



Embedded teaching or academic skills curriculum: re-thinking how we teach academic skills at university

Tanja Tolar

University of Bradford, UK

Presentation abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the teaching of academic skills to undergraduate and postgraduate Radiography students at the University of Bradford. The focus is on the review, design, and delivery of academic skills to students between years 2021 and 2024, alongside the development of a three-tier system for academic skills delivery (direct – hybrid – consultancy).

The analysis of students' understanding centres on key stages of their learning throughout their undergraduate and/or postgraduate studies. It focuses on the core skills required for their assignments in each academic year, helping students recognise the connection between their practical knowledge, the supporting theoretical framework, and the academic skills necessary to develop their literacy. The importance of core skills is crucial, as academic literacy is 'highly specialised' (Basset and MacNaught, 2024, p.1066). As such, it integrates seamlessly into the curriculum rather than being delivered as ad-hoc instruction. This emphasis ensures that core skills are introduced at the right stage of the students' learning, which was the foundation of the project's development. Throughout this process, students are guided to understand the value and application of academic skills for both their academic and professional development. It is in the integration of theoretical and practical skills that the most successful academic outcomes were achieved.

The project was initially designed as a fully integrated approach to teaching academic skills but has since evolved into a hybrid model that combines academic skills training with consultancy and a fully academic-led study skills' teaching. This presentation outlines the development of these modules, the lessons learned from their delivery, and feedback from academics currently involved in delivering the study skills sessions. It is hoped the

presentation opens a discussion around questions of academic skills support within modules and how effective such support really is. It is the aim and scope of this presentation to suggest different options of study skills provision that form the basis for a study skills curriculum and thus more holistic, centralised academic learning experience within the HE environment.

Keywords: embedding; study skills; integration; learning.

Community response

The integration of core skills and extra-curricular activities into timetabled academic sessions has been mooted by others (Dickinson, Griffiths and Bredice, 2021; de Main, Holmes and Wakefield, 2022) as a way of getting students to engage with skills sessions and providing the opportunities to ensure that students engage with and develop the fundamental core skills required for learning. As one participant commented:

Your point about co-teaching with academics creating a change to how students regarded your sessions (made them seem to value them more), accords with a lot of the research on embedding. I think there is a level further that LDers can go, where we can become more properly part of a course/module team, and can then get engagement from students even when teaching alone. But there needs to be the staffing level and the strong support of more senior people in the institution for that to work. Less emphasis on the term 'study skills' could be helpful – like how you talked about them later in the presentation, thinking of the skills as ones which cross over into broader life and employment (Ian Johnson).

For this to work there is a need for support and 'buy in' from senior staff within the institutions and a fully team-based approach to ensure that co-teaching occurs with academic staff rather than trying to fill sessions or replace content. As another attendee observed:

A lot of the work you have done resonated with my views on embedding sessions to programmes of studies and the impact this has on student outcomes. Having the 'buy-in' from academics and co-teaching with them validates our contributions and students see the work we do as an important element of their learning: it is not just important to learn the subject-specific concepts but also develop the skills to communicate this learning effectively in writing and orally, whether this is through assessments or other means (for

example, peer-learning, disseminating information to different audiences). I liked the idea of 'scaling up' the offering to more students and addressing potential resourcing challenges by acting as consultants to academics now, following what I see as a 'train the trainers' model. To second the comment above, it would be helpful to know more about whether/how students contribute to the content of the sessions and in which way you established that your offering reflects student needs accurately. Thank you for your talk and the inspiration you offered (Lenia).

This co-leadership will validate the contribution of learning developers within academic programmes and will give students the opportunity to recognise that the work done is as important an element of their learning as subject-specific concepts. It would provide the opportunity for students to develop the skills to communicate their subject specific concepts effectively in writing and orally, whether this is through assessments or other means (for example, peer-learning, disseminating information to different audiences).

There also needs to be a move away from the notion of 'study skills' or skills which are only useful during study to thinking of them as skills which cross over into broader life and employment.

Next steps and additional questions

Further research could be undertaken to consider the student viewpoint on the need and benefit of attending and engaging with skills sessions as well as potentially creating co-creation opportunities with a tripartite view (student, academic staff, and learning developers). One session attendee also asked: 'What input do students give on the content of sessions?'

Author's reflection

Thank you, Ian, for your contribution and the questions in the session. I fully agree with the points raised. The University of Bradford is currently restructuring, but a development of the Graduate Skills Framework is underway. It is hoped some of these takeaways we experienced with Diagnostic Radiography will translate into that. The aim for my project is also to keep developing embedded provisioning and helping academics with delivery of the skills provision into their curricula. Students respond well to this type of delivery, although supplementary asynchronous support is also needed and valued. Students'

contributions have been primarily felt in terms of feedback and responding to feedback. I designed a session where feedback was delivered by students to students, to empower and engage them in the feedback delivery and reception. This activity helped academics see how students perceive written text and what expectations they can have from students when they give them feedback. There has been a good improvement seen there.

Additionally, we designed full sessions with student collaboration around critical writing/critical appraisal and dissertation writing. This type of collaboration with academics and students is invaluable when we are designing new resources and online student-led provision because we do not hit the main learning gaps if we do not know the audience first (both academics' expectations and students' academic skills). The goal for the next academic year is to upgrade this with more nuanced skills such as resilience, negotiation skills, group collaboration, and strong meta-cognition.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our insight into this conference presentation and its impact on the audience. Special thanks go to Ian Johnson from the University of Portsmouth and Lenia Galata from London Southbank University. The community response was edited by Lisa Wakefield, who captured the key themes of the community discussion.

The author did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

References

Bassett, M. and MacNaught, L. (2024) 'Embedded approaches to academic literacy development: a systematic review of empirical research about impact', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 30(5), pp.1065-1083. Available at:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2024.2354280>.

Dickinson, J., Griffiths, T. L. and Bredice, A. (2021) "'It's just another thing to think about": encouraging students' engagement in extracurricular activities', *Journal of Further*

and *Higher Education*, 45(6), pp.744-757. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1813263>

de Main, L., Holmes, H. and Wakefield, L. (2022) 'Why won't they engage in extra-curricular opportunities?', *AdvanceHE*, 14 January. Available at:

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/why-wont-they-engage-extra-curricular-opportunities> (Accessed: 22 September 2025).

Further reading

Hill, P. and Tinker, A. (2013) 'Integrating learning development into the student experience', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 5, pp.1-18.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.v0i5.172>

Thomas, P., Khanom, N., Lambe S., Adelaja, B. and Mehbali, M. (2022) 'Constructing an academic skills toolkit for embedding purposes', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 24, pp.1-22. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi24.832>

Young, P. (2010) 'Generic or discipline specific? An exploration of the significance of discipline-specific issues in researching and developing teaching and learning in higher education', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 47(1), pp.115-24. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290903525887>

Author details

Tanja Tolar is an academic skills advisor at the University of Bradford. She is passionate about teaching and learning, focusing on curriculum development, recording podcasts as learning tools, and delivering workshops on the importance of feedback. In her spare time she likes to indulge in her other love interest, art history.

Licence

©2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE).