Overview of academic skills support at the University of Salford

Suzanne Waugh

Academic Skills Consultant
The Library

- Clifford Whitworth library
- Allerton Learning Space
- Media City library
Learning & Research Support

• Academic Support Team (as of Sept 2019):

• Academic Skills Consultants x 5
  (‘study skills’, planning/writing assignments, critical analysis, presentation skills, reflection, resilience…)

• Academic Support Librarians x 6.5 FTE
  (information literacy, collections development, reading lists, research support…)

• Digital Skills Trainer x 1
  (Word, Excel, formatting theses, MOS…)
School teams (FTE equivalents)

Salford Business School (1 x ASL, 1 x ASC)

School of Arts & Media (1 x ASL, 1 x ASC)

School of Science, Engineering & Environment (2 x ASL, 1 x ASC)

School of Health & Society (2.5 x ASL, 2 x ASC)
How we provide academic support

• Bespoke / embedded workshops

• Bookable ‘general’ workshops

• 1-1 appointments

• Online support (e-learning, Uniskills, webinar versions of workshops via Collaborate, downloadable guides etc)
Overall…

- The team taught students for almost 2000 hours in total in 2018-19
- Almost 20,000 attendances
Embedded / bespoke workshops 2018-19

- Academic Support Team
  592 workshops
  852 hours of teaching
  16928 total attendances

Of which Academic Skills:
  220 workshops
  332 hours of teaching
  6947 attendances
Bookable / generic workshops

- Academic Support Team
  149 workshops
  270 hours of teaching
  943 attendances

Of which Academic Skills:
  83 workshops
  156 hours of teaching
  533 attendances
1-1 appointments

- Academic Support Team
  819 appointments
  705 hours

Of which Academic Skills:
  367 appointments
  363 hours

Academic Skills and Digital Skills appointments tend to be 1 hour long. Infolit appointments usually 30 mins.
Online stats

• Skills for Learning website had 176,576 unique IP address hits in 2018-19

• 25,542 unique IP addresses accessed our eLearning packages

• Most popular eLearning packages were academic misconduct, referencing, critical analysis and ‘get going’
• **Webinars** (online Skills for Learning workshops)
  19 webinars ran during pilot 2018-19
  238 attendances

• **Uniskills** pilot year 2018-19
  Accessed a total of 10,309 times
  2699 enrolled, 955 earned all 4 badges
What is Smarthinking?

Online tutoring support service owned by Pearson Education.

• Offers 24/7 support with written work
• 24 hour turnaround for feedback.
• Supports writing skills like grammar, structure and organisation.
• Supports numeracy and CVs/covering letters
• Does not offer subject specific help.
Who are the Smarthinking tutors?

- Employed globally.
- Over 90% hold a Master’s degree or PhD.
- Average 12 years of experience working directly with students.
- Don’t have knowledge of the course or the assignment the student is undertaking, unless the student provides info.
Access to Smarthinking

- Students access Smarthinking Blackboard (online learning VLE).
- Smarthinking is added to specific courses/programmes on Blackboard to enable direct access to the ST interface.
Submitting work

Course Level/Title * English 101

Writing Title * My Favorite Vacation Places

Provide your assignment description (including expected length and documentation style if applicable) and any special instructions for your tutor. *

Write a descriptive essay on your favorite place to vacation. Use sensory details to describe it so that you show your readers what it is like to be there.

Select two areas in which you need help *

- Main Idea/Thesis
- Introduction/Conclusion
- Grammar & Mechanics
- Content Development
- Use of Resources
- Sentence Structure
- Organization
- Transitions
- Word Choice

Many Smarthinking tutors are experts in specific types of writing. If you would like a specialist in ESL, business/technical, or creative writing to review your writing, select here (for the fastest service, select "First Available Tutor"). *
Feedback from Smarthinking tutors

Smarthinking’s E-structor Response Form

(Your marked-up essay is below this form.)

HOW THIS WORKS: Your e-structor has written overview comments about your essay form below. Your e-structor has also embedded comments [in bold and in brackets] throughout your essay. Thank you for choosing Smarthinking's OWL; best wishes with revising your paper!

*Strengths of the essay:

Hi, Polly! Thank you for sending your essay about Seaside City! My name is Henry T., and I am your writing tutor. You do a good job of focusing each body paragraph on one part of Seaside City. For instance, your second body paragraph focuses on the amusement pier. Focusing each body paragraph on a single topic makes it easier for readers to understand the parts that make up Seaside City.

*Polly 8765432 has requested that you respond to the Content Development:

I noticed that your first two body paragraphs are missing examples of specific shops, games, and rides. Because of this, your readers do not get a clear image of what the boardwalk and the amusement pier are really like. They might not understand how Seaside City is different from other beach towns. For example, your second body paragraph mentions “rides” and “vendors,” but it is not clear exactly which rides and games one might find there.

- The rides at the amusement pier are exciting and wild. They are thrilling as ever making my knuckles white as I hold on tighter the older I get. Vendors call out trying to get you to try their games to win stuffed animals.
In 2018/2019 the University undertook a small pilot of Smarthinking, at foundation level only.

Engagement levels low - usefulness difficult to assess with short written submissions and IFY students.

2019/2020 extended pilot broadened to specific programmes where extra writing support deemed most valuable (across different schools and levels). Equates to approx. 1000 students.

In the process of evaluating extended pilot.
Challenges

• Raising awareness amongst staff and students.
• Promoting when faced with scepticism.
• Getting students to access the resource.
• Getting Smarthinking linked up to courses through Blackboard, with QEO.
• Designing an efficient and effective way to evaluate the pilot.
Quality

- Tone of feedback (especially for reflective writing)
- Focus on issues such as grammatical errors - may not be primary issue.
- Incorrect guidance on referencing.
- Tutors lack information about assignment/visibility of brief.
Questions/thoughts
LinkedIn Learning
Technology used in teaching
Online referencing tools

Ebba Brooks
Academic Skills Consultant
The Library
• What are your students using?
• What approach do you take to supporting students with using these tools?
• How do you support students with referencing in general?
What about using Library Search?

There’s a handy reference generating tool in Library Search
Let’s see how it performs...
Next meeting?