

Enhancing practice

# Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience

Introducing scholarship skills: academic writing

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# Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience

Introducing scholarship skills: academic writing

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# Preface

The approach to quality and standards in higher education (HE) in Scotland is enhancement led and learner centred. It was developed through a partnership of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students in Scotland (NUS Scotland) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland. The Higher Education Academy has also joined that partnership. The Enhancement Themes are a key element of a five-part framework, which has been designed to provide an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement. The Enhancement Themes support learners and staff at all levels in further improving higher education in Scotland; they draw on developing innovative practice within the UK and internationally.

The five elements of the framework are:

- a comprehensive programme of subject-level reviews undertaken by higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves; guidance is published by the SFC ([www.sfc.ac.uk](http://www.sfc.ac.uk))
- enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR), run by QAA Scotland ([www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR))
- improved forms of public information about quality; guidance is provided by the SFC ([www.sfc.ac.uk](http://www.sfc.ac.uk))
- a greater voice for students in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service - student participation in quality scotland (sparqs) ([www.sparqs.org.uk](http://www.sparqs.org.uk))
- a national programme of Enhancement Themes aimed at developing and sharing good practice to enhance the student learning experience, facilitated by QAA Scotland ([www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)).

The topics for the Enhancement Themes are identified through consultation with the sector and implemented by steering committees whose members are drawn from the sector and the student body. The steering committees have the task of establishing a programme of development activities, which draw on national and international good practice. Publications emerging from each Theme are intended to provide important reference points for HEIs in the ongoing strategic enhancement of their teaching and learning provision. Full details of each Theme, its steering committee, the range of research and development activities as well as the outcomes are published on the Enhancement Themes website ([www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)).

To further support the implementation and embedding of a quality enhancement culture within the sector - including taking forward the outcomes of the Enhancement Themes - an overarching committee, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), chaired by Professor Kenneth Miller, Vice-Principal, University of Strathclyde, has the important dual role of supporting the overall approach of the Enhancement Themes, including the five-year rolling plan, as well as institutional enhancement strategies and management of quality. SHEEC, working with the individual topic-based Enhancement Themes' steering committees, will continue to provide a powerful vehicle for progressing the enhancement-led approach to quality and standards in Scottish higher education.



**Norman Sharp**  
Director, QAA Scotland

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I would like to thank all those who contributed to this project and who were willing to share their practice and experience to supplement the available literature. I would particularly like to thank those who contributed case studies.

Fran Alston

# I Executive summary

The purpose of this project was to consider how to engage and empower students by introducing scholarship skills in their first year at university. The key tasks were to:

- conduct a review of relevant literature
- identify any themes, gaps and issues for practice
- select case studies of good practice in relation to introducing scholarship skills to students in their first year at university
- provide a number of recommendations that would be of use to policy-makers, practitioners and students.

An initial search of the literature indicated that a substantial body of knowledge and material related to the broad area of the development of scholarship skills within the context of higher education (HE). Scholarship skills were also often referred to as generic skills, employability skills or, indeed, came under the broad umbrella of transferable skills. Several HE institutions, for example Oxford Brookes University, the University of Paisley and Napier University, also referred to scholarship skills as 'academic skills'.

To try to remove complexity and ensure focus, the project team concentrated on the theory and practice related to the development of those scholarship skills specifically needed for the practice of academic writing and text production. This report uses the term 'writing' to refer to both the act of writing and the range of practices that surround it, such as information selection, reading and note-taking. Writing, at present, remains the main means of assessment in HE and therefore is an important area of scholarship in relation to the first-year student experience.

The report begins with a review of the literature related to the definition of scholarship skills. It reflects that difficulty of definition that has resulted in complexity in building appropriate support systems to help first-year students to become engaged and empowered in terms of academic literacy. The question of 'who should teach' or 'should we teach' academic writing is also explored.

Next, the report considers approaches taken to help first-year students to identify their strengths in terms of writing. It reflects on lecturers' and students' differing perspectives in relation to the abilities of first-year students - in terms of confidence and academic literacy - at the point at which they join the HE community.

Synthesising the literature review indicated that (despite the issue of definition) a variety of approaches has been developed - in what appears to be a chronological manner - as a means of strengthening the academic writing skills of first-year students. The strengths and weaknesses of each of three main models, along a continuum from 'bolt-on' study skills classes through to completely embedded academic literacy strategies, are discussed.

For each model evaluated, the report considers a number of case studies from current practice in terms of perceived value from a student and practitioner perspective. In total, 26 case studies were gathered: seven from Napier University, 14 from other institutions

in the UK and five from overseas. The illustrative case studies used in the report were selected from the bank of 26 because they appeared to be representative of a broad range of the examples being collected, demonstrated some innovation of approach or delivery, or exemplified one of the models in the chronology of approaches identified in the literature review.

Theory is considered first, supported with exemplars from the case studies. In other words, this report is constructed using an embedded approach throughout.

As part of the information-gathering process and to supplement the literature review and case study exemplars, two focus groups were held: one with staff and one with students of Napier University. Their reflections are linked to the literature and include recommendations for practice. Common themes emerging from the staff focus groups were as follows:

- scholarship skills, in terms of academic writing, cannot be taken for granted in first-year students
- students do not always recognise that the skills they have developed in other educational environments may not be fit for purpose at university
- a factor in drop-out is students' lack of confidence in their ability to produce and present written work of a suitable academic standard
- some lecturers continue to teach students in the way they always have, while schools have changed the content and way of teaching, so there is a mismatch
- some lecturers believe that there is little enough time for content teaching, so there is no place for teaching academic writing techniques
- assessment is a key area where scholarship, or lack thereof, is visible. Staff therefore need to be very clear in designing guidelines for students and not have them 'guess' as to what is needed.

The student voice was consonant with many of the views expressed by staff. Explicit discussion of scholarship centred on assessment, where scholarship skills - or the lack of them - become most 'visible' to both students and staff.

The report concludes with examples of how the literature review, case studies and reflective focus group information can influence policy-makers in relation to designing the first-year student experience. It also provides recommendations for practitioners and students.

## 2 Introduction

Transferable or 'generic' skills schemes were introduced as a result of pressure from employers and government agencies (Scottish Executive, 2003; Drummond et al, 1999; Dearing Report, 1997). A major part of the frameworks for developing such skills included action for evidencing scholarship skills. Other national initiatives such as the creation of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) have also helped to fuel the debate over the role of HE in preparing graduates for employment. Within this context, it is generally accepted that - in parallel with achieving the objectives of widening participation and ensuring diversity in the student population - there has been a growing need to put in place a variety of support mechanisms for student learning.

With the challenge that HE increasingly faces in preparing a diverse population of graduates with the attributes suitable for employment, there has also been pressure to move away from traditional methods of assessment to a more diverse range of assignments that mirror tasks in the workplace and allow students to be able to make the transition more easily. While accepting this in part, the ability to produce academic writing of a high quality remains as one of the key assessment strategies within HE. Success in this area of scholarship is likely to provide students, and especially first-year students, with confidence to proceed to a more creative range of assessment tasks.

The concept of 'scholarship' in academic writing extends to the ability to: appraise and select from a large volume of information; conduct primary research; select appropriate information to answer the research questions raised; and communicate the outcomes effectively.

## 3 Literature review

### 3.1 Challenges in developing scholarship skills in the first year

There is considerable debate as to what capabilities students must develop in order to meet the literacy demands of the curriculum. Much of the existing literature concentrates on this development from the perspective of the educator and not the student. The focus of this report is the introduction and development of scholarship skills with students who are in their first year at university.

This focus is predicated on evidence suggesting that first-year students experience difficulties in the development of their writing. For example, McGivney (1996), Yorke (1999; 2007) and Fitzgibbon and Prior (2003) have all indicated that a factor in first-year student drop-out from HE is a lack of skills in areas such as essay writing and note-taking, and/or a lack of study skills techniques. In addition, Johnson (1997) and Lowe and Cook (2003) found that students, especially first-years, do not recognise that the study skills they have developed in other educational environments are not sufficient to meet their needs at university.

Output from the STAR (Student Transition and Retention) project at the University of Ulster (2006) found that secondary education often prepares students explicitly for assessments and trains them to work towards 'highly defined' outcomes. Students are permitted to experiment with testing their knowledge and understanding through presentation of multiple drafts and regular feedback.

This works for many secondary pupils in terms of Higher and GCE A-level achievement. But when they then enter their first year at university, they find nowhere near the same level of explicit advice and support. The project found that module descriptors are often written as minimalist specifications, and first-year students find the level of intensity of work to be much higher at university, but are unsure what they are expected to do to evidence learning.

It would appear that students and academics may both underestimate the challenge faced in the first year. Cook and Leckey (1999) found that most students in their study, made confident by their recent success in national examinations, expected to be able to cope with first-year academic work.

Academics, many of whom see their teaching role as almost entirely related to teaching subject content, may also expect students to be able to cope with producing academic work of an acceptable standard in the first year of their degree (Lowe and Cook, 2003). Currently, the expectations of both groups seem to be disappointed. Academics report that their students are not coming to them equipped for self-regulated learning (for example, Heikkila and Lonka, 2006), and academic writing in particular (Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis and Turner, 2001). Students discover that the strategies used to produce work of a satisfactory standard in the school environment do not work at university, and they are often at a loss to understand exactly what is required of them (Lowe and Cook, 2003; Gourlay and Greig, 2007).

The change in focus, assessment types and study requirements in fact represent a change of culture. This is not necessarily recognised by academics, and probably only recognised in hindsight by students, who have either adapted or failed to adapt (Zepke et al, 2006).

Given that academics are increasingly recognising that students are not entering the first year necessarily equipped to succeed, what strategies are commonly adopted to deal with this issue?

