A model to support the equitable development of academic literacy in institutions of higher education

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The globalisation of higher education and the resultant increase in the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student body has cast the spotlight on English language proficiency as never before. How universities best assess applicants' linguistic suitability for their future degree studies, set appropriate proficiency thresholds, and put in place suitably structured, relevant and equitable language support post-entry is both an educational question and a moral one. This article looks specifically at English language support post-entry – widely referred to as in-sessional support – and considers a range of issues concerning the focus of that support and the nature of its delivery. It goes on to describe a decentralised model of English language provision that reflects an academic literacies perspective according to which English language development is inseparable from the acquisition of discipline knowledge. The model, implemented in Australia, rests on the idea that decentralised English language support in the form of faculty-based 'satellite' English language teams promotes relevance and thus engagement and learning. Furthermore, its scalability and cost-effectiveness help ensure that it is sustainable.

Keywords: academic literacy; decentralised English language support; English language gatekeeping tests; embedding academic literacies; student diversity

1. Introduction

One issue which has received considerable attention in the literature in recent years concerns how best to structure academic literacy provision in universities so as to ensure that students are sufficiently conversant in the literacy practices of their disciplines and able to access course content and complete assessed coursework and examinations to a standard that reflects their academic potential (Johnson & Tweedie, 2021; Murray, 2016; Thies & Rosario, 2019; Wingate, 2018). Its prominence is the result of a number of developments, two of which been particularly influential. The first is the emergence of the academic literacies approach articulated by Lea and Street in their seminal 1998 article, and since discussed and elaborated on by others (Rex & McEachen, 1999; Henderson & Hirst, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Thies & Rosario, 2019); and the second, work around genres and genres analysis (Hyland, 2006, 2007, 2008; Nesi & Gardner, 2012), which has benefitted from evidence of attested language derived from electronic corpora.

The academic literacies approach sees each discipline as having associated with it a set of literacy practices which collectively help define the discipline and a working knowledge of which effectively confers bona fide membership of its community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1999; Wenger, 2010) upon those who, through a gradual process of socialization into that community, adopt and appropriately deploy them. Those practices are captured in the nature of disciplinary discourses and the genres embedded within them and through which subject matter is expressed, explored, analysed, and contested (Henderson & Hirst, 2006; Nesi & Gardner, 2012). This disciplinary variation in the way in which language incorporates linguistic, social, and cognitive elements embodies Halliday's idea, central to

Systemic Functional Linguistics, that language develops to serve the particular purposes for which its users choose to employ it (Halliday, 1978); that is, economists for example, have developed and employ a shared set of practices that express the meanings and communicative purposes germane to their field, just as mathematicians, nurses etc. have to theirs.

This pluralistic view of academic literacy contrasts with the longstanding and still prevalent view which sees academic literacy as unitary in nature in as much as the knowledge and skills underpinning it are treated as generic and thus applicable across different disciplines. This divergence in conceptualisation is reflected in the distinction, increasingly invoked in the applied linguistics literature, between English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) (Bruce, 2011; Jordan, 1997; Murray & Muller, 2019). As its name suggests, EGAP refers to the teaching and learning of academic English that is generic in nature, having 'a cross-disciplinary focus designed to provide students with a broad understanding of the principles of language use that apply to most, if not all, academic disciplines', and typically prioritizing the arts and humanities and social science disciplines over the pure sciences (Murray & Muller 2019, p. 258). ESAP, in contrast, refers to the teaching and learning of English in a way that reflects 'the requirement to switch practices between one setting [one discipline] and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes' (Lea & Street 1998, p. 159; my parenthetic insert).

