

Academic Language Feedback toolkit: Making progress with post-entry language skills development

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This paper introduces an Academic Language Feedback (ALF) toolkit which was developed as a result of a series of pilot programs aiming to facilitate post-entry development of students' English language proficiency and academic literacy skills in the Faculty of Education, Monash University. The programs were implemented taking into consideration strategies and support options outlined in several models of embedded academic language development. The ALF toolkit consists of the ALF guide in the form of the diagram, relevant resources for staff and students, and a Hands-on English Language Program (HELP) syllabus corresponding to the elements of the ALF guide. The paper provides a description of the conceptual framework which informed the development and use of the ALF toolkit. In semester 1 2015, the ALF toolkit was used to support assignment marking and feedback provision processes in two core units. The application of the ALF toolkit included delivering professional development sessions and providing resources for teaching staff as well as creating resources for students and responding to students' requests for assistance. I argue that the use of such toolkits can raise awareness among teaching staff and students of their responsibilities with regards to post-entry academic language and literacy development. The paper reports the preliminary findings of the evaluation study which focused on academic staff use and perceptions of the ALF guide and corresponding resources in Semester 1 2015, and provides suggestions for further use of the toolkit.

Key Words: academic language feedback, staff development, embedded academic language development, English language proficiency, assessment for learning, professional learning.

1. Introduction

The Academic Language Feedback (ALF) toolkit discussed in this paper was an outcome of a series of pilot programs on academic language development that I initiated based on my experiences as an Academic Language and Literacy Development (ALLD) advisor in the Faculty of Education, a former international student, and a passionate teacher of English as an Additional Language (EAL). The faculty is one of the few at the university to have two faculty-based ALLD advisors who provide discipline-specific support to students in all faculty programs, ranging from the undergraduate pre-service teacher courses to research candidates. The impressive variety of faculty-based ALLD programs has been enriched by more recent integrated support options, where the faculty ALLD and the library faculty teams worked in collaboration with academics in the faculty. Although such work was more effective than extra-curricular options (e.g., academic skills workshops and booklets), these models did not provide systematic post-entry English language proficiency and academic literacies development. What complicat-

ed the matter further was the fact that the university had no institutional approach to post-entry English language proficiency development and no support service that could assist students with the need for further English language development.

The pilot programs were a response to the apparent demand for the extension of provision of post-entry English language proficiency and academic literacy development options for the diverse student cohorts in the faculty. The latest program involved the use of the Academic Language Feedback (ALF) toolkit, comprising a comprehensive range of mechanisms, strategies and resources on development of post-entry English language proficiency and academic literacies in Education. The ALF toolkit includes: an ALF guide infographic and a comprehensive bank of corresponding self-access resources; a GET HELP (Hands-on English Language Program) syllabus and materials for students; ALF syllabus for an ALLD professional learning module for teaching staff; and ALF resources for staff use (a comment bank template, a 'plan of action' template, and the ALF referral flowchart template).

The paper starts with a brief overview of one of the preceding pilot programs, followed by the description of the conceptual framework that shaped development of the ALF toolkit. I then describe the Academic Language Feedback (ALF) toolkit components and application protocols. The paper also reports on the preliminary findings of the project evaluation which focused on the academic staff use and perceptions of the use of the ALF toolkit in Semester 1 2015. I highlight successes of the pilot ALF toolkit application and analyse challenging moments. To conclude, I outline possible implications of the pilot and offer suggestions for further research.

2. Setting the scene

The current ALF as reported in this paper is the result of a two-phase pilot program conducted throughout 2014 and 2015. Phase 2 of the 2014 pilot involved a trial of reflective assignment preparation activities and specific Moodle resources aligned with the elements of the Academic Language Feedback guide (see Appendix A). The elements of the ALF guide were derived from the Phase 1 academic language feedback sheet template (adapted from Harris, 2013) and common mistakes identified in the analysis of student writing in Semester 1 2014. The choice and wording of elements were based on the results of the 2014 pilot program which examined writing of more than 600 undergraduate and graduate students in the faculty. Appendix A shows the ALF guide as it was used in peer-review activities and for guiding markers when they provided language-focussed feedback on student assignments. "Language-focussed" feedback in that context meant that feedback on academic language-related criteria in student assignments was detailed and provided explicit direction for further English language proficiency and academic literacy development processes for each individual student. Comments from students indicated that they appreciated opportunities to develop their academic literacy and language when these opportunities were part of the unit delivery (in class and on-line). The two discipline teaching staff who provided the reflective assignment preparation activities in their tutorials and marked the assignment using the ALF guide, reported finding it easy to apply and believed that consistent formative feedback with the use of the diagram elements raised students' awareness of the importance of specific communication skills. One of the lecturers noticed an immediate improvement in the students' assignments with regards to structure and language. The analysis of the interview and reflective diary data from the other lecturer provided a valuable insight into the dynamics and challenges of sessional teaching as well as possible directions for staff training with regards to provision of quality language-focussed feedback.

