

An Evaluation of the Academic Writing Centre in Athlone Institute of Technology

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Introduction

The Academic Writing Centre (AWC) was established in Athlone Institute of Technology in November 2015. The aim of the study which formed the basis of this report was to evaluate this new initiative which sought to promote excellence in academic writing, to determine the benefits offered and challenges faced by the service to date, and to seek information would help develop and improve the service.

Specifically this evaluation sought to identify:

1. the types of support provided to students;
2. student views on how their writing processes and practices have been changed;
3. the views of lecturing staff on whether and how the AWC has enhanced the writing of users;
4. any aspects of the service which needed to be revised or improved.

Background

From 2013 – 2014 Athlone Institute of Technology was a partner in a Midlands, East and North Dublin (MEND) Cluster project which also involved Maynooth University, Dundalk Institute of Technology and Dublin City University, the aim of which was to provide structured learning support to students in the areas of Maths, Programming and Academic Writing. One of the project's outputs was the *Guide to Setting up a Writing Centre*, published by Maynooth University.

In Ireland, writing centres in institutions of higher education are a relatively recent phenomenon, despite the fact that many academics frequently express concern about the standard of academic writing among their students. While the university sector introduced such centres in the last decade, the institutes of technology were slower to establish structures to provide targeted academic writing support to students. However, over the last number of years, almost all Institutes of Technology (IoTs) have begun to offer this service, either under the auspices of their Centres for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Learning Support Units or in the form of dedicated writing centres. Desktop research indicates that the following writing support services are available in other institutes of higher education throughout the country:

Table 1: Writing Support Services offered in Irish Institutes of Higher Education

Support for Academic Writing in Irish Institutes of Higher Education	
Institutes of Technology	
AIT	Academic Writing Centre (established October 2016)
Blanchardstown	
Carlow IT	

Cork IT	Academic Learning Centre – English Academic and Report Writing Self-Learn Online Support via Blackboard
DIT	Academic Writing Centre under CELT
Dundalk IT	Student Academic Support Services
GMIT	Academic Writing Centre
Letterkenny	Communications Learning Centre (The Curve)
LIT	Learning Support Unit
IT Sligo	Writing Centre
IT Tallaght	Centre for Learning and Teaching (CeLT)
IT Tralee	Shannon Consortium (with UL, LIT and Mary Immaculate College)
WIT	Student Life and Learning
Universities	
Trinity	Student Learning Development
UCD	Writing Support Centre
DCU	DCU Writing Centre (Library)
UL	Writing Centre / Regional Writing Centre / Centre for Teaching and Learning
Maynooth	Maynooth University Writing Centre, CELT

AIT's Student Resource Centre (SRC) did initially access funding through the Dormant Accounts Fund to provide some writing support from the academic year 2009-2010, but this was primarily aimed at mature students and those returning to education through the Access programme. The opening of the AWC to students in November 2015 was a result of collaboration between the Student Resource Centre, the International Office and the Learning and Teaching Unit and was funded through SIDF. AIT was one of the last institutes of higher education in Ireland to provide this dedicated service.

According to Farrell and Tighe-Mooney (2015), the establishment of an AWC is underpinned by factors such as:

- the much greater diversity of the student population and the welcome emphasis on access to higher education for non-traditional groups;
- the increasingly complex nature of the writing/written world where students need to navigate in multi-modal ways through a growing variety of genres;
- that writing can be learned, transformative and satisfying.

Once a writing centre has been established, its impact must be monitored and reviewed. Bell (2000) asserts that writings centres should evaluate themselves regularly as doing so can improve the service to students and may influence the amount of funding made available by those who control the budget.

This study is both a formative and summative evaluation as its findings on the impact for the academic year 2015-2016 will influence key decisions regarding the service in the future.

Methodology

Approval was sought from and granted by the AIT Research Ethics Committee for the research upon which this report is based. It was conducted using an online student survey and focus groups and individual, semi-structured interviews with academic staff, all of which took place in the institute throughout May 2016. To ensure that there was a sufficient response rate from the student cohort, all students who had engaged with the service up until the end of Semester 2 were invited by email to complete the survey. Purposive sampling was used to identify academic staff who had engaged with the AWC and therefore had the relevant experience to participate effectively in interviews. All of the academic staff involved in providing the service were invited to participate in focus group discussions.