These developments in our understanding of disciplinary discourses have potentially significant implications for the way in which universities think about how best to ensure that their students learn the literacy practices pertinent to their academic disciplines. Specifically, they need to guide thinking, and ultimately decisions, around who should be responsible for facilitating any such learning and within what type of institutional structure(s) those individuals conduct their work. These decisions need to be informed by a clear theoretical

and pedagogical rationale and an appreciation of the implications for human resources and for staff professional development. Clearly, however, until it is determined who should have primary responsibility for developing students' academic literacy skills, the question of which mechanisms need to exist for this to happen cannot be meaningfully and effectively addressed. Furthermore, as I hope to show, what may appear to be an ideal delivery scenario may present logistical and political challenges that, ultimately, render it untenable in practice.

2. Examining the argument for an EGAP approach to in-sessional academic literacy

It is difficult, if not impossible, I believe, to dissociate decisions concerning who should have primary responsibility for developing students' academic literacy skills from the EGAP-ESAP distinction, in that there are strong grounds for saying that while EAP teachers are best placed to deliver EGAP support to students, it is academic content lecturers (ACLs) who would seem to be ideally positioned to deliver ESAP support – a point to which I return later. As a prerequisite to doing so, however, it is useful to consider some of the arguments that have been put forward in support of an EGAP approach to academic literacy.

McWilliams and Allan (2014, p. 4) have noted that there are four main arguments typically cited in support of a generic (EGAP) approach to academic literacy; namely, the generalisability of core skills, the lack of subject knowledge by writing specialists, the importance of getting the basics right first, and the cost-effectiveness of a general approach to teaching academic writing. Although EGAP has been the mainstay of EAP in-sessional provision over the last 40 years and can thus be assumed to have served a useful purpose during that time, there are, nonetheless, reasons to call into question the robustness of these four arguments in today's higher education context and to consider ESAP a more desirable alternative.

Firstly, the fact that something is cost-effective does not make it good practice, and while it would be naïve to ignore the financial pressures that can impact the nature and extent of EAP provision, I will later outline a model for delivering ESAP support to students that has the benefit of being adaptable according to local circumstances and available resources, and which therefore offers a cost-effective option.

Secondly, 'generalisability of core skills' and 'getting the basics right' would seem to amount to much the same thing, implying as they do the existence of a set of *other* non-core/basic skills – that is, discipline-specific literacy practices – that need to be acquired once the basics have been mastered. This idea is questionable on two related counts. First the underlying premise that discipline-specific literacies are somehow not core denies their role as fundamental to engagement with the discipline. Second, although second language acquisition research indicates that certain language elements and features are typically acquired or developed before others – with , for example, more frequently used vocabulary preceding the acquisition of technical or specialist vocabulary, 'getting the basics right' implies a vertical conception of language development which 'suggests that there exists a threshold level which students must traverse in order to participate in academic or professional literacies' (Harper, Prentice & Wilson 2011, p. 41). However, if the acquisition of academic literacy is essentially a discipline-specific enterprise, then so far as possible it needs to occur prior to and during students' studies as a product of engagement with the discipline and in parallel with the learning of its subject matter. As Arkoudis and Kelly have noted, 'the literature is unequivocal that high impact student learning occurs when communication skills are integrated within disciplinary learning and assessment' (2016, p. 4).

Finally, and in relation to the issue of writing specialists' subject knowledge, it is a common refrain that ESAP teachers come to their work lacking sufficient knowledge of the content and literacy practices of the disciplines being studied by students whose language

they are tasked with developing (de Chazal, 2012); that is, most learn on the job, although a minority come with a background in the relevant discipline, courtesy of their undergraduate and/or postgraduate degrees. Over time, some will develop a level of expertise or specialisation, although this assumes an extended period during which they are engaged with the same disciplines, and this will not always be the case due to institutional variation in the way language provision is organised and language teachers are deployed, and the tendency for this to be subject to periodic restructuring. The fact that this situation exists, however, is not an argument for adopting a generic approach but rather one that highlights the desirability of EAP delivery structures that provide opportunities for teachers to develop knowledge of particular disciplines and their associated literacy practices through sufficient exposure to them.

