Journal of Academic Language & Learning
Vol. 17, No. 1, 2023, 40-68. ISSN 1835-5196

How managers influence learning advisers' communications with lecturers and students

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(Received 22 October, 2022. Published online 21 April, 2023.)

Learning Advisors (LAs) are uniquely well-placed to discover what lies behind students' difficulties with reading and writing for their discipline subjects, and these insights have driven their efforts since the 1990s to establish collaborations with discipline lecturers in order to develop academic literacies within their subjects. To determine the effects of university management decisions on LAs' ability to communicate with students and discipline lecturers so as to fulfil these goals, Academic Language and Learning (ALL) advisors across the Australian higher education community were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey of six questions relating to how their management encourages or discourages collaboration across the university. Our research questions asked how respondents have experienced effects of management decisions, whether helpful or obstructive, in relation to their communications with students and lecturers. The survey findings indicate that most ALL staff have been encouraged to collaborate with students and discipline lecturers but that the support from management to facilitate this teamwork was mixed. The reasons cited were incompetency and micromanagement, ongoing re-structures, poor location of services, lack of understanding of the nature of ALL work, and lack of priority for collaborative processes. The results indicate that ALL support could be more effectively located and integrated into university systems, preferably with managers recruited from ALL backgrounds, in order to enable and sustain a virtuous circle of communication with students and lecturers.

Key Words: academic language and learning, management, communication with students and lecturers, collaboration, development of academic literacies, academic skills, learning support.

1. Introduction and literature review

In a survey of the Academic Language and Learning (ALL) community across Australia, we sought to learn about the ways that university management decisions support or limit Learning Advisors' (LAs') ability to communicate with students and discipline lecturers. Opportunities for collaborations with discipline teaching staff have been seen in the change to a corporate model and culture in Australian universities, with the requirement to demonstrate Quality Assurance. Measures to achieve this expectation have included requiring academic subjects to demonstrate

Constructive Alignment between learning objectives and assessment (Biggs, 2014); policies to improve students' English language proficiency and inculcate generic skills and attributes in every graduate; and improvements to the first-year experience to increase retention. Often, LAs have been (re)defined, (re)located, and/or (re)deployed in the service of these projects, and have generally welcomed more involvement in the university's core business. However, where greater access to lecturers comes at the expense of working with students (which can arise if students are referred to peer mentors or external feedback providers rather than LAs for help), LAs lose access to a crucial source of knowledge about challenges of learning and teaching. Since management decisions influence whether this loss of contact with students occurs, our research asked how respondents have experienced effects of management decisions, whether helpful or obstructive, in relation to their communications with students and lecturers as well.

Both the help and the hindrance can be situated in the context of changes in the purposes of university management over the last several decades (Gurney & Grossi, 2019; Jones, Bonanno, & Scouller, 2001). In Australia as elsewhere, the broad trend has been, as Gumport (2000, p. 67) summarised it for the US, away from seeing "higher education as a social institution to higher education as an industry". Davis (2017) notes that managers have multiplied faster than academics on campuses in the change to corporatisation, and Frye and Fulton (2020) likewise report that administration is the fastest growing category of employees on campuses. This has entailed a change of management style in which "universities have been transformed from intrinsically managed expert communities towards … managerial control, surveillance and authority" (Tapanila et al., 2000, p. 118; cf. Jarvis, 2014).

The change in management style has been documented as a rise in output-focused performance measures, the repositioning of students as clients, university management as professional staff and more emphasis on top-down approaches (Ginsberg, 2011; Kallio et al., 2015; Kallio et al., 2017; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Parker, 2011; Tuchman, 2009). Parker (2011) suggests that higher education institutions are serving financial imperatives as a result of declining government funding. Meanwhile, in the search for alternative sources of revenue, "accountingization of both individual academic and university performance [has] become the norm", replacing the traditional social mission of universities (Parker et al., 2021, p. 125). The consequences of these changes are that "University managements have tended to develop managerialist decision-making systems that have intentionally or unintentionally gradually undermined the collegial consultative model, academics' autonomy and authority within the university governance structure being the major casualty" (Parker, 2011, p. 444).

When the provision of ALL support was becoming established in the 1980s, it was those "expert communities" (Tapanila et al., 2000, p. 118) of discipline lecturers who decided what to teach and how to teach it. Students had to work out what each lecturer wanted (e.g., James, 1997), and where they seemed to lack the language or skills to produce whatever that was, learning advisors (LAs) were employed to "bring them up to speed" (Chanock, 2011a). This location on the margins of the academic project in which students and lecturers were engaged was a source of chronic frustration for LAs (Stevenson & Kokkin, 2007; Webb, 2001; Malkin & Chanock, 2018). From talking with students and perusing the materials they brought in from their discipline subjects, it was evident that many difficulties with assignments could be pre-empted if the subject teachers understood what students found confusing. LAs could often see where the problems lay and felt that if they could feed their insights back to the lecturers, they could support learning and teaching much more effectively (Macdonald, Schneider, & Kett, 2013; Percy, 2014; Stratilas, 2011; Yoo, 2016).

What they saw was that the questions academics asked and the genres and language in which they framed their answers were products of the cultures and epistemologies of their disciplines (e.g., Chanock, 1997; Clerehan, Moore, & Vance, 2000; Moore, 1999; Taylor et al., 1988). The literacy skills students needed to draw on varied, therefore, from one discipline to another (Hyland, 2013),

and consequently, a focus on developing generic literacy skills might not be very useful and, at worst, be actually misleading (Chanock, 1997) unless they were inculcated in a discipline context. LAs with contacts and credibility in a discipline might share their insights into its discourse with a discipline subject coordinator, and collaborate to build these insights into teaching in that subject (e.g., Chanock, 2004, 2011; Gurney & Grossi, 2019; Macdonald, Schneider, & Kett, 2013; Maldoni, 2017; Vance & Crosling, 1998). Such initiatives might be extended and sustained for a period (Chanock, 2011a). However, such initiatives, when they occurred, tended to be more or less ephemeral, eroded or discarded with changes to staffing or subjects, or dwindling of resources (Gurney & Grossi, 2019; Jones, Bonanno, & Scouller, 2001; Thies, 2012). It seemed that the contribution of LAs could gain more traction if they could form part of a systemic program with central planning and reporting, backed by mandates rather than collegial decision-making with its inherent instability (McWilliams et al., 2010; Thies et al., 2014).

With universities' adoption of a corporate model, it seemed possible that this central planning and reporting might come about. Universities now had "stakeholders" – government, industry, and the public at large – and must be responsive and accountable to their expectations (Barrie, 2006; Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009; HEC, 1992; Jarvis, 2014; Parker, 2011). Their efforts to manage this need for accountability created a range of opportunities for ALL practitioners to be involved in, and perhaps even to influence, the overhaul of learning and teaching that accompanied this transformation (Arkoudis & Starfield, 2008; Fenton-Smith et al., 2017; Maldoni, 2017; Thies et al, 2014). Such a role for ALL practitioners was explicitly foreshadowed in Candy's (1995) report on a project sponsored by the Higher Education Council and the Vice-Chancellors' Committee to discover how institutions "can promote and implement the principles of lifelong learning and enhance students' learning-to-learn skills in the course of their undergraduate studies". Candy (1995, vii) identified

> [a]n enormous reservoir of expertise embodied in many…[study skills and learning support units], which needs to be harnessed to the purpose of producing life-long learners. We found that the best way of achieving this is through routinely building such institutional support into undergraduate programs, and through treating the staff who work in them as full and equal partners in the design and delivery of the learning process.

The extent to which ALL staff have been treated as "full and equal partners" has varied in practice, but at the time, its rarity made this a significant suggestion.

