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# Integrating English language communication skills into disciplinary curricula: options and strategies

Final Report 2014

Integrating English language learning into higher education curricula

National Senior Teaching Fellowship

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The University of Melbourne

< [www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/arkoudis\\_fellowship](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/arkoudis_fellowship) >

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## List of acronyms used

AEI	Australian Education International
AHELO	Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
ALL	Academic Language and Learning
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council Limited
CLA	Collegiate Learning Assessment
DVC (A)	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ELP	English Language Proficiency
ESL	English as a Second Language
GPP	Good Practice Principles for English language proficiency for international students in Australian universities
HEIs	Higher education institutions
IEAA	International Education Association of Australia
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
LMS	Learning management system
LTAS	Learning and Teaching Academic Standards
OLT	Office for Learning and Teaching
PELA	Post-entry language assessment
PTE	Pearson Test of English
PVC (A)	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

## Executive summary

The Fellowship activities sought to offer strategies which would move the sector forward in addressing the issue of assuring students' communication skills upon graduation. The Fellowship activities have resulted in the following findings:

- There is still much debate about where responsibilities lie for developing and assessing students communication skills
- It is possible for some students to pass their course of study without being assessed on their communication skills
- Communication skills should be core business in teaching and learning.

The issue of English language learning in Australian universities will increasingly challenge universities as the sector expands and broadens participation within a demand-driven system. In international education this has been a longstanding challenge. But now both domestic and international students are entering university study with varied English language ability. Australian universities state that communication skills are important graduate attributes. Yet there are perceptions within the community that graduates lack the necessary communication skills for employability. There is a gap between what universities espouse and community perceptions of graduates' oral and written communication skills. This raises questions about the quality of Australian higher education.

The fellowship focused on effective and economical ways of addressing the gap. The resources developed from the Fellowship have been designed to assist universities to strengthen their reputations regarding the English language standards of their graduates by:

- Developing internal quality assurance processes to demonstrate that they assure their graduates' English language standards
- Utilising stronger evidence about graduate learning outcomes to recruit students from diverse backgrounds
- Offering specific ways of responding to concerns and criticisms.

English language and literacy is integral to learning in higher education. Traditionally, English language entry requirements have been used to assure English language and literacy standards in higher education. Universities have relied on assessing the readiness of students to undertake study where English is the medium of instruction, assuming that they will develop effective communication skills during the course of their study. While English language entry standards are important and are a necessary part of a standards framework, more attention needs to be given to guaranteeing exit standards. Currently it is possible for students with poor communication skills to graduate from Australian universities.

What can be done to address this? Assessment of oral and written communication skills should be core business in university teaching and learning, alongside assessment of disciplinary knowledge. How can this be achieved? The impetus for change will come from universities adopting the stance that students will not be able to graduate unless they can demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills.

The fellowship findings suggest that while a number of higher education institutions have developed institutional strategies for assuring the communication skills of their graduates, practices can be disjointed and not connected to disciplinary assessment. It is not possible to protect minimum standards for oral and written English language and literacy skills unless these are assessed, and the most appropriate place for this assessment to occur is within disciplinary teaching and learning. However there is still much debate about who is responsible for developing and assessing students' communication skills. What is required is an integrated approach that includes a variety of strategies that fit together to develop and assess students' communication skills. This does not mean that it is shared evenly but rather that it is distributed according to the professional responsibilities of key people involved in teaching and learning. The idea of distributed responsibilities is useful in considering how various approaches contribute to ensuring students have attained threshold levels of English language communication upon graduation. Distributed responsibilities include the following:

- **Teaching and Learning leaders** (can include Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Associate Deans Teaching and Learning) – What is the evidence base that graduates have attained threshold oral and written communication skills upon completion?
- **Course coordinators** – What communication skills are students expected to have on completion of the course? Where and how are these assessed during the course of study?
- **Teaching academics** – What are the learning outcomes for the unit in terms of communication skills? How will these be taught and assessed?
- **Academic Language and Literacy (ALL) Advisors** – How can course coordinators and teaching academics include ALL advisors in developing resources for teaching communication skills?

All of the above should increase students' awareness of their responsibilities towards developing their communication skills and of the importance of their communication skills for success in university study and employability.

The resources developed from the Fellowship that can guide practices within a distributed responsibilities approach are available at:

[www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/teaching/integ\\_eng/](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/teaching/integ_eng/)

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# Chapter 1: Evidence-base for informing practices

Every Australian university states that oral and written communication skills are important graduate attributes. There are also perceptions within the community that graduates lack the required levels of these skills, as is seen from claims made by employers and through allegations of soft-marking. There is a gap between what universities espouse and community perceptions of graduates' oral and written communication skills. This raises questions about the quality of Australian higher education.

The fellowship focused on effective and economical ways of addressing the gap. The resources developed from the Fellowship have been designed to assist universities to strengthen their reputations regarding the English language standards of their graduates by:

- Developing internal quality assurance processes to demonstrate that they assure their graduates' English language standards
- Utilising stronger evidence about graduate learning outcomes to recruit students from diverse backgrounds
- Offering specific ways of responding to concerns and criticisms.

## Definitions

There are a number of terms that are used within Australian higher education to define students' English language and literacy ability. 'English language proficiency (ELP)' is the term used by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) and the Australian Government when referring to all students' English language and academic literacy skills. Yet, most Australian universities use 'oral and written communication skills' in their graduate capabilities or attributes. Academic Language and Learning (ALL) Advisors who mainly work with students in developing their English language ability largely define their area as 'academic literacies'. For purposes of clarity, 'communication skills' is the term used for the fellowship activities, as it is the most pragmatic term to use when referring to English language and literacy in higher education. This is because the term 'communication skills' resonates most with teaching academics and is inclusive of all students. An additional advantage is that academics and leaders of teaching and learning more widely use 'communication skills' in relation to student learning outcomes.

'Course of Study' or 'course' refers to a program leading to a qualification offered by the university. For example, Bachelor of Arts. In some universities the terminology used is 'program'.

'Unit' refers to the parts of a course. For example, French Revolution, Politics 1. In some universities the terminology used is 'program' or 'subject'.

## Do we really have a problem that needs to be addressed?

The short answer is 'yes'. The question that higher education institutions (HEIs) should be able to answer is how they know their graduates have attained threshold levels of oral and written communication skills upon graduation.

