

**School of Languages, Cultures
and Societies**

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND CULTURES



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

LCS Project Report

December 2023

Embedded Academic Literacies Approach in the LCS PGT Curriculum

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Context and Rationale

Increasingly diverse linguistic and socio-cultural student communities in HE have led to the development of partnerships between disciplinary lecturers and academic literacy specialists (Maldoni, 2017; Page, 2020; Wingate, 2019). These aim to scaffold linguistic and academic socialisation for students, and are reflected in similar institutional practices here at Leeds. Drawing on successful in-session partnerships across the Faculty, a programme of year-round in-session support for students enrolled on LCS PGT programmes was established in 2022-23. This support is provided through a collaboration between colleagues from the Library Learning Development (LD) Team and the Language Centre (LC), with the aim of enhancing the learning experience of LCS students and their successful engagement in M-level study through the development of students' academic language and literacies, such as critical reading and writing, analysis, argumentation and academic referencing.

Structure of Support

This initiative was for the introduction of in-session support for PGT students in LCS:

1. that provides a year-round dedicated academic literacy programme that is sensitive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and is embedded in, and directly relevant to, the content covered in LCS degree programmes, to compliment the Skills@Library co-curricular academic skills provision;
2. that, leaving existing MA Film Studies provisions in place, caters for students on LCS MA degree programmes in Linguistics, Linguistics & ELT, MAPLIS, CTS and MAAET, thus allowing for some economy of scale; and
3. that draws on academic skills expertise from the Library Learning Development team and the extensive experience from the Language Centre in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

These classes are tied to, and work with the materials covered on designated core (methods) modules on PGT degree programmes. Given the structure of PGT programmes in LCS, this involves the following modules: MODL5001M (all CTS MA programmes, MAAET, and for some in MAPLIS); MODL5012 in semester 1 and MODL5300M/MODL5305M in semester 2 (MAPLIS); and LING5470M in semester 1 and LING5480M in semester 2 (MA Linguistics and MA Linguistics & ELT).

The first iteration of this collaborative provision in 2022-23 comprised weekly x 1 hour classes every week across semesters 1 and 2, with repeated sessions to accommodate the large cohorts, that is, 4 on Translation & Interpreting, 2 on MAPLIS, and 2 on Linguistics programmes, with additional 1-1 tutorials as required.

With increasing student numbers predicted on MAPLIS for 2023-24, it was agreed to reduce the provision to 6 sessions on each of the three programmes per semester, to accommodate repeated sessions on each programme, specifically, 2 for Linguistics, 4 for MAPLIS and 4 for Translation & Interpreting. Although optional, sessions are timetabled on the core module each semester for *all* students on their respective programme of study, rather than only those students identified as 'international'.

Project Overview

This project commenced in October 2022 with the aim of reviewing the partnership working approaches underpinning the embedded academic literacies provision by Language Centre (LC) and Library Learning Development (LD) colleagues on each of the PGT programmes in the School of Language, Cultures and Societies. It has involved an investigation of the perceptions, both of the academic literacies approach, and the way in which it is facilitated through this collaboration, by key stakeholders: PGT students; LCS academics and LC and LD tutors. It is hoped that this review will inform future planning of the embedded partnership approach to supporting the development of students' academic literacies (AL) and provide a working model upon which other collaborations might similarly be established.

Project Objectives

- To investigate academics', students' and our perceptions of the academic literacies approach in the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies post graduate taught curriculum
- To explore effective partnership working approaches in embedding academic literacies

Methods

This project adopted a mixed-methods approach through which research data was collected via:

- A questionnaire for students to investigate their perceptions of the embedded AL provision in the LCS PGT curriculum, and their view of the role of LCS PGT academics as compared with LC/LD tutors;
- Interviews with student volunteers from the three PGT programmes to further explore student perceptions of the embedded AL provision and the role of academic staff in its delivery;

- Semi-structured interviews with academic teaching staff on the three LCS PGT programmes to explore their interpretation of ‘academic literacies’; their approach to supporting the development of AL in PGT students on their respective programmes; and their view on how LC/LD tutors contribute to students’ development of AL; and
- Reflective accounts from LD and LC staff to consider aspects of the collaboration which have worked well; where there have been any challenges, and how these might be addressed; as well as what success looks like in terms of embedded AL within Curriculum Redefined across the three programmes.