Quality Assurance required that degrees and the subjects that comprised them be subjected to a process of "Constructive Alignment" (CA) (Biggs, 2014). Degree structures were rationalised (Candy, 1995) and subject coordinators were required to articulate their learning objectives for students, and how their assessments were designed to achieve these. A shift in attention from generic skills to curriculum might offer LAs opportunities to feed their insights about students' misunderstandings into the design of subjects. Further, the mapping of subjects to audit their coverage of skills and content for CA purposes laid the groundwork for implementation of central policies such as integrating development of students' "Graduate Attributes" into key subjects in each degree (Barrie, 2006; Candy, 1995; Clanchy & Ballard, 1995; HEC, 1992; James, Lefoe, & Hadi, 2004; Lawson et al., 2013; McGowan, 2018). These Graduate Attributes tended to be generic, but commonly included communication, learning and critical thinking skills, clearly within the purview of ALL (Jones, Bonanno, & Scouller, 2001), and the Graduate Attributes movement could be seen to open a door for academic literacies to be mapped into discipline curricula (Thies et al., 2014). By 2012 (Donleavy, 2012), every Australian university had adopted a set of Graduate Attributes.

Another front on which universities felt pressure to respond to stakeholder expectations fell even more clearly into the domain of LAs with their expertise in language. Concerns expressed by employers and government about the English language proficiency of graduates led to the

establishment of standards informed by a set of Good Practice Principles (DEEWR, 2008) in whose formulation ALL practitioners were closely involved (Barthel, 2008). The insistence that language should be developed across the years of the degree, and as part of students' work for their disciplines, owed much to the influence of ALL practitioners. Within each institution, it fell to ALL practitioners to devise and implement a post-enrolment language assessment (PELA) to identify which students in a cohort would need help with academic language, and to find a way of supporting them (Bonanno & Jones, 2007, whose MASUS tool is widely respected in ALL; Harris, 2013; Hillege et al., 2014; Murray 2011; Reid, 2016; and Veitch & Johnson, 2022, provide a recent discussion of ways in which PELA can induce collaboration between ALL and discipline staff). Barthel (2021) has ascertained that over two-thirds of Australian universities now use a PELA.

Finally, universities turned their attention to the problem of student attrition, which was both expensive and a reputational risk. The solution would be to improve the "first year experience" (Baik, Naylor, & Arkoudis, 2015) to increase students' engagement, conceived in terms of both social adjustment and identification with the institution, and early academic success. A "Transition Pedagogy" was widely adopted to monitor students' engagement early in each subject and offer support to any who seemed to be coming "unstuck" in the first weeks. Again, this transition pedagogy was a whole-of-institution approach to the issue of retention, with which LAs had considerable experience (Kift, 2010; Lawrence, 2005). Kinash (2021) emphasises the necessity of "joined-up" University practice with disciplinary and support staff working in collaboration instead of operating in silos. TEQSA's Good Practice Note on Retention (2020) named "academic student learning support" as one of the nine key factors to improve student completion of degrees, while Stone and O'Shea (2019) recommend "timely, proactive, embedded support" (p. 63) as one of the most significant influences on student retention and engagement.

Common to all these efforts was an emphasis on locating support for learning and teaching within disciplines or programs, which was congruent with the development, in the ALL field, of the theory of "Academic Literacies". ALL practitioner experience confirmed the insight that "different assumptions about the nature of writing, related to different epistemological presuppositions about the nature of academic knowledge and learning, are being brought to bear, often implicitly, on the specific writing requirements of their assignments" (Lea & Street, 2000, p. 38). LAs hoped that integration of their work into the disciplines could extend the reach of their advice from the few students who consulted them individually or attended their workshops to – potentially – every student in a particular course of study (Ashton-Hay & Roberts, 2012; Briguglio, 2009; Campitelli et al., 2019; Chanock et al., 2012; Frohman, 2012). In a virtuous circle of communications, ALL practitioners would feed what they learned from students about the difficulties of learning in a particular discipline back to subject coordinators and consider, with them, how the subject might be revised in the light of this learning (Chanock, 2007a, 2007b; Gurney & Grossi, 2021).

When discussing the role of management in such efforts, ALL practitioners have tended strongly to the view that management should support integration by mandating it across courses and particularly in first year units (Ashton-Hay, Wignell, & Evans, 2016; Breen & Protheroe, 2015; Drury & Charles, 2016; Kift, 2015). While integration of academic literacies into discipline subjects could be done from a location in a faculty or from a centralised unit deploying LAs to work with designated disciplines, an all-of-institution approach seemed to imply a centralised structure to manage it.

Deployment from a centralised location did not, however, guarantee that LAs could do what they did best, but on a larger scale (see, e.g., Benzie et al., 2017). In the service of broader institutional priorities, LAs have been (re)defined, (re)located, and/or (re)deployed without being "free to determine what counts as success [or] how best to pursue it" (Gurney & Grossi, 2021, p. 5). While the local collaborations that had developed were based on Learning Advisers building relationships with receptive discipline lecturers and demonstrating they had a knowledge of students'

learning in the lecturers' subjects, success often resulted in LAs being removed from those collaborations and sent to fix other subjects identified as failing to attract or retain students. Also, such an approach meant that Coordinators of such subjects may resent and resist top-down intervention by a team of outside "experts" – an LA, an academic developer, and a web designer, for example – and be sceptical about the LAs' brief to turn their subject around in a period of weeks. Such scepticism is justified; effective changes require time and communication with both students and lecturers in an atmosphere of trust and genuine enquiry, rather than merely the application of a model hurriedly imposed from the centre. Meanwhile, the focus on greater access to lecturers comes at the expense of working with students who are now increasingly referred to peer mentors or external feedback providers (Maldoni, 2017), and LAs consequently lose access to a crucial source of knowledge about the challenges of learning and teaching (Stevenson & Kokkin, 2007).

Consequent to the above observations, our research sought to discover how widespread this problem of disruption to the virtuous circle of communications among LAs, students, and lecturers is, and how significant it is – or is not – in the wider context of traction gained by ALL practitioners in institutional programs to improve learning and teaching.

2. Method

To learn more about the virtuous circle of communication between ALL practitioners, students and discipline lecturers, we sent a Qualtrics survey to the membership of the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL), asking recipients also to pass it on to any interested non-AALL-members among their colleagues. In principle, the AALL executive committee endorsed and welcomed this research project for members of the Association, as its results might usefully inform their practice, although it was not based on a grant or any funding provided by AALL. Anonymity allowed greater truthfulness, not always assured due to the sensitivity some universities have towards discussions of their working environments (Burns, 1994). A cover email invited AALL members to participate and explained details of the project in a Participant Information Sheet. The project received ethical clearance from the Human Ethics Research Committee at Southern Cross University, approval number 2022/007.

The brief, 6-question survey (see Appendix 1) comprised mainly open-response questions designed to elicit an emic (subjective, insider) view (Brown, 2009) of the effects of management decisions on respondents' communication "circles". The first question asked whether the respondent's management encouraged collaboration, and the rest were concerned with how collaborations were supported (or not), and how effective the support was felt to be. An open-ended response box was included at the end of the survey if the respondent preferred to answer all the questions at once.

The online survey was open for 30 days in June 2022, and reminders to complete the survey before it closed were emailed twice to AALL members, after the second week and again, the week before the survey closed. The survey was also advertised on social media via the AALL Facebook page which has a closed practitioner membership. When the Qualtrics survey closed on 30 June 2022, 62 responses had been received. This indicated a 30% response to direct survey mail outs.

