

## **Royal Holloway Individual Institutional Profile**

### **Researcher Development Programme and CeDAS**

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

Royal Holloway is one of the UK's leading research-intensive universities, with 21 academic departments and schools spanning the arts and humanities, sciences, social sciences, management, economics and law.

Our 9,000 students learn from internationally renowned academics and researchers. Built on the foundation of philanthropy, we take our name from one of our founders, the Victorian entrepreneur Thomas Holloway, who established Royal Holloway as a college for women in 1886.

#### **Researcher Development Programme for doctoral students.**

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

For the most part, doctoral students are separated from the main writing provision (CeDAS – Centre for the Development of Academic Skills) but collaborations and co-tutoring do occur.

Academic writing is delivered to doctoral students on the Researcher Development Program. AS of 2016, we have 729 doctoral students, and just over 20% of the whole University cohort are international. The majority of international students I have tutored consider their first language to be Chinese, Iranian, and Arabian, while European students are from Greece France, Germany, Sweden and Italy. About half the students I advise are English speakers and struggles with writing occur around clarity of expression as well as grammar and language use. Sometimes students use their first year simply to adapt to a new environment with new challenges such as knowing what research is, how they can represent it and how it differs from their previous experiences.

Workshops aim to give students not only a structure and a basis for completing their thesis but to give options and ideas to develop their writing to become advanced research writers. Workshops ask students to either discuss their research or write their research in the class and gain peer and tutor feedback. Each class concentrates on a specific section of the thesis, e.g. introduction, literature review or methodology, with the aim of covering the basic information that students need to understand what goes into these sections, but also how they can adapt this template and form their own researcher identity in their chapters. Identity work is important in the workshops.

Other workshops not focused on the thesis help students to publish their work. These workshops are more specific to discipline and the primary goal is to support students with turning their academic writing within their thesis into publishable work.

Tutorials with students look in-depth at their writing needs and struggles with the aim of helping them with any technical difficulties as well as helping them understand how a reader would view their writing. Reflexivity within their writing is encouraged.

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

The Researcher Development Programme mostly sees doctoral students who are international or European but many English speakers also attend the classes as well as the tutorials. All students come with different experiences and those who attend tutorials are often doing so because they are struggling with expressing their research in a way that suits their supervisor at that time. Limited English language use can hold their development and the development of their thesis back. Other students are struggling to interpret feedback from their supervisor or peers and so discussions on reader-based prose are useful. Difficulty with the clarity of their sentences is sometimes a result of the student's difficulty with understanding the complex subject matter and so sometimes tutorials are spaces where students can work through their thoughts and verbalize their interpretations in a supportive atmosphere.

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

- Dr. Laura Christie, Educational Development Officer (Researcher Development)
- External consultants.

**5) Explain the specific writing related initiative(s) at this institution**

The Researcher Development Programme contains a series of academic writing workshops as well as offering one-to-one tutorials for doctoral students. The programme covers all disciplines and while discipline specific classes were trialed for a short while, having students from all disciplines attend the workshops together made for greater and more in-depth discussions.

When I started directing the programme in 2013, the initial remit was to provide classes on academic writing. The programme as a whole is meant to encourage students to think about their life beyond the PhD and to start developing their transferable skills for employment, either in academia or industry. Given that I was asked to develop workshops from scratch, I decided to make each class relevant to a specific section of the thesis. Students wanted to know

how to write a literature review or what goes into a methodology section so I created classes to match the progress through the thesis. Each class takes a section of the thesis and takes the format of working through a basic outline of each section and building up to allow students to fill it with what is relevant to their research. Workshops are three hours and start with an understanding of what students already know. Knowledge is built up throughout the class and the thesis section is studied first from a broad perspective and drills down to use of language and differences and options for style.

Students are being told by supervisors to give their own opinion on their subject and in a literature review they struggle with this concept. Together as a small class, we take apart what being critical means, what authorial identity means and how it can practically be applied to this section. Many of the workshops are about building confidence and motivation and provide a much needed safe space for students to find out about familiar and often unspoken struggles with writing.

At this time, there was no one-to-one provision for doctoral students. Hearing that some students were struggling with basic grammar and language or suffering from a writing block, lack of motivation, lack of confidence in their abilities, difficulties with representing their interpretations and findings in writing, I started a pilot project in the summer of 2014 and offered tutorials. Over a short period of just 8 weeks, I saw 23 students and gave a total of 40 tutorials. I would ask for a draft of their work prior to the meeting and use in-text comments to make suggestions and give feedback. Then I would meet with the student and together we would look through these comments and make the changes together in the meeting. This way I can advise students to look for solutions to language or style issues at the same time as giving feedback.

