

# 'Occupying the niche': opening In-sessional to all...

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# Fill in the blank...

*In my institution In-sessional provision is \_\_\_\_\_  
the University*

- a) Embedded within*
- b) Separate from*
- c) Important to*
- d) Barely noticed by*
- e) Part of a coherent strategy within*
- f) Regarded as a necessary evil by*

# In-sessional in our context: “semi -integrated” (Wingate 2015:48)

## a) In department courses (Academic Writing Unit)

- Requested by departments
- Not embedded in modules

## b) General programme (In-sessional programme)

- Range of courses and workshops (700 hours per year)
- On an EGAP- ESAP continuum (discipline-specific, faculty-specific, generic)
- One to one tutorials
- Includes collaborations with a wide range of support departments (library, careers, counselling, widening participation)

# But...

- Not the deeply embedded, discipline-specific provision advocated in the literature (and in place in some other institutions)

# Why?

- Deficit view of language
- International students with 'writing' problems need additional 'language support'
- *"I think of my international students as having a disability"* (Durham lecturer, last week)

# Perception gap...

## **We think:**

We offer a university-embedded, scholarship-driven programme of academic language and literacy development

We can work with students across all levels and all disciplines, home and international to develop the interdependent language and academic literacy skills that enable effective academic participation...

## **The University thinks:**

The ELC offers English language support to students who can't cope

Or

What's In-sessional?

# Consequences...

- Until recently, ELC not included in wider discussions of academic literacy or 'study skills' issues...
- Establishment of a new UG 'Study Skills' unit in 2014 without ELC consultation under the remit of CEEC (Careers). The University did not see what we do as having any relationship to 'study skills'...
  - This unit was essentially one person with a tiny budget
  - The ELC delivers the academic writing provision under the banner of 'study skills' in addition to all In-sessional provision

# The ELC's position in Durham...

- Reflects how EAP functions in the *'ivory tower'* institutions described by Hadley (2015: 36) *EAP in Neoliberal Universities*:
  - We have considerable autonomy and independence: financial and organizational
  - We are treated as an academic unit with staff on academic contracts which require scholarship
  - We are in full control of our own curricula
  - We teach relatively high level students (entry levels of IELTS 6.5-7.0)
- The university doesn't fully understand what we offer but we have room to maneuver...at the moment



# Times are changing...

- 'Study Skills' are moving up the agenda thanks to TEF, widening participation targets, student demand and ever increasing internationalisation
- One key strategic goal for Durham is '*transitions*' which seems to acknowledge this...
- There are spaces and opportunities for EAP in Durham (in other institutions?)
- We need to invite ourselves to the table

# So...

- We decided to explicitly and visibly to occupy the 'study skills' niche by opening up our existing In-sessional provision to all students...