Overall, the 2014 pilot results indicated that many staff and students seemed to lack a clear understanding of their responsibilities and related processes with regards to post-entry academic language skills development. It was recognised that a redevelopment of the program was needed to maximise student success by assessing students' current writing proficiencies using authentic measures integrated into assignment tasks through the use of newly created language-focussed rubrics enhanced with specificity for clarity. A new program needed to include integrated resources and workshops tailored to known shortcomings (e.g., grammar, academic style and voice) and emergent trends, and to provide assistance to students and academics to better understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to academic language development and overall

communication skill improvement. It was also evident that the success of future programs depended on the availability of resources and support options that directly correspond to the ALF guide elements if the ALF guide is used as the feedback tool, because lack of such resources and support could undermine the effectiveness of the language-focussed feedback.

The results of the analysis of the student cohort demographics in this study warn against homogenising student profiles if a supportive learning culture is to be provided, based on the belief that all students benefit from explicit skill scaffolding and further language enrichment processes. The extent to which students engage with such processes depends on on-going diagnostics of their learning needs and is often independent of the student progress in the course or citizenship status. This is where students' language proficiency needs to be considered as one of influential factors for formulating proper skill development mechanisms, in which the needs and responsibilities of all stakeholders (students, academics, support staff and administrators) become clear. One of the first issues to address in the process of developing such mechanisms is that of availability of information about the academic language ability of student cohorts.

The current program on academic language development was based on the use of the ALF toolkit by both staff and students. For students, the toolkit incorporated facilitating the development of both students' English language proficiency (left side of the ALF guide) and academic writing proficiency (right side of the ALF guide) (shown in Appendix A) through corresponding Learning Management System (LMS) resources, and meeting the students' demands for assistance in the Hands-on English Language Program (GET HELP) sessions and individual consultations in addition to existing ALLD workshops and support. For academics, the application of the ALF toolkit included professional development sessions and further resources to support assignment marking and feedback provision using the ALF guide. The ALF guide elements featured in the assessment rubrics and feedback comments templates as well as in the titles of resources and face-to-face sessions in order to ensure consistency of messages related to English language enrichment and academic literacies development and to promote staff and students' awareness with regards to their responsibility in this matter. It was hoped that the ALF guide would act as a teaching and learning framework (Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2015) to add structure to adjunct options and resources that students would access independently. Another aim was to link the ALF guide and assessment criteria, thus creating opportunities for language-focussed feedback and making the ALF focus areas more meaningful to students. This approach is in contrast to previously provided broad comments about the need to improve English language expression or proofread their future submissions more carefully. The sections below describe the overarching framework and decision-making processes used in the redeveloped academic language development program that incorporated use of the ALF toolkit.

3. Overarching framework

The conceptual foundations that informed development of the ALF guide and, consequently, the ALF toolkit, illustrate my holistic understanding of academic language use in tertiary settings.

3.1. Understanding academic language

This paper understands the term 'academic language' ability to mean students' capacities to use English language and academic literacy skills to engage with the course content and satisfy assignment criteria. Such understanding is based on the description of language ability as "a capacity that enables language users to create and interpret discourse" (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 33). Therefore, *academic language* ability would mean engagement with the *academic* discourse, or Discourses. According to Gee (2015), various Discourses are composed of distinctive ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, reading and writing that are considered "normal" by specific groups.

The diversity of the student population in Australian universities warrants careful consideration of discipline Discourse acquisition and learning processes to ensure that no student cohort is disadvantaged. From a practical perspective, this would mean a combination of explicit scaffolding and apprenticeship-like models used for facilitating students' academic language devel-

opment. Within various discipline contexts, the ALF toolkit could be a means to help students “get appropriately in sync” (Gee, 2015, p. 172) with a secondary Discourse by providing an overview of the academic language requirements in the particular discipline. At the same time, teaching staff could be reminded of the values embedded in their language use and Discourse practices, and how “concrete and accessible” (Minnis, 1994, p. 385, as cited in Gee, 2015, p. 184) these are to students.

To add to the understanding of the rationale behind the ALF toolkit as a constituent of a bigger agenda of embedded post-entry English language proficiency development, a discussion of non-reciprocal language use components offered by Bachman and Palmer (2010), which includes language knowledge and strategic competence, as well as accompanying attributes such as topical knowledge, personal characteristics, affective schemata, and cognitive strategies, is necessary. Bachman and Palmer (2010) acknowledge the influence of these attributes on student assessment performance and argue that awareness of these attributes can facilitate the design of appropriate assessment (for more, see Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Lea and Street (1998) express similar views concerning students’ performance in university assignments, where several complex phenomena (repertoire of discipline-specific linguistic practices, social meanings and identities, personal identity) are at play and need to be recognised if students’ writing is viewed as “being concerned with the processes of meaning-making and contestation around meaning rather than skills or deficits” (p. 6). In this context, it is important to understand how appropriate individualised feedback and direction for action may enhance students’ skills and confidence.