3. ESAP and the argument for embedding academic literacy on the curriculum

Once the argument for EGAP is called into question, so too are the delivery models associated with it. Historically, academic literacy has almost universally been regarded as falling squarely within the purview of English language teachers and the often specialist university units that employ them, such as English language centres, applied linguistics departments, and learning and teaching centres. A cause and consequence of this is that these units are invariably seen as service departments engaged in remedial work that is somehow peripheral to the main 'stuff' of the discipline. This is not helped by the fact that they typically serve only the language needs of students for whom English is not a first language, the assumption being that students who are not categorised as such come equipped with the academic literacy practices they require for their studies and/or with the capacity to acquire them merely through exposure; as such they are seen as not requiring any formal

developmental work in this regard. This is a questionable assumption, however, seeing as there are subjects taught at tertiary level, such as accounting and finance, law, global sustainable development, and linguistics, that are generally not available in secondary school curricula, whether in English-speaking countries or elsewhere. In addition, in order to widen participation in higher education as part of the equity and social justice agenda, governments and universities are seeking to ensure that under-represented students have access to higher education, a move which, along with the significant increase in international student enrolments seen in recent years, has contributed to a much broader student demographic.

Traditionally, university students have acquired the literacy practices of their disciplines through their engagement with reading texts and classroom discourse and feedback received on written assignments. While such an inductive process that largely obviates the need for direct pedagogical intervention may not be the most efficient way to ensure that those practices are acquired, it could be argued that students who, in the 1960s, accounted for 4% of secondary school leavers and as such constituted an academic elite, were arguably relatively well equipped to do so nonetheless, coming as they did to higher education with a significant measure of the required cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Ryan & Hellmundt, 2005) and the ability to adjust quickly to what Thomas (2002) and Sheridan (2011) have referred to as the institutional habitus. However, today's considerably higher levels of participation (around 50%) and the associated increase in student diversity – both local and international – mean that we can make fewer assumptions regarding the knowledge and skills with which students come to their studies and their ability to 'pick up' the academic literacies of their disciplines (Dunworth, Drury, Kralik & Moore, 2014, Wingate & Tribble, 2012). This fact provides a compelling argument for embedding academic literacy in the curriculum for this would certainly appear to be the most effective way of ensuring that *all*

students have the opportunity – and equal opportunity – to develop the literacy practices of their disciplines.

3.1 Academic content lecturers as teachers of academic literacy

If academic literacy is to be embedded in the curriculum, then it makes sense that academic content lecturers (ACLs) should assume primary responsibility for developing students' proficiency in it; they are, after all, the most knowledgeable about the literacy practices of their particular disciplines, for they engage with those practices every day of their professional lives and as such would appear to be best placed to pass on that knowledge to their students. If such practices are fundamental to a given discipline and thus a working knowledge of them prerequisite to becoming a fully-fledged members of its community of practice, then it might be seen as an historical oddity that academic content lecturers have traditionally assumed responsibility for imparting knowledge of subject matter of the discipline but *not* the means through which that knowledge is expressed, explored, analysed, and contested. Knowledge and its expression cannot be disaggregated; they are mutually dependent and need to be taught concurrently within the curriculum in order to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, benefit and that none are disadvantaged (Meyer et al, 2015; Wingate, 2018). This serves to underscore the fact that academic literacies are fundamental to the discipline and not an optional, bolt-on extra targeted at – and thereby potentially stigmatising – particular cohorts.

However, while there is a significant and growing body of work that reports on efforts to embed academic literacy in the curriculum (e.g. Baik & Greig, 2009; Bohemia et al., 2007; Curnow & Liddicoat, 2008; Edwards, Goldsmith, Havery & James, 2021; Gunn et al., 2011; McKay, 2013; Murray & Nallaya, 2016; Thies & Rosario, 2019; Wingate et al., 2011), there

is a notable dearth of literature that explores the notion of ACLs taking a primary role in developing students' literacy skills and its possible implications (although see Wingate, 2018), or that recounts direct experience of this in practice[1]. This is likely because implementation comes with considerable challenges and is, therefore, rarely undertaken.

