writing does involve such attention across the years, then perhaps the content specification of courses might need to be reviewed and re-worked in order to provide resources – both faculty and student time – for addressing the writing requirements.

Likewise, the relationship between writing genres required in exams and in courses might be addressed. There was brief consideration of the issue of choices for students regarding exams and the kinds of writing required and their relationship to coursework. For instance, in Engineering, students may choose an "essay-based" exam question or one that is "calculation-based". It was reported that very few chose the essay (this raised questions of comparative standards of assessment that were not pursued in this context). It would seem that TW has raised issues of writing genres and variations for a number of discipline tutors, although their resolution might be beyond the local level.

Pedagogy

There were numerous examples of detailed and specific ways in which tutors help students with their writing and of how the TW input had offered support and ideas. A common example that drew directly upon the inputs provided by TW was the development from small bits of writing to larger pieces; a tutor might begin with "bite-size-bits" that students can build on, such as an outline, then provide feedback following which the student produces an initial written draft which elicits further feedback and further drafts leading eventually to the essay required for assessment. This ongoing process was seen as overcoming many of the 'problems' raised, notably that of 'plagiarism' (the "need to devise plagiarism proof assessment" had been brought up) – it is harder to just cut and paste work from sources, such as the internet, when the writing is developing slowly and interactively in this way. This

approach also addresses the 'deficit' issue raised above, since it serves to enhance all students at any level (it was noted that academics produce articles through a similar process). However, it was recognised that such an approach is very resource heavy and that when courses have large numbers of students it becomes very difficult to implement. One response to this was the use of Teaching Assistants (TAs), usually doctoral or post doctoral students who could be trained and then called upon to provide this kind of support to students. Again, however, there are resource implications that might need to be addressed above the level of the Department. A point that was raised by all the tutors who had been involved in such work was that they had been developing ways to offset the "extra work" that such approaches may bring, but in general felt that their extra efforts were being "rewarded" through visibly improved, higher quality, and more interesting student writing.

<u>Resources and Strategies</u>

The discussions cited above regarding how writing is conceptualised, explanations for 'problems', and the role and responsibilities of discipline tutors all have implications for how 'solutions' are posited, who is responsible and how resources can be called upon to address the issues. A number of tutors at the Focus Groups raised the question of credit for 'writing' courses. Students often raised the issue – for them a degree programme that put great weight on final outcomes, examinations etc., seemed to lead to a view that it was "not worth" attending a course in which credit could not be earned. This also raised the issue of the "image" and status of writing specific courses – for some students writing courses were "only for overseas students" and they wouldn't want to be seen attending. For staff there was an issue of 'trade off' between time and resources allocated to 'content' courses and to writing inputs; some said, for instance, that course time was "already full" or that the demands of outside bodies, such as professional associations crediting the degree programme, meant that content could not be cut back to allow "time" for specific attention to writing. One resource strategy was for tutors to be "bought out" from their regular teaching as indeed has happened as staff have applied for funding from the Westfield Trust and currently from Teaching Quality Enhancement Funds (TQEF). These funds have also been used to integrate more writing/ different kinds of writing and support into courses.

Other strategies have been for TW to provide input 'free' on a one-off basis and then faculty take over, or for TW support be ongoing. This involves higher management discussions about funding allocations, such as budgets for staff development, bids