The results of the questionnaire were collated and analysed using the tools available through Survey Monkey®. Notes taken during the interviews and focus group discussions were analysed thematically.

Findings

Findings of focus group discussions with lecturers who worked in the Academic Writing Centre

The six academic staff members who worked in the AWC providing support to students participated in focus group discussions. Many of these lecturers have a background in teaching English as a foreign language, and are affiliated to the institute's International Office. Their involvement with the AWC was facilitated by the Director of International Relations.

The lecturers reported that the aspects of writing for which help was most frequently sought were:

- planning;
- literature reviews;
- paragraph structuring;
- paraphrasing;
- referencing;
- analysis and critical writing / critical comment;
- guidance on how to approach and start the assignment.

Benefits

When asked about the benefits attending the AWC afforded students generally, the lecturers made the following observations:

Students benefitted primarily from:

- having someone to talk through the assignment with and having one-to-one conversations about their work;
- being helped to break the assignments down and being able to verbalise their approach to the assignment;
- being encouraged to *think* about their writing.

The lecturers found the small workshop sessions and the one-to-one sessions with students most rewarding, commenting that students worked well and helped each other in the workshops.

As students often only attended the AWC once, or were seen by a different lecturer in their subsequent session, it was not always possible to state categorically that students' work had improved after a session, but there was a clear perception among the lecturers that this was in fact the case.

The lecturers also noted that students were perceptibly more confident when leaving the session. Mature students who sought help with their writing benefitted particularly from having someone to talk to and working with others in a similar situation

All of the lecturers asserted that having a 'physical presence' was an essential element of the success of the AWC. They emphasized the importance of students being able to make an appointment in person, of having a 'human face' with whom to arrange the appointment and referred to the relief felt by students at having 'somewhere to go for help'. The administrator in the AWC was described as 'an encouraging presence' who was also able to give students advice on what materials to bring with them to the centre so that they could maximise the benefits of the service.

The visible, central location of the AWC was welcomed, and it was perceived as being better than having a room located beside the other Student Service offices. The value of the Moodle page dedicated to academic writing resources was also stressed.

Issues

During the discussion on which aspects of the AWC the lecturers felt needed to be addressed, the following points were made:

- Some faculties were more represented than others.
- Sometimes students arrived with nothing other than a blank page – generally it was felt that it was necessary for the student to submit a sample of their work in advance but this did not always happen.
- There was a tendency among students to submit a first draft of their work without actually proofreading it.
- In some instances, students needed technical help rather than (or in addition to) assistance with their writing.
- While the workshops provided to class groups worked well, the lecturers noted that adequate notice is needed to give them time to prepare relevant materials and find appropriate resources. Sometimes the AWC lecturers

needed to consult with the subject lecturer because the topic being discussed was so far removed from their area of expertise. Guidelines given during workshops with large groups tended to be generic rather than specific or targeted. Some lecturers perceived the one-to-one sessions as being more beneficial in this regard.

- The question was raised about where students for whom English is a second language can go for writing help, if they don't / can't enrol in the formal English programmes run through the international office. While these students may have completed their education in Ireland and not be classified as international students, lecturers found that many of them had issues with sentence structure due to interference from their mother tongue. Lecturers reported that data is needed on NESB students (non-English speaking background / ESL) with a view to providing them with specific supports.
- Regarding the resourcing of the AWC, lecturers noted that time is needed for professional development and staff training, for creating and developing materials and resources, and for maintaining the Moodle page so that if students are referred to it, the links are live and up-to-date.
- Resourcing was also raised in the context of offering students further assistance after their initial appointment. Many of the students commented to the AWC lecturers that they would welcome more help, but this was not always possible.
- The timing of the general workshops was not always suitable, particularly as other demands on students' time increased.
- Some concerns were voiced with regard to the physical space of the AWC. Lecturers commented that the room is small, there is no natural light and the door needs to remain shut, as it is too noisy otherwise. Keeping the door closed, however, exacerbates the problem of heat and 'buzz' caused by the presence of the server in the room. The canteen table directly outside the door impedes access, and on entering, the administrator's desk is directly inside the door and consequently there is no sense of space. However, as noted above, its central location was perceived as an advantage.
- Sometimes, lecturers were not automatically notified that a session had been booked with them.