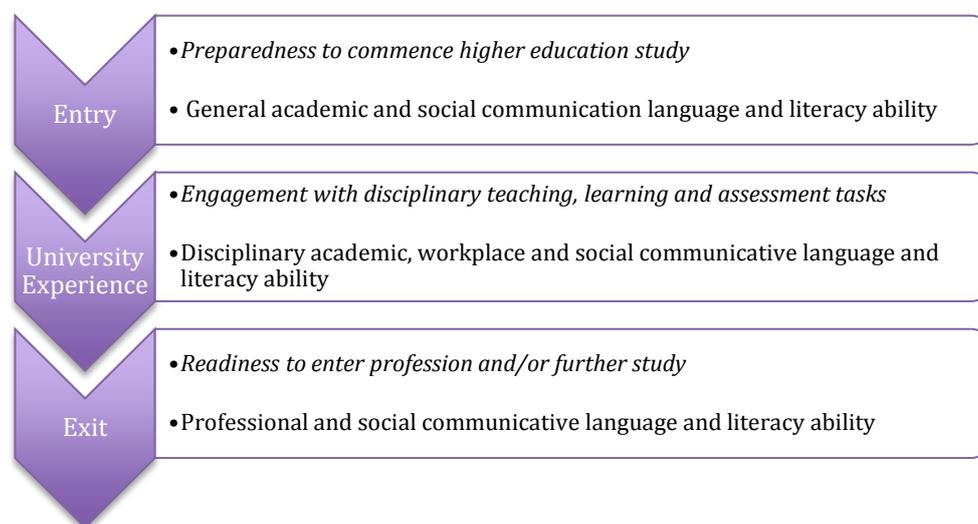
As stated earlier, there is a perception within the community that Australian graduates lack the required levels of communication skills for employment. So far, HEIs have not managed to dispel these perceptions. Within the demand driven Australian higher education system, universities have not been "swift to demonstrate how their pedagogies and assessment systems can protect minimum standards on graduation" (James, 2014, p.2). This is the case with regard to the communication skills of graduates. Very few HEIs have systematic approaches to teaching and assessing oral and written communication skills across the course of study. For example, in many institutions successful completion of a degree course has become proxy for assuring students' communication skills upon graduation. However, there is no strong evidence base from available research to support this assumption. This places HEIs at risk in terms of safeguarding minimum standards upon graduation. It is currently possible for some students to graduate from their course of study without having to demonstrate that they have attained threshold levels of oral and written communication skills.

As we know, within the *Higher Education Standards Framework* (2011) the focus of attention has shifted from entry to exit standards. HEIs have relied mainly on English language entry requirements to protect standards for English language and literacy, and the main attention has been on international students. The challenge for institutions is to develop an outcomes-based model for all students. This requires a repositioning of the role of communication skills in higher education teaching and learning that includes:

- From international to all students;
- From entry to exit; and
- From a deficit to a developmental model.

The diagram below presents the development of communication skills (which include English language and literacy) from entry to exit. The model emphasises the ongoing importance of students developing their communication skills during their higher education studies. It draws attention to the changing focus of communication skills development from entry to study and through to employment or further education.

Figure 1: Communication skills developmental continuum  
 Adapted from O'Loughlin and Arkoudis (2010), cited in Arkoudis, Baik and Richardson, (2012, p. 13)



## Challenges for developing communication skills

This section draws on research to outline what we know about the challenges to assuring that graduates have achieved threshold levels of communication skills upon completion of their course of study.

### Entry – what we know

- A wide variety of English language entry requirements are used by HEIs (Murray & Arkoudis, 2013; O'Loughlin & Murray, 2007).
- There is little evidence to indicate that the different types of English language entry requirements are comparable, resulting in commencing students with diverse levels of preparedness for higher education study (Murray & Arkoudis, 2013; O'Loughlin & Murray, 2007).
- English language entry requirements indicate preparedness to commence rather than a capacity to successfully complete higher education studies (Arkoudis et al., 2009).

### University experience – what we know

- Students do not develop their communication skills through osmosis (Dunworth, 2013; Rochecouste, Oliver, Mulligan, & Davies, 2010).
- Research indicates communication skills are important for success in higher education study and for employability (Arkoudis, et al., 2009; Gribble & Blackmore, 2012).
- When communication skills are integrated into disciplinary teaching, learning and assessment, there is evidence of increased retention rates and higher grades among students (Baik & Greig, 2009).
- Institution-wide post-entry language assessments (PELA) are often not completed by 'at risk' students, and often do not result in these students attending support programs (Dunworth, 2013; Harris, 2013; Ransom, 2009).

- Students do not regularly attend communication skills programs that are separate from their disciplinary studies (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012; Wingate, 2006).
- Academics are concerned about their students' communication skills, but do not believe they have the time and expertise to address these concerns within the disciplinary curriculum (Baik, 2010; O'Loughlin & Arkoudis, 2009).
- ALL advisors have expertise in developing students' academic language and literacy, but developing collaborative approaches within disciplinary curricula is often a hit and miss affair (Briguglio, 2014; Dunworth, 2013).

## Exit – what we know

- Increasingly graduates have to demonstrate that they have the required communication skills for employment (see for example, nursing, teachers, doctors, accountants, and engineers) (Arkoudis, et al., 2012; Humphreys & Gribble, 2013).
- Standardised English language tests were designed to assess readiness to commence higher education study, and may not be suitable for assessing work readiness (Humphreys & Gribble, 2013; O'Loughlin & Arkoudis, 2009).
- Students are often unaware that they need to develop their communication skills for employability or further study (Arkoudis, et al., 2009).

Communication skills have not been part of core business within teaching and learning. Instead, there has been an overreliance on English language entry requirements for maintaining standards in higher education. This is not enough to assure that students graduate with required levels of oral and written communication skills, and the evidence supports this (Craven, 2012; O'Loughlin & Arkoudis, 2009). Once students enter institutions, the development of communication skills is often viewed as an 'optional extra'. Responsibility has rested primarily with individual students and with ALL advisors. There is also much variation within HEIs about the extent to which communication skills are integrated and assessed within disciplinary curricula and if these skills are assessed. It is possible for some students to graduate from their course of study without having attained threshold levels of communication skills. This is because communication skills are not assessed in some courses.

## What can we do?

We need to achieve genuine penetration in the curriculum and there is general acceptance of this across the higher education sector. This involves rethinking options and strategies at entry, during study and upon exit from the course of study. The focus is not on adding extra work or resources but developing integrated and sustainable approaches to ensure the learning outcomes of graduates. In part, this requires pedagogic shifts in teaching and learning where communication skills are repositioned as:

- Relevant to all students
- Integrated within disciplinary learning, teaching and assessment
- Incorporated into institutional quality assurance processes.

The fellowship activities have sought to provide institutions with options and strategies for integrating English language and literacy learning within higher education curricula. One of the aims of the fellowship was to investigate how a significant leap forward can be made regarding the concern of graduates' communication skills. It seems apparent that one of the main impetuses for change would be to explicitly assess communication skills across the course of study, and for HEIs to take the stance that students are required to demonstrate that they have attained threshold levels in order to graduate.