for support from TW or other units, use of TAs (who also need training and therefore resources). A number of those attending the Focus Groups pointed out that Departments do already put in significant resources but these may remain "hidden" in budget lines. Time was regarded as the "biggest hidden resource." Even if tutors' time is successfully "bought out" to work on developing new approaches and course materials, it was the experience of a number of participants that their individual obligations and duties to those courses did not just simply disappear. They found that a great deal "unanticipated" time was required during the "handing over" process as well as while courses were underway. Similarly, it was the tutors' experience that the time needed to organise and schedule meetings both within and across departments such as communicating with and finding convenient working times with the TW team was also more than originally anticipated. Many participants argued that such issues should be recognised in any wider discussions. Strategies proposed included: giving credit in promotion applications to teaching development, e.g. a College Strategic Plan; building on the wider ideological frame that is being mooted, regarding the importance of the "student experience". Some noted that the resource issues raised here were "the price of widening participation". Members of the LLU in particular noted that students were becoming increasingly aware of their "rights" as consumers and as such expected explicit guidance and support from tutors when they encountered 'problems', such as with writing. Likewise, it was recognised that employers were bringing more pressure to bear regarding the skills they required of graduates. In future, then, student writing is likely to have a higher profile and to be subject to pressure from a variety of interests, beyond university tutors themselves. This has implications both for how the issue is conceptualised, how it is addressed organisationally in the university and for the provision of resources.

The relationship of various units in addressing these pressures and taking some responsibility for supporting student writing was a key issue that those attending felt, again, should be included in wider discussions. Some tutors felt that the reason for choosing one particular unit to help them with supporting student writing might be serendipitous – whether they had been easily accessible on the web pages for instance. People tended to favour whichever programme/ unit they had found. Those cited in the discussions, as well as TW, included the LLU; Educational and Staff Development (ESD); the Royal Literary Fund; the Disability and Dyslexia Service, and the library, although speakers were not always clear what their relationship and relative responsibilities were. TW has been involved in helping develop specific courses on writing in the disciplines, such as Integrated Studies in Biological Sciences (ISBS), a 2nd and 3rd year interdisciplinary course taught by discipline tutors

, and the Teaching Writing in English Studies course (TWES). It was suggested that there were differences in attitudes, approaches, and ideologies between such courses and units, etc., and that this variation needs to be taken into account when general strategic decisions are made. Again, 'one size fits all' does not seem appropriate in such a complex context.

Members of the LLU felt that there wasn't always a great deal of "fruitful" and "enriching" dialogue between departments and the writing and language tutors in terms of how best to support students in developing their academic language and literacy skills. The members of the LLU did feel strongly, however, that TW had had a significant impact in this area, facilitating dialogue, "opening tutors' eyes" to subtler aspects of writing and providing valuable feedback from departments to the LLU. The LLU offers a variety of pre-sessional and in-sessional courses as well as a range of workshops and study skills seminars. These courses, both at Queen Mary and at other HEIs, are largely 'generic' in nature, however the LLU felt strongly that a number of courses offered through the LLU were consistent with TW pedagogies and ideologies, being more 'embedded' in the subject discipline. Members of the LLU suggested that this was a direction that they hoped writing support would take in future.

Responses to Questions Raised

The main purpose of the evaluation is to "review the aims" of TW and propose recommendations for the future. Drawing upon the evidence cited above we can provide the following responses and recommendations.

Overview

Those we spoke with/listened to were uniformly positive about the role of TW. Some, for instance, said that the TW advisers had "saved" staff who were struggling with the issues associated with student writing: early help had been massively appreciated; the input had changed tutors' conceptions of writing, such as the conceptualisation of what counted as 'problems' and understanding of the difference between 'deficit' approaches leading to one-off responses and ongoing support within the content work of the department. The distinction between 'generic' and 'specific' problems and support ran through all of the discussions, expressed through use of terms such as "integrated", "embedded", "surface", "one off", etc. There was a strong sense that there is a 'problem' with student writing, but not overall agreement as to how this can be described or explained nor as to whether this involves all students or given

percentages – although a "bottom" percentile was a frequent reference point. Whether the response to such 'problems' was a matter for specialist units or for content tutors was also debateable, although for those members of staff who had taken up the invitation to attend the focus groups the TW, more embedded, approach was seen as more appropriate than a "one off" "clinic". How such a view could be spread amongst other colleagues who might be more 'resistant' was a persistent theme. Members of the LLU, for instance, suggested that perhaps only 10% of staff from across the College had taken these perspectives on board, although reasons why it hadn't touched others were not simply a matter of "resistance" but more often "lack of awareness". This raises the issue of how the impact of TW for example, or conceptualisations of and responses to writing, responsibilities, resources, etc., might look quite different both across and within departments.