On receipt of the survey results, we assigned a number to each respondent (R1, R2, etc.) and each of us scrutinised all the answers, and sorted them into themes. We then compared, combined, and refined our themes to produce the results and discussion below. We found that our survey design fell short in two respects. The first of these was unavoidable: although we had more responses (n = 62) than there are universities in Australia (n = 39), we are not able to say whether every university is represented because the surveys were returned anonymously. The second shortcoming is owing to our lack of foresight in framing our questions. We asked whether and how restructuring had affected respondents' ability to communicate with lecturers and students, but we failed to ask them to specify what position they had been restructured from and to. Responses did allow us

to identify some moves that were experienced as damaging (or, more rarely, advantageous), but not at the level of specificity that we would have wished.

It would also have been advisable, we realised after the fact, to ask respondents who their "manager" was, both with respect to the level or location of the person they reported to, and with respect to the professional background of that person. We left "management" undefined, because it is so various and shifting in the context of ALL work. Only one respondent commented on the lack of a definition of management, but their response is pertinent:

> *I just want to point out that the term "management" is not defined here in any way, which makes it difficult to know exactly what you mean here. Lower-level management represents us quite well, I feel at our university. However, our priorities and agenda are only one among many for the university as a whole, so of course we do not get the same level of support at the highest levels. This distinction may be important when wanting to better understand the impact of management.* (R31)

ALL practitioners may answer to people at different organisational levels and in different roles – deans, associate deans, or heads of academic divisions, managers of student services, heads of academic development units, librarians – and they are often relocated from one of these situations to another. Moreover, the people they report to may come from backgrounds in ALL, or in academic disciplines, or in librarianship, or in management *per se*. We did not wish to impose assumptions about any particular management structure, preferring to see what kinds of arrangements participants might describe. However, the professional backgrounds from which managers had come emerged as an issue in several responses, and more specific information about their management might have allowed us to explore this issue more extensively.

Readers will note that the number of responses to questions does not always add up to 62, or 100%. This is because not every respondent answered every question, and some took the option that was offered of combining their responses into a single text box. We do not think this detracts from the survey's validity, as the intention was to minimise repetition and maximise engagement; that is, where respondents had something pertinent to say, they said it. One further anomaly is that some questions have more than 62 respondents; this is because a few blank responses appeared in the middle of our spreadsheet, possibly from people who were test-driving the survey before they were ready to respond. That the additional responses had no content means the results are reliable. Percentages have been calculated on the basis of the actual responses to a particular question.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Quantitative results

Three of our questions presented a choice of responses, rather than an open answer, allowing for quantitative results, with the results from Qualtrics entered into Excel to produce more readable graphs in this section. The first closed question asked whether management encouraged collaboration to develop academic skills. There were 56 responses to this question. Figure 1 demonstrates that 64.3% of participant responses (n = 36) believed that management supported collaboration between ALL staff and disciplinary lecturers. Seven percent (n = 4) of respondents indicated that management did not encourage collaboration, while the 'yes and no' answer was agreed with by 28.6% (n = 16). Although Figure 1 appears to favour management encouragement of collaboration, the qualitative comments from open-ended questions indicate a wide variety of subthemes for later discussion.

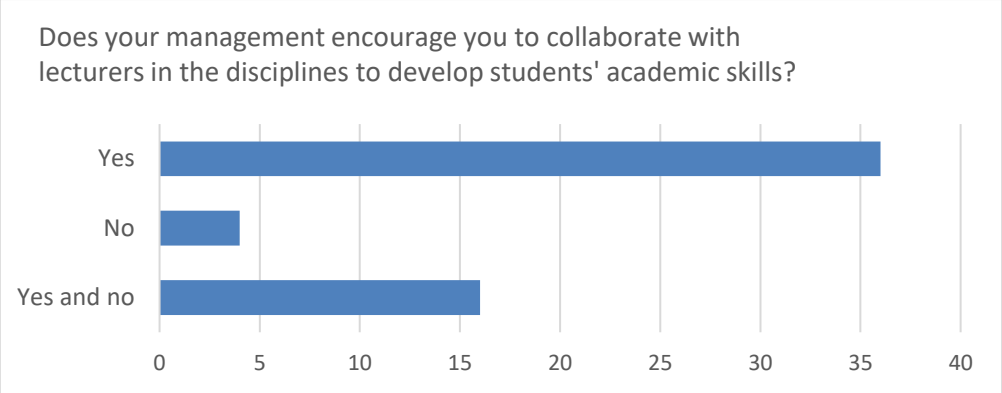

Figure 1. Management encouragement for collaboration seems quite common.

Question 1A was a sub-question asking how effective did respondents feel the management support to be. Figure 2 below indicates that 30.2% (*n* = 16) of 53 responses believed the support was very effective, 20.8% (*n* = 11) not very effective and 49.1% (*n* = 26) of respondents believed the support for collaboration by management was mixed and neither effective nor not effective. The graphic below had been generated before a late response was received, so that result is not included in the graphic.

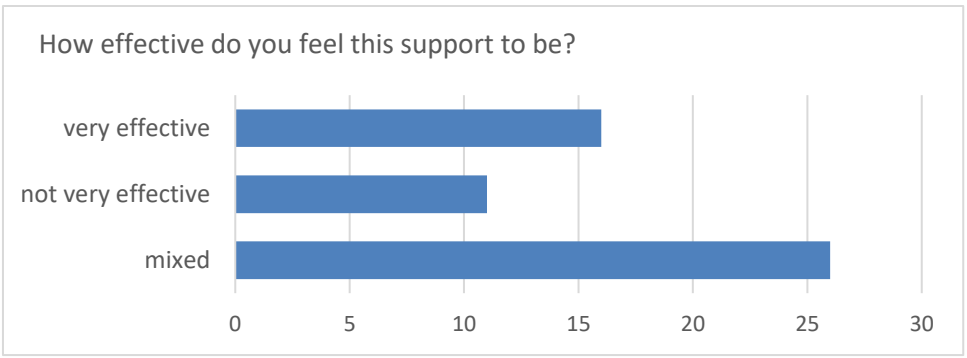

Figure 2. Support for collaboration does not appear to be perceived as being as effective as would be desired.

The third quantitative question related to management encouragement and discouragement for collaboration between LAs and discipline lecturers. There were 21 responses to this question. The majority of 57.1% (*n* = 12) of respondents chose the third option which was 'make collaboration difficult through structural distance or separation of ALL and discipline staff'. The first option of 'neither encourage or discourage' was chosen by 28.6% (*n* = 6) of participants and 9.5% (*n* = 2) chose the 'discourage by directives precluding collaboration' option. Again, the graphic below had been generated before a late response was received, so that result from one additional survey is not included in the data shown below.

A thematic analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions can "put flesh on the bones" presented in these graphs. As there was overlap between the questions, and also because we provided the option to respond in a single text box rather than answering each question separately, we have drawn our themes discussion from responses to all the questions rather than each in turn and summarised the key points in tables.

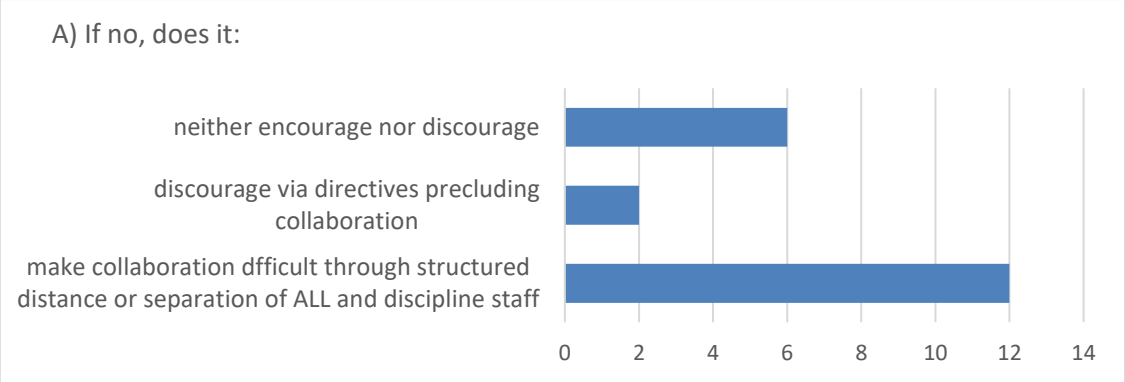

Figure 3. Structural issues were widely perceived as making collaboration difficult.