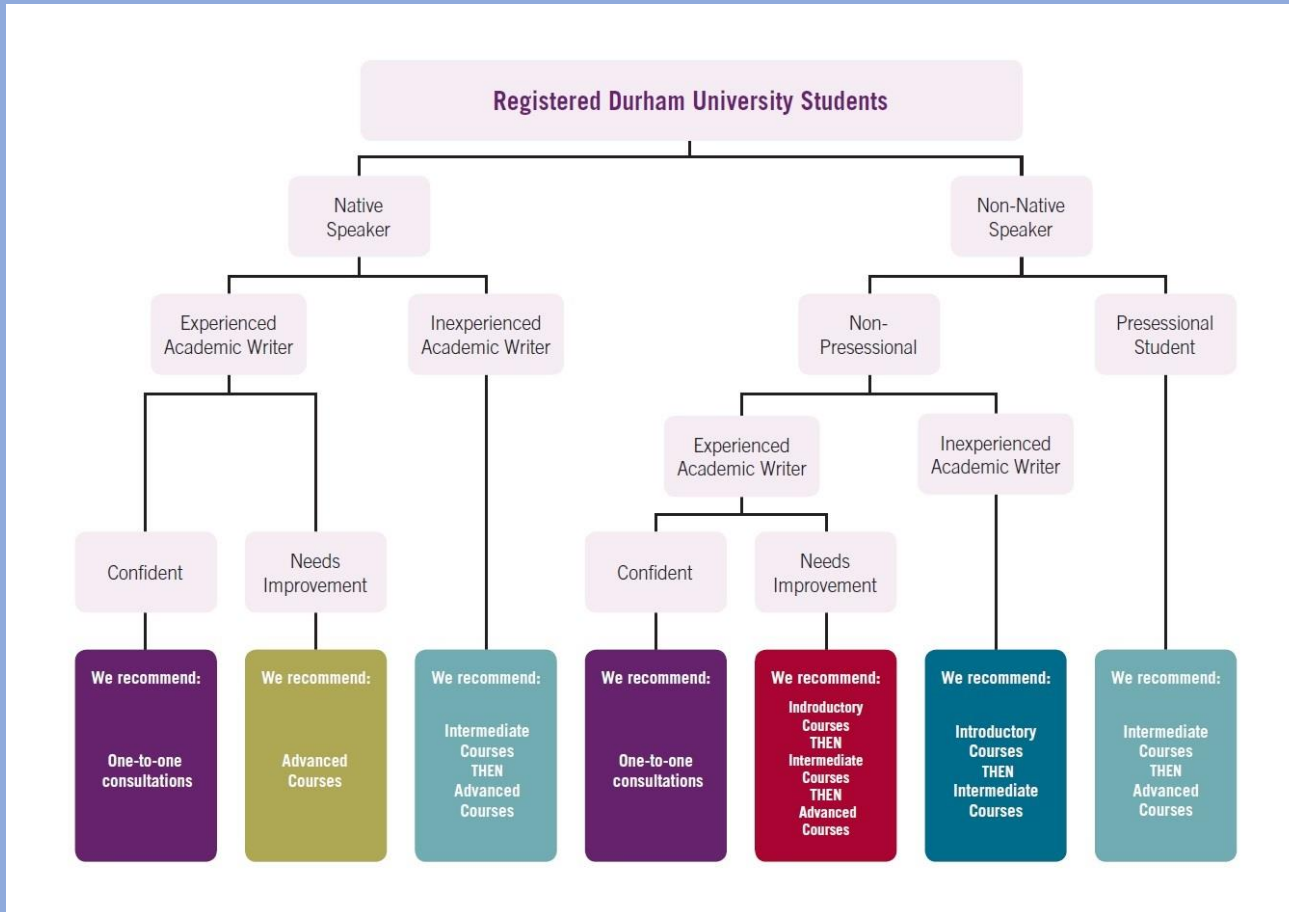
# Out of our comfort zone?

- We perceived the Durham UG home student cohort as academically high-achieving and academically self-confident. Are we sure we have something to offer?
- How would they react to teaching staff from “the English Language Centre” and associated deficit implications?

# Getting seen and heard...

- Changed the name of the programme (from In-sessional to Academic Language and Communication (ALC) Courses)
- Developed a range of promotional materials with “*no-one’s first language is academic English*” as our core message
- Reviewed range of provision, categorised courses and introduced new ‘advanced courses’
- Developed a ‘sorting tool’ to help students access most appropriate courses
- Did a tour of departments to give a presentations to students during induction
- Offered ‘what the ELC can do for you’ presentations to departments and support services
- Presence at all student fairs and around the University in key areas during induction and periodically during term time


# Our sorting tool...



Assess your academic language skills against Durham standards



As part of our Academic Language and Communication provision, the English Language Centre offers incoming students the chance to test their academic language skills. Find out more inside.



The English Language Centre's Free Academic Language and Communication (ALC) support is designed to help you achieve the academic language skills you need to succeed at your Durham University postgraduate studies.

We have a dedicated team of Academic Language Support tutors, so you can get the support you need.


[www.durham.ac.uk/englishlanguagecentre/englishlanguage](http://www.durham.ac.uk/englishlanguagecentre/englishlanguage)

**Durham University**  
English Language Centre

## Academic Language and Communication (ALC) Courses

*Because No-one's First Language Is Academic English*

### Durham Wall Planner 2015 - 2016



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English Language Centre

## Academic Language and Communication (ALC) Courses

*Because No-one's First Language Is Academic English*

### Queen's Campus Wall Planner 2015 - 2016



**Durham University**  
English Language Centre

## Durham Academic Language Test (DALT)

*Assess your academic language skills against Durham standards*




As part of our Academic Language and Communication provision, the English Language Centre offers students the chance to test their academic language skills. Find out more inside.

**Durham University**  
English Language Centre

## Durham International Student Employability Programme (DISEP)

*Helping International Students navigate the recruitment process*



The English Language Centre (ELC) and the Careers, Employability and International Centre (CEIC) are working together to provide a specialised course covering the graduate job application process from an English language perspective.

[www.durham.ac.uk/englishlanguagecentre/englishlanguage](http://www.durham.ac.uk/englishlanguagecentre/englishlanguage)

**Durham University**  
English Language Centre

## ELC Academic Writing Unit: One-to-One Consultation Service

*Do you need additional academic writing support?*



Free to all registered Durham University students, the English Language Centre Academic Writing Unit provides a One-to-One Consultation Service. This offers you the opportunity to discuss academic writing and academic language issues on an individual basis. Our academic support tutors will aim to give you help and advice which you can take away and implement in your academic work.

[www.durham.ac.uk/englishlanguagecentre/englishlanguage/consultation/](http://www.durham.ac.uk/englishlanguagecentre/englishlanguage/consultation/)

# A note about terms...

- 'Home' and 'international' are essentially financial designations
- 'Native' and 'non-native' are fraught with complication and potentially unhelpful
- Language was chosen to clarify that we see all types of students and to allow us to direct students to certain courses but all courses are 'mixed'...
- Students 'self diagnose' and we offer a 'glossary'...
- Under review!

# What happened?

- Home students did turn up...18% (of approximately 700 students per week in the first term)
- Big home student take up of one to one tutorials (approximately 22%)



# 'Home' Student feedback

(125 survey responses)

- Average course rating of 3.6/5 (4.3/5 for non-native speakers)
- Lots of positive comments in the "*I would have appreciated this earlier in my studies*" line...
- CLT-type strategies often critiqued "*Why the endless discussing with my partner? Tedious*"
- Comments about level "*...this was not advanced*"
- The more discipline-specific the better...
- 73% would come to another session...

# 'international' student feedback

- Overwhelmingly positive about mixed classes
- More positive than 'home students'
- *"It's a good opportunity to practice my English"*
- *"They make me feel shy" ...*

# Teacher Feedback

(feedback from 7 teachers)

- Loss of “safe space” for international students but “Reflects the reality of university study”
- Issues with varied processing speed and session pace but differentiation strategies developed
- Issues of level more related to academic level than native/non-native-ness. 3<sup>rd</sup> UG students have significantly more well-developed academic literacy skills than 1 year NNS PGT students
- Overall, we should continue so as not to “fuel the deficit model”

# University response...

- Higher profile: committees, emails, mentions in key strategic documents..
- More contact for AWU courses in department

# Where to from here?

- Continue to occupy the space and work to raise the profile of the ALC provision to students, departments and the University hierarchy
- Refining of our sorting tool to place students more effectively
- Reviewing materials and course offerings (avoid calling anything 'advanced')
- Think about distributing students according to academic level/level of academic acculturation rather than 'native-ness'
- Consider effective teaching strategies for mixed groups

# What does it all mean?

- The literature-defined ideal and the possibilities of our reality can be very different
- EAP and EAP professionals have much to offer the academy. How do we get seen and heard?
- Managing your context requires that you understand the drivers of your status within the University
- The University unlikely to reach out to us (?) we need to go to them
- Do we (and our students) lose as well as gain by 'occupying the niche'?

# Questions?

(Does this resonate or is this a peculiarly Durham tale?)