The fellowship findings suggest that while a number of higher education institutions have developed institutional strategies for assuring the communication skills of their graduates, practices can be disjointed and not connected to disciplinary assessment. It is not possible to protect minimum standards for oral and written English language and literacy skills unless these are assessed, and the most appropriate place for this assessment to occur is within disciplinary teaching and learning. However there is still much debate about who is responsible for developing students' communication skills. What is required is an integrated approach that includes a variety of strategies that fit together to develop and assess students' communication skills. This does not mean that it is shared evenly but rather that it is distributed according to the professional responsibilities of key people involved in teaching and learning. The idea of distributed responsibilities is useful in considering how various approaches contribute to ensuring students have attained threshold levels of English language communication upon graduation. Distributed responsibilities include the following:

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All of the above should increase students' awareness of their responsibilities towards developing their communication skills and of the importance of their communication skills for success in university study and employability.

## Chapter 2: Distributed responsibilities for assuring graduates' communication skills

This section will present options and strategies that can be used to distribute responsibilities for assuring graduates' communication skills. The suggestions are part of the general professional responsibilities that each of the nominated groups has within their institutional practices. Therefore, they should not add to academic workloads or crowd the curriculum. Rather they should effectively integrate communications skills within the curriculum and make them more visible within disciplinary teaching, learning and assessment practices, as well as increase students' awareness and responsibility for developing them. Each of the levels of distributed responsibility is discussed further in the following sections.

### Teaching and Learning leaders

#### Responsible for quality of teaching and learning

Oral and written communication is integral to successful learning in higher education. It is also important for the employability of graduates. If HEIs want to assure that their graduates have attained the required level of communication skills upon graduation, then there is one key question that Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC)/ Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC)s (Academic) and Associate Deans Teaching and Learning need to address:

*What is the evidence base that graduates have attained the required levels of communication skills?*

The impetus for change will come from HEIs adopting the stance that students will not be able to graduate unless they can demonstrate that they have attained threshold levels of oral and written communication skills. Adopting this stance will strengthen institutional reputations and increase student confidence in their learning, as well as enhance recruitment of international students. In order to develop a shared responsibility to this approach, strong leadership will be required from Teaching and Learning Leaders, as they will have to ask their course coordinators two important questions:

- What communication skills are students expected to have when they graduate?
- Where and how are these assessed during the course?

Addressing the two questions above will allow HEIs to collect the evidence of teaching, learning and assessment practices that safeguard minimum standards upon graduation.

Examples of good practice for developing institutional approaches:

### **Strategy plan for communication skills development**

A number of HEIs have developed strategic plans for communication skills development. Some focus only on communication skills, while others integrate communication skills within teaching and learning initiatives such as eLearning, work integrated learning or their graduate capabilities. Linking communication skills within the major teaching and learning initiatives and curriculum design is a common strategy used to integrate communication skills within core business in teaching and learning.

### **English language entry requirements**

Many institutions monitor and evaluate their English language entry requirements. Ongoing monitoring over time of student progress from different English language entry pathways allows HEIs to have a stronger evidence base to review entrance requirements for particular courses of study.

### **Post-entry language assessment (PELA)**

PELAs are used in many HEIs in Australia. They have proliferated within the sector at a time when there has been much concern about identifying international students 'at risk' and offering them some support with their English language development. In general, PELAs have not achieved this aim, as student uptake is varied and much effort goes into following up students for additional support (Dunworth, 2013). Evidence suggests that best practice concerning identification of students is through early assessment within disciplinary contexts, usually by the fourth week of semester (Arkoudis, et al., 2012; Harris, 2013). Communications skills can be included in this assessment, and this approach would save resources in administering university-wide PELAs and following-up on students for support programs, which can be redirected towards supporting teaching and assessment of these skills within disciplinary teaching.

### **Students' responsibility for developing their communication skills**

Much more needs to be done to emphasise to students the importance of developing their communication skills for success in their studies and for their future employment opportunities. This should occur before they commence their course of study, through early information about their course of study and the importance of developing their oral and written communication skills.

### **Institution-wide policy on assessing communication skills**

In a few HEIs assessment of communication skills occurs across all units offered within the courses of study. This is done in a number of ways. At Edith Cowan University, all units use the assessment criteria sheets and an assessment guide. Information is available from:

ECU: [intranet.ecu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/593889/ELP\\_Strategy.pdf](http://intranet.ecu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/593889/ELP_Strategy.pdf)

At the University of Western Australia, a communication skills framework is used within assessment rubrics in all units taught. Information is available from:

[www.catl.uwa.edu.au/projects/communication](http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/projects/communication)

### **Student evaluations of their communication skills development**

One form of evaluation that can provide useful information to institutions is student evaluations on the extent to which their communication skills have developed during the course of their study. While acknowledging that student self-reporting has a number of limitations, there are also a number of advantages to this strategy. These include providing general information to the institution about how students perceive the value-add of their study to developing communication skills and broad information on the strategies implemented across different courses of study. Such evaluations also emphasise to students the importance of communication skills development during their higher education studies. For examples of this approach, refer to Douglass, Thomson & Zhao (2012).

## Case studies of institutional approaches to developing communication skills.

### Case study #1: Edith Cowan University (ECU)

Dr Anne Harris  
Chair ELP Committee

**Context:** Analysis of School of Business results at the end of 2008 revealed that students with English as an additional language were among those most 'at risk' or placed 'on probation'. The vast majority were international students and staff questioned entry pathways and academic standards. The Dean secured financial support from the Vice-Chancellor to address these concerns. That started a project spanning five years, culminating in a university-wide English Language policy being implemented in 2014.

#### **Developing university-wide ELP strategies**

With the VC and Dean involved, a Project Manager (in academic position at level C) was employed in the Faculty of Business and Law. Over the next two years:

- Assessed health of ELP in the faculty and analysed entry pathways
- Conducted different Post-entry Language Assessments (PELA) in the faculty in two units; one at 2<sup>nd</sup> year and the other at 5<sup>th</sup> year. Then trialled online and various paper-based PELAs with a small group of volunteers
- Faculty was granted funds to continue investigating ELP requirements and to support initiatives. Major initiative was establishment of small faculty-based Academic Skills Centre
- As part of a university-wide curriculum renewal project, two different processes were administered within the faculty: in-course completion and sessions conducted during Orientation Week
- As various trials were completed, university-wide working parties analysed best approaches and strategies. Two key decisions:
  - PELA: short written task contextualised to course
  - Process: administered in one core unit in all undergraduate courses and feedback within one week of completion
- Based on outcomes within this faculty, the University considered wider implementation within all undergraduate programs. External funding was gained to provide strong transition to university. ELP projects were included in this funding
- The University's Curriculum Teaching and Learning Committee (CTLTC) recommended that all undergraduate courses include a PELA and ensure provision of effective English language and literacy support
- ELP became a university-wide strategy linked to developing standards and strategies and how to best establish and monitor them
- A PELA Manager (HEW 8) and PELA Admin Officer (HEW 4; 0.6) were employed to manage the process

- Course coordinators were to implement the introduction of PELA, which was to be conducted within a 1<sup>st</sup> year core unit
- Evaluated initial procedures and made changes. For detailed discussion, refer to [journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/276](http://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/276)
- Within 12 months, there was considerable buy-in from stakeholders across all faculties.