3.2. Qualitative results

3.2.1. Management's encouragement/discouragement of interactions with lecturers

It seems that the wisdom of embedding or integrating ALL support in disciplines is now well-accepted, as one respondent explains:

> *We recognise that students see the relevance and value of academic skills learning when contextualised in their program of study, e.g., related to an upcoming assessment. Further, while there may be shared general principles in academic practice across the disciplines, the ways these manifest in practice can be very nuanced, not just "in the discipline" but based on the way particular lecturers approach their classes.* (R51)

Indeed, Ashton-Hay, Barthel, and Müller (2021) found that embedding academic literacies in the disciplines is part of the work of ALL in 81% of Australian universities.

The extent to which LAs were encouraged to work with lecturers in the disciplines varied across 57 responses from not at all (n = 4), through "yes and no" (n = 17), to yes (n = 36), with a range of supports reported (see next section). It was rare that LAs were forbidden to interact with discipline lecturers, although one respondent's team "were told not to talk to lecturers or go to lectures or tutorials" (R6), while another stated that management "discourage via directives precluding collaboration" (R7). Another five respondents were "allowed" to collaborate, but given no support to do so, and R7 stated that management "make collaboration difficult through structural distance or separation of ALL and discipline staff". R4 said "Learning support are treated more like ambulance chasers – fixing what's broken, rather than collaborating to develop better resources from the outset." While these responses may seem to indicate that embedding is resisted by some institutions, it may be, rather, that ALL staff are not the people tasked with doing it. We are aware of cases where academic developers are tasked with embedding development of skills in disciplines, while learning advisers are restricted to offering generic workshops or tutoring individual students. This division of labour may be owing to an historical divide between academic developers and LAs, going back to the 1980s, in which academic developers were thought qualified to deal with academics while LAs were relegated to dealing with students (Chanock, 2011b). This idea has largely changed in recent years – but not, apparently, everywhere.

3.2.2. How collaboration is supported by management

The minimal form of support for collaboration, reported by four respondents, was to allow LAs autonomy to work on collaboration as they saw fit, and another two reported simply that time was allotted to it in their workload. Sixteen respondents reported that working to embed development of academic skills into discipline subjects was an explicit part of their job description, and in a further two cases it was "given priority". Four respondents noted that they were assigned to a particular Faculty to do this work, and another said that working on collaboration was the sole

role of some advisors in their team. Invitations to join teams for this purpose were reported by three respondents, while another six were included in meetings with Faculty staff, and seven were involved in design and/or reviews of subjects. Two more spoke of "building a community of practice" with lecturers (R57, R58), and three said their managers encouraged LAs to learn from each other's experience of collaboration. In only one case did a respondent say that this was part of an all-of-university program; and another said that the lack of such an approach was holding their team back:

> *Our management supports us but there needs to be better buy-in from the university as a whole. Some lecturers/UCs are wonderful to work with and see the arrangement as a partnership. Others do not. There needs to be a whole of institution approach for embedded academic literacy instruction and support.* (R25)

In one response, it is evident that LAs are well established in a position in which they are able to influence teaching and learning practices in their university:

> *Learning advisors at our university are included in a group of stakeholders that review subject outlines, assessments, etc. Our learning advisors also teach directly into classes into so-called 'gateway' courses and others. Learning advisors have also written subject outlines, assessments, and teaching resources for courses.* (R31)

Table 1 sums up the key respondent subthemes from this survey question. The encouragement from management is shown to include perceived valuable and relevant support in the form of time allocation and collaboration being considered a key part of the job or a priority in building a community of practice with discipline lecturers and students. It is also interesting to note in some cases, that management encourages LAs to have a role in designing and reviewing unit curricula and teaching directly into 'gateway' courses. In our introduction, we suggested that universities' move to "Constructive Alignment", whereby learning objectives are set out explicitly and learning activities and assessments are aligned with those, and such an approach might offer opportunities for ALL practitioners to feed their insights into the design of subjects. It seems that, for some respondents, these opportunities have materialised.

On the other hand, discouragement to interact with lecturers came in the forms of lack of LA autonomy, structural distance, separation of academic and LA staff and directives forbidding ALL staff to speak to lecturers. These problems suggest that, while LAs perceived opportunities in the move to a more corporate style of management discussed in our introduction, this move has entailed losses for some in terms of autonomy and access to academic staff.

Table 1. Management encouragement and discouragement of interactions with lecturers.

Encouragement	Discouragement
Seen as valuable and relevant	Like ambulance drivers, fixing what's broken
Time allocation in workload	Forbidden to speak to lecturers
Embedding part of the job; a priority	Structural distance
LAs design and review study units	Separation of staff
Community of practice development	No autonomy
Teach directly into 'gateway' courses	No university-wide approach holding team back
All-of-university approach	

3.2.3. Why managerial support was considered effective

When managers' support was considered effective, it was, in four cases, because the respondent cherished the autonomy they were allowed; for example,

> *[Collaboration] has largely been instigated by myself, as a means to let students know about Learning Advice at our institution and how to access it, in addition to scaffolding students' academic skills acquisition. They allow me to do it and indicate that they are happy for me to keep doing it. Management haven't really outlined any parameters for me, they are happy for me to be in control of this ('hands off' approach).* (R55)

In most cases, however, support was more substantial and was felt to be effective because of the attention such managers gave to considering how collaboration could be initiated, implemented, and sustained. In R25's workplace, the manager takes the initiative:

> *Management of our team facilitates collaboration through the development of an embedded literacy skills program. They seek the interest of unit coordinators and explain how the program works, then put us in touch with the relevant UC.*

R10 told us that their manager likewise:

> *provides time for discussion with others collaborating and [we] have team discussions on ways of supporting; offers names of suitable contacts; always open for discussion and sets up academic support team sharing of notes and materials used for Faculty collaboration.*

The encouragement of a team approach to mutual professional development is evident, similarly, in the response of R18 who commented on their manager's "*Positive statements, encouraging the sharing of approaches, arranging PD to explore ways to achieve meaningful collaboration*".

Similarly, in R15's workplace, "*There is top-down encouragement from associate dean level for faculty academics to engage with us and us to engage with academics*", and in R17's, "*We are encouraged to reach out to academic staff, respond to their requests for student support via individual consultations and discipline-specific workshops. This is considered part of our work load.*"

For R21, it was important to have back-up, rather than autonomy:

> *We use an embedded approach to promoting academic literacy skills and are encouraged and supported by our supervisor to work with the unit coordinators. Our supervisor will 'enforce' this collaboration, if the UC's are 'not forthcoming' in their collaboration. I feel that there is a buffer between the academic and me, if things go awry.*

Similarly, R62 is able to rely on their manager for "follow up":

> *I have been working closely with discipline academics to both embed support directly into units but also to assist with developing clear rubrics and assessment briefs. Management extends the call for support and then academics contact me to request support. Management will also follow up on my behalf if necessary.*

One respondent highlighted their management's encouragement of LAs collaborating with discipline lecturers in action research (cf. Chanock, 2007b). The manager:

> *Builds bridges with faculty leadership (e.g., associate deans L&T), employs casual staff to manage the 1:1 bookings with students to free up learning advisor team to work with lecturers, etc. Learning advisors have a research allocation and are encouraged to collaborate on action research with lecturers they are working with. We don't have all the institutional structures in place*

