

# Academic Writing Support: Effective Practices in Collaboration

Emma Guion Akdağ & Jane Bell,  
Heriot-Watt University



LSE, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2016

# Outline:

- **CEM model**
- **‘Academic skills’ versus ‘study skills’**
- **Current academic skills provision**
- **Survey results (December, 2015)**
- **Issues, progress & successes**
- **Implications for future provision?**

# Academic skills & CEM

(Sloan & Porter, 2010:202)

**C**ontextualisation: ‘specificity through contextualised learning and teaching materials’

**E**MBEDDING: EAP programme integrated into degree programme, described as ‘a major cultural shift’

**M**APPING: ‘EAP content aligned to subject modules’ – deliver EAP support at the right time

‘changing staff & student perceptions’ of EAP

## Criticisms of CEM Model

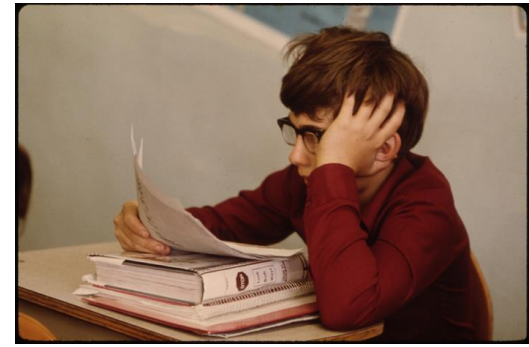
- Sloan & Porter (2010) “compound the notion of EAP tutor as ‘servant to the discipline’”
- EAP teacher positioned as ‘deficient in knowledge, dependent on the subject-specialist’
- How do subject-specialists benefit from CEM?
- CEM ‘not rocket science’
- Evidence of benefits of CEM to students ‘anecdotal’ (EAP Archivist, 15/01/16)

## **Further research: Sloan, Porter & Alexander (2013), Northumbria University & Heriot-Watt (case studies)**

### **Aims:**

- to offer a pedagogical alternative to EAP remedial sessions based on deficit model of students
- to address lack of: student engagement, communication btw. study skills and subject specialists and transferability of 'study skills'
- 'Study skills' (surface skills) rebranded to 'Academic Skills', to reflect change in content and approach
- Embedding & mapping less successful than hoped, due to lack of awareness of Ac. Skills provision & lack of communication from some subject lecturers
- Attendance variable, feedback from staff & students positive

# ‘Academic skills’ vs ‘study skills’



**Study skills = narrow aspect of academic skills**

**‘Academic skills’ used at HW to mean:**

Enabling students to understand and meet course requirements, including:

- Research skills
- Assessment requirements
- Critical reading skills with ref. to required reading
- Critical writing skills, inc. genre-specific text structure
- Avoiding plagiarism
- English language support



# Current Academic Skills provision at HW: context

- Offered to Master's students in School of Management & Languages (NS & NNS)
- **Semester 1:** 1 hour per week (optional) offered to support six courses
- **Semester 2:** 1 hour per week (optional) to support one core course AND one-to-one consultations

# Current HW Academic Skills provision:

## Embedded:

Academic skills provision is:

- Advertised in degree programme information
- Embedded in subject VLE courses: communication, learning materials

## Mapping:

EAP teachers:

- Liaise with subject lecturers re assessment requirements
- Attend some lectures
- One-to-one consultations on sts' own work / dissertation proposals



# HW survey: December, 2015: Results

68 participants, from:	Percentage of total
Accounting &/or Finance	19.4%
International Business/ Management	29.9%
International Marketing	17.9%
Strategic Project Management	7.5%
Logistics and Sup Chain Manag	16.3%
Other (related to Business/ Management/ Marketing)	9%

## Survey results continued:

**Did you attend Academic Skills sessions linked to the core course on your degree?**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>76.1%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23.9%</b>

## Survey results continued:

**If you attended Academic Skills, how many sessions did you attend?**

No. of sessions attended:	No. of students:	% of students:
1	9	16.4
2	10	18.2
3	16	29.1
4	8	14.5
5	6	10.9
6	6	10.9