Suggestions for improvement of the service

The lecturers who worked in the AWC had a strong sense that writing skills and writing in the disciplines need to be promoted across the college, and made concrete suggestions as to how this might be achieved, specifically:

- There should be an explicit statement of what writing skills are needed across entire programmes (a specific learning outcome), highlighting the development of writing skills from first year to graduation.
- Specific disciplines should develop style sheets and the AIT library's guidelines on referencing should be used across all faculties.
- In the context of programmatic review, writing should be incorporated into individual modules and marks allocated in continuous assessment assignments for writing in the discipline.

- In addition to the Learning and Development for Higher Education module, first-year students should take the one-hour-per-week Academic Writing module (which has already been written) in Semester 1, with follow-up workshops at the start of each subsequent semester / academic year throughout their studies.
- The Learning and Development for Higher Education module should be reviewed with the aim of increasing the amount of time spent on writing and composition.
- AWC lecturers could be invited to take one Learning and Development for Higher Education hour to focus specifically on writing and to promote and highlight the supports offered by the AWC.
- AWC lecturers should be invited to programme boards to promote the services of the centre.
- There was general agreement that the service needed to be publicised in places such as the Engineering and Nursing buildings, as students there are often unaware of what is happening in the main building or unable to access the service due to time constraints. The suggestion was made that these departments should be targeted, with the service being made available in different locations on different days. There was some concern however that it might be too soon to do this yet as the service is only now establishing itself in the main building.
- A pilot programme was proposed whereby one lecturer from each programme to invite an AWC lecturer to co-present with them when they are distributing an assignment. The AWC lecturer would go through the requirements, the planning process and writing stages with the students. This would be particularly useful if done in September as the guidelines and information are transferable across other modules and assignments
- The lecturers referred to the cultural shift needed within the institute to encourage and promote writing among colleagues and students. Seeking help with writing should not be seen as a weakness or be stigmatised.

Findings of Interviews with academic staff who engaged with the Academic Writing Centre

Individual interviews were held with five members of academic staff who had engaged with the AWC, either by inviting lecturers from the centre to hold workshops with their class groups, or by referring their students to the centre for assistance with their writing. Two of the lecturers work in the Faculty of Business and Hospitality, two in the Faculty of Science and Health and one in the Faculty of Engineering.

Triggers

Academic staff who had requested writing workshops or who had referred students to the AWC had noticed that their students had difficulties with the following aspects of writing:

- poor quality of writing by Engineering students, whereby the focus tended to be on word count rather than on the writing itself;
- students' lack of ability to structure assignments;
- issues with referencing;
- poor paragraph structuring from students, and a tendency to drift from point to point;
- some students, particularly those who had come through the Access programme and whose first language was not English, clearly needed help.

Other reasons for referring students were also cited. The changing landscape of Social Care means that it is now more procedure led. Academic writing carries more weight than it did previously, and practitioners must be able to write using an appropriately formal and professional style.

Benefits

When invited to comment on the perceived benefits of the AWC for their students, the lecturers uniformly welcomed the fact that the resource was there. *'Having some place to send students for help'* was the immediate response from all of the participants. Other favorable remarks included:

'The service offered by the AWC is professional, caring and sensitive.'

'Being able to arrange individual sessions for students is very beneficial.'

'Being able to see different ways of presenting and explaining information is useful.'

'It saved time. It was useful to be able to send students for help rather than having to use lecture time on teaching writing skills.'

'The Moodle page is a good resource.'

Lecturers noticed a perceptible improvement in their students' referencing and in their ability to structure and write in an academic style. One lecturer reported that an assignment comprising the writing of a summary was noticeably improved compared to a similar assignment she had given the previous year. However, it was difficult to tell whether the improvements were solely due to the AWC as there has been an improvement in student writing over the previous few years and the introduction of the Learning and Development in Higher Education module may have played a role.