> *to affect all of our integrated strategies, but the manager is working with us to create those conditions.* (R51)

Specific strategies for operationalising collaboration between LAs and lecturers were listed in a detailed response to our question about effectiveness of management's support:

> *Strong encouragement and support in the following areas:*
>
> - *making contact with academics to collaborate on assessment writing for targeted units*
> - *providing adapted ALL resources and/or lectures within class time and online to support students with the academic writing process*
> - *encouraging academic staff to advertise ALL academic resources that assist with the writing process through endorsement videos or forum posts*
> - *encourage collaboration by asking academics to identify students who need support through a referral process*
> - *encouraging trust building by matching specific ALL staff with academic staff to ensure continuity each term to ensure reflective practice occurs to improve resources.* (R28)

It seems possible that some respondents who mentioned working with discipline units but did not describe them as "targeted" were nonetheless assigned to work with units identified as having difficulties. We noted in our introduction that such assignments can engender resentment from the coordinators of those units, if they feel that their teaching is being criticised. However, one of the responses to our survey suggested ways in which targeting of subjects can be less invidious. R33 said "*We do this with about 40 units and corresponding coordinators targeted as those with high numbers of LSES*", suggesting that subjects are seen as needing help because they enrol a high proportion of vulnerable students (Low Socio-Economic Status), rather than because the teaching is at fault. It seems problematic that this strategy frames the need in terms of student deficit – in this case, because of social class – a framing that ALL practitioners have spent decades trying to undo. However, in the context of this discussion of the effectiveness of managerial support, it points to a solution to the problem of coordinators of targeted subjects resisting input from ALL.

In another response, help is provided to students whose needs show up in "compulsory screening", but it is not clear how that help is "embed[ded]":

> *In our ALL group we are assigned to specific faculties and we work cooperatively to tailor the support needed. We work under the carapace of a project/program to embed literacy practices that is compulsory across the uni. The support is targeted at those who have been identified through compulsory screening. It is always complex but generally speaking the faculties have been very supportive of the project.* (R59)

When this works well, it can be very effective, as R28 reports:

> *Management encourages a sense of innovation and assists with providing the time and structures that help ALLs to work towards a common goal of supporting students. The embedded collaboration is highly valued by academic staff and with continued collaboration with one particular staff member over multiple units this type of collaboration can be very effective at increasing student engagement with academic resources.*

In these responses, it is sometimes LAs who take the initiative in forming collaborations with lecturers, or more often, it is their manager who instigates these. In the latter situation, respondents do not cite a loss of autonomy, but rather, appreciate the benefits of having a more powerful figure to mediate their interactions with discipline academics. Our literature review quoted Candy (1995)

looking forward to the systemic harnessing of LAs' expertise to support undergraduate programs, and in this section, we see ALL managers enabling the fulfilment of that expectation. It is important to note, however, that not all LAs feel that their expertise is being harnessed – that is, their special insights into causes of confusion in particular subjects, highlighted in the introduction to this article – but only their labour in producing materials to support less well-informed conceptions of what students need. Frustrations of this kind are explored in the next section.

3.2.4. Factors that limit effectiveness of collaboration with lecturers

Despite the advantages canvassed above, a large number of responses pointed to limitations to the efficacy of collaboration or the satisfaction it afforded. A few respondents were explicitly frustrated with the people who supervised them – one had "*an insecure and incompetent manager trying to micromanage*" (R63), while another lamented that "*Management barely understands why [collaboration] is beneficial, let alone encourages it*" (R48).

In other cases, respondents were not impressed by being expected to produce materials or conduct workshops when they were allowed little input into decisions or planning around those. R9 said, "*We have contextualised assessment preparation and academic skills workshops; however, the workshop content is decided based on management discussion with disciplines*", while R38 receives "*Lots of support for adding resources to the LMS such as scaffolds and supporting documents. Less support for assisting in the design of units to embed skills and map skills.*"

However, the main problems respondents addressed were ones that their immediate management might not have the power to solve. ALL work is only part of the ecosystem of collaboration, after all, and discipline lecturers must cooperate if it is to work. First, lecturers must be aware of ALL work and its likely benefits for them. Next, LAs and lecturers must be able to form and sustain working relationships over time. The conditions for collaboration to flourish depend partly on people making the necessary efforts, and partly on organisational structures that facilitate such efforts; and respondents pointed to problems with both of these. This section will look at a range of factors around communications, awareness, and willingness of other staff, while the next section looks at the influence of location within organisational structures.

Seven respondents thought that discipline lecturers in their context were not sufficiently informed about their work, or at least, were unaware of what they could offer beyond consultations and generic workshops. The following are examples of such responses.

> *The communications about engaging with our services don't always trickle down to all unit coordinators or tutors/ sessional teaching staff who quite often don't know who we are or what we do. Hence, students are also oblivious.* (R15)

> *It is often hard to connect with academics given the demands on their time and their priorities. We do feedback to our Education Services team, whose brief is to support academics in terms of pedagogy and curriculum design and assessment, and they feedback to academics as well. This is not as systematic as it could be though, and there is a certain amount of bureaucracy that gets in the way too.* (R17)

> *Management is supportive; however, processes to facilitate collaboration with faculty have yet to be refined. It requires Faculty to be proactive in wanting to integrate ALL resources/services into their units. Otherwise, academic skills are regarded as separate to discipline-specific work by students and are not prioritised.* (R19)

It was not always clear whether it was low levels of awareness that were the problem, or lack of enthusiasm:

> *Faculty staff appreciate being able to refer students for individual consultations but we don't get a great take-up of our offers to embed academic skills into unit content.* (R8)

In one case, however, awareness was lacking at the level of the respondent's immediate management:

> *There is a push from a higher up level to collaborate with first year lecturers that management of my team wouldn't discourage, but I have yet to see how the support for collaboration from a high level will trickle down to my actual work. I feel neither supported or unsupported. The management doesn't really understand my work as a Learning Advisor, so I go about collaborating with lecturers as the opportunity arises.* (R20)

In this connection, it is worth remembering Barthel's (2021) observation that in 2010, around "87% of ALL managers had an ALL background"; in contrast, "today our managers are more diverse, some with no/limited language education backgrounds" (Barthel, 2021, slide 3).

As long as LAs are free to implement their own ideas for collaboration, there is scope for it to develop, as R18 notes:

> *A lot comes back to the individual learning advisor, as well as to the ways of operating that have developed over time within the different Schools.*

Conditions for such initiatives vary, as R16's response makes clear:

> *Our management is pretty ineffective, so it's left to us to collaborate and form associations with lecturers.*

Such collaborations, then, may not gain traction beyond the local level:

> *I wish there had been stronger support from the university. It's taken me years to achieve the level of integration we have at the faculty, but it could be more.* (R27)

> *There needs to be a coalition of the willing, and it's also difficult to develop a whole of course or program approach.* (R43)

Other staff may need to be included and accommodated too, as R50 notes:

> *Part of the job description, collaborative teams – on evaluation/feedback, assessment design – is setting up/encouraging partnerships groups consisting of IT, EdTech, ALL and faculty staff in each faulty/discipline. [However, effectiveness] depends on faculty and other support units' willingness to be involved/active participants, some different preferences around communications and approaches need to be negotiated.*

Pertinent to this is R53's reflection on the need for training so that all parties can contribute effectively:

> *Our organisational structure is designed to support and encourage partnership with faculty-embedded student success teams (these teams including careers, STEM and language and learning educators) organisationally, through a faculty embedded team structure. [However,] there has been a lack of sustained support by management in the implementation – i.e., no training or effective onboarding. There has also been no formal mechanism to encourage practice sharing and problem solving with the new faculty embedded structure. Most educators did not have curriculum or resource design experience for discipline and have not been supported well (through professional development) to help partnership occur effectively.*

Table 2 summarises the key limitation and support factors mentioned by respondents and ALL practitioners across the themes of management, relationships, and processes.

