

# Study Skills For All:

Teaching multidisciplinary and cross-year groups



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Embedding study skills has become increasingly popular and much of the supporting literature champions the use of subject-specific learning (Wingate 2006). Contrary to this, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Keele University is delivering successful study skills workshops not only across all of its subjects but also across all of its years.

This paper profiles the development of faculty level study skills workshops. It describes how this approach can be a workable option as well as revealing the hidden benefits of cross-subject, cross-year support. In summary, it looks at both the art and the advantages of teaching soft skills to a mixed audience.

# A Bit of History

## Setting the Scene



In 2004, Keele had appointed 5 Learning & Teaching Assistants (LTA) within the Faculty of Humanities & Social sciences

Each LTA 'belonged' to a subject area consisting of

- Law
- History
- English
- Psychology
- Criminology

Embedding study skills within disciplines (Wingate 2006; Durkin & Main 2002)



# BUT

Following a period of restructuring in 2006, the LTA's were lifted out of their subject areas and became **Learning Support Officers** for the faculty

LSO's for the faculty so the role became broader than the LTA role yet narrower than the supporting roles within central services

## A new middle ground?

Or

## Our Third Way?



# Making it work

- Establishing the new roles
- Providing study skills support



# Making it Work: Establishing the Roles

As an LTA, I was

**Very Identifiable**

&

**Immediately linked with colleagues**

As an LSO, I was

**Floating**

&

**More removed from colleagues**



To combat this, we needed to  
'package' our provision



# This included the following

- A Logo
- An Acronym
- A dedicated space on our VLE
- A supporting blog
- A marketing campaign



LSSHSS\*

\*Learning Support for Students of Humanities  
& Social Sciences



Your location: Home Page



# LSSHSS\* LearningSpace

\*( Learning Support for Students of Humanities and Social Sciences )



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Meet your two faculty Learning Support Officers



# LSSHSS\* LearningSpace

\* (Learning Support for Students of Humanities and Social Sciences)

TUESDAY, 14 APRIL 2009

## Facebook getting in the way of your revision?

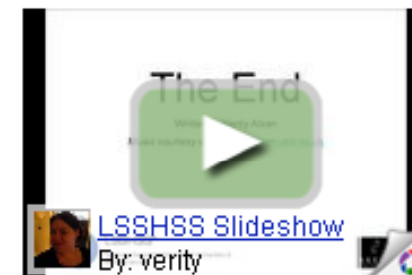
Fear not? We may just have the answer to your problem. If you use Firefox as your browser, you can download this free Add-on. Its called Leechblock and its designed for users to curtail their internet habits by blocking out their own access to certain sites at certain times.



### LeechBlock 0.4.2.2

This means you could set up your PC to keep you off certain sites whilst you're in the midst of your revision. This could

WELCOME



OUR NEXT WORKSHOP WILL BE:

### Exam Skills

On Tuesday 24th March, 1-2 in  
DW0: 32/33 (Darwin Building,

# Making it Work:

## Providing Study Skills Support

The central principles are:

1. Interactivity
2. Learner-centred methodology



# Experience based



Allow students to relate to learning theory in real terms

# Supportive



Creating the right environment for students to feel comfortable to speak about a range of issues

# Their Time



Learners must feel that they 'own' the session. We need to be willing to relinquish some control.

# Non-Routine



Sessions need to be non-formulaic, spontaneous, stimulating and different in order to capture imaginations and hold interest. This is best normally achieved by making it 'about them'

# A Point of Contact



Workshops not a one-off time slot of availability but a starting point. Support must be ongoing and far-reaching.

# Normalising



Study skills are not remedial or remote. They are everyday and normal.

# Hidden Benefits of Multi-disciplinary and Cross-year groups



# Peer Pressure



‘If you say something and a student validates it, other students automatically take note’

# Informal Mentoring



Finalists can pass their experience onto 1<sup>st</sup> year students

‘students use each other as a major source of support and information, often in preference to the formal mechanisms put in place by institutions.’ (Shahabudin 2009: 22)