The number of requests shows the demand for individual writing advice and so I continued this for the next academic year seeing 20 more students with a total of 41 meetings in 2014/15 and 25 students and 43 tutorials in 2015/16.

Feedback from doctoral researchers who have attended workshops and tutorials say that they feel more motivated to write, that they feel more equipped to approach writing differently and more effectively and in some instances it has changed the way they view their work.

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

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/iquad/doctoralschool/researcherdevelopmentprogramme/researcherdevelopmentprogramme.aspx>

**7) A brief summary explaining the successes and struggles around this particular writing initiative.**

The academic writing workshops seems to get students thinking about what they need to do next within their thesis. Feedback has indicated that the workshops clarify confusions, give students a greater sense of what is expected of them and motivates them to write differently and with more self-awareness. Usually tutorials are requested from attendees of the classes but success can be evidenced through supervisors sending their students to request tutorials. Struggles arise due to the generic nature of the classes. Although discipline specific classes were trialed I felt that when students from different writing cultures came together greater awareness was generated leading to more diverse and engaged discussions. Students seemed to gain more from talking to others outside their subject and learning about how writing is 'done' in other disciplines.

**8) Your Role and Relationship with the institution if any?**

Educational Development Officer (Researcher Development)

**9) Send me pictures and videos of the campus, students, teachers, the city, the writing initiative in action, or photo of the setting (e.g., classroom, building exterior, nearby locale) that pertains to the writing initiative in action.**

(Pics attached)

**CeDAS – Centre for the Development of Academic Skills**

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

The broad aim is to enable all undergraduates and postgraduate taught writers at Royal Holloway to achieve their full academic potential. Depending on the particular needs of the student, this means:

- enabling those new to university to acculturate to unfamiliar writing practices;
- helping writers to find their voice within a particular disciplinary community;
- providing language support to L2 writers so that they can communicate with greater fluency and accuracy on paper;
- supporting writers with particular learning differences.

CeDAS has responsibility for establishing a coherent view of writing provision and, to this end, is creating an 'Academic Skills Hub' on the student intranet, which aims to bring together all academic development services (including writing) in one place.

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

Undergraduates and taught postgraduates, both home and international, attend classes and sign up for 1:1 writing tutorials.

Writing development at Royal Holloway is evolving quite rapidly. Within academic departments, the teaching of writing skills is becoming an increasingly important part of the curriculum, particularly for first-year undergraduates. In terms of centrally-provided writing services, provision for L2 writers remains significant given the large numbers of overseas students. However, the last few years has seen a move to address the needs of home students too through activities that aim to ease the transition from school to university writing; build confidence for writing in particular genres; and develop the skills needed to write with clarity and precision so highly prized by prospective employers.

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

Silke Placzek, Head of CeDAS  
Gerard Clough, Senior Teaching Fellow, CeDAS  
CeDAS Teaching Fellows

**5) Explain the specific writing related initiative(s) at this institution**

CeDAS provides bespoke, discipline-specific writing development as part of the curriculum. This may be devised and delivered by subject specialists or by CeDAS staff and academic staff working in collaboration;

- Essential Academic Skills: bookable workshops and lectures on generic academic writing skills;

- Academic English for International Students: bookable courses on academic writing with a joint focus on language and literacy;
- 1:1 writing tutorials: bookable writing advice sessions with a CeDAS teaching fellow;
- Writing Cafe: informal advice on academic writing delivered by trained writing mentors in collaboration with the Students' Union;
- Online writing resources, e.g. EAP Toolkit, Skills4StudyCampus

CeDAS and other writing developers in the College are working together to meet such needs at all levels through delivery of both bespoke and generic writing skills courses and workshops as well as through the personalised support of 1:1 tutorials. We are also looking to develop a wider repertoire of approaches through, for example, adoption of peer mentoring schemes and writing retreats.

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

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/cedas/home.aspx>

<http://eataw2017.org/>

#### **7) A brief summary explaining the successes and struggles around this particular writing initiative.**

Against this background of positive change, the task of improving the visibility and accessibility of the academic writing services offered still has some way to go. With the development of new student and staff intranets and the positioning of student services in the new library, there is every prospect that this will be achieved.

A recent success will see us host the EATAW 2017 conference entitled Academic Writing Now: Policy, pedagogy and practice, which aims to take stock of the shifting realities of the higher education today. As practitioners of academic writing, we are in a unique position of being able to observe the effects – across disciplines – of the many changes affecting the sector.

#### **8) Your Role and Relationship with the institution if any? Or Source of your information?**

Edited by Dr. Laura Christie. Source: Gerard Clough, Senior Teaching Fellow, CeDAS.