Table 2. Limitation and support factors for effectiveness of ALL Collaboration.

Themes	Limitation factors	Support factors
Management	Incompetent, ineffective, insecure, micromanaging Doesn't understand the work Lacks understanding of benefits of collaboration Little encouragement Decisions made with no consultation Only support to add online resources	Backup and follow-up Part of strategic plan Understands the work Knows benefits of collaboration Encourages partnerships Consultative, inclusive decision-making Time allocation Casuals hired for 1:1
Relationships	Need willing faculty Sustainability; changes in staffing Unaware of services available Communication and messaging	Time and autonomy Valued process Services promoted Clear communication
Processes	Not prioritised Needs refinement Communication and messaging Needs to be coalition of willing Needs to be holistic university strategy	Prioritised process Part of strategic plan Positive communication Staff champions University-wide strategy

It is interesting to note how the support factors counterbalance the limitation factors, particularly in the university processes section where priority is provided as part of a university-wide strategic plan which includes positive communication and staff champions. As mentioned earlier, Kinash (2021) highlighted the need for "joined-up" University practice with disciplinary and support staff working in collaboration instead of in separated silos. ALL staff have also emphasised the need for holistic collaborative approaches across university practice systems. The support factors that our respondents alluded to show that the corporate model of management can deliver on the hope of ALL work being included in planning and programs across an institution. At the same time, the limitation factors show that structural support is not enough; managers must understand the nature of ALL work; communicate effectively about it; and elicit, respect, and make use of the particular expertise that LAs can offer.

3.2.5. Location of ALL Services

Nine respondents commented on the importance of relationships and shared experience for maintaining collaboration, and a key factor in forming and sustaining relationships is where ALL services are located. The evolving roles of ALL, from its beginnings in counselling and international students' language learning, to increasing involvement in academic development and peer mentor supervision, have given rise to a variety of ALL staff locations in organisational structures and campus maps. As of 2021, these included 19% "embedded in Faculties, colleges, or major university divisions"; 26% "centralised within a teaching and learning team"; 43% "centralised within a student services support team"; 12% "centralised with a library"; and 14% "centralised within another team" (Ashton-Hay, Barthel, & Müller, 2021). It is probably only the first category of staff embedded in particular divisions of a university who would have the opportunity to mingle with discipline lecturers in their workplace setting, dropping into their offices, meeting them in corridors and tearooms. Such informal conversations can lead to participation in lecturers' subjects, scaffolding of assignments, and even plans for joint action research. These opportunities are

unlikely if LAs are located elsewhere on the campus, often in units whose purpose is not prominently seen as academic.

While we do not know the structural or physical location of all of our respondents, we have seen above those respondents who felt their position was advantageous in terms of support for collaboration with disciplines were either located in a Faculty or assigned by their central management to work with Faculty academics. By contrast, 12 respondents considered their location an obstacle to effective collaboration, including eight who were located in libraries. All considered themselves worse off as a result of recent restructures.

A respondent who had been shifted into Student Support units found the move unhelpful. One told us that:

> *We used to be part of the Office of Learning and Teaching and met / were introduced to a lot of academics. Prior to that we were located in the Humanities faculty and met many academics in the kitchen / water cooler / toilets etc. Now we're in Student Support in a different section of the university and don't have those casual encounters with academics.* (R16)

Another, whose role was centralised, found that that entailed staff cuts as well:

> *Messaging has been inconsistent, so it is sometimes confusing. Markedly reduced after re-structuring because student support was taken out of Faculties and centralised. The number of staff in student support has been halved over the past 5 years. Current staff are now overwhelmed yet are expected to still offer the same volume of support as we did 5 years ago. This has been really difficult during the pandemic and the support is of course not as good as it used to be.* (R22)

We will come back to the problem of contracting LA numbers, but first, it is worth looking at one kind of organisational restructure in some detail because, as noted, 8 of the 12 respondents who considered their location unfavourable were located in a library.

On the face of it, location in a library seems to make sense. ALL and libraries are both concerned with research and reading, which belong to the university's core academic business; and the literature shows LAs and librarians collaborating with discipline lecturers to embed skills development (e.g., Einfalt & Turley, 2009; Kokkinn & Mahar, 2011; Thies, 2016). Such collaborations do not require co-location, but it has been advocated on other grounds: while academic skills support may be viewed as peripheral by many students, the library has always been at the centre of degree studies. Writing about the incorporation of ALL skills into the Library at Monash University and others, Smith (2011, p. 251) argues that "embedding and interconnecting these services within strongly established areas of the university identified with the academic agenda is significantly advantageous and reduces the possibility of marginalisation", and she quotes a Monash faculty member as saying that, "The Library is the logical bridge between the faculty and students" (p. 257). However, despite an increasingly closer association of ALL with libraries (Torres et al., 2021), including some being subsumed under their organisational umbrella, a number of responses to our survey showed that such a structural location can actually impede effective ALL embedding work. These respondents' experiences have been of being side-lined or stifled in their libraries' operations.

> *Exec[utive] management want relational collaboration and then use a functional structure that prevents cross-discipline and degree level collaboration. Also encourages discipline teaching and learning teams to take over the role of ALL through assessment practices and online exercises. It's in the strategic plans, but we are within a Library who make little effort to understand ALL and focus on librarians and creating transactional interactions. It has a two-fold effect. Distancing by structure means students are asked to undertake assessments that fit the curriculum and marking time frames, but students aren't prepared for them and then get punished either through academic integrity*

referral or failure. The second effect is encouraging the perception that rhetoric will do and ALL isn't to be taken seriously. (R61)

[There is a] completely siloed structure and dysfunctional management in the Library. Having to go online with Covid limited student access but now we are a digital library there seems little appetite for returning to [face-to-face]. (R64)

Although the rhetoric is to collaborate with researchers, academics and School Learning & Teaching teams, the reality is physical and structural separation from the schools. We are in another building, ALL advisors are separated into discipline groups and restricted to that group, collaborating with teaching academics is all we are encouraged to do to suit Librarians' functions and capability. ALL staff are discouraged from interacting with research institutes, supervisors and research candidates because our manager feels this is her role and the role of the Discipline Librarians in the research team (none of them have research degrees or teaching backgrounds). They advertise Library services in School meetings, on the library webpage and through two newsletters (one student facing and one school facing). The rhetoric of it is placed in the operational plan, but there are no measurement criteria and ALL is not in the strategic plan at all. The focus of the communication is library and most academics associate this with databases and reading lists. (R34)

[T]wo restructures in two years… [have] resulted in us moving portfolios and in being 'integrated' into Library services, with a new management structure based around Library models and needs. We have lost management support in our own professional area and have had to advocate for the maintenance of our services. (R17)

[W]e had a restructure where our team moved from Student Development in the Library. This has been a poor transition, hurting the quality of our work and morale overall. We now work in an area that doesn't understand what an academic skills team does and doesn't wish to learn. It's frustrating. (R20)

We have been relocated into a building next to the Library, on the fourth floor and behind a locked door. Our web presence on the Library website has been obscured through location, levels of webpages, terminology and removal of generic workshops. The only way to connect with ALL staff is to know to use the 'contact us' tab on the Library webpage and to complete a generic form. The rhetoric to use the form [is] to protect our ALL staff from being used by academics and schools as substitute tutors... all that told me was our managers have no idea what I do, what difference that makes to students and academics, and are so focussed on librarianship that they are blinded to anything else. (R34)

Our interaction with students is now remote. We've gone to the Telstra model of use the website and FAQ until frustrated; go to/chat/phone the Library help desk, who escalate the frustrated client; ALL staff deal with angry person and counsel them through frustration before we can assess the problem they started with. (R61)

[Our] area has been reduced in number and also buried in the structure of the Library. Few staff or students know we exist mainly due to poor marketing -- a problem (neglect or conscious decision?) with the management, not the marketing team. (R64)

Table 3 summarises the key comments made by respondents relating to the location of ALL services. A common theme in these responses is that location in a library has made LAs inaccessible to both students and discipline staff. Partly this is because they are not visible, but perhaps it is also because association with the mechanics of research and reading obscures the fact that their particular expertise is different from that of librarians. LAs have an interest in, and knowledge about, the cultures and discourses of the disciplines, which makes them uniquely capable of helping students and lecturers with challenges of learning and teaching these. However, if they cannot talk with lecturers, it is likely that lecturers will be unaware of this expertise, and if they cannot talk with students, LAs are likely to lose that knowledge. Only if the library makes ALL support a feature of their services and provides conditions to maintain it is the university going to be able to call upon it into the future.