In relation to the mismatch in expectations, the following two case studies highlight 'information-sifting' techniques used to provide lecturers and first-year students with a better idea of where they are both starting from in terms of preparedness for study at university.

### **Case study 1: University of Bristol, first-year skills audit**

One way of addressing the problem is exemplified by the first-year skills audit that the University of Bristol offers to all incoming first-year students in the Faculty of Arts. Students are presented with an online activity (or paper-based if they prefer) in the form of a questionnaire, sub-divided into the following sections:

- critical thinking
- information literacy
- referencing and academic conventions
- presentation skills
- personal organisation
- developing your learning.

Questions are posed in each area, and students are asked to rate themselves in terms of how confident they are in relation to each of the issues raised in the question. For example, the information literacy section asks: 'How confident are you that you know how to find journal articles in a particular topic?' and 'How confident are you that you know what plagiarism is and how you can avoid it?'

Students are asked to take their responses with them to their first meeting with their personal adviser, who explains to them how they can get the answers to any questions they may have. The idea is that students will continue to reflect on the questions as they proceed through the first year, and be able to identify clear progress in follow-up sessions with their tutor.

The strength of this approach is that it is clearly linked to the student's personal development and is an indicator of engagement in the learning journey. It also allows both student and tutor to overcome assumptions and work on areas where strengths and weaknesses in knowledge may exist. However, it can be viewed as something of a deficit model, with students having to say where the gaps in their knowledge lie and individually having to elect to go along to non-timetabled support activity classes.

For more information, see: [www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/skills/audit.html](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/skills/audit.html)

### Case study 2: Napier University, support in Sports and Exercise Science

During induction week, first-year students on the undergraduate Sports and Exercise Science degree programme are asked to fill in a short questionnaire on their hopes and fears regarding their university experience, and to indicate (from a list) any areas where they might like some support. In the responses it is usual for less than 10 per cent of any cohort to indicate immediately that support may be required. The exercise is repeated three weeks later; at this point, it is usual for up to one-third of the cohort to indicate that they would like help with aspects of their coursework, most often note-taking and essay writing. In recognition of this, workshops on both topics are organised (in advance) and run in weeks 4-6.

Once again, the strengths of this model are that the student and staff perspectives of what is required may well differ initially. However, after becoming more familiar with the university and their tutors, students feel able to state that there are areas where support is needed, and tutors can rely on the service being available to bridge this gap. The weakness is that it requires students (who have usually formed into groups by this point) to elect to go to student support workshops facilitated by academic advisers.

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## 3.2 Models for developing the scholarship skill of academic writing

Drawing on the findings of a research project that investigated staff and students' contrasting expectations regarding academic writing, Lea and Street (1998) identified and critiqued implicit models of student writing and subsequent responses that have emerged in the HE sector.

First, Lea and Street discussed what they termed the 'study skills' model. This, they indicated, is where either the student or the tutor identifies a perceived need, and support is then built to remedy the deficit; they criticised this as being based on student deficit. They moved on to describe what they characterised as the 'academic socialisation' model, which emphasises the induction of the student into a new academic 'culture', but which they suggested also tends to present the academy as a relatively homogeneous, static entity.

Finally, Lea and Street proposed an 'academic literacies' framework as a means of understanding and developing writing practices in universities. This framework, which is described more fully below, draws on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) in relation to situated learning. It regards reading and writing as a set of social practices. Student writing and learning are: '...issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation' (Lea and Street, 1998, pp 159).

The following sections of this report explain in more detail what is meant by each of these models, and looks at the literature surrounding each one in turn. Even at this early stage it should be emphasised that, in practice, models tend to be neither mutually exclusive nor strictly sequential, and many institutions employ combinations of the three approaches. The models are outlined in table 1 and described more fully below. In broad terms they can all include an element of embedding, but each approach goes further than the one before, like steps on a ladder.

Model	Key features
Study skills	Can be bolt-on or embedded and subject specific or generic
Academic socialisation	Teaching or practising of scholarship skills using the language of the subject discipline with some subject content (for example, nurse education - helping students to think as a nurse may think)
Academic literacies	Totally embedded approach in which academic writing skills are explicitly developed within the programme

Table 1: models for developing academic writing (from Lea and Street, 1998)

### 3.3 The study skills approach

The origins of the study skills approach lie in the assumptions that were made at a time when considerably fewer of the population had access to university than do today, and where those who did have access largely entered into a highly selective system. In this early model the prototypical student was assumed to arrive at university equipped with all the necessary skills to cope with the demands of scholarship in a university context, and if the skills did not exist they needed to be 'taught'. Lea and Street found that the most common institutional approach was to 'fix the problem' (1998, p 158) by running courses for students separated from the subject disciplines, with the provision tending to focus on the surface, technical aspects of writing.

The review of literature related to the first-year experience conducted by Harvey et al (2006) for the HEA made reference to the work of Durkin and Main (2002), who argued that intellect and transferable skills can be developed through study skills support sessions. Harvey et al also referred to the work of Cuseo (undated) who, in a review of student support in HE institutions in the USA, found that skills developed in 'isolated and insulated learning skills workshops or on study skills courses' would not be translated into lasting and enduring transferable skills.

Cottrell (2001) and Wingate (2006) also highlighted the pejorative nature of this model. Students, usually regarded as 'non-traditional', could be described as 'in need of help' in developing scholarship skills, and would then be regarded as 'at risk' of non-progression. For this reason the study skills approach could be viewed as 'remedial' or deficit based.

Broadly speaking therefore, the now hugely popular study skills approach was originally seen as a deficit model. Universities would address students' deficiencies by providing generic classes on essay/report writing, information-searching skills, information-screening skills, presentation skills and numeracy classes. In addition, help would be provided through drop-in sessions, websites and handbooks, but rarely through embedding in subject-specific content.

Wingate's main objection, in line with Durkin and Main (2002), was therefore that this model teaches study skills separately from subject content and knowledge, and that 'this separation suggests that there is a difference between studying successfully and learning, and that, if certain techniques are acquired, students can study successfully without deep engagement with the subject' (2006, p 459).

Wingate also quoted Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986), who commented that some skills courses may lead students to a strategic approach as they may '...degenerate into techniques for passing examinations, for coping with the system rather than developing the skills of learning' (p 9). When these skills are taught without embedding them in the subject area this, it has been argued, leads to a view of knowledge as '...an external, objective body of facts' (Gamache, 2002, p 277).

Academics, however, although not keen to be involved in teaching 'skills' rather than their subject, nevertheless seem to feel that the technical aspects of writing are not the main challenge for students. Instead, they see the challenge as residing in students' struggles to understand the kind of work they are required to produce - a concept that academics themselves have often found difficult to articulate (Lillis and Turner, 2001).

Students' views on study skills provision are often less than enthusiastic (Lea and Street, 1998). As Murphy (2001) stated, 'it is unlikely that students will welcome time spent on skills development which does not have a direct positive bearing on their main work or subsequent career prospects' (p 12). The situation is perhaps further exacerbated by the current emphasis placed by the government and employers on 'skills' (severally described as transferable, generic, employability, core or key skills) as opposed to specific subject knowledge (Leckey and McGuigan, 1997; Murphy, 2001; North, 2005). Academics and students now recognise the need for these to be developed early during HE, but what is the best strategy for success for all concerned?

The following case study shows an attempt to move from a solely 'bolt-on' study skills model (so called because workshops are usually an addition to the formal student timetable and programme) towards one in which the model is extended to an embedded study-skills approach. This is often positively received and exactly what first-year students need in order to make sense of the new environment within which they are asked to produce academic writing.

### **Case study 3: Kingston University, Politics and Sociology Writing Skills Workshops**

In spring 2002, Kingston University introduced Politics and Sociology Writing Skills Workshops to provide first-year students with a more developed set of academic writing skills. The aim was for students to develop more effective written communication skills at level 1, in accordance with the commitment by the university and the government to enhance key skills for employability.

Following an initial pilot in induction week, it was identified that a more comprehensive, sustained programme was needed, which gave students practical guidance on essay writing and also individual guidance on areas to work on. Feedback was given on activities related to the latter.

Weekly workshops of two hours' duration were facilitated by the team leaders in politics and sociology, who had a great deal of experience in teaching first-year students. The leaders were supported by third-year politics and sociology students (who had their own, already good, written skills supplemented by training in analysing essays).

The workshops ran for six weeks, beginning in week three to allow for diagnostic testing, settling in and training. In terms of evaluation, the team at Kingston found that no

students who attended the workshops failed their essay/coursework submissions in the first semester. They also found a marked improvement in performance across the first-year politics and sociology cohort as a whole.

In terms of recommendations for practice, the team at Kingston suggested that essay-writing workshops must be seen as part of an overall framework that links induction with pedagogic practices within modules. The team's view is that there is not a shortage of students who write well and who can be encouraged, through investment in their training, to really make a difference in developing the academic writing skills of first years.

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The approach and outcomes of the work at Kingston seem to articulate with the views of Murphy (2001), who suggested that scholarship skills can be developed as early as during the induction process. Drummond (1998) also argued that for a skills development programme to be effective, changes must be systemic and multidimensional. They need to be systemic as the programme should be built around subject-specific content, involve a change in teaching methods towards greater student-centredness, and progress through the levels of a degree programme. To achieve all of the above, change must become multidimensional, taking in curriculum, assessment and staff development - exactly the approach used in the Arts Faculty at Kingston. Drummond's research developed the argument that piecemeal change cannot be sufficient.

### 3.4 The academic socialisation approach

The second approach identified by Lea and Street (1998, p 159) is that of 'academic socialisation', which seeks to facilitate increased student participation in the HE setting, emphasising learning within the context in which it takes place. As Lillis (2006) pointed out, this model is in a sense the default model of writing development at university, as it works on the assumption that students will pick up the skills they need as they become inculcated into the university culture.