The lens that has been adopted in this study to assess the usefulness of language-focussed feedback takes account of three thematic categories – students, student-tutor interactions, and the institution (Lea & Street, 1998). Viewing feedback provision and student engagement with it through this lens takes the focus away from the skill deficiency assumption and draws attention to feedback quality and power relationships as well as to institutional approaches to staff development and learning. Self-reflection and peer-learning opportunities need to be natural additions to expected tutor feedback so that students engage properly with the formative feedback they receive (Rayner, Papakonstantinou, Gleadow, & Abbott, 2014).

The last, but not the least, important point to make in this section is that assessment, and therefore, feedback, needs to focus on “learners’ ability to use the language for functional communication, especially in the areas of advanced education, professional practice and employment” (Read, 2015, p. 111). The process of academic language development needs to be linked to the effective professional communication skills that are listed as graduate attributes by Australian universities. Moreover, links between academic language requirements and professional communication skill standards need to be made explicit. Students’ capacities to use language competently in one domain assists their ability to communicate in other domains (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). When students understand this connection, they are more likely to improve their literacy across domains. The concepts and factors discussed in this section highlight the need for fully embedded models of academic language development that are discussed below.

3.2. Embedded models of academic language development

The use of the ALF toolkit is based on the premises of the embedded development of students’ English language proficiency and academic literacies, a sound pedagogical principle of in-curriculum skill enhancement, rather than a remedial ‘quick fix’ approach (Briguglio & Watson, 2014; Chanock, 2007; Percy, 2014). Percy’s (2014) argument for the re-integration of academic language and learning (ALL) specialists and academic developers (AD), which is needed to “foster collaborations in educational development that promote student learning and language development simultaneously” (p. 10), seems to be especially relevant in the modern Australian university contexts. The shift from the often ‘post-failure’ support and counselling role to that of a language and learning expert (Briguglio, 2014) should make a difference to the ways in which ALL staff act, which, in turn, would contribute to improved academic language development practices within curricula.

Briguglio’s (2013, 2014) *Working in the Third Space* (WITTS) model provides an insight into interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise of disciplinary academics and ALL staff in the third

space, with facilitation and mediation processes taking place to constitute professional learning processes. Embedding is described in the literature as the entrenched language development and support continuum, in which various forms of collaboration between teaching staff and academic language and literacy (ALL) advisors are used to ensure all student needs are addressed from entry to completion of a course of study (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012; Briguglio and Watson, 2014). Briguglio's understanding of the third space is adopted in the context of this paper and is further extended to that of the "common ground", or shared discourse creation, to include not only academics and ALL staff but students as active academic language users and acknowledge influence of individuals' characteristics and a number of other factors that have an impact on language use.

Embedding academic language development means "providing a variety of [language development] strategies and opportunities within the curriculum" (Briguglio & Watson, 2014, p. 71) so the necessity of educating Australian academics about such processes cannot be disregarded. Application of the embedded models requires teaching staff development and learning with regards to their intercultural communication skills as well as provision of linguistic development as part of the holistic student development (Briguglio & Watson, 2014). The belief that the usefulness of any post-entry language assessment "depends on the quality of feedback provided" and opportunities for revisiting feedback for further skill development purposes (Read, 2015, p. 91) underlay the quest for consistent language-focussed feedback provided in the units, not only in extra-curricular settings.

The rationale for integrated language-focussed feedback was also shaped by the reality of student lives, where "assessed coursework will typically take precedence" (Murray, 2012, p. 60) over other study commitments. Although struggling students do benefit from extensive individualised support, so do many others whose skill development needs often go unnoticed. Moreover, more often than not those students who do not engage with any additional skill development opportunities are "in greatest need" and "most vulnerable" (Murray, 2012, p. 60) due to numerous challenges presented by their studies and life commitments. This is where academics can play a role as skill development facilitators. It was hoped that the ALF toolkit could assist teaching staff with preliminary diagnoses of students' academic language capacities in their tutorial and workshop groups. However, it is not something that all academics see as their responsibility nor something they would feel comfortable doing (Read, 2015; Murray, 2010). Such an approach requires advanced understanding of what roles discipline and language experts can play in academic language development embedding processes.

