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LIBRARY AND STUDENT SERVICES

TEACHING EXCELLENCE PROJECT REPORT

AUGUST 2024

Further enhancing LBU academic skills development for international students

Executive Summary

This report summarises a second University-wide Teaching Excellence Project investigating the academic skills needs of international students. Based upon the impact of previous interventions and input from staff and international students, it provides best practice recommendations and highlights key resources and services for 2024-25.

Action Requested

Colleagues are invited to:

- Review the best practice recommendations, teaching and support options, disseminating to colleagues as appropriate.
- Direct any queries about available options to your School's [Academic Librarians or Academic Skills Tutors](#).
- Contact Laurence Morris, Academic Skills Development Manager, if you wish to have your students represented in international student research as it continues in 2024-25.

Authors

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Date: August 2024

Teaching Excellence Project Report: Further enhancing LBU academic skills development for international students

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1 Introduction

This report summarises a second University-wide Teaching Excellence Project (TEP) investigating the academic skills needs of international students. Based upon the impact of previous interventions and the input of both staff and international students, it provides best practice recommendations and highlights key resources for 2024-25.

2 Project context

2.1 Rationale

The number of international students at LBU has grown in recent years and is expected to remain significant, despite a likely reduction for 2024-25 largely attributable to changing UK immigration policy. In 2022-23, a University-wide Teaching Excellence Project ([Morris, 2023](#)) investigated the academic skills needs of contemporary LBU international students, providing best practice recommendations and influencing the evolution of LBU academic skills development.

This follow-up project was conducted to provide updated recommendations and highlight relevant resources given: a) the impact of new interventions made by the Library Academic Support Team (LAST) in academic year 2023-24 and b) evolving student needs around topics such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

2.2 Specific project aims

Specific project aims:

- To investigate the impact of new and existing academic skills development options for international students in 2023-24.
- To pool and share the perspectives of teaching colleagues and international students on academic skills support needs.
- To highlight evolving LBU services and good practice, as well as relevant wider literature.

3 Project methodology

The project followed a mixed methods approach, based upon:

- Surveying 100+ students who received in-curriculum academic skills teaching from the LAST, with a specific emphasis on international student support and sessions where formative feedback was offered, including at PhD-level.
- Surveying over 500 participants in the International Students' Academic Introduction module and the University's other online academic skills modules.
- Mapping Registry data on student outcomes to student engagement with central academic skills services for the first time.
- Relevant data from parallel LAST projects on teaching impact and student continuation.
- Review of standard student engagement and feedback data for relevant information.
- 4 further international student focus groups, conducted October 2023 to December 2023, incorporating 30+ participants from around LBU.
- Open interviews with academic, SU and professional services colleagues who kindly contributed their expertise to the project, further facilitated by Centre for Learning and Teaching networks.

4 Impact of 2023-24 services and interventions

As in the previous TEP report, the diversity of international students and their previous experiences, the need to avoid generalisations, the need not to frame teaching and support on a deficit model, and course-level variations in pedagogical practice should be noted. It should also be noted that as Merabet (2024) and others observe, the very term 'international student' is potentially othering. However, the following points nonetheless emerged across the University as a whole.

4.1 International Students' Academic Introduction (ISAI) module

- 2,067 students actively engaged with the module, compared to 1,739 in 2023-24.
 - The actual rise is likely to be higher due to a change in reporting methodology.
- 113 survey respondents ranked the module at 4.7/5 for usefulness.
- There was a significant shift in patterns of student engagement.
 - An average of 175.1 students accessed the module per week in 2023-24, as opposed to the historic engagement pattern centred on September and January induction periods and the 2022-23 average of 59.6 per week.
 - This reflected successful promotion of the module as guidance to access as required, with all content now available from the point of initial student access to MyBeckett rather than being released on a weekly basis.
- Indicative early mapping of Registry statistics to module engagement shows students who engaged with the ISAI were more likely to attain positive outcomes, ranging from increased chance of progression to higher marks. Evaluation continues in this area.
- There remains a variation in awareness of the ISAI module in different Schools, with a subsequent correlation with engagement.
 - Course-specific student engagement reports are now available on request, informing local support of individual students.

4.2 In-curriculum tuition

- 7 of the new suites of interconnected academic skills sessions for international students resulting from the previous TEP were delivered across the University.
 - Provision of collective formative feedback pre-assessment was particularly welcomed by learners, with colleagues noting impact also.
 - Resources from these sessions are provided in 5.3a for colleagues to adapt and use themselves.
- A further 50+ in-curriculum teaching sessions were delivered by the LAST in which international student support was identified as a particular need.
 - A parallel LAST impact project found that 66% of students reported a positive impact on their confidence with key academic skills from such sessions.
 - Colleagues noted the impact of these classes in building understanding of how to conduct specific academic activities, resulting in specific positive student actions.

4.3 School-level academic skills inductions

- New timetabled f-2-f and online sessions were trialed in Semester One on the basis of the previous TEP's findings and Students' Union requests, to mixed results.
 - c.175 students attended across multiple sessions, giving an average feedback score of 4.45/5 for session usefulness, particularly welcoming practical information around Library and IT systems.
 - This was still a notably low proportion of overall international student starters, particularly given sessions were timetabled, and unsustainably expensive in staff and room resourcing for the level of engagement.
 - A reduced version of the programme ran on an elective basis in Semester 2, promoted to courses with high numbers of late international starters and receiving proportionally comparable engagement.
 - This revised approach will therefore continue for the small but still significant proportion of international students who welcome this form of induction, targeting late starters in particular.

4.4 Elective tuition options

In addition to the timetabled options above, students also engaged with a range of academic skills tuition options, with the capacity to adopt a 'pick and mix' approach to services particularly welcomed by international student representatives. In particular:

- 886 1-2-1 appointments were conducted by the LAST, a post-pandemic high.
 - The most popular topics were finding information, academic writing and academic English/EAL.
 - Approximately 50% of appointments were for L7, with a significant proportion allocated to international students transitioning to UK academic study.
- 3,304 students engaged with Skills for Learning workshops, another post-pandemic high and a 28.5% annual increase.
 - However, engagement was predominantly with session recordings at students' convenience, not with live workshops.
 - The most popular topics were academic writing, critical thinking, dissertation skills and how to reference.
 - More than 50% of bookings were from L7 students.

- The LBU Academic Integrity module, generally of particular interest to international students, had 3,011 active users in 2023-24, up from 2,663 in 2022-23.

Remodelling of these services is an ongoing process, based upon changing student engagement, needs and feedback. However, the underlying rationale remains to channel students to services which provide a high impact at low staff time expense, while leaving learners with agency over the timing and form of tuition or support they access.

4.5 PhD-level writing guidance

- An Academic Skills Tutor-led suite of three sessions on PhD writing was provided to c.120 UK and international student attendees to positive feedback.
 - Participant feedback praised the suite as “excellent,” with researchers noting the group camaraderie and capacity to facilitate peer support.
 - The provision of collective formative feedback on writing samples was again particularly welcomed by international participants.
- ‘Should you love your PhD?’
 - A new parallel workshop on emotional wellbeing and PhDs had 17 attendees.

5 Key tuition and resources, exemplar sessions, best practice prompts

5.1 Context

Students applying to Leeds Beckett from some countries outside the UK must meet a minimum level of English Language as well as meeting specified academic requirements. Universities operate within [UKVI](#) guidance on this but can use any assessment for direct entry to courses; a [CEFR](#) B2 level of proficiency must be achieved across all four skills (BALEAP, 2020). Despite meeting university English Language requirements, some students may still find that there is a gap between their proficiency level and the requirements of their course. All academic discourse communities have their own way of representing the world (Alexander, Argent & Spencer, 2008); students consequently need to develop specific language and skills to become part of their community.

The following resources have been developed to teach students such as those described above the necessary academic skills and language to be successful on their courses.

5.2 Key tuition and resources

Modules

September and January starters are auto-enrolled on [The International Students’ Academic Introduction Module](#). This blended learning programme combines introductory webinars with three units of online resources. From September 2024, study cafes will be organised to check in on progress both after the initial induction period and at assessment time.

The [Academic Integrity Module](#) is also strongly recommended as it addresses the issue of good academic practice with a particular focus on appropriate use of Artificial Intelligence tools such as Chat GPT and Quillbot.

In-curriculum teaching

Colleagues can use the [booking form](#) to request [in-curriculum teaching in key academic skills topics](#) for their students. Specific practical resources have been developed for international

cohorts, in addition to generally relevant classes such as the new session on ‘Good academic practice’. Discussion of appropriate tuition options is welcomed and tutors are available to offer colleagues individual and team training.