Many of those attending recognised that responding to student writing needs requires institutional support and resources – "the Departments can't just do it on their own" - but at the same time they much appreciated the "grassroots-up" way of working provided by TW. In all the discussions, those who had been working with TW felt that the discursive nature of their interactions with the TW team had been key to the overall success of the working relationships. Participants felt that it was through close dialogue with the TW team that their own understanding of writing and how TW approaches and pedagogy could be applied to their own departments and subjects had taken place. This way of working was seen as playing a crucial role in tutors' professional (and personal) development. They felt that a more 'top-down' approach that didn't have the same level of departmental and personal engagement and involvement would be at risk of failing to achieve this same level of impact and success. Most participants recognised and valued the responsibilities of the 'content' tutors in relation to developing students' writing and were somewhat sceptical of central provision, especially where this might become institutionalised, regulated, and bureaucratic. There was, then, recognition of a need for a Central Strategy but **not** for Central Control, which is clearly an issue for further discussion and planning. Many tutors felt that what TW needs is time and funding and for some this is connected with the issue of cross Unit Links. For others, the resolution of these issues is a matter of Staff Development to be provided by central funds not just of Departmental support.

This also left open to some extent the relationship of TW input to that provided by other units, such as the library (offering 'study skills' support), ESD (mainly supporting staff through seminars and workshops) and the LLU itself. Again, the Focus Group meetings did not so much resolve these issues of management and

organisation but posed them from a "grassroots" perspective and addressed some of the conceptual issues that would underpin any strategic proposals.

Particular Questions

In particular we were asked to address the following questions:

- Can evidence be found of specific impacts on students' writing where TW approach has been used in departments?
- To what extent has involvement with TW served as a means to raise the profile of writing in a department?
- Has involvement in TW been associated with other innovations in curriculum and/or assessment?

The 'impact' on student writing of the TW approach is mainly seen through the eyes of their discipline tutors – these were highly positive, with an overwhelming sense that 'TW improved the product', without firming up precise 'indicators' of what counts. Indeed, one suggestion was that attention to this might go into 'future recommendations' (see below). The Evaluation Team were sceptical of indicators that become regulatory, as in other sectors of HE, and would recommend a more 'formative' and interactive approach.

There is significant evidence that the involvement of TW has raised the profile of writing – the discussions about generic/ specific, what counts as writing and how it varies across disciplines and years; identification of 'problems' and explanations for them; issues of pedagogy; and the allocation of resources all came across as thoughtfully conceptualised in the light of the TW experience. Across the focus groups and at the level of senior management there was a strong sense that TW is playing a vital role in engaging academic disciplines and initiating dialogues that have raised the profile of writing. The work done by Sally Mitchell as leader of the TW initiative was uniformly recognised and praised.

The fact that the people we met were invited to participate in the evaluation on the basis of some prior involvement with TW reinforces the 'finding' that the TW influence has been to help refine and develop this understanding of issues. In all the Focus Groups a feeling of "momentum" was expressed. This was seen by all as being extremely positive and something which had been achieved through genuine commitment and hard work from all those involved. There was a feeling of concern

for the future of this work and many expressed a desire to see some sort of "commitment" at the college level to the future of this work.

One of the major questions now is how such understanding and involvement might be extended to others, especially those who might "resist" the claim that course tutors have a role to play in writing support. The kind of evidence of other innovations in curriculum included the recognition and use of "small steps" in the teaching of writing; the raising of questions regarding the relationship of course writing and assessment writing (although the general feeling here was of constraints and not much room for manoeuvre); the attempt to refine writing support according to task, year and discipline; and the continuing interest in how content courses can 'embed' writing, including working jointly with TW tutors in combined classes. From all of the discussions a clear message was that Thinking Writing is not an initiative that 'fixes students' but one that has an invaluable and ongoing role to play in staff and student development.

