

Adapting one-to-one Insessional tutorials to research student needs

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Overview of existing study skills research provision

- Academic Development Directorate – 'Research Student Support' for all research students (total 674)
- one off tutorials 45 mins.
- No EAP remit.
- Practical focus eg software packages, preparing qualitative interview questions, working with research assistants in the field.
- Research Skills trainer ft permanent post
- Some overlap with Insessional EAP remit eg academic style, structure, use of citation.

Insessional courses

- Insessional courses for all Overseas students (EU and non EU)
- Some have 'requirements' where they have to enrol in a course; others voluntary. Mostly for PG but also research and UG.
- For MPhil students requirement must be fulfilled to progress to Phd
- Insessional courses focus on EAP with study skills.
- No extra charge to student
- 2 hrs per week per course
- Little homework

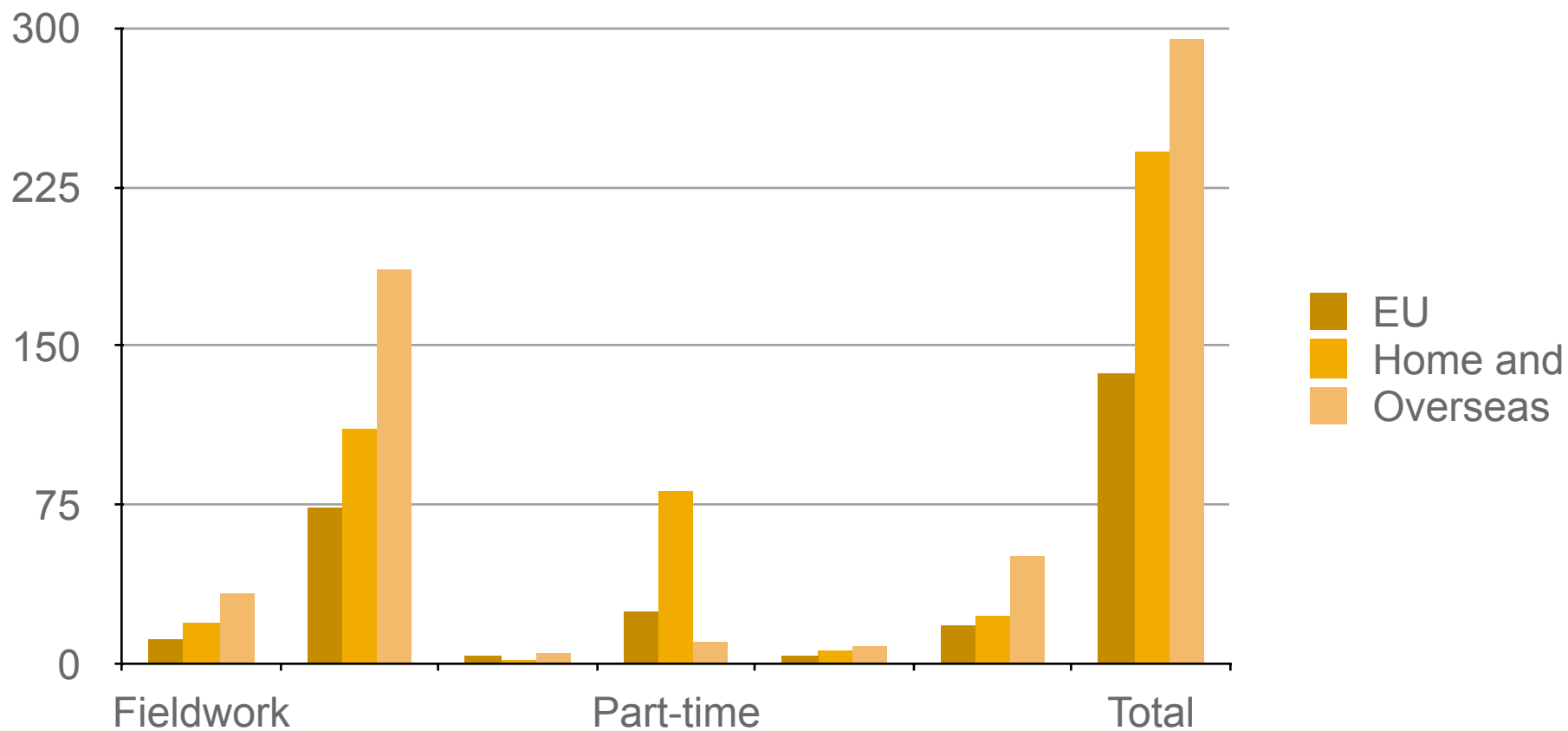
Existing Insessional courses at SOAS 2012-13 (896 hrs)