Workshop recordings and appointments

[Skills for Learning workshops](#) now include sessions specifically written for international students such as Understanding Academic English and Academic Integrity. Students can use the new ‘on demand’ format of the workshops to listen to a recording at their convenience, then book an academic skills appointment with a librarian or tutor or attend a live drop-in to ask any questions they might have.

Further online resources

In addition to the dedicated Library page for [International Students](#), the [Skills for Learning website](#) now includes [English Language](#) and [Academic English](#) pages.

5.3 Exemplar sessions

Academic writing success

Three interconnected sessions were initially developed for L7 students in Politics and International Relations, with the underlying principle of [Test-Teach-Test](#) adapted to local context. Students undertake a short writing task, followed by feedback and tutor guidance on good practice. Students are then required to review their original writing in pairs and discuss its strengths and weaknesses. The intent is to ensure that learners can:

- Complete a formative writing task
- Receive feedback on their writing
- Understand good practice in key academic writing skills
- Apply that new knowledge to improving their writing.

As these resources are redeveloped for 2024-25, they will be [available for colleagues to repurpose](#), with further guidance on their use available from Skills.for.Learning@leedsbeckett.ac.uk.

Artificial Intelligence

The new Skills for Learning workshop on generative Artificial Intelligence tools may be of particular interest to international students, given the widespread use of such tools to support language needs. Due to fast-changing nature of the technology, the workshop operates by developing general academic literacies around appropriate and responsible use of AI tools, reflecting Jisc guidance which noted that learners increasingly view AI as “a collaborative tool to coach and support active learning and critical thinking...” rather than an overt “answer provider” (2024, p.2).

- [A subtitled recording of the workshop](#) is available for sharing with students.
- [Session slides are also available](#) for colleagues to adapt and use.

More generally, as well as channelling to [the latest LBU guidance](#), colleagues are advised to proactively use discussion of the appropriate uses and potential limitations of the technology as teaching opportunities, as with Hosseini’s work (2024) around racial bias in generative AI results.

5.4 Recommended best practice

Multiple colleagues have commented that they have found the QAA’s [prompt questions](#) (2023) useful on specific issues, both in the classroom and when forming broader policy. While

acknowledging the extent to which they represent 'business as usual', the following prompts are therefore offered on the basis of key themes highlighted by teaching colleagues from around LBU:

Have you ensured that any new international students have engaged with the LBU International Students' Academic Introduction (ISAI) module in MyBeckett? [Digital Learning](#) can provide course-specific student engagement data.

Can you [access the ISAI content](#) yourself? Colleagues can either self-enrol on the module or request enrolment from [Skills for Learning](#) or their [Academic Librarians](#), accessing content and seeing announcements about further in-year student sessions which may be relevant to promote.

Have you promoted the [September/January ISAI webinars](#) to your students? The webinars give students the opportunity to ask key contacts questions about the module and LBU in general.

Have you shown the [ISAI Welcome Video](#) to your students/built it into your induction? We interviewed students about the module and how it helped them.

Have you made clear the requirements of assignments, explored the past experience of the cohort with that form of assignment and established understanding of relevant academic literacies?

- A significant number of international students surveyed welcomed explanation of how the 0-100 marking range is applied in their courses.
- Multiple colleagues have also noted the need to consider listening as well as writing in English as a potential support need.

Have you ensured that international students on your module know how to access further relevant LBU academic skills teaching and support, as outlined in 5.2?

Have you considered how to facilitate or steer informal student peer group knowledge exchange mechanism such as WhatsApp groups, noting their potential prevalence among national groupings?

- One recent large-scale survey of international students (Pagliarello et al, 2023) found that while 42% of respondents wanted more teaching contact hours as their top priority, 36% requested more student-led academic support groups, highlighting a potentially popular means of student support when additional contact hours are impractical.

Have you [booked any in-curriculum academic skills teaching](#) for your students from LAST librarians and tutors? Note that the session 'Good Academic Practice' covers a range of relevant topics such as Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence.

Have you ensured that any in-curriculum academic skills teaching is meaningfully tied to assessment? Such sessions are significantly more effective when framed as support for an assignment, or a chance to explore feedback, rather than being presented as useful general information.

Have you provided examples of past assessment submissions to facilitate student understanding of requirements?

Have you provided a forum for students to receive formative assignment feedback to build their understanding of the requirements of the task, whether on a collective basis in class or with LAST tutors as in-curriculum guest lecturers, subject to availability?

