

The Study Skills Conundrum

Writing Skills - an integrated approach.

Angier and Palmer (2006, p18), in the Royal Literary Fund Report, support the idea that, ideally 'every department would have its own writing tutor, or better still, it would integrate the skills of writing into the very fabric of learning' (Murray, 2005), but then go on to suggest that this is impractical, as it 'would require a wholesale change in the ethos and practice of higher education.' Here at Huddersfield we believe we've made a small start in changing that ethos and that this might impact on how students engage with learning.

We have developed a 'distributed' Academic Skills model with tutors based in each School. These tutors are experienced lecturers who seek to work closely with lecturing staff to look at how they can incorporate the development of student writing into their modules as well as alongside them. We believe that students are much more likely to engage with ideas about improving their own learning if they appear relevant and cohesive within their own subject area. Even where we do stand alone study skills, or one to one work, we endeavour to understand the module and the specific requirements of the assignment even though we are not dealing with content. This gives students reassurance and because the students are used to seeing us within the school, being fully involved and interacting with their lecturers, they feel confident in the relevance of our contribution.

Motivation will always be the key to student engagement; by publicising our approach within the School and emphasising the developmental rather than remedial aspects, we encourage students to see us as a means to an end: facilitating their 'academic integration' (Draper, 2005), improving their grades and also improving their chance of succeeding in an increasingly competitive world in which good communication skills can be a major factor in achieving goals. Feedback from evaluation of our provision suggests that students are beginning to take a far more positive attitude towards writing development. This presentation details how the model at Huddersfield has evolved from a small TQEF funded project and what challenges have been and are still being faced. We document a case study of a department where we feel the model has worked successfully and explore ideas for developing a cohesive cross-university strategy.