## Survey results continued:

### If you did not attend, why not?

Reason:	No. of students:	% of students:
I already have the skills I need for my degree.	2	6.7
I already studied Academic Skills on the pre-sessional course.	10	33.3
I need to spend time on my studies rather than attending Academic Skills.	9	30
Other, eg unaware of sessions/ timetable clash	9	30

**To what extent did you realize that Academic Skills sessions were based on the sources and assessment tasks for the core course on your degree?**

<b>1 = No link 5 = Close link</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>27.9</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>39.3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>

## To what extent was Academic Skills embedded within the core course for your degree, e.g. available in Vision?

1 = not embedded 5 = Closely embedded	No. of students	% of students
1	2	3.3
2	3	5
3	18	30
4	25	41.7
5	12	20

**To what extent did you receive reading and writing support in Academic Skills at the time you needed it to meet deadlines for your coursework submissions?**

<b>1 = not in time 5 = in good time</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>% of students</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11.5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>31.1</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26.2</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>27.9</b>



## Learning outcomes: student priorities

‘Which of these learning outcomes are important to you?’

	No. of students	% of students
Understanding what critical evaluation involves	36	22.4
Understanding how to write in an academic style	31	19.3
Understanding how to structure an essay	27	16.8
Finding out what my lecturer expects in coursework	28	17.4
how to interpret exam questions	24	14.9
get the best possible grades	15	9.3

# HW Academic Skills provision: issues

- Attendance: small % of students and numbers decrease as semester progresses
- Survey not yet conducted of subject lecturers' views on effectiveness of provision (Autumn)
- One student criticised EAP practitioners' lack of subject knowledge and another wanted weekly tutorials on the content of the lectures

## **HW Academic Skills provision: successes**

**Largely positive survey feedback, eg:**

- **“These sessions helped me to be critical in my research”**
- **“Found the sessions very helpful”**
- **“It was really useful.”**
- **“very engaging and useful”**

## **Progress: introduction of one-to-one LibCal appointments**

- Students choose timeslot & make appt online
- Approx. 30 individual appts so far (some students ↑ once)

### **Main issues students wanted to discuss:**

- Coursework requirements (16 requests)
- Research issues (16 requests)
- Dissertation topic (9 requests)
- Adopting critical approach (only 3 requests but most in need of guidance)
- English language support (4 requests)

# Summary



- Academic skills becoming more embedded in HW courses
- Gradual process – raising profile of English Section (CEM model since 2009)
- Student engagement greatest close to submission dates & exams
- Increasing demand for one-to-one support
- What next?
- Student focus groups
- Survey of subject lecturers' views

# Questions for discussion:

1. How can EAP provision be tied more closely to student needs?
2. How can student attendance at in-sessional academic skills sessions be improved?
3. What is the optimum format of in-sessional provision, eg 1-1/ small groups/ online?
4. How can staff & student perceptions of EAP be changed (from viewing it as an add-on or 'servant to the discipline', to an integral aspect of HE study)?
5. What types of discipline-specific knowledge do in-sessional EAP practitioners need?

# References

- Hyland, K. (2002) 'Specificity revisited: how far should we go now?', *English for Specific Purposes*, 21, 385-395
- Hyland, K. & Hamp-Lyons, L. (2002) EAP: issues and directions. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (1) 1-12
- Postgraduate Taught Student Experience Working Group, SHEEC (2013) 'What is mastersness? Discussion paper'. *Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee*
- Sloan, D. and Porter, E. (2010) 'Changing international student and business staff perceptions of in-session EAP: using the CEM model', *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 9, 198-210
- Sloan, D., Porter, E., Alexander, O. (2013) Yes, you can teach an old dog new tricks. Contextualisation, embedding and mapping: the CEM model, a new way to define and engage staff and students in the delivery of an English language and study skills support programme: a case study of Heriot-Watt and Northumbria University. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 2013, Vol.50(3), p.284-296
- The EAP Archivist (15/01/16) The CEMistry of EAP. Theeaparchivist (Blog), Wordpress. Accessed online (03/03/16) at <https://theeaparchivist.wordpress.com/2015/01/15/the-cemistry-of-eap/>
- Waters, A., & Waters, M. (2001). 'Designing tasks for developing study competence and study skills in English'. In J. Flowerdew & M. Peacock (Eds.), *Research perspectives on English for academic purposes* (p. 37). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.