- Academic Essay Writing 258 hrs (29%)
- 1-1 tutorials (30 min slots) 184 hrs (21%)
- Grammar Improvement 130 hrs (15%)
- Seminar Speaking Skills 86 hrs (10%)
- Academic Literacy 54 hrs (6%)
- Exam Writing and Revision 50 hrs (6%)
- Dissertation writing 46 hrs (5%)
- Reading and Notetaking 44 hrs (5%)
- Listening to Lectures 26 hrs (3%)
- Academic Vocabulary and Style 10 hrs (1%)

Student make up at SOAS

- UG total 2011-12 2550, Non UK 333 (13% non UK)
- PG total 2011-12 on campus 2150 Non UK 953 (44% non UK)
- Research Total enrolled (various stages) 674. Non UK 450 (67% non UK) Non native speakers 357 (53%)

MAKE UP OF RESEARCH STUDENTS CURRENTLY ENROLLED SOAS



Insessional budget

- Open ended but cost is watched
- Separate from ADD budget
- Funded centrally
- Outside IFCELS own budget
- 1 hour provision= £77.42-£93.96 depending on pay scale
- 2012-13 896 hours provided
- Of these 70 hrs for Insessional research tutorial provision added in summer term as part of this project

Why no special Insessional provision for overseas research students thus far?

- Remit covered to some extent by ADD workshops and seminars and one to one provision (all research students).
- Overseas research students have fitted into existing courses to fulfil requirements
- One-to-one tutorials expensive
- Different stages of research, different needs
- No demand thus far?
- IFCELS staff expertise? Phds? Specialist area?

Why new provision?

- Reaction to ongoing stream of Phd candidates who came to see me in varying degrees of distress in terms 2 and 3. Clearly needed individual attention.
- Reaction to research students whose needs were not being met in eg Insessional Dissertation Writing class.
- Insessional requirement for some research students to progress from Mphil to Phd- how useful?

SOAS, IFCELS, EAP teaching staff

- EAP teachers-33
- Subject Lecturers-(most Phds)-18
- Both EAP and SL-3 (all Phds)
- Occasional both EAP and SL-3

- **IFCELS Courses**
- ICC –pre undergraduate
- Understanding the Modern World,
- World History, World Art, Business, Economics,
- International Law, Politics, Development studies, Media, Quantitative Methods
- FDPS- pre postgraduate
- Cultural Studies, Development studies, Business, International Law, Media, Studies in European Society, International Relations
- ELAS- Academic English
- Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Business

- EAP teachers have background knowledge of a number of the above disciplines to varying degrees-lecture cycle.

Choosing EAP teachers for Research students

- 2 had Phds themselves,
- 3 educated to Masters level
- All except one previously SL had wealth of experience teaching EAP
- One was subject lecturer (Phd history) recently completed CELTA who needed to fulfil teaching hours according to her contract and had thus trained in English teaching.
- Purely research oriented tutorials to the two teachers with Phds. These were 40 minutes each. 40 minute sessions.
- I gave the three other tutorial slots to the other EAP teachers including myself, where there were a mixture of postgraduates doing dissertations and research students. These sessions were 30 minutes each.