Have you provided a meaningful forum for students to clarify their understanding of a task or feedback before resubmitting any work?

6 Ongoing developments

6.1 Forthcoming resources

Three further options are under development to guide colleagues in their teaching:

1. The Centre for Teaching and Learning's 2024-25 Educational Development Programme will contain a LAST tutor facilitated workshop for staff to pool best practice and ask specific questions to international student support specialists.
2. In addition to their bookable in-curriculum teaching, LAST tutors are also available for general consultation on good practice in international student support. For example, in the past year, detailed discussions have occurred on the specifics of AI usage, translation tools, course-long support and how best to teach and support late arrivals.
3. For those with less time, a short instructional video will guide colleagues through resources developed for international students, together with suggestions about how best to integrate them into courses and modules.

6.2 Course-level research

After two consecutive year-long University-level Teaching Excellence Projects, research into the international student experience will continue at course level, potentially incorporating Disability and Wellbeing support to give more a holistic view of student needs, or the use of the QAA document cited in 5.4 to inform an audit of LBU practices.

Colleagues who wish to have their students participate in this research or have new interventions trialled in their areas should contact the authors of this report.

Further general discussion from colleagues would also be welcomed.

7 Acknowledgements

This project benefitted from the input of more than 500 students and 40 colleagues through surveys, focus groups and interviews. While it is impractical to thank individuals, the authors are grateful to all, and for the ongoing opportunity to unite and disseminate the experiences of the LBU community. This report is also an effort to record contemporary LBU practice to inform future colleagues and students.

8 Select bibliography

The following resources were either cited directly in this report or may be of particular interest to colleagues working in this field, in several cases providing useful resource packs or directing to additional scholarly literature on relevant pedagogical topics.

Alexander, O, Argent, S and Spencer, J. (2008) [EAP essentials: A teacher's guide to principles and practice](#). Reading: Garnet Publishing.

BALEAP (2020) [BALEAP guidelines on English Language Tests for university entry](#) [Webpage].

Council of Europe (n.d.) [The CEFR levels](#) [Online]. Note: A useful concise primer linking to more detailed information and resources around the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages \(CEFR\)](#).

Corazzi, S. (2023) [The internationalisation process: an opportunity for meaningful intercultural interaction or segregation in one UK university?](#) *London Review of Education*, 21(1), pp.1-10.

Hosseimi, D. (2024) [Generative AI: a problematic illustration of the intersections of racialized gender, race and ethnicity](#). *Educational Technology and Society*. Pre-print.

Ghemmour, R. (2024) [International students: Is it an innocent label?](#) [Blog].

Jisc (2024, May revision) [Student perceptions of generative AI](#). Bristol: Jisc.

Lomer, S. and Mittelmeier, J. (2023) [Mapping the research on pedagogies with international students in the UK: A systematic literature review](#). *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(6), pp.1243-1263. Note: Basis in extensive 2022 'Pedagogies of internationalisation' Advance HE report by the same authors.

Lomer, S., Mittelmeier, J. and Carmichael-Murphy, P. (2021) [How to internationalise your teaching: an Advance HE resource pack](#). York: Advance HE. Note: This report provides an extensive range of scholarly articles related to relevant practical pedagogical issues.

McKinley, J (2023) [Writing at postgraduate level: Showing, not saying, what you know](#) [Online recording].

Merabet, R. (2024) [Students we label international: an urgent call to reconceptualise research with international students](#). *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*. Preprint.

Morris, L. (2023) [Developing transition and in-course support for international students](#). Teaching Excellence Project report. Leeds: Leeds Beckett University.

Newman, T and Gulliver, M (2023) [International students' digital experience phase two: the experiences and expectations of international students studying in UK higher education](#). Bristol: Jisc.

Pagliarello, M., Vega, F., Torres Cortés, F., Provencher, D. (2023) [Working in partnership to improve international student integration and experience: Final report to the Office for Students](#). London: London School of Economics and Political Science.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2023) [Supporting and enhancing the experience of international students in the UK](#). Gloucester: QAA. Note: A key report on the international student experience, with helpful reflective prompts on specific areas.

UK Council for International Student Affairs (2022) [#WeAreInternational: Student charter](#). London: UKCISA.

UK Government (n.d.) [Student visa: Knowledge of English](#) [Webpage].