To Support Student Learning by Embedding Writing and Speaking Skills

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Overview
The aims of the project are to enhance students’ learning through writing and speaking opportunities, to support their transition into Higher Education, to develop learner autonomy and to improve retention. Tutors have worked collaboratively with SLS to introduce informal and formal writing and speaking activities with supportive feedback. These activities are designed to support students’ learning while developing these skills and learner autonomy. The project is focussing on foundation engineering students in ACES and foundation year Biosciences students in HWB.

In 2007-08, only 8% of the student users of Drop-In Study Practice were ACES students (20% of population) compared to 38% of the students users being from HWB (22% of population).

Engaging students in writing and speaking about the content of their discipline is one of the best ways to get them to learn about the discipline. This will develop the learners’ autonomy through students reflecting on their learning whilst developing graduate writing and speaking skills.

Project Aims to:

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<th>How</th>
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<td>Increase student engagement in their subject</td>
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<td>Increase student understanding of subject content</td>
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<td>Increase understanding of academic expectations</td>
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<td>Develop student writing (accuracy and fluency)</td>
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<td>Develop learner autonomy</td>
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<td>Improve retention</td>
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Methodology

23 of the 52 Biosciences students and 23 of the 90 Engineering students completed a questionnaire half way through academic year. The questionnaire asked students about:

- Their confidence with English writing and language skills;
- Their understanding and confidence with features of academic writing;
- The types of academic writing done, and confidence;
- The study skills support that they had used;
- What they enjoyed, found challenging, and views on writing.

Further analysis of student performance and participation will be undertaken once the assessment of the modules in completed.

Headlines

75% of both the Biosciences and Engineering students either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident with their writing skills, with no significant change between before the course and the time of the survey.

Approximately 80% of the students considered their skills either excellent or good, with no significant difference between the Biosciences and Engineering students.

Bioscience students have a higher confidence in all aspects of academic writing, and feel more confident to demonstrate these features. (Fig 1)

Both groups had low confidence with writing laboratory reports, but for all other types of academic writing the Engineering students felt confident with the tasks. (Fig 2)

Both groups report internet based resources as their most use source of study skills support. (Fig 3)

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