Table 3. Location of ALL Services and location impact.

Location	Location impact
Faculty-based	Conducive to developing strong working relationships with academic staff through casual encounters (corridors, offices, tea room)
	Informal conversations lead to collaboration and team work
	More likely to communicate and be asked to assist with student learning
	Leads to participation in subjects, team teaching, & action research
	Favourable location for ALL work
Centralised	Physical and structural distance from academics
	Hierarchical in university structure
	Student services staff only, very few encounters with academic staff
	Communication and messaging inconsistent and confusing
	Less favourable location for ALL work
Library	LA's presence obscured; lack of visibility
	Inaccessible to students and discipline lecturers
	Librarians do not have teaching backgrounds or research degrees
	No / little management support
	Focus on library but not on ALL or LAs
	Student interactions remote; Telstra model of use
	Poor marketing and communications
	Library involved in university strategic plans but not ALL
	Poor location for ALL work

Two respondents were not specific about their place in their universities' structures, but did point to a strongly hierarchical structure and management style as a problem:

> *Because of the new hierarchical nature of the academic skills unit within a very hierarchical university centre, I have lost autonomy to show initiative and make individual contact with local lecturers. Lecturers have also lost autonomy and lost the ability to initiate such contact.* (R24)

> *It is the hierarchical nature of both the academy and academic skills that makes collaboration impossible. Everything has to be offered to all students, so individual initiatives are almost impossible, unless the initiative can be rolled out to the whole university and this is impossible unless it is [in the form*

> *of] resources totally online. I no longer have the autonomy to do projects. I mostly have to do the team decided projects.* (R63)

In these comments, as well as in the responses noted above from people who were happy to be left alone to discern needs and design interventions to address them, we see some resistance to the corporate culture of "managerial control, surveillance and authority" (Tapanila et al., 2000, p. 118) as the trend was described in our literature review. Respondents commented on top-down management approaches and the focus on out-put mentioned in the literature review earlier. Gurney and Grossi (2021, p. 5) were concerned that, under this management style, ALL practitioners were not "free to determine what counts as success [or] how best to pursue it", and our respondents quoted above have found themselves unable to initiate collaborations or tailor solutions to particular needs.

3.2.6. Effects of restructuring

Comments like the last two refer to changes – the respondents "no longer" have autonomy they used to have – and there were many indications of change both in the section where we explicitly asked about effects of restructuring, and in the other sections where we did not. This fits with Barthel's (2021) finding that restructure has been a common experience for ALL units in the last five years. While seven respondents said their ability to communicate with students and lecturers had not been affected by restructuring, another nine (in addition to those ten counted in the previous section) said that it had. While those 10 all saw the changes as negative, the views of the additional nine were mixed. Two thought they were now better placed because they had been embedded in Faculties, while one felt worse off as a result of being removed from a Faculty location (adding up to three who preferred a Faculty location). One thought they were better off for having been moved out of Student Support, while two thought they were worse off for having been moved into Student Support (adding up to three who preferred not to be in Student Support). Responding from an institution that had replaced local branch structures with a new national structure, one thought the change beneficial, while another saw it as damaging. Finally, one respondent saw both good and bad effects of their restructure:

> *[It is] better as [there is] top down implementation – support via policy and funding due to success and growth in different program formats (short courses, bespoke subject selection, online delivery only) [but it is] challenging to detect students at risk quickly and offer timely support.* (R50)

Even where no issue is articulated with the type of structure adopted, the very process of change is often described as disruptive in itself.

> *Due to a long restructure/change process, our ongoing work with staff is often interrupted. In some instances, this is because staff are experiencing changes to professional services and therefore lack bandwidth to collaborate with our unit. In others, we begun working with individuals, but changes to staffing mean we have to establish new connections with new staff.* (R56)

> *Some established working relationships have disappeared with staff movement.* (R47)

> *Not so much restructuring, but we change managers regularly (every 18 months or so). None of our managers have an LA background. Often no teaching background at all. Meaning we have to explain strategic goals to them over and over.* (R48)

> *We have had two restructures in two years (partly, but not solely as a consequence of COVID). … Changes to university structures have also meant additional admin work for everyone and a lot of meetings, which detract from the time we spend with students. While our university prides itself on its equity brief, in reality there has been a reduction in services to support such students.*

> *As a result of restructures, we have also lost a significant number of highly experienced Academic Skills Advisors and a manager in this area.* (R17)

This problem of cuts to staff numbers is highlighted in seven responses, attributed to either restructuring or the inroads of the covid epidemic. This is happening in a context of changes in ALL staff numbers over the last decade: student ratios rose from an average of 1:2,400 in 2010 to an average of 1:3,900 in 2021, a 59% jump (Barthel, 2021, slide 3).

One respondent made the interesting suggestion that ALL benefitted from the damage done to discipline staff by restructuring:

> *If anything, recent restructuring has made the discipline teachers more open to collaboration – they feel a greater need for our assistance in supporting their students, as well as a greater need for us to support them. One other area I think is interesting is the shift from being employed as 'academic' to being employed as 'professional' staff. I continue to act largely as I did as someone employed as an 'academic', and do not feel any power imbalance when working with discipline teachers. However, am not sure everyone feels the same re that.* (R18)

That doubt was well-founded, for three others felt that the change, in their units, from academic to professional status was going to be problematic, with (as R35 put it) "*a detrimental impact on team morale and motivation*". Another respondent claimed it "*makes it more difficult for faculties to engage with 'mere' advisers*" (R63). The national context for this change, as reported by Barthel (2021, slide 3) is that academic status of ALL staff has dropped from 52% in 2010 to 18% in 2021, a 73% reduction.

Barthel, A. (personal communication, January 5, 2023) explains his statistical calculation as follows. In 2011, the Australian University Register of Academic Language and Learning Centres/Units was completed from data compiled in November 2010, reporting a total of n = 479 ALL staff across the Australian sector. Of these, 52% (n = 248) were academics. A decade later, in 2021, n = 379 ALL staff were reported on the Australian Register. Of these, 18% (n = 67) were academics. The overall difference in ALL staff over this 10-year period (479-379 is 100 or –21%) while the difference of ALL staff with academic status is (248-67 = 181) or –73%. This difference corroborates studies mentioned earlier relating to the rise of managerial and professional staff as the fastest growing category of campus employees (Davies, 2017; Frye & Fulton, 2020).

Table 4. Advantages and disadvantages of restructuring ALL units/centres.