In 2012, an ELP Committee under the auspices of CTLC was formed. Its membership includes all Associate Deans Learning and Teaching; Director Centre for Learning and Development; Head of Student Services; DVC Teaching, Learning and International (TLI); and a representative from ALL. The meeting was chaired by the ELP Leader who managed the initial trials.

### **Implementing policy**

The ELP Committee developed the university's ELP policy over a 10-month period. From the start, there was high-level support for the various ELP strategies and considerable buy-in from academic staff. The latter was due largely to the feedback mechanisms included in the second roll-out of the PELA.

Strong and ongoing consultation regarding new policy. This included the following:

- DVC (TLI) and/or ELP leader attended Faculty CTLC meetings
- ELP leader visited school meetings and course teams where invited
- Both listened to feedback and consulted with ELP committee
- Changes were made to the Policy as a result of consultations and feedback.

Approach was, and continues to be, 'ELP is everyone's business'. Decision to implement strategies in stages (as per below).

### **Range of practical measures**

The *ELP Measure*: The ECU ELP Measure provides the means for teaching staff to assess written ELP of all students. The *ELP Measure* is at the end of this case study.

- The *ELP Measure* serves as a means to provide a minimum standard of ELP that students are expected to achieve by graduation
- Aim is for students to receive feedback on their written ELP with no penalty on their assessment for the task (Note that unit coordinators may choose to include ELP in rubrics for assignments and designate some marks.)
- Students are advised as to support provided - linked to feedback
- Professional Development for staff on how to use the ELP Measure, which involved training course coordinators in the first instance, followed by teaching staff.

*Best practice in provision of Learning Support*: A number of strategies are used to support the development of students' ELP. These include:

- Integration of academic and language skills in key units that have been identified as ELP-focused subjects
- Adjunct workshops, which target English language and literacy skills related to the assessment tasks in large units

- General ELP workshops and faculty-based academic skills workshops – both face-to-face and online
- Assignment Labs that target specific assessment tasks within designated units and general A-Labs
- Individual consultations when necessary.

*Strategies to monitor and assure standards: Assessment of ELP in courses - to be phased in from 2014 – 2016:*

In 2014:

- Include PELA in UG and PG coursework courses
- Learning support provided in units and other ways (as above)
- *ELP Measure* evaluated.

In 2015:

- ELP assessed in 2nd year unit - discussion ongoing as to requirements for those who do not meet benchmark.

In 2016:

- Full implementation of policy in undergraduate and postgraduate courses – with students having to meet the minimum ELP levels in order to graduate.

### **Top tips to guide practice**

- Maximise ownership of institutional plan of action by involving T&L leaders in development and implementation of policy and strategies
- Respected ELP leader in full-time position to liaise with key stakeholders across the university, maximising institutional ownership
- Continue to review and monitor all aspects and address issues quickly. Keep communication channels open. Listen to concerns, address them and be prepared to make changes if necessary
- Work towards a whole-of-course approach to ensure that ELP is everyone's business
- Link ELP initiatives through comprehensive curriculum design.

## Case study #2: James Cook University (JCU):

Dr Andrea Lynch

### Context

As part of a suite of measures developed to respond to both the widening participation agenda and the emerging regulatory requirements from TEQSA, the Deputy Vice Chancellor ( Academic) and the Director of Teaching and Learning Development developed and implemented the [James Cook University English Language and Numeracy Policy](#). This policy, framed around the English Language Standards for Higher Education (DEEWR, 2010), built upon previous work of the JCU Literacy and Numeracy project and the JCU First Year Experience project. The policy identifies the requirements for, and expectations of, students' English language proficiency and numeracy on enrolment, during their course of study and on graduation. The policy was approved in November 2012 and is due for renewal in December 2014. Additionally, the institution currently has a whole-of-institution retention strategy that, among other goals, is working towards embedding language and numeracy development within curricula.

### Developing university-wide strategies

In late 2012, the Director of Teaching and Learning Development (TLD) identified the development of English language and numeracy as a key strategic priority for 2013. In 2013, this was supported by the following actions.

- Development and approval of the English language and numeracy policy
- Operationalising the Systematic Integrated Learning Adviser (SILA) model for the provision of learning support in key courses. Including:
  - Trial of post-entry language/numeracy assessments (PELAs/PENAs) followed by targeted support for students
  - Collaboration with academic staff to build capacity in teaching and assessments that develop discipline-specific English language and numeracy
- Building capacity for academic staff through information sessions and workshops via the Learning & Teaching Week showcase events

In late 2013, the DVC(A) and Director of TLD reframed the university's approach to retention, articulating a scalable, strategic and targeted whole-of-institution strategy. This approach, implemented in 2014, has focussed on embedding language and numeracy development within the curriculum and is strongly supported by policy. Actions have included:

- A collaborative approach involving academic developers, learning advisers, educational designers, career counsellors and teaching teams
- A focus on blended learning and assessment design that incorporates the development of English language and numeracy
- Course mapping that frames English language and numeracy development in terms of exit standards.

- Ongoing policy development in areas such as subject outline requirements; learning, teaching and assessment; blended learning; exit standards; and, English language and numeracy.
- The policy was developed to support the integration of English and numeracy development into teaching and learning areas rather than separate from curriculum teaching and learning.

### **Implementing policy**

The implementation of the English language and numeracy policy followed an extended period of consultation and drew upon research in the field, as well as JCU continuing and completed projects, to inform a contextualised, evidence informed, policy approach. The policy is strongly supported by clearly articulated procedures.

Fundamental to the implementation of the policy was ensuring both 'buy-in' and staff capacity. This was achieved through:

- Professional learning events facilitated by external experts
- Collaborative work with TLD staff, including a suite of resources to support student learning, design approaches to collaboration between academic and TLD staff, and sharing of resources and information within disciplinary departments. This occurred firstly via SILA and later through the retention strategy.
- An approach that was, and continues to be, consultative and responsive to feedback. Throughout this process, rigorous evaluations that included all key stakeholders have been undertaken and used as a basis for future decision-making.