Lea and Street (1998) further identified a more conscious form of academic socialisation. Here, an attempt is made to explicitly induct students into the literacy demands of the HE setting by taking the study skills model and building on it through inducting students into the language and techniques of the subject discipline.

Northedge (2003) also looked at this issue in terms of enabling student participation in academic discourse, and considered the role of the tutor in inducting students into the discourse of the discipline. He explored the issue of the teacher as subject expert, identifying three roles the teacher may play in this regard and expressing them as: '...lending the capacity to participate in meaning, designing well-planned excursions into unfamiliar discursive terrain and coaching students in speaking the academic discourse'.

Northedge (2003) highlighted the immense difficulties that students experience when initially faced with specialist discourses in reading, terms and references. He argued that teachers need to provide a frame for students and help them to generate meaning through, for example, structured discussion. Northedge referred back to the findings of the National Audit Office (2002) in relation to students' preparedness before arriving at

university. He suggested that if students are not helped to a meaningful understanding of the language, discourse, key theorists and construction of argument for and against existing knowledge, then there is a contention of universities being morally reprehensible. Consistent with this, Wingate (2006) advocated that the focus should move to teachers using a structured approach to developing scholarship skills within a wider skills framework embedded in the subject, where the tutor's discourse could be viewed as a model. However, this approach may be criticised as presenting academic community discourses as monolithic and uncontested (Lea and Street, 1998).

### 3.4.1 Situated cognition

The non-integrated study skills model separates what is learned from how it is learned and how it is used. Brown et al (1989) and Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that learning is fundamentally tied to activity, context and culture. At a simple level, they gave the example that it is easier to learn a language as an infant when you are submerged in an environment where everyone is speaking it than it is to do so later from books and papers.

Lave (1991) suggested that many students in HE are taught in a way that encourages fixed thinking and non-transferability of ideas. To illustrate: students of economics learn about rules and laws, which someone else has developed, and which can be used to solve a problem (for example, what, how and for whom to produce, and the role of money). However, this tends to produce fixed meaning which does not transfer very well anywhere else. In Lave's example, by contrast, an apprentice mechanic learns in an authentic situation and hears the language and experiences the practice in a day-to-day 'real' context. The apprentice contextualises the knowledge, and it becomes transferable.

Those who support situated cognition theory argue that the scholarship skill of academic writing is best developed when students are assigned authentic tasks, have to discuss and explain their problem-solving strategy, and compare their information-gathering and writing process with that of others.

In relation to academic writing, Collins et al (1990) argued that lecturers help students to write through modelling the plan for the writing and the method of researching and the use of cue cards. As students grasp more at each stage of the plan, the 'scaffold' of the model and cue cards can be removed. In other words, lecturers fully accept that as learning is situated, the process needs to be an integrated part of the first-year student experience and not an addition to it.

The next case study provides an example of the conscious, situated academic socialisation approach.

#### **Case study 4: Napier University, 'enculturation' in the School of Computing**

In the School of Computing at Napier University, staff have devised a system that emphasises students very quickly becoming active and engaged in the language and discourse of the subject area as part of their introduction to the university.

The process of 'enculturation', as it has been described, involves an intensive induction week during which students are introduced to their tutors and peers through a number of highly interactive, socially integrative events. The activities scheduled for this week are

mainly designed to overcome social isolation. However, they also introduce students to the multimedia packages they will work with, the language of the subject area, the type of assessment and feedback they will experience, and sources of reference to improve submission of coursework.

The ongoing process sees students hand in assignments, online, from week one. They receive instant generalised feedback and then individual instruction on what and how they could improve. Students are encouraged to work in groups to share knowledge and their reflections on what worked and what did not, right from the outset.

The sources of support available are built in as an integrated part of the feedback and, indeed, in many cases are timetabled. It removes the sense of this being anything other than a move to ensure support for the personal and professional development of the student as an ongoing part of the learning process.

By the end of the second week of their first-year programme, students are firmly engaged in their own personal development planning process, have formed a social committee and are learning of resources available to them to help in developing their individual skills, through working closely with their named personal tutors.

The early formative assessments are mainly fun, but in their feedback all students are helped to access information to strengthen their personal performance. All students experience the same process, which highlights the language of the subject, the demands of the curriculum, the lecturer's expectations in relation to assignments, and reflection alongside socially integrative activities. Many of these early tasks are mainly about building confidence in academic writing skills.

This has been a very successful model in terms of enthusiastic student feedback, and has improved student retention and progression.

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### 3.4.2 Embedded models

As mentioned above, Northedge (2003) suggested that the learning environment in which students find themselves is an important factor in skills acquisition. There is considerable support for this view - for example, Heikkila and Lonka (2006) and Lizzio et al (2002). Of possibly even more importance is an understanding of where students have come from in terms of their previous exposure to such skills (Lea, 2004; Lizzio et al, 2002; North, 2005). That an individual student-centred approach would be the most effective, and would overcome differences in terms of background and previous culture (North, 2005; Zepke et al, 2006), seems to be widely acknowledged. However, given the current situation regarding widening participation in HE and the increasing numbers of international students, resources for providing this kind of individual student-centred approach are strained.

Embedding study skills seeks to develop scholarship in line with the situated learning view in a subject-oriented way. A number of researchers have argued for the use of embedded models to develop students' scholarship skills (for example, Gibbs, 1994; Drummond et al, 1998; Cottrell, 2001). Models of embedded study skills seek to progressively develop scholarship skills within and throughout the degree programme.

Cottrell (2001) pointed out that many universities help students to develop scholarship skills as part of a far broader process and framework of personal, academic and professional development. Case study 4 from the School of Computing at Napier University could also provide an illustration of Cottrell's view.

### 3.5 The academic literacies approach

'Literacy' is a term now widely used to refer to a sense of confidence and fluency when operating within a given context, for example information technology (IT) literacy and information literacy.

The SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) Seven Pillars Model for Information Literacy (2007) helps to exemplify this (see figure 1). The model sets out the skills required for information literacy in a hierarchy ordering from the least to the most complex. For each skill, tasks can be built to help to take the learner to the next level of skills development. A good example of the application of this model is shown in the recommendations for institutional practice given at the end of this report.

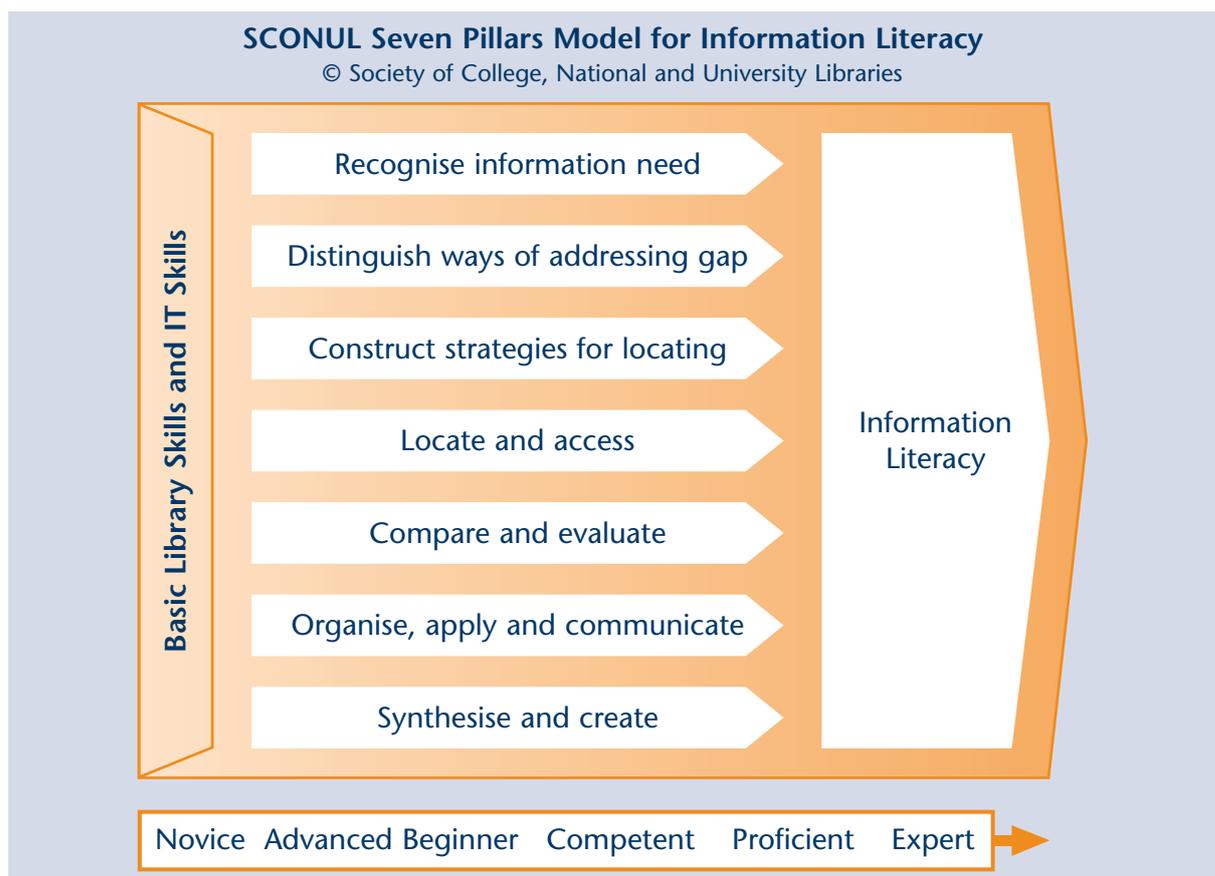


Figure 1: SCONUL Seven Pillars Model

The term **academic literacy** refers to this same idea of the gradual development of competence within the HE setting, where communication is central to success.