All of these issues were taken into consideration when a small amount of central and faculty funding was obtained to use the ALF toolkit as an attempt to embed language-focussed feedback practices in the faculty. The faculty, or "devolved", approach has advantages when discipline-specific models are embedded in the curriculum with the help of academics and ALLD staff (Dunworth, Drury, Kralik, & Moore, 2014). Such advantages include a more coherent disciplinary area, a more cohesive teaching staff and student body, and stronger links between language of academia and language of specific professional communities (Read, 2015). Despite the absence of an institution-wide approach to post-entry English language proficiency development at Monash university – lack of institution-wide senior leadership, sound policies, unity among stakeholders, appropriate resourcing, and sufficient time allocation (Dunworth et al., 2014) – it was paramount that students' needs were identified and met. As already mentioned, the main objective of the pilot programs was to raise staff and students' awareness of their responsibility with regards to post-entry English language and academic literacies development. Therefore, the ALF toolkit was considered to be a means of promoting academic language development options amongst staff and students, enhancing skills for whole cohorts of students, and addressing the ALLD practitioners' concern about catering for individual needs (Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2015, p. 46) through individualised academic language-focussed feedback with the use of the ALF guide and corresponding resources in the target units. The ALF guide structure and corresponding staff toolkit components are described in detail in the sections that follow.

4. Introducing the ALF toolkit: Semester 1 2015

Many of the resources introduced for use in Semester 1, 2015, were often draft versions and have since been updated as a result of on-going discussion and reflection on behalf of the author of this paper and the academic language advisor who was part of the pilot projects in the faculty. Several other tools and resources have been added to the toolkit and will be mentioned later in the paper. In order to introduce the ALF toolkit, it is important to revisit the layout and elements of the ALF guide infographic (see Appendix A), which was originally designed as a simple student academic language feedback template.

4.1. The ALF guide infographic

The Academic Language Feedback guide (see Appendix A) reflects an understanding of academic language as a complex linguistic phenomenon and discursive practice by presenting two separate ‘branches’ of one’s academic language, namely, “English language proficiency/literacy description” (blue colour, on the left) and “Academic writing proficiency description” (purple colour, on the right), both inextricably linked to the central element entitled ‘Content’ (green colour). It is important to note that, although academic writing proficiency is more often than not associated with the written format (e.g., an essay), I argue for other assignment modes (e.g., posters or oral presentations) to be included as they almost always have a component associated with the use of academic language, when most English language proficiency elements and all the elements in the right-hand domain of the ALF guide are applicable. The focus on form through seemingly discrete English language and academic literacy items in the ALF guide infographic needs to be considered in a broader context of language use for specific purposes as the interface of the ALF guide infographic may be misleading in the way it presents academic writing proficiency performance elements. The current presentation of the ALF guide elements was aimed at providing guidance to academic staff and students as active members of the academic language discourse community.

The left side of the ALF guide infographic includes elements associated with English language proficiency – sentence structure, grammatical elements, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and apostrophe. This interface is closely linked with the concept of ‘choice’ in functional linguistics, described as a “prerequisite to any discussion of higher-level text planning, preselection or communicative decision-making” (Blache, 2013, p. 94). The purpose of the boxes is to assist with initial diagnostics and to facilitate the markers’ ability to select the most appropriate comment.

The right side of the infographic presents academic writing proficiency performance components. The components are based on the teaching staff’s understandings of what constitutes a quality response to the task. Relatively simple element descriptions are used in place of concepts such as discourse, cohesion and coherence to ensure that corresponding resources address manageable chunks of information or skills areas and are easy to locate. In order to use this guide effectively, it is necessary to understand that each of the boxes on the right side of the diagram is only an indicator of students’ ability to use a number of academic skills. These underlying literacies are informed by the facets and student autonomy levels in the Research Skills Development Framework (Willison & Reagan, 2007, 2012) and comprise, but are not limited to, finding, evaluating, generating and organising information as well as application, analysis, synthesis and communication of required, self-selected or new knowledge. These aspects are present in the corresponding ALF resources to ensure staff and students are aware of what lies beneath the brightly coloured boxes.

The ALF guide plays a crucial role in navigating the ALF toolkit resources and staff development materials. Moreover, it can be used for creating the summaries based on the students’ academic language proficiency analysis by a teaching staff member in each group. These summaries may become a useful instrument, informing all stakeholders about additional cohort characteristics, which, in turn, could improve student experiences and foster relevant skill development in their course of study.

4.2. The ALF self-access resources

As argued earlier, quality language-focussed feedback needs to include suggested steps towards further skill development of the feedback receiver, the student. These steps need to be quite detailed and clearly indicate what resources need to be accessed first. The ALF guide was used as a means to provide structure for self-regulated study. Various ALF resources with their titles directly corresponding to the elements of the ALF guide were posted on the university learning management system (Moodle) sites for students and staff in the two target units as an additional weekly folder. The resource templates were stored on an external Moodle site, which served as a resource bank and was only accessible to the ALLD staff in the faculty and the discipline team learning skills advisors in the library.

4.3. The ALF comments bank template

The ALF comments bank template was one of the most important components of the toolkit version for staff. Literature indicates that, although many academic staff have clear ideas about what constitutes a ‘good’ assignment, they often struggle to identify and word specific aspects that contribute to success of a specific piece or had an adverse impact (Arkoudis et al., 2012; Lea & Street, 1998). Another possible problem could be what Lea and Street (1998) term “categorical modality” of feedback – authoritative feedback based on the marker’s assumption of what is correct, without further explanation or suggestion for improvement. To address the issues described above, a comment template bank was developed and shared with the teaching staff (see Appendix B for a sample comment template). Staff could copy and paste relevant comments targeting specific elements of the ALF guide, which should have made it easier to provide detailed formative feedback. It was also hoped that carefully worded comments, individualised feedback and specific recommendation would facilitate the student-marker relationship development.