### **Range of practical measures**

- A whole-of-institution approach that respects the expertise of both academic staff and TLD staff and positions ELP as central to all aspects of the curriculum
- A focus on backward mapping from exit standards to ensure that teaching and assessment processes led to students achieving exit standards
- A model of learning support that includes:
  - Collaboration with academic staff to integrate language and numeracy development into all aspects of the curriculum in strategically identified courses (intended outcomes, learning experiences and assessment)
  - Adjunct targeted workshops on request (a requirement for PELAs or PENAs)
  - English language and maths workshops for all students
  - Individual student consultations
  - Individual or group staff consultations
  - Clearly articulated procedures within the English language and numeracy policy that assist staff to support students' development from entry to exit.

### **Top tips to guide practice**

- Strategic and sustained leadership from the DVC(A) and Director of TLD has been crucial to success
- An approach that focuses on overall curriculum design and draws together expertise including academic staff and TLD staff is challenging to execute but highly effective. This approach also serves to position language development as a curriculum consideration not a 'student problem'
- The discussion with regards to communication skills needs to change from a deficit view of the learner to one of developing students' communication skills during their study, and departmental champions are important in reframing the discussion
- Rigorous evaluation, including feedback from all stakeholders, provides a sound basis for refining approaches to designing curriculum that assures student learning outcomes
- A whole of course approach that backward maps from exit standards is central to ensuring that discipline-specific English language is introduced, developed and assured throughout the course and that this is evident in assessment tasks and their accompanying rubrics.

## Case Study #3: University of South Australia (UniSA)

Professor Margaret Hicks and Dr Rowena Harper (Learning and Teaching Unit (LTU))

### Developing university-wide strategies

After an extensive university-wide consultative process, the University of South Australia's Academic Board agreed to a framework for supporting English Language Proficiency. The framework was based on an agreed and clear conceptualisation of ELP. This involved making a distinction between, and defining *general* proficiency, *academic* proficiency and *professional* proficiency. A set of seven principles were developed:

- Any comprehensive approach to ELP needs to account for general, academic and professional proficiencies
- The university will use PELA to identify students in need of general proficiency development
- Those students identified via PELA as 'at risk' will have access to all forms of language and learning provision available in the LTU, including exclusive access to individual consultations and personalised, language-focused assignment feedback
- Wherever possible, all language and learning resources will be discipline-specific in order to ensure relevance and maximise student engagement and thus learning
- Provision needs to be sustainable and systematic while allowing for a degree of local flexibility in responding to specific local circumstances
- Academic literacy and professional communication skills should be embedded in the curriculum and taught by academic faculty (with support from Division-aligned language and learning staff) to all students
- Students who wish to receive IELTS tuition will be referred to external providers and will fund any such tuition themselves.

### Implementing Policy

Academic Board approved that the DVC(A) and Director Learning and Teaching would implement the university's framework for ELP. The Director took leadership responsibility for the implementation liaising with the Deans Teaching and Learning for each of UniSA's Academic Divisions and the Head of Language and Literacy in the Learning and Teaching Unit (once appointed).

Stage one of the implementation process was a managing change process for the learning adviser team within the Learning and Teaching Unit. Prior to the new framework, the team had a team leader (Level C) and 8 x learning advisers (Level B). The new model is staffed by:

- One Head of Language and Literacy (Level C)
- Five Language and Learning Coordinators (Level B, 4 coordinators aligned to each one of our 4 Divisions and the 5th coordinator aligned to equity and open access support)
- Seven Language and Learning advisers (Level A, distributed across each of the 5 areas above).

Stage two involved consulting with Deans and Heads of School to identify one program in each Division in which to commence the mapping and embedding of academic literacies and professional communication skills across the curriculum.

As the model required a PELA (a 'screening test' designed by the University of Melbourne), this needed to be validated, trialled and available online.

### **Range of practical measures**

The new learning adviser team works in four main ways:

- On- and in-curriculum with teaching staff, to embed the teaching and assessment of academic and professional literacies
- Student workshop programs and online resources for developing language and literacies, available to all students and tailored to Divisional, discipline or course needs
- Uni-wide learning resources which support successful orientation and transition and develop university skills (e.g. referencing and academic integrity)
- One-to-one teaching (up to 8 sessions per year available to students identified 'at-risk', either by PELA, staff referrals, or external enrolment).

Each of the team's 5 'sub-teams' is located on the campus where the students and staff from their Division/Area are based.

Implementing the test, including the way it was used to manage student access to individual appointments, presented challenges that had to be worked through and involved making new expectations clear to staff and students.

The embedding of academic literacy and professional communication skills into the curriculum (principle 6) is an ongoing challenge. For example, some of the programs identified at Stage two that were to pilot curriculum embedding did not make any progress. Staffing changes, restructures and shifting priorities meant that in two programs, mapping and embedding did not occur. However, other staff from areas that were not initially targeted approached the team for assistance with developing their students' language and literacies in curriculum. As a result, curriculum embedding is progressing in every Division (in over 100 courses), but often not in the areas originally earmarked by the Deans and Heads of School, and often at course rather than whole-of-program level.

Moreover, embedding language development into a program has proven to be an ongoing process rather than a one-off exercise. Regular staffing changes across the institution, continued curriculum renewal, and shifting industry, sector and student needs mean that any 'embedding' initiative needs to be regularly revisited to ensure it remains relevant and understood by all those working with the course. Course coordinators are responsible for overseeing this and they liaise closely with the Division-aligned language and learning coordinators.

**Top tips to guide practice**

- The need to have a clear and university-wide conceptualisation of ELP
- A systematic way is needed to identify those students at greatest risk linguistically
- A framework for supporting ELP that is agreed across the University and is realistic and sustainable in terms of resources
- Senior/Executive management support for the framework
- Ongoing and systematic consultation, evaluation, and refinement of the framework.

## Course coordinators

### Responsible for the learning outcomes of course of study

Broadly, the responsibilities of course coordinators involve ensuring the learning outcomes of graduates from their course of study. Part of this should include communication skills. The Higher Education Standards Framework (Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2011) indicates that institutions are expected to:

- Specify learning outcomes for each course of study, which include discipline related and generic outcomes
- Use methods of assessment that are consistent with the learning outcomes being assessed and are capable of confirming that all specified learning outcomes are achieved and grades awarded reflect the level of student attainment.

The key responsibilities for course coordinators center around the following two questions:

- What communication skills are students expected to have when they graduate?
- Where and how are these assessed during the course?

Decision points at the course level will assist in developing integrated approaches that incorporate English language communication skills within the teaching and learning responsibilities of teaching staff, and include strategies and options that integrate ALL resources to achieve this. The aim is to integrate communication skills within processes that contribute to institutional evidence about the quality of teaching and learning, and include the development and assessment of oral and written communication within curriculum design at the course level.