Lea (2004) describes gradual development of competency in academic writing as being connected to the field of 'new literacy studies', which draws on linguistics and social anthropology for its theoretical base. Literacies are seen as situated social and cultural practices rather than an abstract set of study skills which can be transferred between contexts (Barton, 1994).

Crucially, the academic literacies approach emphasises the active, 'meaning-making', nature of academic communication as the site of learning - that is, that learning takes place through writing, and that writing is not simply the product or demonstration of the learning. Lea and Street (1998) described this as student writing being concerned with 'the processes of meaning making and contestation around meaning rather than as skills or deficits'.

In their study of one traditional and one new UK university, Green and Bloome (1997) carried out a number of staff and student interviews (and observed participants in group sessions) on the topic of student writing, tutor feedback, and guidance and documentation provided on written work generally and essay writing specifically. They found that many general statements on academic writing were provided, but that these were unhelpful for students in their specific writing tasks. The staff who were interviewed defined good writing in terms of form, structure, argument and clarity and were influenced, in the view of the authors, by the norms of their disciplines. Staff found it difficult to articulate what constituted good 'argument' or 'structure' - perhaps not surprisingly as both carry different meanings according to underlying epistemologies, which makes it difficult to understand these concepts in a generic sense (Lea and Street, 1998).

Students in the Green and Bloome research project found there to be substantial variations and confusion regarding required practices in the multidisciplinary modular system within which they were required to work. They had difficulty unpacking academic literacy requirements and adjusting their writing styles to the specific requirements of a particular assignment, even when provided with general guidance.

These guidance documents, which Green and Bloome analysed in the research project, were found to take a technical, surface-oriented approach. Green and Bloome (1997) also found mismatches in staff and students' understanding of plagiarism, centring in particular on the boundary between what students have read in source materials and their own writing. The students felt that all of their knowledge was implicated in other texts.

In terms of pedagogical implications, Lea (2004) suggested that course designers need to be explicit about the textual construction of the course and aware of the level of familiarity students have with this. In short, students need to know about the expectations of different disciplines in terms of both content and 'ways of thinking'. These can be developed together using the written or spoken, but linguistic medium to construct meaning and knowledge.

### **Case study 5: Auckland University of Technology (AUT) New Zealand, academic literacies policies**

Academic literacies policies have been implemented at institutional level in AUT. The criteria for ensuring development of competence in relation to academic literacy are clearly articulated in all programme specifications. Each module descriptor shows the ways in which students will be supported through the teaching, learning and assessment strategy to achieve specific academic literacy outcomes. Competences achieved are then incorporated in graduate attribute statements. Extensive staff development is used to help lecturers to take responsibility for skills development and graduate attribute outcomes.

For more information, see: [www.aut.ac.nz](http://www.aut.ac.nz)

### **Case study 6: Queen Mary, University of London, Thinking Writing**

Mitchell and Evison (2006) summarised an initiative implemented at Queen Mary, University of London, which places strong emphasis on the 'bound together' nature of learning. The focus is on working with academics to embed writing courses in their programmes. This is achieved through seminars and collaboration, including sharing practice and challenging conventions about writing. Short tasks are used to stimulate learning and creativity, while criticality is an integrated part of classroom pedagogy. The emphasis is away from content onto deeper learning through student engagement. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their practice through questions such as:

- What do you want students to learn about the kinds of thinking in this discipline?
- What do you want students to know about the written conventions of your discipline/department?

The university has constructed a resource base open to all academic staff of any discipline to help in adopting an academic literacies approach to the development of academic writing skills.

For more information, see: [www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk](http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk)

One of the strongest proponents of an academic literacies approach is in the University of Wollongong, Australia. In their 1998 conference paper, *The IDEALL approach to Learning Development: a model for fostering improved literacy and learning outcomes for students*, Skillen et al from the University provided significant information on how this approach can be implemented, and compelling evidence of its effectiveness.

In 1997, the university changed its approach to helping students' transition into the first year. This was with the underpinning philosophy that the best way of helping students to make this transition effectively is to integrate instruction in both generic and subject-specific academic skills within the curriculum. A further assumption was that **all** students are perceived to be 'in transition' to begin with. So 'osmosis' should have no part in the skills development process, because it will be 'hit or miss' as a strategy for developing subject specific and generic writing skills.

Essentially, the model the university developed requires a partnership between academics tasked to deliver the curriculum and academics tasked with learning development (specifically those with a remit to produce learning materials to support both staff and student learning). The Integrated Development of English Language and Academic

Literacy and Learning (IDEALL) model shows a systematic joint approach to integrating instruction and assessment skills development into the curriculum. As the two groups (subject teachers and learner developers) work together in developing the framework approach, there is an opportunity to let subject specialists 'unpack' their literacy and then instruct students on how to build knowledge of the specific conventions of the discipline in a meaningful and planned way.

The case study for Wollongong is shown in Appendix 1 as it contains comprehensive information for practitioners, which suggested that it should not be abbreviated in the body of this report. Suffice to record that the model has several stages (as with the SCONUL Seven Pillars approach). These involve:

- conducting a skills inventory of the curriculum
- assessing students' literacy and language skills
- designing and implementing tertiary literacy instruction
- evaluating student learning outcomes.

The University of Wollongong continues to provide evidence to support the view that this approach improves student performance in terms of academic writing, and consequently student progression.

### **3.5.1 Napier University staff focus group and the student voice**

In each of the cases mentioned so far, it appears to have been accepted that staff and students recognise that there are issues in developing skills in academic literacy and acknowledge the need for transparency. Looking at the issues in terms of assessment is a practicable way to move forward.

To supplement the project's literature review, case studies and research, a staff focus group was conducted at Napier University with staff drawn from all three faculties. This group volunteered from a larger group of possible staff whom the project team had identified on the basis of their experience and expertise in delivering the first-year learning experience and who could offer informed commentary on scholarship in students. These staff included lecturers, some of whom were also teaching fellows, an associate dean and two academic support advisers.

A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed and circulated to the participants in advance of the group meeting and the discussion was recorded. Unfortunately, a technological glitch meant that only part of the focus group was audio recorded. However, two facilitators took extensive written and word-processed notes, verbatim where possible, allowing the session to be captured. Following the focus group, a summary of the main themes was pulled together, circulated to and approved by the staff involved to ensure the accuracy of representation of their views.

## Themes

The staff group felt that scholarship could not be taken for granted in students, particularly in the face of widening participation in HE and the changing nature of secondary education.

Students are very different now to the way they were 10 or 15 years ago, analysis isn't taught in the schools any more, so they are coming without these skills and some people are still teaching as if students haven't changed, we need to look at what they need...to identify the struggling students.

Of the themes that emerged, three are of particular relevance in this context.

- The need to embed support for students' scholarly activities within the subject base of modules. The group expressed the feeling that it would benefit students to have scholarship embedded in modules across the university, as students could see generic study skills modules as being isolated from subject content.
- Assessment is a key area where scholarship - or lack of it - becomes visible, and staff need to be clear about what they are looking for in assessment.

...as staff we need to be clear what we're looking for, staff need to understand these terms (synthesis and argument) and be able to design and write assessments adequately in a way students can understand; students need clear guidelines to perform well.

It was felt that teaching, learning and assessment activities need to be coordinated at institutional level, with an integrated and stepped approach to learning. A 'collective response' across the university was seen as being beneficial, where students could be encouraged to see the development of scholarship as a positive thing and not the remedy for a deficit. It was also felt that students needed opportunities to practise scholarship through the use of formative assessment, offering 'space to learn without penalty'.

- The student perspective is essential - those in the teaching role must take account of students' interest, motivation and the perceived relevance of what is being taught, with explicit dialogue around terms such as 'analysis' or 'synthesis'.

...you have to teach the students you have, not the students you would like!

...look to see where you want them to be at the end of the first year and help them on the journey.

In pulling together the response themes from the staff focus group, it could be seen that each one was consistent with an academic literacies approach to scholarship in students, where learning takes place through active construction of meaning through writing and communication in the academic context. There was very rich discussion around the areas where the dialogue on scholarship activity would be most useful for students and indeed staff. It was suggested that working on scholarship with students through developing academic literacy would also encourage staff to acknowledge explicitly what it was they were looking for in their students in the context of the shifting sands of HE at the moment.

## The student voice

Students volunteered to be interviewed following university-wide administration of an electronic questionnaire on the broad topic of students' knowledge of academic conduct and literacy, which attracted over 600 responses. Students' views were gathered from 25 one-to-one interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule, and from comments made on the electronic questionnaire form. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Students were asked about a number of themes, including their perceptions of themselves as developing writers and their attitudes towards engaging with academic discourse, as well as the parallel thread of academic integrity (Gourlay, 2006).

In listening to the 'student voice' within Napier University, it was clear that there was still room for improvement in the development of scholarship. Much of the student voice was consonant with views expressed by the academic staff in the focus group. Explicit discussion of scholarship centred on assessment, in a parallel to the staff discussion, as assessment of students is what seems to make their scholarship, or lack of it, visible. Students expressed a degree of confusion over what they felt lecturers were 'looking for'.

I think there's bit of a grey area between when a lecturer asks for an essay and when they ask for a report because I always find it difficult to, difficult to distinguish between the two, and sometimes I worry that I haven't got quite the right context...

...some of the better lecturers, some of the modules when they're giving out a coursework question there is normally a lecture or tutorial put aside to discuss that, and I think that's always really helpful because at least we're normally getting the context of what the essay question means.

