



Institutional Profile on Writing Programs Worldwide
 ACADEMIC WRITING AND PUBLISHING MODULE
 LTTC, DIT

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Name of the Institution/University:

Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

The size and mission of the institution (any other introductory background on the institution):

The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) is now one of Ireland's largest and most innovative university-level institutions. There are 20,000 students registered in DIT (nearly 20% of the student body comes from outside Ireland), and over 2000 members of staff <http://www.dit.ie/about/profile/>

With links dating back to 1887, DIT has a long and proud tradition of providing education to the highest levels combining the academic excellence of a traditional university with career-focused learning. Publicly-funded, DIT is a member of the European University Association and offers an extensive range of undergraduate programmes at Bachelor Degree levels and postgraduate programmes at Taught Masters, Research Masters and Research PhD Degree levels. All degrees are recognised internationally and as an autonomous, doctorate-awarding institution DIT has an excellent reputation established in areas including: Applied Arts and Tourism, Business and Finance, Engineering and the Built Environment, Sciences and Health. DIT's mission is to provide an innovative, responsive and caring learning environment for a diverse range and level of programmes to students of all ages and backgrounds. In doing so, DIT:

- combines the academic quality of a traditional university with career-focussed learning, discovery and the application of knowledge
- emphasises excellence in learning, teaching, scholarship, research and support for entrepreneurship,
- contributes to technological, economic, social and cultural progress, and
- is engaged with and within the community.

<http://www.dit.ie/about/profile/missionstatement/>

Where is writing occurring at the institution: what languages and dialects are used and in what context with what goals?

Writing is occurring at all levels of the institution, and is undertaken by staff and students of the institution. The next section describes the composition of the student cohort and the structure of the Institute into Colleges and Schools. The wide-ranging programmes offered

by the Institute include many options in languages other than English. Students may learn and study through Irish/Gaelic, Chinese, Spanish, German, French, and Italian. Writing is therefore undertaken in all of these languages and the important dialects of each. It is also important to note here that since Irish/Gaelic is officially the first language of Ireland, institutional documentation, signage and online material must be available in this language and its presentation must have parity with the presentation of all English language material.

Writing is undertaken in different contexts and with different goals and objectives. In an institution offering higher education, writing is clearly one of the central forms of expression of all that has been taught, learned and assessed. **Academic staff** write teaching material in numerous formats: slide presentations, supporting handouts, tasks, exercises and tests. Programme teams construct programme handbooks, policy documents, webpages, and promotional materials. Many academics use social media to communicate with their students, colleagues and the national/international community. This entails writing in completely different register, and usually very economically. The Institute has recently provided specific training and professional development for academics using social media to support effect writing for these new channels. **Students** are engaged with note-taking and note-making in lectures, laboratories, fieldwork, library study and tutorials. Students write in many of the forms of assessment used in their modules and programmes: typically, they will undertake three-hour written examinations at the end of each semester. Many types of continuous assessment are central to programmes and modules: these include laboratory practicals, projects, reflective blogging, critiques, translation exercises, essays, presentations and reports.

Writing tasks are used to develop the graduate attributes and career-relevant skills of students in many disciplines: this has been a concern for highly scientific and numerate disciplines which may traditionally have had less emphasis on written communications and assessments. However, a focus on strong oral and written communication is common to all discipline areas. The diversity of subjects at the Institute means that in one building, a student may be writing a critique (or “crit”) of a piece of fine art, while in another their colleagues role-play and write correspondence between a pharmaceutical company and its clients. The proliferation of apps and social media tools available both to academics and students has facilitated new writing activities and tasks in numerous contexts and with wide-ranging learning objectives in mind.