### **What communication skills are students expected to have upon graduation?**

Many HEIs state that graduates have developed 'effective communication skills'. What communication skills are involved for graduates from your course?

Example:

*Bachelor graduates in Accounting will be able to justify and communicate their ideas in straightforward collaborative contexts involving both accountants and non-accountants. (see [achievementmatters.com.au/approach/standards/](http://achievementmatters.com.au/approach/standards/))*

The Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (LTAS) project has defined communication skills within disciplines and can be used as a reference point. Resources are available from [www.olt.gov.au/resource-library?text=LTAS](http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-library?text=LTAS).

## Where and how are communication skills taught and assessed during the course?

Communication skills should be a part of course mapping activities of learning outcomes. It is not necessary for every unit to develop and assess communication skills. Consider both oral and written communication skills. The answers to the following questions should guide practice.

- Which units across the degree program teach and assess oral and/or written communication skills?
- Do the suite of assessment tasks that a student experiences over the course of their study align with the course learning outcomes for communication skills?
- Taken together, do the assessment tasks across the course increase in complexity and include oral as well as written communication skills?
- Do course materials highlight the importance of students developing their communication skills for success in their studies and employability?
- Will students fail units in the course if their communication skills are assessed as below threshold levels?

What professional development opportunities exist to engage academics on curriculum design and assessment, which can also include communication skills?

## Examples of good practice

### Course A:

In this course there is a whole course plan for assuring graduates' communication skills. A Foundational unit in the first year of the course introduces students to the field of study and covers material relevant to developing students' disciplinary knowledge, while also teaching and assessing academic skills, including communication. Early assessment tasks are used within the first four weeks of the semester to give formative feedback to students about their progress and to identify students who may need to undertake English for Academic Purposes (EAP) credit subjects, which are designed to develop students' communication skills. The most common unit combinations across the course are identified for focusing on teaching and assessing communication skills. ALL advisors are allocated to the units to develop resources for the students on developing their communication skills.

Capstone subjects are offered towards the end of the course to assess the disciplinary knowledge and skill development of students before they graduate.

### Course B:

This course is professionally accredited, and needs to demonstrate that graduates have attained the required oral and written communication skills to enter the profession. The course material emphasises that students will need to demonstrate that they have developed the required communication skills as a hurdle requirement to graduation. The way they will show this is through developing an ePortfolio of six pieces of work completed during their course that demonstrate their oral and written communication

skills. Students also provide a self-reflection, discussing how their communication skills have developed over the duration of their degrees (see example at the end of this section). Units that teach and assess communication skills are identified across the different year levels of the course. Academics offer students feedback on their oral and written communication skills and students can use the assignments and academics' comments for their ePortfolio. In addition, ALL staff offer a number of workshops that can assist students in completing their assessment tasks.

**Course C:**

Graduates from this course will need to demonstrate that they have the required communication skills to enter the profession. The course coordinator has adopted a number of approaches across the course. This involves disseminating course and assessment information guidelines that include assessment and feedback to students. Communication skills are included within the guidelines. Assessment of communication skills is holistic, rather than itemised in an assessment rubric. A common assessment template is used by all academics to give feedback to students (See Appendix 2). In addition grade descriptors have been developed to guide assessment by academics, including communication skills. Students are made aware of the importance of developing their communication skills during the course of their study. ALL staff work with the course coordinator to identify units across the course in which they can develop resources and material to support students in developing the skills required for the assessment tasks. Students undertake work placements, where their communication skills are assessed. Professional development sessions are organised so that teaching staff can share ideas for assessment design, examine issues related to assessment in general and communication skills in particular, and develop a shared understanding of threshold standards of communication skills attainment for the course.

## **Example of ePortfolio for demonstrating threshold levels of communication skills**

### **The University of Melbourne**

### **School of Engineering**

#### **What is STEP?**

The Skills Towards Employment Program (STEP) is a set of workshops and online lessons designed to support students in the completion of the Engineering Practice Hurdle (see [www.eng.unimelb.edu.au/elu/activities/eph/](http://www.eng.unimelb.edu.au/elu/activities/eph/)). These workshops resources are optional and can be registered for through the Skills Towards Employment Program community.

#### **What must be submitted?**

You must submit an ePortfolio. It needs to demonstrate your written and verbal communication skills. Both of these skills require a preparation piece, reflection/improvement plan and a final major piece, this means you need 6 items in the ePortfolio before you graduate:

#### Written Communications

- Preparation piece (a draft, plan or document similar in nature to your final piece)<sup>1</sup>
- A reflection (improvement plan) on the feedback you received for the preparation piece and how you will apply this understanding to improving the final piece\*
- A major written piece.\*

#### Verbal Communications<sup>2</sup>

- A recording of your practice (it needs to show you and your slides)
- A reflection (improvement plan) based on your viewing of the practice recording and the feedback received. The feedback received from at least 3 audience members needs to be included\*
- A recording of your final presentation. Include your slides if the screen is not clear.\*

<sup>1</sup> Feedback can be obtained from subject staff if the preparation piece is assessed within the subject or by the academic skills unit

<sup>2</sup> A poster can be used for the Verbal Communications requirements. Refer to the "Full Requirements" document for details.

\* These items are assessed for quality.

The ePortfolio must be submitted through the Careers Online website and can be done at the end of semester 1 or 2.

## Teaching academics

### Responsible for the unit learning outcomes

This short guide contains practical suggestions to assist teaching academics to consider ways of integrating communication skills. The strategies focus on aligning intended learning outcomes with teaching and learning activities, and assessment. Some of the suggestions may seem self-evident as they represent widely accepted principles of effective teaching in higher education. The strategies presented do not require specialist knowledge about communication skills, and are designed for easy implementation.

Many academics believe that they lack the expertise to assist students to develop their English language communication skills. Some do not consider it their responsibility to teach and assess communication skills, as students should already have the required levels to successfully participate in their studies. There are a number of perceptions that can block the integration of communication skills within disciplinary curricula. These include the following:

#### **Students should develop their communication skills before they enter their course of study, and it should not be part of higher education curricula**

The teaching and assessment of communication skills is an essential component of teaching and learning, at all levels in higher education, as stated in the Australian Qualifications Framework and the Higher Education Standards Framework. Students enter higher education studies through different English language entry pathways. While these pathways indicate that students have the required communication skills to commence their studies, they do not imply that students have the required communication skills to successfully complete their course. Therefore, during their higher education course, they will need to develop their academic language skills, in much the same way as we expect them to develop their disciplinary knowledge. It is an ongoing developmental process that is linked to disciplinary learning. For example, students use oral or written communication to express their understanding of disciplinary knowledge, and academics rely on students' communication skills to assess understanding and application of disciplinary knowledge. Teaching and assessing communication skills is a necessary component of disciplinary teaching and learning.

