“I was left confused more than anything”

Exploring students' experiences of finding and accessing academic writing support

Jenna Mann (jenna.mann@ed.ac.uk)
Institute for Academic Development

Alison Thomas (Alison.Thomas@ed.ac.uk)
English Language Education
Why we did it

- Rich and diverse provision of support and development
- Different guidance and advice on different aspects/challenges
- Our experience: variety inhibits student access to writing support
- We wanted to know their perceptions of accessing provision at a time and level suitable to them.
What we did

• PTAS small grant (book tokens)
• BOS survey
  – MHSE Ethics
  – Student Surveys unit
• Sent to 3068 PGT (AY 17/18, ⅓ total cohort)
• N=357 (3.9% total PGT)
  – 95.2 % PGT; 3.6% PGR; a couple of outliers; 1UG...?!
What we asked

10 questions designed to elicit student attitudes and perceptions of finding and accessing writing support.
Main teaching location of on-campus respondents (Q2a)

% respondents

Campus

ECA  Easter Bush  George Square  Holyrood (incl. MH, StLL)  KB  Lauriston Buildings  Little France  Western General
Nationality of respondents (Q4)

% respondents

Nationality

UK

EU

Outside EU
When students want support (Q7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timings</th>
<th>% respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-arrival</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start of course</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given assignment</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After discussions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started writing</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post marking</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What we found – a mixed bag!

• Didn’t know where to look
• What they found was good quality
• They want:
  – One to one support
  – Subject specific support
• Online students felt unsupported
• Confusion over IAD and ELE roles
What we do

• **English Language Education**
  – Online: tutorials, independent study materials
  – On-campus: in-sessional support (incl. 1-2-1), School specific support, supporting staff

• **Institute for Academic Development**
  – Online: workshops, learning resources
  – On-campus: workshops, 1-2-1s, Schools specific support, supporting staff
Where next....

- Map provision from across the university (knowing what and where)
  - Helps us respond better to students’ needs and expectations
- “…there should be an online platform where all courses are…” (Q15)
- Develop a resource (tool?) to aid students to find and access support when **they** want/need it