Some students reported that they had understood requirements retrospectively - sometimes through negative experience or feedback - while others felt that their scholarship had developed over time.

The class I was in was small so academic support was high and I now feel that from good tutoring and feedback from lecturers that I can reference and write to a good academic standard.

Despite areas of good practice in the academic world at Napier, an argument could be made for a more institution-wide perspective on scholarship. A consonant staff and student view was expressed by this student:

I think academic writing should start at the first year so that by the end of the course students will be in a good position to write...I also feel it is important these skills are gained at an early stage of the course and enough time and supervision should be given to students.

## 4 Conclusions

Lea (2004) suggested that course designers need to be explicit about textual construction. This is reflected in the staff and student voices discussed in this report. In practical terms, academic literacy can be fostered through making assessment and marking criteria explicit and providing the opportunity to open the dialogue around academic expectations and construct knowledge through writing.

Cook and Leckey (1999) highlighted the similarity of expectations in students and academics in approaching the first year. Data and information gathered and discussed in this study further suggest that students and academics have similar expectations in the context of building academic literacies where both value this approach in the learning context. The case studies from a variety of institutions demonstrate the different approaches to engendering scholarship in students seen in the literature being put into operation. Each case study offers insights into the effects of the different approaches on the student experience. This information, combined with staff and student views, serves to open the dialogue and inform debate in the growing acknowledgement of the need to support our students through the building of knowledge and academic literacy.

In considering both the theoretical and practical aspects of improving scholarship, it is clear that students and staff value such improvement in a variety of forms. Although there is an argument in favour of tailoring opportunities for improving scholarship to the individual student, pragmatic considerations in today's higher education environment make that an unlikely scenario. However, the theoretical underpinnings of improving scholarship which have been growing over recent years perhaps suggest that the apparent antithesis of the individualised approach may be the way forward and operate at institutional level. Students might be able to use appropriate parts of an entire range of academic literacy opportunities made available to them by the institution. They can use these opportunities to improve their scholarship as and when they feel this is valuable, in consultation with someone in the teaching role.

In an ideal world, an institutional application of academic literacies would take the form of students being encouraged to construct knowledge through writing, within a safe space supported by academics within subject areas who take responsibility for this aspect of student learning. The academic benefit would be substantial. The challenge lies in managing the tension between a consistent institutional approach to academic literacies development against the need for an embedded approach at subject level, with a sense of ownership from discipline academics.

This report has summarised some of the literature's main criticisms of the established study skills model of developing student writing. The potential and limitations of the academic socialisation approach were also discussed. The remainder of the report focused on the emergent academic literacies framework, with its focus on embedded social practices within the discipline.

Existing models may be helpful in seeking to adopt this approach and may be a source of inspiration. Auckland University of Technology, the University of Wollongong and Queen Mary, University of London have implemented models of provision that are

widely acknowledged to be successful and deeply embedded. To achieve this level of development requires serious, long-term commitment by senior management and funding and resources for staff development. This report concludes with some implications and recommendations for institutions and practitioners.

## 5 Recommendations

A key point arising from this research is that institutions cannot assume that students will make the transition to university equipped with the skills necessary to perform effectively in terms of academic literacy outcomes. Socialisation, bolt-on and study skills provision work in part, but are altogether too piecemeal in approach and do not include all students. Osmosis should not be an option for the development of key skills.

Evidence from theory and practice suggests that **what works best is a planned, integrative, cross-disciplinary/multi-stranded approach** to developing academic literacy skills. This is the key recommendation of this report. The evidence from the University of Wollongong is supported by further evidence from Queen Mary, University of London, the University of Ulster and Auckland University of Technology. It indicates that adopting an academic literacies approach provides improvements in student performance and, while it takes time to embed, leads to greater staff and student satisfaction in terms of work produced.

### 5.1 Examples from institutional practice

One case study exemplifying an institutional approach to the development of scholarship skills is that of Napier University. In the process of moving from a 15-credit modular system to a 20-credit one, the university took the opportunity to embrace the concept of an embedded approach to developing scholarship skills.

Cross-university working groups, representative of all levels and roles, were formed to determine the ethos that would underpin every aspect of the teaching, learning and assessment experience of the university's students in such a way as to engage and empower them. Specifically, educational developers worked in tandem with academic subject specialists to build module and programme teaching, learning and assessment strategies to support student achievement, taking the university closer to the integrated approach used at the University of Wollongong.

Schools produced definitive documents showing the ways in which students would be supported to achieve in their chosen programmes of study. Each new module descriptor included a section that asked explicitly how students would be engaged in the process of developing scholarship skills and, in particular, how they would be prepared for assessment. Subsequent programme specifications mirrored the Queen Mary, University of London model (see also the recommendations in section 5.2) and included sections on how thinking and writing skills would be developed.

As a follow-on to this process, Napier University Learning Information Services (NULIS) have now, through the deliberative channels of the university, developed and implemented a system to help students with the development of information literacy. This process is set out in Appendix 2.

## 5.2 Recommendations for practitioners

To help staff with the process of embedding the development of writing skills, Queen Mary, University of London has offered the following strategies to encourage staff to reflect on and adapt their practices. These strategies are reproduced with permission of Queen Mary, University of London.

### Assessment strategies

- Make assessment guidelines and instructions as explicit and clear as possible in terms of rationale, the type of text you want the student to produce and how you want them to approach the task.
- Include in the guidelines positive reminders about sources, academic conventions and academic conduct.
- Give students anonymised examples/extracts from previous (or invented) coursework and have them analyse them.
- Build assignment plans/drafts into your module plan. These can be used for formative feedback, but do not necessarily have to be marked by staff - they may be used for peer discussion.
- Ensure that feedback is specific, meaningful and respects student feelings/works to build confidence.

### Linking analytical reading to writing

- Encourage students to notice/point out features of writing in your discipline such as common terminology, particular referencing conventions, format and style.
- Share assessment criteria with students and have them apply these to each other's drafts.
- Help students to develop personalised reflective checklists.

### Embedding short writing tasks in teaching

- Focus on specific learning goals such as reading for argument, applying a scientific concept to a context, interpreting a data set.
- Link in-class writing tasks to discussion.
- Use short writing tasks to enhance students' sense of taking responsibility for their learning.
- Use short writing tasks to provide an opportunity to develop group work.
- Have students write questions related to what they think will be coming next in the session/next in the module/in the assessment and answer each other's questions (sense checking).
- Minimise marking and feedback load by maximising reflection and peer feedback.

### Short writing tasks

- Before class students summarise main points from the previous week.
- Lecturer poses questions and students give short written responses in class.
- Students write questions on post-its, which lecturer groups and redistributes in groups to be addressed in short written answers.
- Ask students to summarise their understanding of an idea in a very short word limit (could ask them to read out in small groups).
- Use paraphrasing of reading materials to link reading and writing in class.
- Try collaborative writing - students write an individual piece then pass to another to add comments/questions. The original student can rewrite incorporating additions.

These simple strategies may help to engage and empower first-year students, as the emphasis is on 'little and often' as opposed to extended attention to writing in class.

In Appendix 3, practitioners will also find a case study from the Auckland University of Technology which gives an indication of the kind of development activities which they found useful to support staff and students in movement towards an academic literacies approach.

### 5.3 Final comment

Ultimately, the key to this kind of development perhaps lies in engendering a gradual cultural and conceptual shift in how staff - and consequently students - view writing. If writing can be seen as an intrinsic part of learning, then both may find it easier to confidently focus on and develop academic literacy, thus enhancing student scholarship, confidence and achievement in the crucial first year.

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# 7 Appendices

## 7.1 Appendix 1: Case study, University of Wollongong, Biology

Reproduced with permission from Jan Skillen, Margaret Merten, Neil Trivett and Alisa Percy, University of Wollongong.

The integration of instruction in generic and discipline-specific skills into core first year Biology subjects (Evolution, Biodiversity and Environment, and Molecules, Cells and Organisms) was carried out during 1998. Instruction focused on the discipline-specific reading, writing and study skills required by each curriculum. The first session subject, Evolution, Biodiversity and Environment (BIOL104), consisted of 220 biology students, who were joined by 130 extra students from Health and Behavioural Science (HBSc) in the second session subject, Molecules, Cells and Organisms. Because the students from HBSc received no learning assistance inside their first semester curriculum, this cohort provided a unique opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the integration of instruction into BIOL104, with those students acting as a control group. This case study details the procedures involved in integration and the results of that integration in terms of learning outcomes for the student cohort.

### Autumn session (BIOL104: Evolution, Biodiversity and Environment)

Table 2 summarises the procedures that were taken to prepare for and carry out integration in BIOL104. It lists both the collaboration between learning development and subject staff and the steps taken to directly support students.

Provision of assistance to students	Collaboration between learning development and biology staff
	Collaborative skills audit
	Development of instructional resource
Face-to-face instruction in discipline-specific reading skills and study skills, and provision of resources	
	Collaborative development of instructional resources in report writing
Face-to-face instruction in report writing and provision of resources	
	Evaluation

Table 2: stages in the integration process in first session Biology (BIOL104)

**Skills audit**

An audit of the curriculum suggested that to successfully complete the course students needed to develop the following skills:

- effective and efficient reading and note-making
- an ability to synthesise and integrate material from a number of sources
- learning strategies appropriate to the nature of the discipline
- writing in the genre required by the discipline.

Because BIOL104 was an entry-level subject in the Biology programme, it was expected that few students had been exposed to the genre of biology report writing at university level; thus the full range of tertiary literacy skills relevant to writing in biology were identified as requiring instruction.