#### **Academics do not have the time or the necessary skills to assess effective communication**

Academics regularly assess effective communication in papers that they peer review for journals and conferences. They also implicitly assess students on how effectively they communicate their ideas in assessment. It does not require wholesale changes to the way in which academics go about assessing work for them to assess effective communication explicitly. Instead, it simply requires a little reflection on how they judge the clarity of a given piece of work, and for them to make this explicit in their teaching practices. What academics might lack is the expertise in analysing the particular English language problems students may have and how these can be addressed – but that is not their responsibility. It lies with the ALL advisor and academics should refer students to the academic services available. Ultimately, academics are able to assess whether a student is communicating their ideas effectively.

### **The development of communication skills is an international student issue**

This is an issue for all students. To begin, domestic students now come from more diverse backgrounds than ever before. They include students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and domestic English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. Also, despite the specific needs of certain student groups, oral and written communication skills are a graduate attribute that all students are now expected to attain.

### **Some disciplines do not require communication skills development incorporated within the curriculum, as it is not an important part of teaching and learning in such disciplines**

Students need to be able to communicate effectively regardless of the discipline in which they are engaged. Effective communication skills are an important graduate capability for employability. To perform their roles competently, all graduates have to have the capacity to communicate their disciplinary knowledge to both professional and non-professional audiences in a clear and direct way. Moreover, they need everyday communication skills if they are to interact with people effectively on a day-to-day basis. We should be highlighting to students the importance of developing their communication skills for success in their studies and their employability.

### **Easy to implement strategies for integrating communication skills into unit curricula**

The guide below offers strategies that are easy to implement and increase the focus on communication skills development within units. These are easy to implement ideas that can result in assisting students to develop their communication skills. For academics this means making students aware of the importance of communication skills for success with their studies, making assessment of communication skills more visible in the unit assessment and working with ALL advisors and centres so that they can develop resources to assist students with the assessment tasks.

### **Curriculum planning**

In designing a unit of study, consideration must be given to aligning unit objectives with teaching and learning, and assessment tasks. The curriculum should be designed to assist students in developing their communication skills alongside disciplinary knowledge. Curriculum planning is part of the professional responsibilities of teaching academics, and the strategies offered in this guide aim to make communication skills more explicit within the unit.

### ***Unit learning outcomes***

*What do you want students to be able to do?*

Learning outcomes should include knowledge and skills. Consider the particular communication skills that students will need to develop in order to demonstrate knowledge of the unit. For example:

- Synthesise and critique two scientific research papers on (insert particular disciplinary area)
- Succinctly present arguments in support of global warming to a non-scientific audience.

### ***Teaching and learning tasks***

*What activities will assist students to develop the unit's communication skill learning outcomes?*

This is where the ALL advisors can assist teaching academics. It is not necessarily expected that teaching academics have the time or expertise to teach the required communication skills to their students, but it is important that academics guide students to where they can develop their communication skills. ALL staff can assist with this. On top of their existing activities involving direct engagement with students, ALL advisors can support teaching academics with resources and suggestions that students can access to develop their communication skills. The fact that communication skills are assessed within the unit will increase students' responsibility to access the information that is relevant to their assessment.

Below are some suggestions that academics can consider:

1. Emphasise expectations to students in relation to the communication skills required to complete assessment tasks
  - Include communication skills learning outcomes in information about the unit
  - Link learning outcomes to overall graduate outcomes of the course of study, and communication skills in particular
  - Include communication skills in the assessment criteria.
2. Ask ALL advisors to develop resources that will assist students to develop communication skills relevant to the assessment task
  - Invite the ALL advisor to lectures to discuss the resources that are available to assist students with developing their oral and written communication skills
  - Seek advice from ALL advisors about online materials that could assist students in developing their communication skills for the assessment tasks
  - Emphasise resources available on the learning management system (LMS) to support students' communication skills development.
3. Model examples of good writing or oral presentations for students to see what quality work looks like (disciplinary knowledge will also be included in the discussion)
  - Place on the LMS models for good work and annotate the strengths and weaknesses and ways it could be improved, including communication skills (this can be done by an ALL advisor)
  - Ask students to prepare short pieces of writing for tutorials that reflect the assessment task, and incorporate advice about their academic writing that they have accessed from the LMS
  - Discuss effective techniques for oral presentations.

## Assessment tasks

In this section, tasks involving assessment for learning (formative) and assessment as learning (summative) will be outlined. As teaching academics, we are familiar with using formative assessment as an effective way of giving students feedback on their work and identifying ways that they can improve. This form of feedback can assist with learning and is a valued teaching approach.

Below are options and strategies that academics can use in their teaching.

1. Include an early assessment task (returned to students by week 4) as formative assessment
  - Highlight communication skills in order to provide students with feedback
  - Identify students in need of extra support
  - Offer feedback to the class as a whole on the assignment, and include comments on communication skills
  - Highlight the resources available on the LMS and support available from ALL advisors.
2. Incorporate peer review of students work into assessment tasks
  - Use peer review to develop opportunities for students to discuss their work and identify how it can be improved
  - Focus more on what students learn about their own work from reviewing other students' work
  - One example of organising peer review, linked to the LMS is PRAZE ([lms.unimelb.edu.au/teaching/assessment/praze/](https://lms.unimelb.edu.au/teaching/assessment/praze/)).
3. Use students self-assessment to encourage self-regulated development of communication skills
  - Ask students to refer to the assessment criteria and reflect on their learning and justify the grade they should receive. Their reflection should include their appraisal of their communication skills development. Research evidence suggests that requiring students to evaluate their work against criteria (checklist) prior to submission can lead to improved outcomes and significant transfer in performance to different forms of assessment.

## Further strategies for responding to students writing

Table 1: Typology of academic practices in responding to students' writing (Arkoudis et al, 2012, p.85)

Practices	Examples		
Giving overall general feedback on student work	Giving general feedback pointing out that students need to work on their language and/or writing skills	Minimal Intervention (indirect support)	
Advising students to seek help with writing and/or language development	Giving feedback to advise students to seek help from the language and academic support units  Suggesting that students seek proofreading assistance from native-speaking peers for future assessment tasks	↓	
Organising a workshop on writing for students	Arranging a workshop with a language specialist to review aspects of academic writing for the next assignment		
Making some corrections and pointing out specific problems or areas that need improvement	Correcting some of the errors (usually on the first few pages only), and then commenting on areas that need improvement  Making a list of types of errors or problems with writing and language use and asking students to resubmit corrected assignment		
Correcting most or all errors as feedback and suggesting alternative expression	Making corrections to most or all linguistic errors throughout the students' text and highlighting awkward phrases and/or sentences and suggesting alternative expressions		
Reading drafts of work and providing detailed feedback	Providing extensive writing and/or language support through careful proofreading and editing of several drafts of work before submission of final assignment		
Providing intensive individual support to students in all stages of the writing process	Providing individual consultations with students to assist them at various stages of assignment writing, from reading and formulating ideas to structuring information, to proofreading and editing. Examples of this only occurred in relatively small classes with fewer than 30 students.		High intervention (direct support)

## Example of unit feedback sheet

University of New South Wales - School of Education

### FEEDBACK SHEET

The same format is used across the School of Education. The main headings in bold remain the same and academics add the specific criteria for their unit. In the example below the criteria relevant to communication skills have been included as an example.