Workshops led to students feeling more confident, and consequently more engaged and motivated, although one lecturer expressed the view that the real benefits of the AWC come from small group sessions. She felt the one-to-one sessions might be daunting, and had noticed that in larger workshops some students don't engage with the process.

Lecturers commended the one-to-one encouragement from AWC lecturers. They reported that the feedback from their students was very positive. There were also some quite specific examples of how the AWC had helped students. In one instance, an NESB student was referred for assistance and the improvement was clear. In another, a student was found to have dyslexia, a condition about which the student was unaware until staff at AWC referred him/her for assessment.

One lecturer in the discipline of Social Care commented that students on the PG Steps programme who hold positions of authority in their careers, had articulated that they felt intimidated and vulnerable when it comes to writing. It can be difficult for mature students who register for a formal qualification in an area in which they are already practitioners to be corrected by lecturers who, in other contexts, are essentially their peers.

All of the lecturers interviewed said they would definitely avail of the service again in the future, in some cases earlier in the semester than they had in this academic year. They indicated that inviting a lecturer from the AWC go through an assignment brief at the beginning of the process would be beneficial, and that doing this might even encourage the students to take the advice more seriously.

Issues

According to one of the participants, some students are reluctant to attend the AWC because of the stigma associated with it. For some students, poor academic writing skills are perceived as being akin to having a disability. Some students had told the lecturers that they would have liked more sessions but were reluctant to take up too much time out of deference to other students.

Lecturers were more inclined to refer 4th year students than 1st years as their need was more urgent, and there was a sense that the service, while very welcome, was somewhat belated.

In some instances, the newly introduced procedures for arranging workshops and referring students were perceived as being cumbersome and / or unclear. Occasionally, there had been a breakdown in communication between the lecturers and the centre.

Suggestions for improvement of the service

The lecturers who had engaged with the AWC were unanimously supportive of and enthusiastic about the service. When asked whether they had any suggestions as to how it could be improved, they did make some observations. These included:

- There should be a maximum size for the workshop groups.
- Drop-in sessions should be available. Having a casual, accessible service that they could utilise instantly would fit in with how students live their lives now.
- The AWC should have its own Facebook page updated with links, tips, articles rather than relying on Moodle which is sometimes not appealing to students.
- Some workshops should be arranged on a departmental basis rather than across the whole institute, as they would be less daunting for students.

- There should be more publicity and clarity surrounding the centre and the services it offers. Representatives from the AWC should visit all Learning and Development for Higher Education groups to publicise the resource.
- There should be more publicity and clarity around the AWC's procedures, such as how lecturers should interact with the centre, how they should refer students, and how many sessions may students attend, etc.
- Academic writing should be incorporated more explicitly into course programmes, from Learning and Development in Higher Education in Year 1, onwards. The teaching of writing should continue throughout the students' time at AIT.
- There is potential for cross-modular assignments whereby the writing is assessed by the Learning and Development lecturer and the content by the subject lecturer.
- More resources are needed so that there is not such a tight limit to the number of sessions available.
- It would be useful if lecturers could be informed regarding how many students from particular groups attended AWC sessions.
- It would be useful if a template could be made available for students with learning disabilities (dyslexia), whereby an outline could be provided with a list of opening sentences, generic phrases for each chapter of a dissertation, transitions between , etc. The students could 'then fill in the blanks' with the content.

Findings from the online student survey

The survey comprised 20 questions, including demographic, multiple choice questions, rating scale and open-ended comment questions.

Limitations

All students who had accessed the services of the Academic Writing Centre were invited by email to complete the survey. The survey was open for the month of May, immediately prior to, during and following the summer exam session. It would appear that relatively few undergraduate students access their student email account, particularly once the semester ends, while many post-graduate students are still on campus and are more inclined to check their emails. Consequently, the percentage of responses from post-graduate students may be disproportionate relative to the number of post-graduate students who accessed the service.

Student profile

Of the 57 students who responded to Sections 1 & 2 of the survey, two-thirds (67.67%) were female and almost one-third was male. One respondent identified as transgender.

A significant majority (68.4%) of the respondents comprised mature students, i.e. over 23 years of age, while just over one-fifth (21.05%) were students for whom English was not their first language.