Advantages of restructuring	Disadvantages of restructuring
Beneficial if embedded in Faculty	Disruptive to ongoing work
Some discipline teachers more open to ALL collaboration and assistance during change	Loss of autonomy
	Loss of ability to communicate with students and staff
Top-down support from policy and funding	Meetings and administration detract from time spent with students
Better to be moved out of student support	Working relationships disappear
	Loss of highly experienced staff
	Frequent change of managers; need to re-explain goals
	Challenges to detect at-risk students
	Can't operate with timely support
	Changed status; detrimental impact on staff morale and motivation
	Staff/student ratio declining
	Top-down implementation of policy and funding

Table 4 above represents the key themes arising from comments relating to restructures in ALL centres and units. Many participants highlighted multiple disadvantages impacting their work and their own ability to continue supporting students in an effective and timely manner. This theme recurred in a number of comments and demonstrates a negative impact not only to ongoing ALL work and the ability to provide timely assistance and communication, but also to staff morale and motivation. The main perceived advantages appeared to be the benefit from being embedded in a Faculty or moved out of student support and the perception that discipline teachers were more open to collaboration and student support when change was happening.

Whether a restructure was perceived as helpful or harmful, therefore, seems to depend on whether it moved respondents closer to or further from the work of the disciplines. Rather than seeing a clash, in general terms, between corporate and collegial cultures in which ALL staff are lined up with one side or the other, arguably we can discern a preference for arrangements that allow LAs to develop, maintain, and use their particular expertise in the cultures and discourses of the disciplines. Either a more centralised management or a more dispersed, collegiate one could support such arrangements, which may account for the variety of views expressed by our respondents. If a centralised, more directive management is to be supportive, however, it seems important that it be staffed by people who understand what ALL work is about.

3.2.7. Communications with students

In embarking on this survey, we had thought that ALL practitioners might be concerned about the effects of management policies or practices on their ability to communicate with students. Individual consultations (ICs) have been an enduring mode of teaching for ALL practitioners, both because of their effectiveness for students (Ashton-Hay & Doncaster, 2021; Campitelli, Page, & Quach, 2019; Chanock, 2000; Chanock, Burley, & Davies, 1996; Wilson et al., 2011) and because they provide LAs with an ongoing window into the confusions that beset students in particular discipline subjects, which LAs can then collaborate with the discipline lecturers to address (Chanock, 2007a; Huijser, Kimmins, & Gallager, 2008). At the same time, ALL practitioners have been conscious of the need to justify individual consultations in economic terms, because they are likely to strike managers as expensive and opaque (Berry et al., 2012; Chanock, 2002; Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009; Wilson et al., 2011). It seemed likely, therefore, that ICs might emerge as an issue in responses to our survey about managers' decisions impacting upon communications with discipline staff and students.

In the event, however, little was said on this topic. Some respondents felt the quality of their interactions with students had declined, but this was because Covid had forced a shift to online sources of advice, rather than because of management initiatives.

> *Interactions with students have lessened because of online learning, working from home, lack of face-to-face teaching of workshops and the advent of Studiosity, which is marketed to students as 24/7 connect live learning. Students are not encouraged to discern any difference between the qualifications and experience of Studiosity staff and university employed academic skills advisors. 24/7 access is viewed as the superior product because of accessibility. I would say that academic skills advisors are being marginalised before most of them will be made redundant. Students, staff and university management don't know what they don't know.* (R24)

In contrast, there were those who saw advantages in shifting attention from individual students to focus on meeting shared needs more efficiently. A respondent who had been at their current university for ten months said that:

> *The biggest shift in this role is that we do not do 1-1 support. I would say that this difference has reduced my interaction with students, but at the same time, students seeking 1-1 support often represent a very small minority of students and they tend to be over-servicers of support. So, I would say that not hearing*

> *these voices constantly has allowed me to think more of the whole student cohort rather than being biased towards that niche demographic.* (R31)

Finally, the respondent whose team had been forbidden to talk to discipline lecturers felt that:

> *Our team could support students better by targeting specific assessment items and avoiding 40-50 one-on-one consultations. By working with the entire class, the approach [would be] more sustainable and viable.* (R6)

It may be that most LAs have not seen a significant drop in work with individual students. We know that 90% of ALL units around Australia include individual consultations in their services (Ashton-Hay, Barthel, & Müller, 2021), but we do not know whether the proportion of their time that is spent on this, or the kinds of students who are eligible, are stable over time. Another possible explanation for the low level of concern about diminishing opportunities to learn from students is that, if the younger cohort of LAs have not devoted much time to this, they would be unaware of what they could learn if they saw more, and more varied, students, more frequently, for longer. However, our research does not allow us to do more than speculate on this.

4. Conclusion

The answers to our survey threw up a great variety of views, which are not easily reduced to a few salient points. However, it is possible to draw out some general considerations to inform readers' dealings with their managers, or if they are managers, with others in their institutions.

As we have seen, the shift to a more corporate structure and culture for universities brought opportunities for ALL activities to expand in the service of institutions' need to be more accountable to their stakeholders for students' experience and for their development of "graduate skills" including communication. With increased managerial scrutiny and systematisation of curricula, LAs hoped to offer their insights about students' experience of learning more systematically to the planning, design and teaching of subjects in the disciplines. Our survey has looked at the extent to which managers are felt to help or hinder this process.

First, it is heartening that most respondents said their managers encouraged them to collaborate with discipline lecturers to develop student's academic skills in context, and instituted various structures and conditions to support their efforts. These ranged from simply allowing time and autonomy to do it, to organising meetings, contacts, and professional development. Respondents did, however, identify obstacles ranging from indifference or ignorance about the nature of ALL work to organisational or physical distance between LAs and discipline lecturers that limited their opportunities for communication and collaboration. Respondents were working in various locations including central units, Faculties, libraries, and student services, and it is clear that ALL staff feel more effective when they are managed by experienced ALL practitioners in units which are explicitly devoted to developing academic literacies.

Rationalisation of the functions of various parts of the university might seem to be enhanced by locating different kinds of help for students together in a "one-stop shop", but such arrangements can mean that academic language and learning are subsumed under more general management and LAs cannot maintain the involvement with students and lecturers in their discipline contexts that is necessary to inform their specialised expertise. Efficiencies are not helpful if they result in staff becoming less effective. Our findings suggest that through numerous restructures, disruptions, and the loss of highly experienced staff, some universities still may not have settled on an effective structure for academic language and learning support. The need our respondents perceive is to locate ALL where students can access the services and where ALL staff can effectively have easier, direct access to faculties, and thus collaborate with discipline lecturers to improve student success. The need for integrated, joined-up approaches to university student support services is highly regarded by ALL staff as best practice in the sector as long as their success is not sabotaged by heavy-handed or even stigmatising imposition upon discipline lecturers from above.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Association of Academic Language and Learning for their support for our survey and to the Academic Language and Learning Advisors across Australia who responded so helpfully.

Appendix A: Survey

Please read the rationale for this survey, in our cover letter. In answering the questions below, don't worry if it seems to you that they overlap; you can answer them in a single narrative if you prefer, in the last box. Go into as much (or as little) detail as you see fit. Feel free to tell us if you disagree with our premises (that skills are not generic; that integration is desirable). And/or, if our questions haven't got at what you think is important, please tell us what that is. We know that surveys often frustrate respondents by not asking what they should; we don't want this to be one of those surveys. We want your relevant experience and what you think it means.

1. Does your management encourage you to collaborate with lecturers in the disciplines to develop students' academic skills?
   Yes
   No
   Yes and no

1a. If no, does it:
   Neither encourage nor discourage
   Discourage via directives precluding collaboration
   Make collaboration difficult through structural distance or separation of ALL and discipline staff

1b. Please provide any explanatory detail you wish.

2. If management encourages collaboration, how does it support this effort?

3. How effective do you feel this support to be?
   Very effective
   Not very effective
   Mixed

4. Why or why not, or both?

5. Has your ability to interact with students and academic staff been affected, for better or for worse, by institutional restructuring (or remained the same)? If so, please tell us about this.

6. Optional text box for single answer to all questions.

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