Aside from the contexts of formal teaching and learning activities, academics undertake writing for research and in their wider professional activities. Many lecturers in this Institute also continue in their professional roles (for example in law, or architecture, or performing arts). Therefore they may be involved in writing bids for research funding, research papers, reports, promotional materials and websites in support of research projects, and the use of social media to disseminate their work. Students at the Institute have numerous opportunities to become involved in clubs, societies and community-based activities. The development of their personal and professional skills and attributes through these activities can be accredited through the mechanisms of two modules created at the Institute. For such accreditation, students must undertake detailed reflective writing on their activities and learning. The activities in and of themselves (for example, managing or promoting a club or an event) involve writing and creating materials on paper and online. While we

might not immediately think of such activities as contributing to the development of a student's writing skills, they are widespread and highly motivational to students.

Who is attending this institution or the specific program? (Identify the demographics of the student population and their needs):

There are over 400 undergraduate, postgraduate, research, part-time and evening courses in DIT. There are more than 20,000 students enrolled on full and part-time programmes and over 1,000 international students. DIT is one of Ireland's largest and most innovative institutes of higher education. Strong links and regular interaction with industry and the professions allow the Institute to base its teaching on the latest global trends. With this number of different programmes across its 4 colleges, and 25 Schools, DIT offers a diverse range of specialised programmes, in some cases programmes unique to DIT, and often created and adjusted to meet current industry needs.

The challenges facing lecturers in supporting their students in the writing process centre around the key areas of assessment and learning. Students across the disciplines may be required to produce essays, written examinations, or laboratory reports whose main purpose is to demonstrate their mastery of disciplinary course content. In assessing such writing, lecturers focus on both the content and the form of the writing, which is the language used, the text structure, the construction of argument, grammar and punctuation. Students also need support which can help them engage with disciplinary knowledge as well as develop more general abilities to reason and critique. Specifically they may be required to write texts that trace their reflections on the learning process itself, as with journals where they record thoughts, questions, problems, and ideas about readings, lectures, and applied practice.

In terms of the Academic Writing and Publishing (AWP) module which is the specific program for dissemination through this web portal, there is a blend of academic staff (faculty) and postgraduate students participating each academic year.

Who is teaching at this institution or the specific program that you want profiled?

The DIT adopts the most up to date learning and teaching practices and encourages all academic staff to undertake ongoing training in Academic Communication, New Technologies, Promoting Student Engagement and Enhancing Academic Practice. This is all delivered through the dedicated Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre which delivers the AWP module. There is an excellent student-staff ratio in DIT with average class sizes of 35 students. As well as a dedicated International Student Experience Officer in the International Office, all registered students have access to dedicated support services to help them personally as well as academically through their degree in DIT. In a recent international student departure survey 98% of International students agreed that DIT Lecturers were helpful and friendly.

Within the context of the AWP module, our roles are as course co-ordinators and module tutors. Undoubtedly there are challenges in the academic development role in instructing lecturers to support their own students in writing. The module was developed in acknowledgement that there are ever increasing pressures on academics to undertake research and to publish both in their own disciplines and in higher education pedagogy,

practice and policy. The module is aimed at higher education lecturers who wish to help their own students improve their academic writing in discipline-specific contexts, and postgraduate writers, wishing to publish their work within a year. It was anticipated that the module would combine a practical orientation to teaching writing with a grounding in current theories of writing instruction.

By providing key knowledge and support to those academic staff interested in publishing in teaching, learning or eLearning professional practice, the module is an attempt to help participants' work to become the focus of a form of sustained inquiry, leading towards publication. Through exploration of a wide variety of practical academic writing tools, the intention is to progress well planned research work along the road to publication. Key to participant success is the honing of both written and oral communications skills through extensive writing practice and presentation in a selected area of their choice. Principles of academic writing are investigated along with the necessary skills of advanced information literacy.

Explain the specific writing related initiative(s) at this institution (for example: Writing Center, Specific Writing Related Classrooms, Teacher Training, Teaching Pedagogies, etc.)