UNIT:

Student Name:

Student No:

#### Assessment Task:

SPECIFIC CRITERIA	(-)		(+)		
<b>Understanding of the question or issue and the key concepts involved</b> XXX					
<b>Depth of analysis and/or critique in response to the task</b> XXX					
<b>Familiarity with and relevance of professional and/or research literature used to support response</b> XXX					
<b>Structure and organisation of response</b> Appropriateness of overall structure of response  Clarity and coherence of organisation, including use of section headings and summaries to enhance readability.					
<b>Presentation of response according to appropriate academic and linguistic conventions</b> Clarity, consistency and appropriateness of conventions for quoting, paraphrasing, attributing sources of information, and listing references  Clarity and consistency in presenting tables and diagrams  Clarity and appropriateness of sentence structure, vocabulary use, spelling, punctuation and word length.					
GENERAL COMMENTS/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT TIME					

Lecturer:

Date:

Recommended Grade:

Weighting:

%

**NB:** The ticks in the various boxes are designed to provide feedback to students; they are not given equal weight in determining the recommended grade. Depending on the nature of the assessment task, lecturers may also contextualise and/or amend these specific criteria. The recommended grade is tentative only, subject to standardisation processes and approval by the School of Education Learning and Teaching Committee.

## Chapter 3: Evaluation and dissemination

### Dissemination

A number of activities were undertaken during the Fellowship that have informed the resources developed. These included:

- Review of national and international literature.
- Interviews with 33 DVCs (A) or equivalent to disseminate information about the fellowship, discuss their institutional approaches and seek their views on resources that would assist their institutions
- Interviews with 25 staff involved in developing students' communication skills, who had been identified by their institution
- Discussion paper based on the interviews for the five interstate think-tanks
- Interviews with international academics to compare practices in other English speaking countries.

Along the way, I have been invited to present at a number of Australian universities, and have presented at two international conferences on the Fellowship findings.

These activities were both information gathering and dissemination activities. From the start of the Fellowship I wanted to engage the sector with the activities and discuss with a range of people about best approaches to integrating communication skills within disciplinary curricula. There has been much interest in this topic as TEQSA had proposed a thematic review and the *Higher Education Standards Framework (2011)* emphasised the importance of developing and assessing English language proficiency. This meant that I was able to engage university leaders, course coordinators, disciplinary academics and ALL advisors during the fellowship program.

One of the aims of the Fellowship was to conduct a nationwide conversation with the sector about practical options and strategies. The National Think Tanks, conducted in Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, were an effective way of disseminating the findings. Each of the think tanks offered different perspectives and contributed to the further developing my own and other's awareness of the challenges involved and how these may be best addressed.

I have presented at two international conferences, was a member of the Steering Committee for the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) Symposium on English language competence of international students in higher education and wrote one of the briefing papers, and have been invited to a number of universities to present the findings from the Fellowship.

I have also written academic papers based on the fellowship activities and these will be available on the website once they have been published. In the long term, impact is ensured by my continued work with a number of institutions and publication in refereed journals; and by building on the Fellowship through continuing research in this area. I have recently completed the Good Practice Report on English Language Proficiency for OLT (available at <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-good-practice-report-english->

[language-proficiency-2014](#) ). I am also currently leading a project for Australian Education International on ELP and employability of international students, where I have built on the findings of the Fellowship to develop a framework of institutional practices.

The main findings from the Fellowship, including resources and presentations are available on the website -<[www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/arkoudis\\_fellowship](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/arkoudis_fellowship) >. The website will be kept current by regularly updating articles and presentations post fellowship.

## Evaluation

An evaluation framework was developed with an external evaluator early in the Fellowship. It was designed to ensure that activities undertaken achieved the central goals of the fellowship – to disseminate practical and effective resources that engage universities to develop approaches to integrating communication skills learning outcomes within disciplinary curricula. Evaluation commenced in the first stage of the fellowship with review of the planned processes and activities against intended outcomes and outputs. In each stage evaluation was focussed on processes as well as Fellowship outputs. Evaluation will be formative as well as summative. The outcomes of the evaluation activities undertaken at each stage of the fellowship were used to confirm or modify the activities and processes of the Fellowship.

The Fellowship was successful in achieving its aims. The activities engaged key stakeholders and allowed for some open discussion about the best way to progress the integration of communication skills learning outcomes within disciplinary curricula. The Fellowship offered me insights into how this issue can be best addressed and the opportunity to support HEIs in developing practices. The Fellowship has had an impact nationally through the activities. There is a wide circle of contacts across different institutions who are actively engaged in integrating communication skill learning outcomes within disciplinary curricula. This commitment will be ongoing, as the Fellowship will not cease on the writing of this report. Through the contacts that have been established, I plan to continue the work of the Fellowship, with the view of publishing a book and continuing to contribute presentations and information via the Fellowship website.

## Critical success factors for the Fellowship

There were a number of factors that contributed to the success of the Fellowship.

From the commencement of the Fellowship, my colleagues at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education have been a tremendous support. They have listened to my ideas, and offered critical feedback when requested, and support and encouragement when required. They also gave me the space that I needed to work on the Fellowship activities in concentrated bursts.

Critical to the success of the Fellowship was the support of my research assistants. Ryan and Lachlan, at various stages of the Fellowship, provided the much needed academic and practical support. I could not have achieved what I did without them.

I sought advice strategically from different stakeholders within the sector. This was useful, as the success of the Fellowship depended on understanding how different groups of people would respond to the findings of the Fellowship. Their comments have been very valuable in refining the resources, resulting in developing strategies and options that can assist HEIs in assuring their graduates' communication skills.

Part of the success of the Fellowship is that it the time was right for the sector to engage with strategies which could address the concern about graduates' communication skills. It was relatively easy to discuss these issues with DVC/PVC (A)s, course coordinators, academics and ALL advisors. There was a general willingness to work together to find solutions. The work will continue into the future as solutions take time to implement and fine-tune.

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