**Instruction**

Discipline-specific support was integrated into the subject via two lectures/workshops and the production of supporting teaching materials and learning resources. These lectures/workshops were part of the students' regular curriculum and were provided when most appropriate to their needs and skills development. The first workshop dealt with effective and efficient reading and note-making; strategies to synthesise and integrate material from a number of sources; and learning strategies appropriate to the subject. It also presented the students with a model of how to create scaffolding before exposure to lecture material, enabling them to interact intellectually with the lecture material instead of just writing notes.

The second and more important workshop focused on scientific/biology report writing using an annotated abridged report - this report was one that dealt with the content issues the students were to address in their first report assignment. The annotations on this abridged report were used as a tool which allowed students, working in small groups, to collaboratively deconstruct the text. To ensure that students understood the concepts involved, they were then asked to deconstruct a model report written by the content lecturer and to provide their own annotations to explain the text. This workshop provided students with an understanding and a model of the genre of report writing that they could use to construct their own reports.

This face-to-face instruction was supplemented by paper-based resources on all of the above topics. Such resources have become part of a formal part of the subject's learning resources and will be provided in the future as part of the student handbook for the subject.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation of the integrated instruction was made in terms of students' learning outcomes. This evaluation was carried out firstly by comparing the report assignment marks achieved by the 1998 and 1997 cohorts in this subject. Results of this comparison showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups, with the 1998 cohort achieving significantly higher marks.

Evaluation of this integration was also carried out at the beginning of the second session, when an early report assignment allowed comparison of the level of tertiary literacy skills between this cohort and the group of 130 extra HBC students who together constituted

the second session cohort. These two groups were effectively a treatment group that had received instruction during the session, and a control group that had not. The assignment was assessed for both content knowledge and skills using an adaptation of the following MASUS (Measuring the Academic Skills of University Students) criteria:

- proper use of data and other resources (criterion A)
- suitable structure and development of answer/text (criterion B)
- control of scientific language and writing style (criterion C)
- grammatical correctness (criterion D)
- suitable data analysis and presentation (criterion E).

Analysis of the results achieved by the two cohorts showed that there was a difference in four of the five criteria (criteria A, B, C and E) between the two cohorts, with those who had been previously exposed to integration in the previous session achieving at a higher level than those who had not been exposed to such integration. This difference was statistically significant in criteria A, C and E.

It should be noted that minimal instruction was given in criterion B and no instruction was given in criterion D, accounting for the lack of significant differences in these two criteria. Overall, the students who were provided with instruction inside the curriculum achieved at a higher level than those who had not been. This result provides strong support for the suggestion that an integrated curriculum provides a valuable opportunity for students to acquire both content knowledge in a discipline and the skills that will support learning and success within that discipline.

### Spring session (BIOL103: Molecules, Cells and Organisms)

BIOL103 acts as the second stage of the first year biology programme, and is also a service course for students from the Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences (HBSc); this combined class has student numbers of 350. Table 3 summarises the procedures that were taken to prepare for and carry out integration in BIOL103.

Provision of assistance to students	Collaboration between learning development and biology staff
	Collaborative skills audit
	Collaborative design of curriculum assessments
	Development of staff resources
	Marking workshop/planning session
Submission of first assessment task	
	Marking of first assessment
Face-to-face feedback from learning development and faculty staff	
	Collaborative development of student resources
Follow-up instruction provided online	
	Analysis of first assessment
	Modification of criteria for assessment two
Submission of draft of second assessment task	
Instruction and peer assessment	
Re-submission of second assessment task	
	Marking of second assessment
Feedback and follow-up instruction online	

Table 3: stages in the integration process in second session Biology (BIOL103)

### Skills audit

Two procedures provided a skills audit that identified which skills required further development. One was an analysis of the BIOL103 curriculum, in terms of content and assignments, and the other was an assessment of students' skills carried out on the first assignment. The curriculum analysis suggested that the skills necessary for success within the subject's written assignments were the following report-writing sub-skills:

- proper use of data and other resources (criterion A)
- suitable structure and development of answer/text (criterion B)
- control of scientific language and writing style (criterion C)
- grammatical correctness (criterion D)
- suitable data analysis and presentation (criterion E).

### Literacy assessment

The first report assignment of the spring session was chosen as the basis for assessment using the MASUS diagnostic tool, so that feedback from the assessment would inform the students' further attempts at report writing. This tool has the ability to assess both generic and discipline-specific literacy criteria and covers criteria such as those listed above. Each criterion is rated across a range of one to four, with a rating of one or two suggesting the work has fallen below an acceptable level.

The assessment was carried out by subject staff with some assistance from learning development lecturers. This assistance was provided in the form of a marking handbook that explained the criteria and sub-criteria and gave examples of texts in which the criteria were met and examples in which they were not. Immediately prior to the students' submission of the first assessment task, learning development and biology staff attended a workshop to discuss the criteria and to ensure parity between markers.

After assessments had been marked by subject lecturers, Learning Development entered assessment results into a database that was used to provide marking and feedback sheets to students and to analyse results across the whole cohort. The database allowed students to be given extremely detailed feedback sheets, which displayed the rating they were given for each sub-criterion and an overall rating for each criterion. An overall mark was also recorded which was derived from the five criteria, some of which were differentially weighted. This weighted average score was used only for assessment purposes, while ratings for sub-criteria and criterion averages were provided to assist student development. This first assignment also provided the opportunity to evaluate the integration carried out in the first session.

Further assessments were carried out on a second report assignment. This assignment was a staged writing task, with a draft version required immediately prior to mid-session and a final version due after mid-session. The draft version was marked by peer markers using the MASUS criteria. The final version, which was a revised version that took into account the comments made by peer markers, was marked by subject lecturers and provided the basis for an evaluation of the learning outcomes for the total BIOL 103 cohort (see section below on evaluation).

**Instruction**

Instruction consisted of a number of face-to-face classes as well as both paper-based and web-based resources. The first class was a feedback session following the first report assignment, which focused on areas of weakness identified by the literacy assessment and which was team-taught by learning development and biology staff. This instruction was supplemented by the provision of web-based resources that gave very detailed feedback about the five criteria (and 21 sub-criteria). This provided students with the flexibility to access information and instruction at any time.

The second face-to-face class was the peer-marking session in which students were given assistance in marking first drafts of the second report assignment: again, this was conducted by both biology and learning development staff. During this class, the knowledge that students had gained from the previous assignment, from the feedback and from the online resources was supplemented with further instruction in how to assess assignments on both literacy and content criteria. The peer-marking session provided a valuable opportunity for the students to see that their knowledge of biology writing had improved to the point where they could provide constructive feedback to their peers.

**Evaluation**

The provision of this integrated curriculum in the second session was evaluated in terms of learning outcomes for students, that is, the amount of improvement in the MASUS criteria from the first to the final report assignment. Results showed that there was statistically significant improvement in all of the five criteria. It should be noted that higher ratings in criteria B and D in the second report can be attributed to the addition of further instruction in these areas following the first report.

Evaluation was also made of how markers used the assessment criteria. Analysis showed that variance between markers was very low, suggesting that improvement was not the result of disparity between markers, but was the result of the interventions carried out within the curriculum.

The significant results achieved by the treatment group and by both groups in the final report suggest that instruction integrated into the curriculum does achieve valuable learning outcomes. The improvement shown in students' skills in this instance is the result of the curriculum development that took place. It can be said that integration of instruction in discipline-specific literacy skills into the curriculum propels the development of students' acquisition of skills and increases the rate at which students proceed through the writing apprenticeship that is part of the transition from secondary to tertiary study.

## 7.2 Appendix 2: Institutional example, Napier University, Applying the SCONUL Seven Pillars Model

### Napier University Learning Information Services (NULIS) - delivering information literacy: a partnership framework

Effective and efficient management of information represents an important employability skill for all Napier students (Napier University, Student Support Services, Careers Unit, 2007):

Managing information - the ability to process information in a manner which is relevant to the context and purpose for which the information is required. Managing information involves research, which is the ability to identify and investigate a range of sources to discover relevant facts, ideas and opinions. It also includes the ability to understand and extract appropriate meaning from the information.

Information literacy competences for university students are recognised in the SCONUL Seven Pillars Model for Information Literacy (2007). These are highlighted in figure 1.