(This will be the highlight of the profile)

Since the early 1990s, there has been an obvious trend in faculty professional development which emerged as a formal activity in most third level institutions in the UK, Australasia the US, and in turn, Ireland. This led to the inception of centres for (faculty) academic development, including the Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre (LTTC) at (DIT) in Ireland in 1999. A year later, the LTTC began to offer its accredited academic development programmes and short courses for academics within and externally to the Institute. Academics have a range of qualifications to choose from within the LTTC, and the focus of this AWP initiative for the web portal is a 10 ECT¹ module offered as part of a Masters in Higher Education, or can be taken as a standalone CP module.

An exploratory model [see web site below] is proposed for critical academic writing encompassing a series of scaffolded in-class activities, virtual peer learning, and blended tutor feedback – culminating in the publication and dissemination of individual practice-based educational research. These two practical outputs from the module, a paper for publication in a peer reviewed journal and a conference presentation on each participant's practice-based research have been designed to support lecturers with academic writing in their discipline. A diverse and contemporary range of topics from practice have been published to date including: research on the use of wikis to support collaborative learning in Marketing; stories from higher education technology-enhanced learning; a practical approach to teaching students with dyslexia; active learning techniques in legal professional education; project management skills for apprentices in construction; problem-based multimedia learning; cognitive research in first year chemistry; and effective tutorials in professional education; work placement blogs as a means to facilitate peer to peer learning; effective implementation of 'crits' in art and design education, interdisciplinary engagement in higher education through opera training; meta-analysis of research into sustainable

¹ ECTS is European Credit Transfer System

construction materials; reasons for the failure of knowledge management strategies in business; state-of-the-art research in retail display and business.

Figure 1 shows the different components of the blended module. Integration of online and face-to-face class (f2f) activities for writing development saw an online journal club being introduced as well as virtual peer learning sets. The journal club took place in the virtual learning environment, Blackboard. It was aimed at helping participants learn how to read articles critically. Provocative articles on the role of academic writing were chosen for review, and participants worked in small groups to appraise a recently published research paper, and present their findings to their peers in the online journal club. If possible, articles with some discipline relevance were assigned. Initially, participants do not feel confident in their critical appraisal skills, so checklists for critical review were made available online. The advantage of this approach is that reviews are more consistent and alert the readers to methodological flaws. Incorporating learning principles such as agreeing goals relevant to participants was used to enhance the learning experience. Group theory suggests that clear boundaries contribute to a sense of security, making creative thinking possible.

The peer learning sets were virtual to allow the participants to maintain the dynamic and pace of their learning between f2f classes. It was integral to the impact of these sets that investment was made in establishing mutual trust amongst the participants as part of the f2f module induction as such peer exchange is rooted in existing relationships and a certain degree of reciprocated faith. We established early on that peer exchange necessitates a minimum shared knowledge of the context so as to make sense of what peers have to say about their work and that it requires a will to learn on the part of all the participants. That will to learn implies that participants need to be able to admit that they do not know all the answers, which in turn requires there to be mutual confidence and a relatively non-threatening atmosphere within the virtual peer set. Arguably writers require both social and academic integration in order to successfully complete their work in a timely fashion. We believe that creating opportunities for social and academic interaction with other participants is of vital importance for setting a positive affective climate for writing. By providing personal support, the virtual peer sets were based on openness and personal commitment to one another which helped participants develop the ability to combine criticism with support and also serve as a first filter for ideas and shared resources. The emotional side of writing is usually privatized and often under-communicated so the participants were encouraged to exchange experiences, frustrations and discuss writing-related issues. Having an open-hearted manner and communicative frame of mind by all involved, which they interpreted as trust was central to its success. The crux to engaging writers in the virtual environment is the creation of a space where they feel comfortable, trusted, and valued.