Recommendations

The University maintains and enhances the momentum, and enthusiasm that has been fostered through the work that has taken place in the TW scheme, through developing the following areas:

Links across units: *Work in supporting students' writing needs to take place in dialogue with departments and units. This includes both explicit provision by TW staff of writing components embedded in content areas and of advice and support to discipline tutors on issues involved in supporting student writing (e.g. regarding generic/ specific, reflexivity on their own writing, pedagogy, etc.). The University, then, needs to address the issue of writing as a matter for staff not just for students and for all staff not just for new tutors. Currently little TW-type support is incorporated into Staff Development courses or the PGCAP (although Sally Mitchell has provided some workshops in the Learning and Teaching Continual Professional Development Programme). A key point here, then, based on comments from tutors and staff involved in this evaluation, is that the presence of writing in current staff development may not be as strong as it could be. How this is organised institutionally is a larger question but the point of principle that TW has a Staff Development aspect came across very strongly. A further point in relation to staff development is that those involved in the focus groups felt strongly that TW-type support was not something*

*that should only target students or new lecturers but is appropriate and necessary development for **all** staff.*

*Other links might include the Library, which currently offers students support with referencing and bibliographies but not necessarily taking into account wider issues of the kind focussed on by TW, although they do, like TW, work with disciplines. Likewise, links between TW and the LLU, such as involvement in 'Foundation' courses, etc., need to be clarified. Wherever TW is located institutionally, the principles it addresses and the skills and knowledge it develops need to be recognised and made available across the University. There was, however, recognition that whilst there is a need for a Central Strategy this should **not** be framed in terms of Central Control: the "ground-up" approach currently in action was generally favoured.*

***Identifying need:** the relationship between needs of international students, 'non-traditional' home students, 'native/ non-native' speakers and others could be explored further and the boundaries might be weakened, e.g. some provision may apply across the board rather than just be seen as a (second) language issue e.g. discipline requirements for writing in different years might be a more meaningful criterion than generic 'writing problems'.*

***Resources** should continue be made available to subject disciplines for buy outs (e.g. individual tutors' time for developing and teaching writing-specific courses/ units), 'buy ins' (e.g. paying for TW tutors to co-teach, expanding the number of people who could take on the TW tutor role), TA training and payment, and other ongoing ways in which Departments could be facilitated to address writing issues amongst their students. For many of the participants there was a feeling that monies for such resources and development should not come from departments 'trimming' money from their budgets but through funding channels such as staff development.*

***Indicators:** Whilst recognising the importance of 'Indicators' that such programmes were making a difference, the Evaluation Team were sceptical of technicist or regulatory approaches, as in other sectors of HE, and would recommend a more 'formative' and interactive approach.*

***Credit** and recognition for discipline tutor work in supporting student writing could be explicitly marked in measures of regard, including promotion criteria.*

Publicity: Many of the points indicated here have been taken into account to some extent but may need a higher profile in order to be taken up by those outside the immediate groups who have been influenced by TW. This could be achieved through increased TW involvement in and consultation with other College-wide initiatives, such as the University's 'Student Support Strategy', the 'Graduate Attributes' initiative, etc., and publicity activities generally, which could enhance both internal and external recognition of what is involved.

Expansion: Spreading the TW perspective beyond the narrow band of 'enthusiasts' to the majority of the faculty is probably the next big move, once the initiative is firmly consolidated. For this to happen, all of the above issues will need to be addressed.

Thinking Writing: Most of the people with whom we consulted were aware of TW and generally saw it as being characterised by "ground up" approaches seeking to support all students, and maybe even staff, to become better writers. It was seen as working towards embedding writing in the disciplines. All those involved in the Focus Groups recognised the importance of TW in relation to staff development as well as student enhancement. The role of TW in raising awareness is clearly one of its major contributions and a recommendation would be for the College to find ways to continue and enhance the TW presence across the College and its headline concept Thinking Writing – both participants and the Evaluation Team were in agreement that "if the awareness and thinking improve, so does the writing."