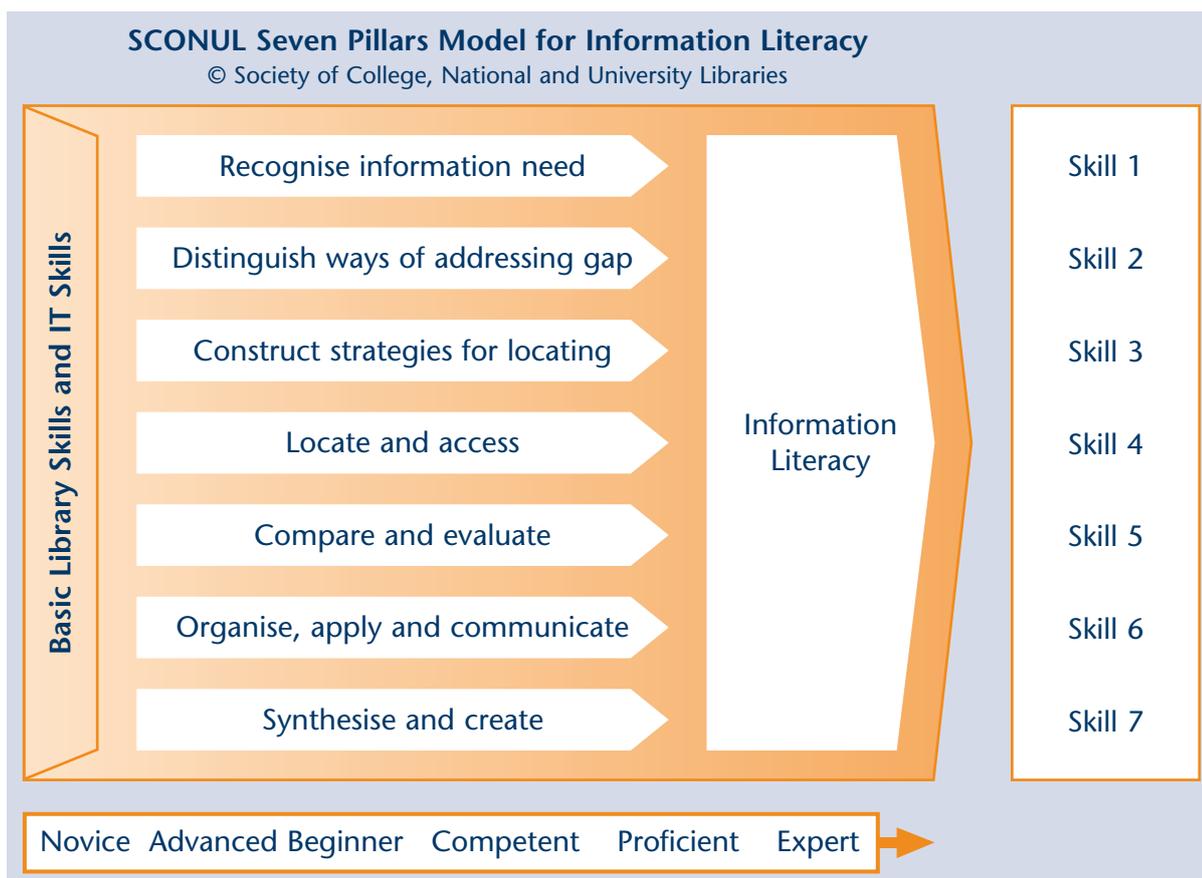


Figure 1: SCONUL Seven Pillars Model

The model combines ideas about the range of skills involved with both the need to clarify and illustrate the relationship between information skills and IT skills, and the idea of progression in higher education embodied in the development of the curriculum through first-year undergraduate up to postgraduate and research-level scholarship.

Using this model, NULIS has developed learning outcomes, activities and skills for information literacy appropriate for levels 7-10 (see tables 4-6). NULIS currently offers a range of delivery methods to meet these competences throughout the complete length of a student's programme at Napier. To ensure that our graduates possess these necessary information skills, NULIS staff must work in partnership with academics to achieve this.

The move to 20-credit modules and the redevelopment of the academic year creates opportunities to revisit the timing and methods being employed to deliver this skill set. Basic information competences lend themselves well to potential week 1 activities, while others are best embedded with assessment-led work later on in years 1-3 and trimesters 1-3.

NULIS information services advisers (ISAs) are keen to meet with directors of student experience and programme and module leaders to discuss these competences further and plan how we can best meet these outcomes for your students and achieve the optimum timing for delivery. They may also prove useful for personal development tutors.

<p><b>Outcomes:</b> To recognise a need for information. To develop an awareness of the basic information sources available at Napier, recognising when and how to use these. To acknowledge the use of information sources via standard referencing methods.</p>		
Activities and skills	Maps to SCONUL information skill	Library (NULIS) - possible delivery methods
<p>Develop an awareness of the basic services offered by the university campus libraries, including locations and opening hours.</p> <p>Locate the main campus for the programme of study.</p>	Skill 1	Basic C&T/NULIS week 1 induction PowerPoint
Be capable of accessing the library catalogue (NUIN) and the electronic portal (NUINLink) both on and off campus.	Skill 2	<p>INFORM - library's online information skills programme</p> <p>Library web page, including subject guides</p> <p>NULIS Online learning objects.</p> <p>ISA-led lecture(s)</p> <p>ISA-led practical workshop(s)</p> <p>ISA/lecturer-led problem-based learning activities.</p> <p>GUS (Get Ready for University Study) online package [wider access]</p>
Have a basic awareness of at least one major subject resource appropriate for the programme and year of study.	Skill 2	
Know where to locate module reading lists.	Skill 2	
Recognise the individual elements in a bibliographical reference.	Skill 2	
Appreciate the difference in content between books and journals.	Skill 2	
Select items from a reading list, knowing how to locate these using the library catalogue and/or portal.	Skills 2, 4	
Know how to borrow, renew and request library items.	Skill 4	
Gain an appreciation of information quality and how to evaluate it.	Skill 5	
Appreciate the need to evaluate the use of internet-based information sources (who, what, when, why?).	Skill 5	
Be aware of the concepts of referencing and plagiarism.	Skill 6	
Know where to locate, and how to use, the appropriate referencing system for the programme of study.	Skill 6	

Table 4: year 1 (level 7) learning outcomes, activities and skills

<b>Outcomes:</b> To recognise a need for information to fulfil a particular task. To develop insight and experience in searching a limited range of subject-based information sources. To appreciate the need to select and evaluate the information retrieved, referencing it where appropriate.		
<b>Activities and skills</b>	<b>Maps to SCONUL information skill</b>	<b>Library (NULIS) - possible delivery methods</b>
Identify the information required for a particular task.	Skill 1	INFORM - library's online information skills programme Library web pages, including subject guides NULIS Online learning objects NUIINLINK - guides and instruction Databases - guides and instruction ISA-led lecture(s) ISA-led practical workshop(s) ISA/lecturer-led problem-based learning activities
Specify the information required in the form of significant keywords and synonyms.	Skill 3	
Select a limited number of appropriate sources to search.	Skill 2	
Construct a search strategy appropriate to the resource being used and the time available.	Skill 3	
Consider the use of search techniques such as Boolean, truncation and wildcard searching; how to cope with too much/too little information; how to apply search limits.	Skill 3	
Select suitable references and know how to access these by linking/saving/printing.	Skill 4	
Differentiate between the quality and nature of information retrieved from different sources using standard evaluation techniques, including relevance, level, currency, bias, authority.	Skill 5	
Use the retrieved information where appropriate to construct reference lists and bibliographies, applying the required referencing system for the programme of study.	Skill 6	
Have an awareness of the concept of copyright for personal study.	Skill 6	

Table 5: year 2 (level 8) learning outcomes, activities and skills

<p><b>Outcomes:</b> To construct information strategies to meet a wide range of information needs. To develop insight and experience in searching a wide range of subject-based information sources. To evaluate the information retrieved, reflecting and redefining the information search where appropriate. To consider the storage and retrieval of bibliographical references. To appreciate methods of current awareness appropriate to the area of study.</p>		
Activities and skills	Maps to SCONUL information skill	Library (NULIS) - possible delivery methods
Design a systematic plan to retrieve and review literature to meet a particular information need.	Skill 1	<p>INFORM - library's online information skills programme</p> <p>Library web pages, including subject guides</p> <p>NULIS Online learning objects</p> <p>NUINLINK - guides and instruction</p> <p>Databases - guides and instruction</p> <p>Endnote - guides and instruction</p> <p>ISA led lecture(s)</p> <p>ISA-led practical workshop(s)</p> <p>ISA-led info on subject-based current awareness sources and services</p> <p>JISC Legal</p>
Analyse the information requirement, constructing a list of major and minor concepts in the form of significant keywords, phrases and synonyms. Determine search limits.	Skill 3	
Construct a comprehensive search strategy/ies appropriate to the resources being used and the time available.	Skill 3	
Apply advanced database search techniques, considering the use of controlled vocabulary and/or cross-searching.	Skill 3	
Critically evaluate search results, modifying the search plan where necessary.	Skill 5	
Consider an appropriate method for the storage and retrieval of search results, that is, importing/exporting results to and from bibliographical reference management software.	Skill 6	
Be aware of how to access material beyond Napier using the Document Supply service and/or through the use of external library access schemes.	Skill 4	
Use the retrieved information, where appropriate, to construct reference lists and bibliographies, accurately applying the required referencing system for the programme of study.	Skill 6	
Determine a strategy for maintaining current awareness in the area of study.	Skill 6	
Have a working knowledge of the ethical and legal constraints involved in using published/unpublished information.	Skill 6	

Table 6: year 3/4 (level 9/10) learning outcomes, activities and skills

### 7.3 Appendix 3: Case study, Auckland University of Technology, developing a policy to promote academic literacies in English at tertiary level

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Alison Kirkness, Centre for Educational and Professional Development,  
Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand

Full paper available at: TESOLANZ Journal 2 (2003)

#### **New developments for students**

At the start of their tertiary studies all students are made aware of the assistance provided by student services, Te Tari Awhina: The Learning Centre. The Centre offers a comprehensive range of workshops and short courses specifically designed to help with academic literacy development. There is now a range of materials aimed at inducting students from very different cultures into the academic conventions of learning in English. A Self-Access Learning Lab is widely patronised on both campuses with audio, video and computer resources for academic literacy and study skills.

Academic orientations are offered for new international students, who are provided with a wide range of information about studying in English, about Auckland and New Zealand to assist their transition to a new country. Over 990 students completed these programmes in 2002. A parallel but independent development has led to whanau and fono rooms on campus to support Maori and Pasifika students in their transition to university study.

The library makes dictionaries readily available on all floors and a librarian now specialises in addressing the specific needs of students with English as an additional language (EAL). Library services conduct tours and tutorials for students to learn how to find, use and manage information for academic purposes.

Fiocco (1997) suggests a variety of models for how academic literacies can be taught and how content knowledge and language knowledge can be combined. At AUT many programmes run English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) adjunct courses parallel to content courses, with language and content teachers working separately but cooperatively. In the Business faculty, for example, first language English-speaking students study communication skills while English as an Additional Language (EAL) students attend parallel classes that focus on developing their academic language skills in English. A special programme fosters the academic support and pastoral care of Maori and Pasifika students. Some academic support targets EAL students from Asian countries. These support people are usually bilingual, and are often successful past students.