The number of participants from each LCS programme is shown in the table below:

Method	Linguistics	MAPLIS	T&I
Student Survey*	12	7	20
Student Interviews	5	7	5
Staff Interviews	3	2	3

(*39/199 students in total = 20% response rate)

Key findings

Students reported:

- A better understanding of discipline-specific text types (not studied at UG level); how to write critically; academic language and style; and UoL systems and academic practices; but would like a greater focus on research methods;
- PGT lecturers as responsible for teaching academic content, not supporting their AL development, but valued the collaboration through an embedded approach:

The important role that module lecturers place in here is about the context [...] Skills tutors and module lecturers should work together because module lecturers can help skills tutors put the general academic skills into context; the module lecturers should provide that context (MAPLIS student).

- That practical application of theoretical concepts and making cross-curricula links (with other modules) were helpful in academic literacies sessions;

I think the academic language and skills is more like a lamp; it can help us to find the final destination, which is graduation (MAPLIS student).

- The analysis of subject-specific genres, functions and development of glossaries as helpful in scaffolding their understanding of the discipline:

Our lecturers give us the ideas of what we're going to write [...] but you and Helen equipped us with specific tools [...] of how to do it (MAPLIS student).

Staff reported:

- A lack of time to provide academic literacies support during lectures, but that a critical approach pervades all teaching:

There's an understanding of undergraduates that they haven't been to university before and they don't know [...] anything is. But at PGT, they've already done studies. So we kind of have a lot of expectations about what we think they should know. And I see it very much as your [LD/LC] role that to be able to kind of try and bridge that gap (MAPLIS lecturer).

- Students may develop academic literacies, but falter when their knowledge and/ or understanding is challenged:

Admissions and who we are getting [means] we can't really have unrealistic expectations about what academic skills provision can do (Linguistics lecturer).

- A high proportion of international students needed support because register and texts are linguistically and culturally-bound, and that syntactical knowledge and skills are very important, for example in note-taking;
- Increased levels of confidence in students' understanding of what they were expected to do, for example in essay writing (*cf.* previous year), along with positive feedback from students, who seemed calmer and better prepared, for example for their exam, as the academic literacies support seemed to alleviate a 'pinch point';
- A faster transition to Anglo Saxon-centric approaches to the development of knowledge (in non-UK students) and increased critical engagement with readings;

It's been a real breakthrough to know that the students understand that these sessions are part of their academic development (Linguistics lecturer).

Implications for practice

- Consider avoiding categorising students according to their linguistic or socio-cultural background, such as 'international'. While they do not represent a homogeneous group, these may also be labels with which students themselves do not identify or may be uncomfortable with denotative or connotative associations.

- Scaffold students' transition from UG to M-level study. Irrespective of students' undergraduate study, they are all new members of the academic community on their respective programme of study at Leeds, and may be unfamiliar with the academic expectations and practices associated with that community of practice.
- Consider how to support student understanding of both text and context. This applies to texts students will access, navigate and critically evaluate, as well as the types of genres they are expected produce. This can be supported through the submission and discussion of, and feedback on, formative tasks and texts, which could be also peer produced and reviewed.
- Ensure that there is appropriate support to scaffold the development of students' academic literacies. This should be embedded in or aligned with core module content, timetabled and made available to all students.
- Map academic literacy sessions to assessments across the programme, and introduce these at the relevant 'point of need', rather than as part of induction for example. This may include scheduling additional sessions during the summer period to support independent project planning for example, and involve booking rooms to facilitate student-led peer work.
- Collaborate closely with Learning Development and Language Centre colleagues, both in terms of academic literacies curriculum planning and responding to student feedback. Identify 'planned for' as well as incidental opportunities to make explicit links between academic literacies and disciplinary content through signposting and the use of exemplars, for example.

Next steps

The structure of support will be reviewed for 2024-25 and beyond, based on identified student need and capacity within Language Centre and Learning Development teams. In addition, a key aim for the Learning Development Team is for disciplinary lecturers to take responsibility for the delivery of academic literacies provision with support from learning advisors from the Library to co-design and co-deliver where necessary, in accordance with Curriculum Redefined principles. The Language Centre will continue to provide academic language and literacies insessional support where capacity allows.

For further details about this project, please contact Jiani (J.H.Liu@leeds.ac.uk) or Helen (H.C.Sadig@leeds.ac.uk).

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