4.4. The ALF ‘plan of action’ template

The teaching staff were given an overview of the ALF resources in the form of a two-page document in a table format. This guided the teaching staff in their choices when recommending a plan of action to students or referring them for more specialist help. The two columns in the table listed resources which corresponded to either the left or the right side of the ALF guide. It was important that the staff in the target units were aware of the most recent developments in a quickly changing ALLD environment. The world of post-entry academic language development at Monash University is complex and at times confusing due to the size of the university, the fact that units are delivered on multiple campuses, and differentiated support which is based on the student status dependent on their citizenship or their use of English as a native/non-native language. Students’ progress in the course depended on the appropriate referral for students who were in need of immediate support, and the ALF action plan provided details of available options, which were explored in more detail in teaching staff development sessions.

4.5. The ALF staff development materials

The staff development materials and sessions focused on the most appropriate ways to use the ALF guide and corresponding resources when providing formative language-focussed feedback. To ease the somewhat abrupt mobilisation of the teaching staff in embedded skill development processes, the teaching teams were provided with academic language skill mapping outlines which demonstrated required skill development options and listed relevant resources. As part of the language-focussed feedback induction sessions for teaching staff in the target units, several short student samples were offered for marking and moderation with the use of the ALF guide. Suggested marking protocols with the focus on language and the “plan of action” document were discussed in detail. The session materials, modified for self-access option, were distributed to all teaching staff to include academics who were not be able to attend a face-to-face induction session.

The ALF toolkit application process involved planned use of the toolkit components and monitoring of staff and student engagement with the ALF resources by the ALLD team. It is described in more detail below.

5. The ALF toolkit application process: Making decisions

5.1. Choosing target units

It was difficult to choose the most appropriate unit for embedding academic language proficiency development as the units available within the Education Faculty did not offer much in terms of explicit academic language development objectives or content. The analysis of the course maps and assessment tasks further narrowed possibilities for productive collaboration. As a result, the selected units were two core pre-service teacher education subjects delivered to all first semester students in an undergraduate program and in the Master of Teaching program. Assessment tasks could not be changed as they had been finalised months before but there was some room for consultation with regards to the wording of the assessment descriptions and rubrics. Both units had early assessment due in Weeks 2 and 3 so the idea of providing language-focussed feedback so soon after enrolment seemed too attractive to refuse.

A total of 1244 students were enrolled in the units. The enrolment report clearly demonstrated that the number of international students in each unit was not representative of the diversity of language users and their backgrounds in these units. No conclusions about individual students' English language proficiency or familiarity with the disciplinary discourses could be drawn due to the wide range of entry pathways. Therefore, the subject academics were asked to perform special roles which could be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable for some of them.

5.2. Roles of staff

As discussed earlier, proper academic language development needs to be considered within the framework of embedded practices which include curriculum planning, implementation, evaluation and changes. This implies active involvement of both discipline and ALLD staff. Teaching staff can be viewed as the best promoters of further skills development if academic literacies are understood as social practices (Lea & Street, 1998). Therefore, ALLD advisors' recommendations "have to make sense to students if they are to integrate them into their schemata for studying, and that sense must start from the meanings that students have already made" (Chanock, 2007, p. 5). I sought permission from chief examiners and unit coordinators in target units to be part of the pilot academic language development program with the use of the ALF toolkit. While the staff seemed to be willing to trial ALF resources in their tutorials and workshops, there were concerns about additional knowledge and effort required, which reflected contentions in the literature about academics' required language and associated metalanguage expertise and perception of responsibility with regards to students' language issues (Ferguson, 1996, as cited in Murray, 2012, p. 50).

To address this concern, teaching staff were offered comprehensive resources and training sessions on the use of the ALF guide in their units. As mentioned earlier, the language-related entry details in specifically generated enrolment reports were not always direct indicators of the English language proficiency and literacy levels of individual students. The only way to find out more was through teaching staff who engage with students directly and mark individual assignments and so have multiple opportunities to assess students' academic language proficiency both formally and informally. The staff were asked to provide summary profiles of their student groups by indicating the most common issues and any other relevant comments relating to academic language on a group (usually tutorial-based) ALF guide copy. The rationale for this request was the importance of the "focal point" in the continuum when students move from entry to study (Arkoudis et al., 2012). A request for such information could be seen either as an unwelcome addition to the already heavy workload or a positive move towards more effective development of students' communication skills, which, in turn, could make marking easier later on. It was hoped that the majority of the staff in the target units would see this as the latter.