3.2 Challenges with embedding academic literacies in the curriculum

If academic literacies are to be embedded in the curriculum, one initial hurdle that needs to be overcome is the identification of those literacies and the disciplinary practices associated with them. There is evidence that ACLs can find it difficult to identify the literacies of their disciplines and articulate what Jacobs (2005, p. 447) refers to as 'tacit' knowledge of their disciplines' discourse conventions; that is, they struggle to convert procedural to declarative knowledge, to articulate as discrete concepts that can serve as points of learning the knowledge and skills they draw upon and apply daily in their professional lives. EAP teachers and academic developers need to work with ACLs to tease these out and, having done so, to locate them strategically within the curriculum (Curnow & Liddicoat, 2008; Thies, 2012; Wingate, 2018). Curnow and Liddicoat (2008) provide a useful account of this process, drawing on their experience of having implemented it in an Applied Linguistics undergraduate degree programme in Australia. Their starting point was to determine which academic literacy practices students would be expected to have developed upon completion of the programme and then distribute these across the different assessment items for those core courses where they arise most naturally in terms of being a prerequisite to engaging with course content. While these literacy practices may also emerge and be called upon in other

[1] Murray & Nallaya (2016) is an exception to this.

optional or elective courses, assessment of them needs to occur in *at least* the core courses so as to ensure that *all* students have the necessary exposure to them and thus opportunities for learning as a result of engagement with those courses. This, of course, presupposes that there is space in the curriculum for such embedding to take place, and this may not be the case for heavily-prescribed curricula and/or where other initiatives such as sustainability, experiential learning, and equality, diversity and inclusion have encroached on curricula.

Having embedded the relevant literacies in the curriculum, consideration needs to be given to ensuring that all ACLs have the knowledge and pedagogical skills required to develop in students a working understanding of them.

This professional development activity needs to be a collaborative enterprise between ACLs, EAP teachers and academic developers, and experience suggests that there is likely to be resistance from ACLs who may not believe in or understand the value of the approach and who may feel that the teaching of academic literacies is not part of their role and/or that they have neither the appropriate qualifications to take on the responsibility nor the time to do so, given their other teaching, research and administrative responsibilities (Dunworth, Drury, Kralik & Moore, 2014; Murray & Nallaya, 2016). This is exemplified by a quote from a law lecturer cited by Jenkins and Wingate as follows:

> I am a Law lecturer . . . I am quite happy to help as far as I can . . . but you know I am not an English support teacher. I'm not trained to help people who really need specific targeted support nor are any of my colleagues (Jenkins & Wingate, 2015).

Personal experience of driving an embedding process of this kind suggests that ACLs often interpret 'academic literacy' very narrowly as knowledge of grammar and syntax, and this inevitably and understandably influences their perception of themselves as unqualified to teach it. Consequently, a change of culture may well be required if ACLs are to buy into the

idea of imparting to their students the academic literacy practices of their disciplines. They need to understand not only what academic literacy means and what the teaching of it entails, but also be open to the idea of professional development focused on acquiring the pedagogical skills needed to teach language practices in an accessible and content-integrated fashion, and to assess students' proficiency in those practices. Achieving this kind of cultural change can be difficult in a sector continually saturated with new curricular initiatives that place additional demands on academics. Many such initiatives fail to come to fruition, thereby breeding scepticism and a reluctance to engage fully with any new proposals, regardless of their merits (Dunworth, Drury, Kralik & Moore, 2014). Such attitudes can present a formidable obstacle to the idea of embedding and teaching academic literacies within the curriculum, especially when combined with the likely need for them to undergo professional development in order to do so. When widespread resistance to change on this scale is envisaged in an area of activity widely seen as peripheral to the core business of universities, institutional senior management are unlikely to have an appetite for it and to endorse it in the manner required to ensure compliance. Consequently, despite the apparent merits of a model in which ACLs assume primary responsibility for developing students' academic literacy, that role is likely to remain with EAP teachers. This raises the question of whether it is possible to retain an embedded academic literacies model where the disciplinary literacies are taught by EAP teachers; and if not, what might be a desirable and workable alternative.