# Aids Differentiation



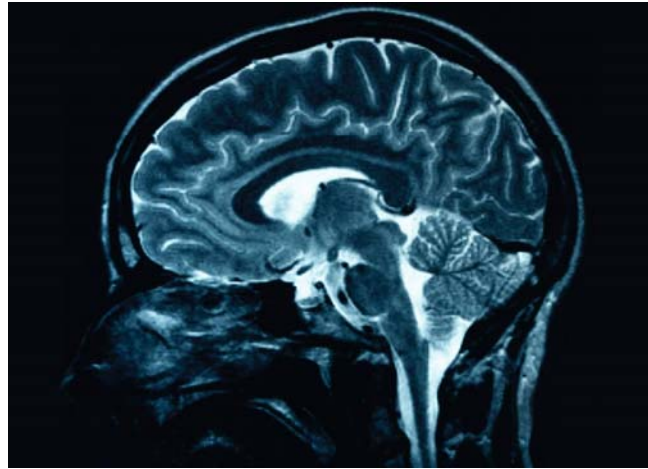
A good mix really supports small group work with experienced students juxtaposed alongside novice HE learners

# Reveals subtle differences



Providing students the opportunity to discuss their learning with one another is always a useful insight. By discussing issues openly is in keeping with HE culture and by exploring study skills from different subject perspectives we see the grey areas as well as the black & white

# Promotes Meta-Cognition



Mixed groups are more likely to look at how they learn in order to find a common ground and moves them away from the 'what do I need to do?' rhetoric. They are concerned with trends and practices rather than a 'how to' breakdown approach

# Organic Exchange of Ideas & Experience



Mixed groups lend themselves to value a plurality of ideas. The focus becomes more on the learning process rather than the learning outcome

# Avoids Situational Learning



Everyone is different so the emphasis is  
always on potential transferability

‘students view academic writing as a necessary evil to pass their course rather than a skill that will benefit them in the wider world.’ (Shahabudin 2009: 23)

# For Dual Honour Students



It makes sense to think about things from a multi-disciplinary perspective

# Hidden benefits of neutral spaces



# Some advantages of having study skills provision outside of discipline areas include:

- Actively non-judgemental environment
- Discussions are natural and people are at ease
- A real honesty transcends
- A chance to let things out
- Anything goes!
- Part of 'their' space and time

'dyslexic students learn effectively from their peers in informal settings, and that they respond to smaller groups'  
(Shahabudin 2009: 22)



# Limitations



# Time



We usually run lunchtime sessions and 1 hour never seems long enough. 1.5 hours is probably ideal if you have the time slots available.

# Too cool for skool?



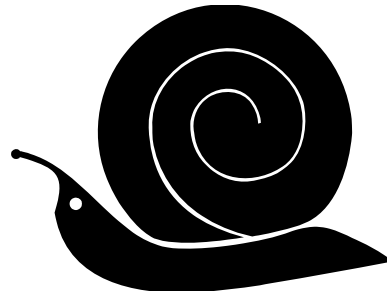
Some students see the non-contextualising of study skills as too basic and even below them. These tend to have initial barriers. This is a type of disruptive behaviour and needs managing. Can be overcome by placing high value on dialogue and experience – looking at things in real terms

# Follow-up work is high



There are always students who can't make the session but want information on x, y and z. This can be very time consuming. We are mediating this with surgeries and online support

# It's a slow process...



- Popularity increase over time
- Provision needs to get established
- A bit of a rolling stone

# It's the wrong students Grommit!



Workshops tend to attract middling to strong students. The real 'at risk' groups are less likely to attend.

# Concluding Thoughts

- Study skills for all can and does work
- Must be learner centred in approach, design & delivery
- Mixed groups enrich learner centred activities
- Mixed groups promote the importance of learning to learn by valuing experience and pluralities



# What Next?

- Revision Provision
- Refreshers Week
- Virtual Summer School
- Bigger, better, bolder – the rolling stone syndrome!



# References

- Durkin, K & Main, A (2002) 'Discipline-based study skills for first-year undergraduate students' *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 3: 1
- Shahabudin, K (2009) 'Investigating effective resources to enhance student learning' An overview of LearnHigher research, 2005 – 2008. [Available at [http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/eventsandnews/learnhigher\\_eventsandnews/Report-presents-overview-of-LearnHigher-research.htm](http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/eventsandnews/learnhigher_eventsandnews/Report-presents-overview-of-LearnHigher-research.htm)] Last accessed 16<sup>th</sup> April 2009
- Wingate, U (2006) 'Doing away with study skills' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11: 4