The units targeted in Semester 1 were delivered by large teams of subject academics ranging from sessional staff to senior academics on three campuses (n=34), many of whom joined the teaching teams just days before the semester started. The decisions about the ALF toolkit application specifics were discussed in initial consultations with the Chief Examiners, whose responsibility was to plan the unit content, including assessment, in consultation with the unit coordinators. The rest of the teaching teams were sometimes present at the planning meeting or were kept informed about the suggested ALF toolkit application via Moodle messages and e-mail. The sporadic communication and over-reliance on e-mail communication became major problems as the semester teaching gained its full speed. Such problems could not be overcome in the current circumstances as many new units were taught by new staff due to simultaneous introduction of new course structures in the faculty.

The ALLD team consisted of an academic advisor who was part of the marking and tutoring team in the 2014 iteration and myself, in the role of an ALLD advisor and the leader of the ALF toolkit pilot project. Together, we created ALF guide-based resources for staff and students. Our expertise in academic language teaching and learning and knowledge of the effectiveness levels of existing support mechanisms was invaluable in the process. We also enlisted the help of the learning skills advisors in the library and used resources which had been previously created in collaboration with the library learning skills advisors. To foster effective collaboration, the ALL staff were enrolled in the target units on the LMS as non-primary lecturers, which allowed free site navigation, material and message posting, and tracking staff and student engagement with the self-access resources on Moodle. The project leader and academic language advisor were also included in relevant teaching team correspondence and were part of several planning and moderation meetings throughout the semester.

5.3. Laying the groundwork

The cohort demographic information was shared with the key staff in the two units in order to enlist their full support with regards to language-focussed feedback provision and integration of academic literacies development in their units whenever possible. It was clear that fully embedded academic language development models could not be implemented due to lack of institutional approach and policy support in this area. To facilitate a more effective use of the ALF toolkit, there was an attempt to link learning outcomes, rubrics and the ALF toolkit resources with varying degrees of success. For example, in the Master of Teaching unit, the learning outcomes included indirect references to academic literacies and the assignment rubrics used the elements from the ALF guide as criteria, such as “Organisation and development of ideas in response to the task and “Mechanics of referencing”. The input of the ALLD advisors into the planning of the undergraduate unit was only partially considered due to several circumstances beyond the ALLD team’s control.

Unfortunately, the amount of class time that could be devoted to meaningful skill development was extremely limited, which at times created conflicting agendas. Undergraduate tutorials were only 50 minutes long and were filled with practical assignment activities. In the slightly longer Master of Teaching workshops, there was a challenging and time-consuming task of catering for the needs of all course specialisms. To ensure visibility and easy access to the ALF resources, academic writing proficiency resources (mostly PowerPoint presentations and more interactive packages created in Adobe Presenter) were added to weekly topic materials where appropriate, while English language proficiency and literacy presentations (including a PDF version of the ALF guide) as well as links to existing skill development opportunities were in a folder at the bottom of the Moodle sites of the target units. The teaching staff were not expected to teach academic language; rather, they were asked to refer to the academic language resources in class whenever possible and promote independent study of self-access resources as ‘homework’ for students.

It was hoped that the ALF toolkit resources could fill potential gaps in knowledge and alleviate possible anxiety for those academics who were new to the faculty or were unsure about their new responsibilities. The teaching staff ALF ‘induction’ sessions were attended by 17 academics on three campuses. Three other academics asked for an individual consultation as they were

not able to attend a group session. The staff development aspect was new to me as this had never been an explicit role of ALLD advisors in the faculty. The face-to-face sessions provided opportunities for questions and discussions, which informed ensuing planning of resources and opened communication channels between ALLD and teaching staff. Initial exploration of academic staff perceptions of the ALF guide and corresponding resources was carried out as part of the mid-year evaluation process.

6. Evaluation of the use of the ALF toolkit: staff perspectives

6.1. Perceptions and attitudes of academics: questionnaire results

As part of the mid-year evaluation phase, a short on-line survey was administered to the teaching staff in the target units soon after the Semester 1 ended. The anonymous questionnaire comprised 14 questions about the use of the ALF guide and corresponding resources. Fifteen valid responses to the questionnaire were recorded. Though I was disappointed with the number of responses, the 44% response rate was considered sufficiently representative of the whole group. The findings of the preliminary analysis of the questionnaire responses are discussed below.

Fourteen out of 15 respondents thought that the structure of the ALF guide was clear and found it helpful. The staff used the ALF guide in several ways: 12 respondents referred to the ALF guide in their workshops and tutorials when explaining assignment requirements and academic language expectations, 11 respondents consulted the ALF guide when marking assignments and 12 used the ALF guide when providing feedback to students. The use of the ALF guide prompted 10 respondents to reflect on their knowledge of academic language elements and available support options. Eight respondents who attended an ALF induction session thought it was quite helpful. One academic wanted to see more visuals and examples in the ALF induction materials. Only seven respondents used the ALF comments bank but all found it helpful.