Following another model where the discipline teacher takes responsibility for inducting students into the discourse, the School of Art and Design incorporates a year-long content-based academic literacies paper into their certificate course. The team includes staff with both content and ESOL expertise who teach on the studio component of the certificate as well.

Other programmes run special tutorials where staff focus on the academic language of the lecture material and give students the opportunity to use the discipline discourse.

### **New developments for staff**

At the time of policy development, AUT was moving from being an institute of technology to becoming a university of technology. The advantage of its polytechnic role was that it specialised in small classes and emphasized the importance of teaching. This high priority historically given to teaching has led to a culture of staff seeking support for teaching issues. In this climate, staff-development workshops are seen as a way of developing the necessary skills for the changing needs of the classroom.

Staff-development workshops to promote academic literacy skills are tailored to the needs of the programme team, which gives colleagues the opportunity to explore the issues within their own discipline context. Currently, when staff voice concerns about student language skills, a language needs analysis is distributed and collated by a staff developer. The results often give new insights into the real issues for students who have the opportunity to articulate their difficulties and often offer suggestions for how teachers can assist them understand lectures and take notes. Speaking in public is the issue they most frequently raise as an area of difficulty. A large majority of EAL students and many first-language English speakers say they are nervous, lack quick thinking skills and adequate vocabulary to answer questions in class. Furthermore, even with preparation time, many students find oral presentations extremely difficult because of their fear of public speaking. For EAL students this is compounded by their self-consciousness about their accents and worry that they are incomprehensible. Many are not familiar with oral work at undergraduate level. Such concerns point to a need for more guidance and tutorial support. In all programmes where a language needs analysis has been carried out, teaching staff have benefited from a clearer understanding of their students' needs.

Many programmes seek staff development support to discuss issues in teaching culturally diverse classes and to evaluate strategies to make their teaching more effective. Both in newsletters and in workshops examples of good practice are disseminated. In the last few years, groups have met to discuss cultural aspects of group work and the development of intercultural capabilities. Materials have been developed to help staff implement strategies that support language learning without lowering standards or demanding too much extra time. Small adaptations, such as providing pre-reading materials or writing specialist words on the board, support understanding of the content and need not intrude on class time. Strategies that benefit EAL students can benefit all students (Zamel and Spack 1998).

Allied staff play an important role in establishing an inclusive environment. They are at the frontline in offering services to students to enable them to enrol in courses and avail themselves of library information. This group at AUT most closely reflects the ethnic distribution in the wider community, and their own experiences of working in a multicultural workforce models the inclusive environment that the policy espouses. Workshops on interacting with people from other cultures prompt lively discussion about understandings of speech variations as well as non-verbal communication across cultures. Underpinning these sessions is the importance of adapting English language and its delivery to a multicultural world where EAL speakers now outnumber first language English speakers (MacArthur 2002). Intercultural communication needs have led to workshops on the pronunciation of Chinese and Korean names in addition to the regular sessions on the pronunciation of Maori place names. Further workshops are planned for other ethnic groups. A seminar series entitled Cultures of Education Around

the World was organised with staff from Maori, Pasifika, Indian, Chinese and Korean cultures presenting their experiences of their cultures of education and was attended by staff from all areas of the university. For staff who want to avail themselves of any of the above-mentioned developments, a helpline has been established to direct them to appropriate services and web-based material.

### **Specialist training**

Teaching staff are seen as central to resolving issues arising from national demographic changes in the student population and the internationalisation of education.

Student diversity is a challenge for staff rather than just a student problem (de Wit 1995, Reid 1996), in that staff are challenged to understand more about the process of second language acquisition and the socio-cultural context in which languages are learned (Samway and McKeon 1999). In order to support mainstream staff in developing this expertise, AUT piloted a pre-service language teacher-training course in 2000.

An existing course, the Certificate in Language Teaching to Adults (CLTA), was offered in adapted form to a small group of staff from each faculty so that they would be able to act as a resource for their school or programme. This provided them with an initial understanding of second-language-learning principles, thereby enabling them to judge student language progress and student language needs more accurately. Some of the ESOL-trained staff have taken a leadership role in this area in their programmes, giving advice to peers, suggesting changes to materials, adapting the language of exam questions and initiating tutorial support. Many staff have led new developments in curriculum change, others have combined their discipline knowledge with a new interest in language and cultural influences, leading to new fields of research. Their greater understanding of EAL students' language needs has enriched the programmes they are working on.

This professional language teacher training is available in different modes throughout the year (summer courses or part-time for one or two semesters) for would-be ESOL teachers. Although this initiative exclusively for mainstream faculty has not been repeated, enrolment in the regular programme is available to university staff free of charge. Mainstream teachers who allocate their professional development time to understanding language are able to offer a new and valuable dimension to their discipline team.

### **Writing in an academic world**

The attitudes of teaching staff at AUT reflect worldwide trends in teacher perceptions at tertiary institutions in their dissatisfaction with student writing (AUT Report on Staff Experience Survey 1999, 2001). Writing skills are, however, rated as very important by faculty, indicating that issues of student writing need to be addressed both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Writing workshops for staff are offered by the Center for Executive and Professional Development (CEPD) to help teachers take responsibility for promoting student development in academic writing skills (Parker 1997). Staff are encouraged to see themselves as models of the discipline discourse and their own written English as a key factor: written comments on student work need to be legible and comprehensible, exam and assignment questions need to be precise and unambiguous, and student handbooks need to clarify rather than obfuscate issues. In addition, course regulations need to be in plain English so that students can and will read them.

If discipline experts do not feel confident about their own language ability, they can consult a language specialist through the helpline facility. In recent years, student handbooks, university-wide surveys and student evaluation of teaching forms have all been adapted to make them more accessible to a wider audience.

### **Developments at programme level**

Many certificate programmes now take responsibility for inducting the students into academic ways of thinking and writing. Others invite experts in learning support to deliver sessions on their programmes. Some Schools have developed modules in consultation with the School of Languages to reflect expert knowledge in the teaching of EAL students. In some cases these are delivered by both discipline and language experts working collaboratively. In others, the discipline expert may have an ESOL background that enables them to fulfil both roles. Consistent support throughout a student's university study is seen as crucial to undergraduate development and later postgraduate success.

The Advanced Learning Infrastructure Consortium (ALIC) policy requires all new programme proposals to include learning outcomes that address students' academic literacy needs and develop their intercultural competence. This requirement has enabled curriculum change to take place in the early stages of programme development.

Many aspects of academic literacies that have come under the spotlight have been triggered by the immediate needs of international students. Their numbers are likely to increase and their needs must be met, not least because they are paying high fees for the services we offer (Paltridge 2002). Their relatively sudden arrival in large numbers has highlighted the need for consistent and clear practices throughout the university and ultimately for policy development. Internationalisation, although market-driven in its concern with a global approach, has acted as a catalyst for addressing some of the issues which pertain to under-represented social groups in particular (Scott 1998). Indeed, all students will benefit from tertiary institutions closing the gap between institutional expectations and student understandings.

The ALIC policy has had far-reaching, positive effects. It benefits all students in aiming to support and promote academic literacies generally, thereby averting the tension, in policy terms, between 'the massification of [higher education], which has tended to focus on domestic democratic agendas, and internationalisation, which can be seen as giving priority to alien and elite agendas' (Scott 1998 p 125).

The policy has provided AUT with a framework for developing a broad and comprehensive understanding of the literacy and cultural issues for staff and students and the university as a whole.

## 7.4 Appendix 4: Additional case-study material

Institution	Description	Model	Outcome
University of Northumbria at Newcastle Business School	Compulsory generic study skills module for all first-year students in the Business School - around 650 students. Module is virtually devoid of content and assessment is solely on technical skills.	Generic study skills	Deliberately high failure rate (85%), but module is successful in raising student skills in preparation for second year. All but very few pass their reassessment.
University of Ulster Accountancy	First-year students. Module includes explicit exploration of accountancy roles, ethics and professionalism as well as technical study skills integrated with content.	Embedded study skills and some overlap into academic socialisation	A 94% pass rate, increased student engagement and students' pass rates increased in other modules too.
Napier University School of Computing	First-year trimester 1 module taken by 130 students. Designed to promote professional development and social integration in the module. Group work and professional development emphasised. Weekly tasks linked to the formal assignments.	Academic socialisation	Range of formative and summative assessment, good social integration reported - valued by profession. Engagement with WebCT and its content has been high.
University of Wollongong	Integrated tertiary literacy across the institution, including academic, information, computer and statistical literacies as well as professional practice.	Academic/ tertiary literacy	Development of confidence, knowledge, teamwork, critical thinking. Linked with some generic programmes.

## 7.5 Appendix 5: Quality Enhancement Themes First-Year Experience reports

### **Sector-wide discussion projects:**

Gordon, G (2008) *Sector-wide discussion: the nature and purposes of the first year*

Kochanowska, R and Johnston, W (2008) *Student expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year*

### **Practice-focused development projects:**

Bovill, C, Morss, K and Bulley, C (2008) *Curriculum design for the first year*

Nicol, D (2008) *Transforming assessment and feedback: enhancing integration and empowerment in the first year*

Black, FM and MacKenzie, J (2008) *Peer support in the first year*

Miller, K, Calder, C, Martin, A, McIntyre, M, Pottinger, I and Smyth, G (2008) *Personal development planning in the first year*

Knox, H and Wyper, J (2008) *Personalisation of the first year*

Alston, F, Gourlay, L, Sutherland, R and Thomson, K (2008) *Introducing scholarship skills: academic writing*

Whittaker, R (2008) *Transition to and during the first year*

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