

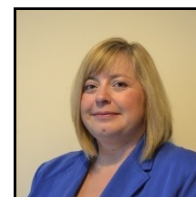
## Teaching Excellence Case Study

### **Academic Skills for MA: A student driven, subject-specific study support programme**

**Practitioner:** [Zoe Gazeley-Eke](#), School of Humanities, Faculty of Arts and Humanities [ab2931@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:ab2931@coventry.ac.uk)

**Initiative:** “Academic Skills for MA” support programme

**Student Level:** Postgraduate (Level 7)



#### LINKS TO EDUCATION STRATEGY PILLARS

- Research inspired teaching
- Innovation and digital fluency
- Intercultural and international engagement

#### AIMS

In response to feedback from international students that academic skills provision did not meet their specific needs, a student-driven programme was developed to support postgraduates on a range of courses within the School of Humanities. A secondary aim was to support students with the development of digital literacy skills, as these varied considerably across the cohort of students.

#### ACTIONS

Students on the MA in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (ELTAL) course, the majority of whom were Chinese, were given the opportunity to highlight areas of concern about academic skills by posting (anonymously) on a dedicated Moodle page. Key topics identified included critical thinking, referencing, note-taking, and avoiding plagiarism.

On the basis of this input, weekly one-hour academic skills sessions were offered to students, initially from the MA ELTAL course, but later expanding to include other Humanities courses. Subject-specific materials were used for the sessions (e.g. articles for analysis), which were easy to obtain from colleagues working in the relevant disciplines.

To support students’ digital literacy skills, numerous activities within the programme were developed using technologies such as Moodle (e.g. key-word matching, drag-and-drop), discussion forums, Instant Messenger (IM) and real time multiple-choice quizzes.

#### IMPACT

- There appeared to be a direct correlation between students’ attendance at the academic skills sessions and improvement in their overall academic performance.

- Positive feedback from student reps led the sessions to be extended to last two hours, and rolled out beyond the MA ELTAL to students from several other courses.

#### STUDENT FEEDBACK

- “After attending this class I learnt a lot to develop my academic skills. For example, my critical thinking, and understanding arguments and limitation from an article. Now when I read an article I can understand arguments more. Most important thing is my score is much higher than before.”
- “I realised the skills were different to my undergraduate...a huge challenge... the university give us an opportunity to have additional support sessions to develop critical skills.”



*Image: Rawpixel on Unsplash.com*

#### TOP TIPS

- Course teams can take a “students as partners” approach to research, and effectively address, the needs of learners.
- Careful planning is needed to ensure that a support programme is organised effectively (e.g. timetabling to align with students’ main course(s); access to PC rooms or electronic devices; development time and support for digital resources).
- Dedicated academic skills development is especially valuable to learners who are new to the UK Higher Education context, particularly for competencies such as critical thinking which may be unfamiliar to them.
- Support materials can be tailored to specific subject areas with support from colleagues teaching on relevant courses.