3.3 The hard and soft forms of embedding academic literacies

Before embarking on that discussion, however, it is useful to a consider a distinction between what might be termed the 'hard' and 'soft' forms of embedding – a distinction that tends to

be lost in discussions of the issue in the literature, with the potential for confusion. The model described above, where space is created in the curriculum and ACLs assume responsibility for imparting the relevant literacy practices to students at appropriate points in their learning constitutes the hard form of embedding. The soft form, in contrast, refers to the teaching of those practices by EAP teachers outside of the regular curriculum but while reflecting a level of alignment with the curriculum; that is, EAP teachers' pedagogical interventions are designed and timed so as to support the delivery of degree course content and any associated tasks in which students are expected to engage. In this way, their interventions respond to the particular academic literacy needs of the moment and thereby assume immediate relevance. While this promises to increase the likelihood of student motivation, engagement and thus learning, it comes with challenges the most significant of which is the considerable human resource required and what for many institutions would be deemed prohibitive associated costs; after all, outsourcing the teaching of academic literacies to EAP teachers would mean having their support available to every discipline and its constituent degree programmes. Consequently, where discipline-focused (ESAP) teaching does occur, it is rarely driven by any comprehensive, institution-wide scheme but instead tends to be the result of local, departmental initiatives that have arisen as the product of established professional and personal relationships between one or more EAP teachers and their academic counterparts in the departments concerned. While such local initiatives can certainly be valuable, they inevitably make for uneven and thus inequitable academic literacy support because they are not systematic. In contrast, ESAP provision that is devolved and employs the kind of a hub-and-spoke delivery model described below offers a viable, more equitable alternative.

4. A devolved hub-and-spoke model of English language provision as a workable compromise

As I have indicated, it is commonplace for English language provision to be centralised and located in English language centres, learning and teaching units, applied linguistics departments, and other cognate departments. It is often complemented by support offered by writing centres, libraries, and careers and skills units (Murray, 2016; Wingate, 2016) Students typically attend classes and/or individual surgeries or consultations within the relevant unit. Unfortunately, this delivery model reinforces the common perception that academic literacy is not core to the discipline and that students sent to such centralised units are in deficit and require treatment to 'cure their ills'. As Lea and Street observed, its focus is 'on attempts to "fix" problems with student learning, which are treated as a kind of pathology' (1998, p. 158). Furthermore, because support is centralised it tends to be utilitarian in that it amounts to a rather blunt tool which seeks to address the needs of the greatest number and as such will typically have an EGAP focus.

The ESAP delivery model I report on here was trialled and successfully implemented at a university in Australia. Its hub-and-spoke design instantiates the notion of devolved – or decentralised – provision, although in reality it was something of a hybrid in that overall management of English language delivery was retained centrally (the hub). Teachers were recruited by the central unit and then deployed to the four university faculties, namely Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Health Sciences and Information, Technology, Engineering and the Environment. That is, each faculty had aligned with it a dedicated, locally-based team of EAP teachers – a satellite unit (collectively, the spokes: one spoke per faculty) – comprising four individuals responsible solely for the language needs of students within that faculty and its constituent departments, and overseen by a Faculty English Language Coordinator.