Subject areas and programme levels

More than one-third (38.6%) of the students were registered for a Master's degree, either by research or on a taught programme, and almost 9% were involved in research at PhD level. All research students came from within the Faculties of Engineering and Informatics, or Science and Health. Two respondents stated that they had received support from the President's Seed Fund. Almost 30% of the students who responded were in 4th year when they used the service.

Students on Social Care courses in the Department of Social Sciences and Design were most likely to attend the AWC for help with academic writing. Almost 30% of all respondents were registered on programmes within this Department. Just under one-fifth of the students came from the Department of Life and Physical Science, while one-sixth were students in the Faculty of Engineering and Informatics and approximately 12% indicated that they were registered on programmes in the Faculty of Business and Hospitality.

Triggers

A total of 44 students completed Section 3 of the survey. When questioned about why they had approached the AWC for help with their writing, almost half (43%) of the respondents reported that they had been referred to it by their lecturer. A further 30% had been referred to the AWC by a lecturer. Three students stated that they had sought help from the AWC following a disappointing result, and the same number had been told about the service by another student. The majority of students (63.64%) dropped into the AWC, while one-fifth made contact by email. The remainder had accessed the service either as a result of talks given by the AWC, or as arranged by their lecturer.

A considerable majority (70%) of students stated that they turned to the AWC for help with structuring a written assignment. Over one third had sought help with writing in an academic style suitable for their discipline. Other areas for which a significant number of students had received advice include citing and referencing (29.5%), interpreting the assignment brief (25%) and paraphrasing (25%) (See Figure 1)

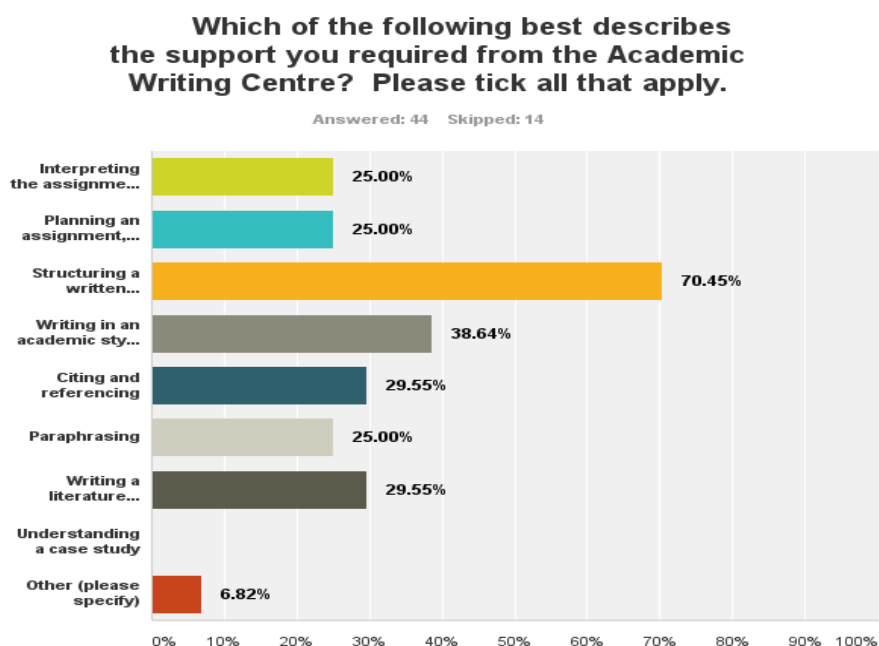


Figure 1

Over half (59%) of the students surveyed had visited the AWC for one-to-one sessions, while one quarter had attended workshops organised for their class group by a lecturer. Just over 13% had attended workshops organised by a fellow student or student representative, and 11.3% had attended one or more of the general workshops offered by the AWC.

The average length of time students had to wait for an appointment with a lecturer from the AWC was 2 – 3 days. Just over 10% had to wait 4-5 days, while 22% reported having to wait for one week.

Fifty-seven percent of the respondents attended the AWC one or two times for help with a specific assignment or task, while almost 20% attended weekly for a number of weeks. Just under 15% attended a few times over the course of the semester for help with different tasks.