The main themes in the analysis of staff suggestions for improvements of the ALF toolkit were: a reduction in the time required to access resources, a desire for interactivity, and a refinement of the follow-up action monitoring procedures. Time-consuming processes were seen as a hurdle that could discourage students from following up on advice and increase staff marking loads. Several academics thought that making ALF guide elements clickable and creating short or direct links between this interactive guide and rubrics would address this issue. Two respondents thought that added interactivity would help provide detailed feedback without spending too much time going through the resources. Another suggestion for improving the ALF toolkit was to create mechanisms which would help track student's engagement with the feedback recommendations, thus closing the feedback 'loop'. One academic thought this could be done by introducing a software program that "would determine what logical options can be recommended to the student" and consequently record in which ways the student followed recommended actions for example. This academic provided a detailed description of how additional assessment could be set up for the student to help them deal with the identified issues.

Importantly, 14 out of 15 respondents confirmed that the use of the ALF guide and corresponding resources increased their awareness of the academic language and literacy development options available to students. Only one respondent was unsure about their answer to this question and felt that language-focussed feedback processes just added another level of marking to their 'already heavy load'.

6.2. Reflection and implications

The reflection on the successes and challenges of the first phase of the ALP toolkit pilot helped the ALLD team identify several areas for improvement of the ALF toolkit resources intended for use by subject academics and ALL staff. The preliminary evaluation results and observations by the ALLD team indicate that direct communication channels with individual academics in teaching teams should be open to ensure important messages reach their audience; asking a chief examiner or unit coordinator to forward an important e-mail is often doomed as academics seem to be dealing with very heavy workloads. Proper induction of all involved staff is necessary for reducing anxiety levels and avoiding misunderstandings later on. Clear titles and con-

cise messages in all ALF toolkit documents that are shared with staff are important as academics are so time poor that they have very little time to read such documents.

It may be concluded that heavy teaching staff workloads have affected the survey response rates as well as the ALF toolkit pilot program implementation during the semester. The analysis of data from student engagement analytics on Moodle, student academic language workshop attendance and individual consultations revealed so called 'communication glitches' (Chanock, 2007, p. 3) in the feedback provision and referral processes. Refined ALF tools will be shared with the staff in the target units in Semester 2. In response to the staff suggestions, the links between the ALF guide and other tools will be made more explicit. The concerns expressed by staff are shared by the ALLD team and suggestions are reflected in the toolkit improvement plans. Investigations into the use of the ALF guide as an interactive infographic began at the beginning of the year and will continue to ensure this interactive resource fulfils expected functions.

The absence of the institution-wide approach to the provision of post-entry English language proficiency development appeared to affect the implementation of the ALF toolkit pilot in a negative way. First and foremost, the project-type funding nature of the pilot programs did not allow for long-term planning and therefore shaped the scope of the programs and the investment into on-going resource development. Secondly, the target units lacked adequate time to cater for the language-related needs of diverse student cohorts and assist students' transition into their Education courses. Finally, proper collaboration was a challenging task to pursue as academic language development is often seen by many academic as an add-on agenda, rather than their core business. Furthermore, teaching teams' blurred understanding of the role of ALLD advisors in unit planning and delivery seemed to have an impact on the effectiveness of communication.

However, despite the factors above, it seems that the use of the ALF toolkit did contribute to increased awareness of staff responsibilities and enhanced capacity with regards to post-entry language development and skill enhancement. Several staff members did not provide detailed improvement suggestions in the questionnaire but volunteered to do so in a follow-up interview. The staff interviews will take place in the coming weeks and will provide further insights into staff perceptions of academic language development that took place in Semester 1. To create a more comprehensive picture of the current academic language development practices with the use of the ALF toolkit, the findings of the first evaluation phase as well as Semester 2 staff interviews will need to be viewed in a broader context of ensuing student engagement with the feedback and recommended action. Upcoming evaluation will focus on student perceptions of the ALF guide and resources. To add to this variety of data sources, several individual and group cases will be selected as instrumental case studies (Stake, 2000). Applying the features of the action research in their pursuit of change (Burns, 2011), the ALLD team will use their reflections, field notes and observations to contribute to the data triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Flick, 2002).

7. Conclusion

The development and implementation of the ALF toolkit allowed my colleagues and I to create a comprehensive range of readily available resources, raised staff and students' awareness of academic language skill development options, increased student uptake of the Hands-on English Language Program, and enhanced engagement with the self-access resources on Moodle. On request from academics, the use of the ALF toolkit was extended to ten more units in Semester 2 2015. Modifications have been carried out to address some of the initial implementation issues. Updated rubric criteria, referral flowcharts and the ALF audit are some of the improved tools that are trialled in Semester 2.