This approach brings with it a number of distinct benefits. Firstly, working with a reduced set of broadly related disciplines means that EAP teachers are able, over time, to develop a better knowledge of those disciplines in terms of content, assessment types and requirements, academic literacy practices (including commonly used genres and disciplinary vocabulary), and associated expectations (Hyland, 2008; Nesi & Gardner, 2012). This enables them to develop syllabi and materials that respond more relevantly to students' immediate needs, thereby promoting greater engagement and thus learning. Being locally based also means that there is greater opportunity for language teachers to become an integral part of the faculty; better placed to source authentic texts for use in language development activities; well positioned to forge relationships and promote dialogue with ACLs; privy to local discussions and debates; and better able to understand the local context and its agendas and priorities, and thus to influence policy and decision-making in the interests of increasing their efficacy as EAP practitioners. This, in turn, affords an opportunity for EAP teachers to learn more about faculty programmes and academics' perceptions of students' needs and to identify possibilities for different types of interventions in students' learning accordingly. While, in some very limited cases, central library staff may be directed to work with particular departments in developing the academic literacy of students, this is primarily through providing relevant resources. However, they are rarely if ever qualified EAP teachers, nor do they typically have the capacity to service the needs of multiple departments or the means and opportunity to understand more intimately the particular faculty and departmental contexts in which students and teachers are functioning.

The hub-and-spoke model adopted extended to the design of online English language student resources, with each faculty English language team taking responsibility for its development – again exploiting the relationships and synergies with local academic faculty in the process of doing so in order to ensure those resources were as relevant as possible.

Students would enter via a central English language homepage where they would click the link to their particular faculty – or faculties in the case of students studying on joint degree programmes. This would take them to materials specifically tailored to the faculty disciplines. Development of each faculty website comprised two phases, the first of which involved the creation of resources reflecting practices shared across disciplines and including exemplar texts and points of learning sourced from those disciplines. During phase two, these resources underwent a process of refinement, the intention being that they should increasingly reflect the academic literacy expectations of individual departments/disciplines within the relevant faculty and the types of assessments students would be required to complete. It was understood that this process of refinement amounted to a significant project and would be ongoing and subject to periodic reviews. Furthermore, there was recognition of the fact that not all students, and particularly lower-level students, would make use of these resources and that, consequently, there was a need to educate students in their use by repeatedly drawing attention to their existence, how to access them, their relevance, and the potential benefits they offered.

There are two additional advantages associated with this hub-and-spoke model that warrant mention. The first concerns the fact that English language teaching is typically seen by universities as a service rather than a core activity, a fact which may in part explain the often modest funding it receives and what are widely seen as the disadvantageous contracts issued to EAP teachers – part-time, hourly paid, and with no clear route to promotion (Jordan, 2002; MacDonald, 2016). By delivering English language provision from within the faculty and through working collaboratively with academic staff, its profile is raised among academics, along with an awareness of what it involves and the specialist knowledge and experience underlying it, and which often goes unrecognised (Dunworth, Drury, Kralik & Moore, 2014). This greater awareness can serve to increase EAP teachers' influence not just

locally but within the wider institution, and thus also the likelihood of improved conditions of service that reflect the value of what they do. Furthermore, it can help make the case for increased funding for language development activity.

The second additional benefit of the hub-and-spoke model has to do with the way in which institutions view the language of non-native English-speaker students in relation to their native-speaker counterparts. As mentioned earlier, because academic literacy programmes are widely seen as existing to meet the language needs of students of non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), those students who are the beneficiaries are stigmatised as they are positioned as being in deficit. However, decentralising the provision of academic literacy in a way that recognises the need to differentiate between the discourses of different disciplines helps even the playing field. The very suggestion that disciplines have associated with them particular literacy practices that extend beyond the more general language competence associated with a native speaker communicating in multifarious and diverse contexts can serve to send out a signal to *all* students that there are important practices that need mastering and with which they may be unfamiliar.