Benefits

There was an overwhelmingly positive response from the students regarding service provided by the AWC, with over 95% claiming to have benefitted from the assistance they received from the centre (See Figure 2).



Figure 2

The following replies are a representative sample of the students' more detailed responses:

'They helped me with writing an introduction and sentence formation.'

'Very good at explaining how to structure properly.'

'It was excellent.'

'The lecturer went through line by line.'

'I believe my writing skills improved greatly.'

'Was great help, will make more use of service if available.'

'Huge help with formatting.'

'In relation to paraphrasing, constructing sentences and writing conclusions.'

'Good information on time management and the process involved with writing. It was good to know that most people find it difficult and I felt I could tackle the process in a more realistic way after the workshop.'

When asked about what aspects of the AWC the students thought were very good, over half (59%) of the respondents highlighted the helpfulness of the the AWC staff and the quality of the service they provided. Comments included:

'The tutors have a very good understanding of the basics of good academic writing and are very approachable and meet student needs.'

'Lecturers and others most helpful.'

'Staff helpful but very busy.'

'They have a very approachable atmosphere when you enter the centre when you are confused and need assistance.'

'Willingness to help students individually and target the information so it is relevant to your needs.'

'Very professional and willing to go that extra mile to help.'

'Staff were friendly and accommodating.'

'The advice given to students is of a very high quality.'

'Staff are very helpful and couldn't do enough for students. Excellent service.'

'Efficient and qualified professionals.'

'Accessibility and friendly staff.'

'How in tune the service is with the students' needs.'

Almost one-fifth of students alluded to the one-to-one sessions also. Over half of the students said they definitely plan to avail of the service again, while only 6.8% said they do not. More than 90% of respondents said that they would recommend the service to a fellow student.

Issues and suggestions for improvement of the service

The survey invited students to offer suggestions as to how the service provided by the AWC might be improved. Over one-third of the respondents were completely happy with the service they had received and stated that no changes or improvements were necessary. However, the remaining responses to this question indicated that there were certain aspects of the service that the students would like to see addressed.

- While 90% of students reported that in general, their appointment times suited them, almost one-fifth (18%) of the students highlighted the fact that the centre's opening hours were not flexible enough. Students referred to the fact that the service was needed in the evenings, and when they were completing their assignments at the end of the semester.
- A few students stated that they would have preferred longer appointments, even if this meant that they would then have access to fewer sessions.
- A number of students also commented on the lack of privacy in such a small room.
- Some students indicated that it would have been useful if they could have received help with their academic writing from someone with a background in their discipline.

Discussion

When the feedback from each of the stakeholder groups is collated and analysed, certain themes emerge.

The establishment of Academic Writing Centre is deemed to have had an immediate beneficial impact by almost everyone who interacted with it. It is clearly perceived as being a much-needed and highly valued initiative, and it is greatly appreciated by all students and academic staff who availed of its services. Its success to date is attributed largely to friendliness of the staff and the quality of the service they provide.

It is noteworthy that a significant number of students who are undertaking research or are in the final year of their course have availed of the services offered by the AWC. This underscores the value of the service in the promotion of excellence in

writing for all students, including those engaged post-graduate research at master's and doctorate level. There was a strong sense among all academic staff that academic writing should be a particular focus of the Learning and Development in Higher Education module in a student's first semester, and that there should be cooperation and collaboration between the AWC lecturers and all academic staff to achieve this. There was also agreement, however, that the focus on writing should not end there, rather it should be continually emphasised and reinforced, from the beginning through to the end of a student's academic career and include a discipline specific focus.

As this was essentially a pilot project, a deliberate decision was made to take a conservative approach and advertise the services of the AWC in a targeted manner initially. However, academic staff expressed the view that the AWC should now publicise the services it offers more widely, and provide clarity on how these services can be availed of by both students and academic staff. Lecturers, from both outside the AWC and within, were adamant that seeking help with writing should not be perceived as indicative of weakness or failure, that it should not be stigmatised and that there should be a 'cultural shift' which would result in all academic staff encouraging and promoting excellence in writing for all students.