Launching project

- Support and backing of research department
- Support of Dr. Yenn Lee Research Skills Trainer (helped publicise to International students)
- Use of Google mail, documents-usual way
- Standard booking system-fixed time every week for 30/ 40 mins
- Allocated spots
- Waiting list

- CONCERNS
- Would EAP teachers be able to meet needs and help?
- How far overlapping/ treading on toes of ADD?
- Would students show?
- Justify expense?

Guidelines to tutors

- Don't proofread
- Spend only 30 minutes on each sample of work
- Use skimming and scanning rather than close correction
- Use comments etc if time
- If possible find patterns of systemic errors to correct
- See how it goes
- Any problems let me know

Student responses

short survey

Ranking, general comments, recommend to a colleague?

Ranking: all most positive

Yes to recommend to a colleague.

Themes in comments:

- Comfortable/ safe
- Familiarity with subject was helpful
- 30 minute tutorials straight to the point
- Someone from outside looking in
- Helped with confidence
- Liked sentence level correction
- Time slots should be flexible
- Liked process of submission of draft and suggestions following on

5 questions for teacher survey

1. What were the main differences between tutoring Masters students and research students in one-to-one Insessional tutorials?
2. What were the main challenges you faced when tutoring the research students for Insessional tutorials?
3. What were the main successes you enjoyed when tutoring the research students for Insessional tutorials?
4. In what ways do you think your existing EAP teaching skills or other skills are suited to helping research students?
5. How do you think future Insessional one-to-one course provision for research students could be improved?

Teachers' responses

5 questions

Summary of themes

Q 1 Difference between tutoring Masters and Phd students?

Research students

- Isolated
- In need of moral support
- Higher critical thinking ability
- Ideas fully formed at time of meeting
- Need to know structure rather than content
- Ideas need rearranging
- Independent and dedicated

PG students

- Less well formed ideas
- Choosing topic most important
- Not worried about form
- Worried about fulfilling conditions of course
- Not keen on after class tasks
- Different backgrounds so difficult to teach one size fits all dissertation in class

Q 2 Challenges?

- Confronting a student if not up to Phd standard
- Different faculties/ backgrounds
- Difference in needs according to stage of Phd
- Reading before tutorials
- Ever changing needs
- Organising timing of meetings

Q 3 Main Successes?

- In depth honest feedback
- Seeing improvement in writing
- Basic grammar work
- Getting to the bottom of systemic errors
- Restructuring
- Increase in confidence

EAP Skills suited?

- Complementary skill sets-grammar knowledge, writing styles, research methods, analytical thinking, specialist academic knowledge, EAP expertise
- Awareness of –academic discourse, cross-cultural difference in rhetorical styles and conventions, what is expected of students in extended writing tasks
- Familiarity with subject area helps (IFCELS lecture cycles)
- Outside perspective (wood and trees)
- One teacher who is Hungarian commented that she had had to learn British academic writing conventions herself which helped.

How to improve provision?

- More flexible arrangements for tutorials-easily done
- Liaise with supervisors-get information regarding the students' needs
- Get a synopsis of the research project before meeting
- Make sure the tutors get written work well in advance

CONCLUSIONS

- Idea of a '3rd place'-not supervisor, not friend or relative and not proofreader
- Need for systemic errors to be addressed
- Can be introduced earlier in the year
- Need for flexible scheduling
- Phd qualification is not necessary in order to help Phd candidates but may help
- Successful contribution of EAP teaching skills to Phd support

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT/ ACTION

- Linking up with other areas of support eg ADD? Overlap/ join forces?
- Need to liaise with supervisors to discuss individuals?
- Need to publicise amongst supervisors so they can refer students easily
- Different stages of support-start, progression to Phd, after field work
- Helping -how much? Balance appears fine.
- Class provision rather than tutorials?