Importantly, the hub-and spoke model of provision described did not and need not preclude the possibility of EAP teachers who work in different faculties coming together periodically for the purpose of professional development activities and sharing with their colleagues their experiences and learnings. Such meetings were of significant benefit to our project not least because they both reflected and encouraged enormous creativity. The fact that the different satellites worked largely independently of each other and in a palpable spirit of what can be described as ‘constructive competitiveness’ meant that they experimented with and adopted innovative and somewhat different approaches as they attempted to address the needs of the students in their respective faculties.

As I have indicated, despite its considerable benefits, this hub-and-spoke approach does represent a compromise. English language development teams are faculty-based on the grounds that academic literacy practices are more likely to be shared – or at least to align more closely – across departments within the same discipline; however, there will still be degrees of divergence. Having a local English language community presence in the form of satellite teams means that different models of provision can be negotiated between the relevant faculty English Language Coordinator and local academic course managers in order to most effectively accommodate such divergence. It may be, for example, that while there is an ongoing cycle of workshops and masterclasses directed at students in general within the faculty and which draw on material sourced from the range of disciplines that make up the faculty and embody general principles that operate across those disciplines, individual departments can work with the Faculty English Language Coordinator to organise individual language consultations, writing circles or a language course tailored more to the specific academic literacy needs of their particular student cohort. Similarly, Coordinators negotiate with individual departments and course leaders whether courses are to be mandatory and for whom, to which year-groups they will be available and for how long, whether they will be formally assessed, and whether they will be credit-bearing. In this way, the model allows for a modicum of flexibility in shaping the language support on offer and gives rise to a degree of inter-departmental and inter-faculty variation which, in practice and within each faculty hub, is likely to be a hybrid of tailored and/or embedded provision and the kind of more standardised centralised provision associated more with a service-based model.

5. Evaluation of the model

Although it was understood by the university's senior management and those tasked with implementing the model that it would take time to bed in and that it would need to be reviewed periodically in order to meaningfully gauge its reception by faculties and evaluate its efficacy, the early indications were promising in that there was reason to believe that all key stakeholders felt the benefits; in particular, ACLs, EAP teachers and the students themselves. Feedback obtained from students both informally and via a cross-faculty focus group, as well as through the EAP teachers and Language Learning Coordinators, indicated that students appeared more engaged and appreciative of the greater relevance of the content to their immediate needs and to their assessments, and this was reflected in their increased engagement with the now redesigned website and the positive feedback this elicited. Comments such as "The teacher understands what I need … so that's really helpful", "It's really useful because teachers can help me with course assignments" and "I don't feel like I'm on my own because I feel like I can always talk to my teachers about my work. I really appreciate" were highly representative, reflecting as they did widely held perceptions. Attendance of workshops and courses offered, while necessarily subject to resource limitations was, nonetheless, noticeably better than that seen in the more generic EAP classes previously on offer. The one aspect about which both students, EAP teachers and ACUs felt less than enthusiastic concerned one-to-one consultations. While these did continue to feature in the different faculty offerings, they were seen by senior management and those leading the embedding project as being inefficient and resource-heavy, given that an hour of teachers' time devoted to a single student could potentially have been used for the benefit of many more students in a class or small group environment.

The reasons for the generally positive reaction of students to the model reflected those of the faculty EAP teams, who were able and encouraged to share their views at the project's Operational Group meetings, which were convened fortnightly in order to reflect on progress

and address any issues that had arisen in the intervening period. The Group included the Head of Language and Literacy, the Deputy Director of the Learning & Teaching Unit (responsible for Academic Learning Services), and the four Language and Learning Coordinators (one per Division). It quickly became apparent at these meetings that the more focused nature of their teaching meant that, as with the students, they felt that what they were doing was responding better to the needs of their students, partly through their own development and increased understanding of the disciplines within their respective faculties. This was professionally rewarding. The fact that, within certain limits – again, mainly resource-related – they felt able to shape the nature of provision within their own faculties and to liaise and form collaborative relationships with academic staff meant they felt valued and a sense of control and ownership of what they were doing, something very evident in the way in which they invested themselves in the development of the website, as described earlier.