INSESSIONAL ENGLISH PROGRAMME

Semester A	2001-02	2002-3	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	**2007-08**
Number of students enrolled	308	483	483	479	540	577	**677**
Number of teaching groups	17	27	30	31	28	32	**28**
Average group size	18.1	17.9	16.1	15.45	19.3	18.0	**24.2**
Courses[8]: **# groups (# students)**							
• Academic Writing	11 (197)	12 (223)	13 (213)	13 (189)	7 (133)	10 (192)	**9 (251)**
• General English	6 (111)	10 (177)	11 (184)	8 (131)	10 (181)	8 (154)	**7 (145)**
• Lecture Comprehension & seminar skills	0	5 (83)	6 (86)	4 (62)	5 (90)	7 (108)	**5 (99)**
• Grammar & Vocabulary	N/A	N/A	N/A	6 (97)	6 (136)	7 (123)	**7 (182)**
• Research Writing Workshop	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	**N/A**
EU students (all)	150 (49%)	141 (29%)	67 (14%)	148 (31%)	93 (17%)	179 (31%)	**250 (37%)**
Socrates students	36 (12%)	35 (7%)	16 (3%)	52 (11%)	30 (6%)	101 (17%)	**117 (17%)**

Semester B	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	**2007-08**
Number of students enrolled	105	348	433	346	377	221	**229**
Number of teaching groups	11	25	33	30	26	27	**28**
Average group size	10.5	13.9	13.1	11.5	14.5	8.2	**8.2**
Courses: **# groups (# students)**							
• Academic Writing	7 (68)	15 (202)	20 (305)	13 (143)	8 (113)	10 (79)	**9 (66)**
• General English	4 (37)	10 (146)	8 (62)	7 (49)	8 (100)	8 (60)	**7 (53)**
• Lecture Comprehension & seminar skills	0	0	2 (16)	4 (17)	4 (32)	3 (16)	**4 (40)**
• Grammar & Vocabulary	N/A	N/A	3 (50)	6 (61)	5 (107)	5 (66)	**6 (52)**
• Research Writing Workshop	N/A	N/A	N/A	1 (8)	1 (25)	1 (20)	**2 (18)**
EU students (all)	40 (38%)	69 (20%)	68 (15%)	112 (32%)	(Data not available)	104 (43%)	**85 (37%)**
Socrates students	5 (5%)	11 (3%)	20 (5%)	22 (6%)	(Data not available)	57 (24%)	**48 (21%)**

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[8] Each Insessional course comprises 40 hours of contact time: 2 hours a week for 10 weeks.

ACADEMIC STUDY PROGRAMME

Workshops:

Autumn 2007	Number of students
Effective Study Skills	5
Time management	7
Grammar, Syntax and Punctuation	15
Seminar Presentation and Discussion I and II	9
Pronunciation I and II	7
Critical Reading and Critical Writing	17
Academic Writing I and II	22
Lecture Comprehension and Note-Making	7
Reading, Note-Making, and Referencing	5
Exam Techniques and Revision Planning	9
Total:	103

Spring 2008	
Effective Study Skills	0
Time management	1
Grammar, Syntax and Punctuation	0
Seminar Presentation and Discussion I and II	3
Pronunciation I and II	1
Critical Reading and Critical Writing	0
Academic Writing I and II	4
Lecture Comprehension and Note-Making	1
Reading, Note-Making, and Referencing	1
Exam Techniques and Revision Planning	4
CVs and Personal Statements	2
Total:	17

Student Profile

By degree level	
UG	62%
PG	38%

By department

Business Management	9%	SLLF	6%
SBCS	7%	Materials	6%
Computer Science	3%	SMD	23%
Economics	2%	Politics	9%
Electronic Engineering	2%	History	2%
Engineering	2%	School of Law	23%
English and Drama	6%		