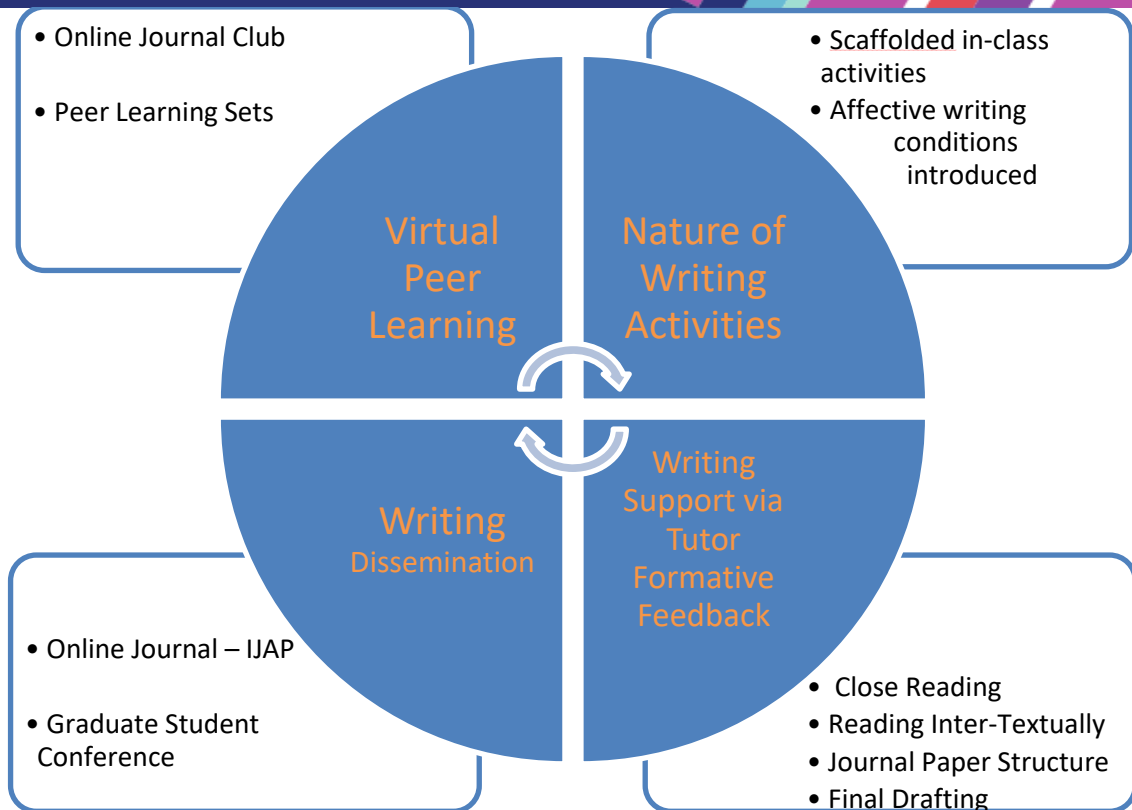


Figure 1 Exploratory Model of Supporting Postgraduate Academic Writing

Irish Journal of Academic Practice

Published by the Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre



In terms of writing dissemination opportunities resulting from this module, two outlets for the participants' work have been introduced – a graduate student conference to celebrate their work and an online journal entitled Irish Journal of Academic Practice (IJAP) <http://arrow.dit.ie/ijap/>. Special emphasis in the journal is on innovative practices in teaching and learning. The purpose of the graduate conference is to disseminate educational research from across the programme (involving both present and past graduates), which is relevant and interesting to all academic staff. The graduate student conference is a way to build a network of research-informed participants and by encouraging such networking, it is anticipated that the event will also reinforce participants' understanding of the value of involvement in communities of practice associated with academic disciplines and professions. This conference focuses attention on how learning and academic writing happens, as well as how it is experienced in different subject contexts; specifically it encourages participants to critically reflect on their thinking and learning about educational research in which they are currently engaged, and to share these reflections with others by involving themselves in this student-led conference.

As a complement to the provision of support in academic writing for Faculty, in 2015 an Academic Writing Centre (AWC) opened for the first time in the institution to provide a free service to all DIT students (undergraduate and postgraduate) who seek support to enhance and develop their academic writing skills. The Centre operates by providing non-judgemental and friendly support to assist students in developing their ability as writers in an academic environment. Its remit is to support students in becoming better writers. It does this by offering one to one appointments with one of the AWC tutors and a weekly drop-in session. <http://www.dit.ie/awc/>

Links to program websites and writing related initiatives (if any)?