The refined conceptual framework presented in this study will be shared with staff and students to outline complex constructs that underlie the ALF toolkit interfaces and create common understanding of complex discursive practices in the discipline. There is a danger of taking the ALF toolkit at a surface value and seeing it only as an instrument that helps identify specific

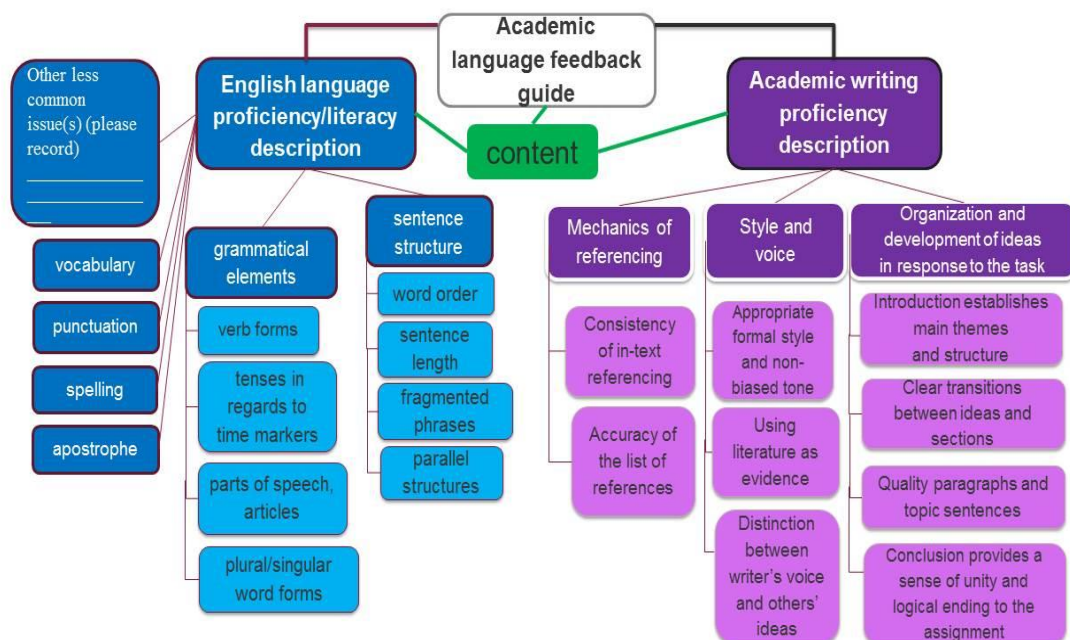
deficiencies in students' written language performance. The purpose of the toolkit is to provide staff and students with opportunities for pro-active meaning-making. The use of the ALF toolkit could enhance students' ability to apply their English language knowledge in academic contexts by helping academic language users fill specific gaps in the previously acquired knowledge and become confident members of academic and professional communities. For academics, the ALF toolkit could provide "common language" templates which could help avoid misunderstanding and facilitate student-staff relationships as members of the community of academic language discourse users in their discipline.

Preliminary results of the ALF toolkit implementation indicate that faculty and institutional support needs to become more systematic. Long term collaboration outlooks and availability of required resources are crucial for the success of embedded and integrated academic language development. It is hoped that on-going evaluation and improvement of the current strategies will result in continuous development of academic language feedback practices in the faculty and institution-wide.

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Appendix A. Academic Language Feedback (ALF) guide (version used in Semester 1 2015).



Appendix B. Excerpt from the ALF toolkit comments bank (version used in Semester 1 2015).

<p style="text-align: center;">English language proficiency/literacy</p> <p>If you feel the student is at risk of failing due to the English language proficiency issues, please refer them to the GET HELP coordinator, Name/e-mail</p>	<p>Comment template (1-2 elements):</p> <p>Usage of {ALF element in bold} at times interferes with your intended message. You need to check your writing after you have looked at the resource on {ALF element in bold} in the Academic Language Resources folder on Moodle (bottom section). Pay particular attention to.... (tutor identifies specific errors if possible).</p>	<p>Comment template (3 and more elements):</p> <p>Usage of {ALF elements in bold} at times interferes with your intended message. You need to develop your English language skills further and look at the resource on {ALF elements in bold} in the Academic Language Resources folder on Moodle (bottom section) and the GET HELP session schedule and bookings in the same folder. Pay particular attention to.... (tutor identifies specific errors if possible).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Academic writing proficiency</p> <p>Students need to develop their academic literacy skills as part of their unit as well as by engaging with additional resources.</p> <p>If you feel the student would benefit from an individual appointment, please refer them to the learning skills advisor in the library on your campus: Campus/name/email</p>	<p>Comment template:</p> <p>Please pay attention to {ALF element in bold} and look at the resource on {ALF element in bold} in the Academic Language Resources folder on Moodle (bottom section).</p>	<p>Comment template:</p> <p>Please pay attention to {ALF elements in bold} and look at the resources on {ALF element in bold} in the Academic Language Resources folder on Moodle (bottom section). Use the drop-in sessions and other classes offered in the library before you submit your next assignment.</p>

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