Informal feedback obtained from the ACLs during the consultation process prior to implementation, as well as post-implementation suggested strongly that they appreciated having a local and dedicated EAP team with whom they could liaise more easily and directly and who listened to their concerns and needs and worked with them to create optimal solutions within the constraints that existed.

6. Funding the hub-and-spoke model

Any model of English language provision needs to be supported by a sound and sustainable funding model that helps ensure provision is as equitable is possible. In the case of the hub-and-spoke initiative I have described here, the faculty-based English satellite teams were relatively small, and their formation required the recruitment of only a small number of additional EAP teachers who were centrally funded by the university. However, the model

itself has the advantage of being scalable according to individual institutions' needs and financial circumstances. Any investment in academic literacy resource needs to be weighed against the ethical responsibility universities have to support the students they enrol and the reputational benefits they stand to accrue from being able to demonstrate that they have in place the means for doing so systematically and on an institution-wide basis. A per capita model could be established whereby faculties with larger student bodies receive proportionately more funding, to be utilised as they see fit in light of local discussions between their constituent departments and the resident English language team, as discussed earlier. The cost of such provision could be recouped indirectly via student fees or via a central services charge levied on faculties, with those receiving more on a per capita basis having to meet a higher central services charge. Alternatively, those individual departments benefitting most from faculty English language support – quantified in terms of the number of students attending language support sessions – could be required to pay a higher proportion of the cost of faculty English language provision.

While the devolved model of academic literacy described here may not be regarded as the gold standard of provision according to which academic literacy is embedded in the curriculum and imparted by ACLs for the benefit of all students, it does represent a workable alternative. While it cannot claim to be wholly equitable in the sense that all students have equal access to academic literacy development opportunities, it does provide a reasoned basis on which to distribute available resources. The reality is that universities face multiple competing priorities and this means that satellite teams of the kind described are unlikely ever to be in a position to provide academic literacy support tailored to the needs of all students studying in all disciplines in their respective faculties. As a corollary of this, individual departments will always have the freedom to supplement whatever provision is made

universally available by the institution and as such absolute equitability is likely always to be elusive. Ultimately, the size of satellite teams, and thus the scale and breadth of their contribution, will depend on the extent to which any given institution views academic literacy as a 'problem' and the degree of potential collateral damage – in terms of delivery of the curriculum, student drop-out rates and its reputation – it is prepared to tolerate in order to keep any investment in EAP teacher resource within what it regards as affordable limits.

7. Conclusion

Although something of a compromise, a hub-and-spoke model of academic literacy provision aligns well with the need, increasingly recognised within the EAP community, to ensure that English language teaching in tertiary contexts reflects the particularity of the discourses of different disciplines and the need for English language tutors to acquire a degree of familiarity with the content of those disciplines and the way in which knowledge is expressed, explored, analysed, and contested[2]. It reflects a view that familiarity with the academic literacy practices of the different disciplines is fundamental to operating within them and a prerequisite to membership of their respective communities of practice, and by providing a structure through which EAP teachers can impart those literacies it ensures relevance and thus increases the likelihood of student engagement. Furthermore, it addresses what is something of a disconnect between the English language proficiency tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, used by universities as gatekeeping mechanisms and which focus on English for General Academic Purposes, and the particular, subject-specific language skills they require in order to meet the expectations of their degree courses. The hub-and-spoke

[2] See de Chazal (2012) for the converse view and an argument against teaching students English for Specific Academic Purposes, and instead focusing on English for General Academic Purposes.

model allows a degree of flexibility in the exact shape of provision according to local circumstances and helps ensure that provision is optimal in this regard by integrating English language satellite teams into the faculties and thereby creating the conditions – knowledge of local affordances and constraints, personal connections, etc. – that facilitate discussion and negotiation. Finally, it is a model that is theoretically informed, inclusive, and scalable according to individual faculty needs and the financial resources available.

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