AWP Module Overview: <https://littcprogrammes.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/cpd-academic-w-riting-publishing-info-sheet.pdf>

Link to 2015-6 module timetable and flyer:

<https://littcprogrammes.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/final-awp-module-timetable-2015-16-final-oct-19th.pdf>

http://www.dit.ie/littc/media/ditlittc/CPD_Academic%20Writing%20%20Publishing_InfoSheet.pdf

Model of Critical Thinking-Reading-Writing:

<https://littcprogrammes.wordpress.com/model-of-critical-thinking-reading-writing/>

6th Annual Graduate Student Conference 2015:

<http://www.dit.ie/littc/researchscholarship/graduateconference/>

2016 Conference link:

<http://dit.ie/littc/researchscholarship/graduateconference16/>

Previous Graduate Conferences:



A brief summary explaining the successes and struggles around this particular writing initiative:

Successes in the AWP Module

- Participants regularly publishing their journal papers in a target journal of their choosing and presenting their work from the module at national and international conferences.
- Rich in-class peer discussions on critical thinking, academic writing and getting published. They also counteract the sense of isolation writers experience and address the misconception that a 'reject and resubmit' decision is a failure.
- Online journal club to explore critical reading.
- In effect, participants experience peer review informally with each other and formally via the assessment process for the module. In some cases, the peer review interaction continues beyond the module.
- The assessment process closely parallels the review process which they will encounter when making submissions to peer-reviewed journals. This prepares them for both the challenges and benefits of the peer-review cycle leading into publication.

Struggles across the AWP Module

- Balancing activities that appeal simultaneously to both faculty and PG writers.
- Keeping up with the continuous formative feedback – via both audio and screencast.
- Addressing individuals' specific specialist topic areas, with which tutors may not be fully familiar, in order to provide appropriate and detailed feedback.
- Keeping a happy medium in terms of responding to very strong demand for the module while keeping its strengths and integrity.

Academic Writing issues identified by participants:

- Gear-change: moving from writing in the discipline to writing about their teaching, or reflecting on their learning
- Writing more than usual
- Writing about their own experiences, instead of their research/work in general
- Lack of confidence in academic writing
- Challenges in engaging with a new field of secondary reading, and this as the foundation for writing
- Literature searches
- What counts as literature/levels of criticality in reviewing literature
- Move to different referencing styles

What do we do about the issues identified in academic writing:

- Involvement of Librarians in module delivery – driven by a series of digital literacy workshops
- Suggested literature and links for each topic
- (Audio) Formative feedback on authentic writing tasks at regular intervals
- Provision of a common writing guidelines and agreed referencing guide

- Frequent communication between module tutors – regular update meetings
- E-Portfolio for students supports the development of their writing across two years – with a series of reflective writing prompts and inputs

Your Role and Relationship with the institution if any? Or Source of your information?

We are academic developers based in the Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre [LTTC] in DIT: <http://www.dit.ie/lttc/>

Roisin Donnelly: <http://www.dit.ie/lttc/about/lttcstaff/#rdonnelly>

Publications: <http://www.dit.ie/lttc/about/lttcstaff/#rdonnelly>

Claire McDonnell: <http://www.dit.ie/lttc/about/lttcstaff/#cmcdonnell>

Publications: <http://www.dit.ie/lttc/about/lttcstaff/#d.en.107362>

Claire McAvinia: <http://www.dit.ie/lttc/about/lttcstaff/#cmcavinia>

Publications: <http://www.dit.ie/lttc/about/lttcstaff/#d.en.110557>

Accompanying this information are a series of pictures and videos of the writing initiative in action with students and teachers in the classroom setting (with Photo credits).

Video of New Grangegorman Campus in Dublin where the writing initiative will be located from 2018 onwards:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EW_ThDM1eJE