It is evident from the student responses that the perception exists among them that a primary purpose of the writing centre is to help them 'fix' a particular assignment. It is evident that many students need guidance on every aspect of completing an assignment, from understanding the assignment brief to organising their ideas and structuring their writing. This can be particularly true of mature students and students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, but even students who have reached their final year of study and those engaged in post-graduate research clearly recognised this need for themselves. However, while it is entirely understandable that difficulty with a specific aspect of writing might provide the impetus for students to turn to the writing centre initially, focussing on one text is a short-term solution. In his seminal article *The Idea of a Writing Centre*, North (1984:438) states:

'Any given project - a class assignment, a law school application letter, an encyclopedia entry, a dissertation proposal - is for the writer the prime, often the exclusive concern. That particular text, its success or failure, is what brings them to talk to us in the first place. In the center, though, we look beyond or through that particular project, that particular text, and see it as an occasion for addressing our primary concern, the process by which it is produced. '

Students and academic staff who engage with the service should be mindful of North's axiomatic statement that the job of a writing centre 'is to produce better writers, not better writing.' If the cultural shift referred to above takes place, an awareness that this can be the ultimate achievement of a writing centre may ensue.

In *The Maynooth University Guide to Setting up a Writing Centre*, Farrell and Tighe-Mooney (2015) discuss the issue of personnel and pose the following questions:

'Who will direct the centre? Will that position be part-time or full-time?

To whom will that person report?' (p.8).

There is a presumption that this is a key role within a writing centre. The fact that majority of students first made contact with the AWC by dropping into the office in person indicates the importance of the service having a 'human face', a point that was reinforced by all academic staff.

Recommendations

To ensure the continued success and growth of AIT's Academic Writing Centre, the following recommendations are proposed:

The status of academic writing within AIT

Excellence in writing and writing in the disciplines should be emphasised across the institute, for the duration of all courses and beyond to post-graduate level. Excellence in academic writing should be an integral, assessed learning outcome in all programmes. The current positioning of the AWC within should be reconsidered so as to avoid the deficit model and promote excellence.

Resources

- A larger space should be provided to allow greater privacy, however this should be still be located in an area of high footfall.
- The institute should support the mainstreaming of the AWC to ensure its continued success by:
 - employing a permanent administrator;
 - introducing more flexible opening hours to facilitate students on part-time and evening courses;
 - providing more one-to-one sessions and writing tutorials for students;
 - allocating time for AWC lecturers to create materials;
 - providing continued professional development for AWC lecturers.
- The viability of providing a 'drop-in' service should be explored further.

Publicity

- Lecturers from the AWC should be invited to programme boards to promote and familiarise all academic staff with the services of the AWC.
- The AWC should undertake a more wide-spread publicity campaign throughout the institute, and publish promotional material regarding the services it provides and the procedures for accessing these services.
- Use of social media, for example the creation of a dedicated Facebook page, should be considered as a means of communicating with students on a platform that they readily use.

Collaboration between the AWC and academic staff

- There should be consistency in the writing and referencing guidelines given to all students within a particular faculty (or better still, across the institute);
- There are opportunities for closer collaboration between the AWC and lecturers delivering the Learning and Development for Higher Education module;

- Collaboration between the AWC and all academic staff who lecture on modules for which students are required to complete written assignments should be encouraged. This collaboration could include:
 - co-presentation of assignment briefs;
 - the design of discourse / discipline-specific style guides.
- Academic staff from all faculties who express an interest in promoting excellence in academic writing within their specific disciplines should be invited to contribute to the work of the AWC.

Conclusion

The response of both students and academic staff to the Academic Writing Centre has been overwhelmingly positive. There is clearly a need and a demand for the service, and its establishment can be assessed as having been a very successful pedagogical initiative. However, it is not sufficient to view student writing as 'a problem to be remedied by separate study skills instruction that attempts to reach writing as a set of discrete techniques without relation to curricular content.' Nor is proficiency in academic writing 'something that students can absorb through their immersion in disciplinary practices and exposure to disciplinary modes of knowledge.' (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006). Once it is acknowledged by all stakeholders and decision makers across the institute that explicit, integrated instruction in and support for academic writing assists the academic and intellectual development of all students, each of the remaining issues raised can be addressed with appropriate funding.

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