Report on the Independent Expert Evaluation of the English language entry standards and ongoing support for international students

at

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Evaluation conducted by Cynthia Kralik
March 14 and 15, 2012
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide a report on the outcomes of the Independent Evaluation conducted at the University of Western Australia (UWA) on March 14 and 15, 2012 in response to the DIAC requirement for an independent expert to evaluate the University’s English language entry standards and ongoing support for international students.

From the outset, UWA indicated that it was seeking an objective evaluation to meet DIAC’s requirements and to validate or inform its current practices.

This report has the following structure:

1. Executive Summary
2. Background: Approach and Methodology
3. UWA Profile
4. UWA Submission to DIAC: Observations and Evaluation
5. Recommendations
6. Conclusions
7. Attachment 1: Terms of Reference
8. Attachment 2: UWA Strategies for English skills development

PROFILE OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATOR

Cynthia Kralik has over 20 years’ experience in the English language and tertiary sectors. In this time, she has held roles that range from teaching English, teacher training, business development and senior management. Cynthia was the Director of the English language centre which is part of RMIT University for 3 years before moving into the Academic Director role at the same institution. In that role, she managed the academic quality of all the Centre’s English language programs, led the redevelopment of print and electronic courseware for the Centre’s English for Academic Purposes publications, managed the Centre’s transnational partnerships at 7 offshore locations and provided strategic advice to RMIT University with respect to English language entry standards, testing and support.

In 2010, Cynthia was seconded to RMIT University to lead a major strategic initiative to support RMIT’s linguistically diverse student community. Over a 2 year period, Cynthia formulated, implemented and evaluated a cross-university English language strategy which reached over 7,000 students in Melbourne and offshore and over 120 academic teaching staff through its formal and informal professional development components. This project has provided RMIT with valuable data to inform an evidence-based strategic plan which the University is currently implementing.

Cynthia is currently conducting research as part of an ALTC-funded project entitled Degrees of Proficiency: Building a Strategic Approach to University Students’ English Language Assessment and Development.

She has held non-executive board director roles on the English Australia Council in 2006 and on the National English Language Teaching Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) in the period 2007-2011.

Cynthia holds a Master of Education (International Education) and a Diploma in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (known now as the Cambridge DELTA). She is currently undertaking PhD studies in the area of English language policy formulation.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Independent Evaluation of the University of Western Australia’s (UWA) strategies to ensure that students have appropriate levels of English at the commencement of their course and strategies to ensure that students continue to develop their English language skills during their studies was conducted March 14 and 15, 2012.

The methodology for the Independent Evaluation comprised a desk audit of relevant documentation and interviews with a cross-section of relevant staff. Terms of Reference for the Independent Evaluation were agreed to in advance of the visit.

This Independent Evaluation of UWA’s English language entry requirements and provision of support services to international students highlighted the breadth, integrity and quality of UWA’s processes and practices.

The interviews conducted and documentation reviewed demonstrate strongly that UWA is committed to providing its international students with every opportunity to succeed and that it protects the education that is offered to its students.

Relevant support areas such as Student Services, STUDY Smarter, the Graduate Research and Scholarships Office and the Centre for English Language Teaching are staffed with dedicated, highly qualified and committed practitioners who take a highly student-centred approach to their activities.

Whilst many universities across Australia have an English language centre that is attached to it, there are varying arrangements in place (fully owned commercial entities, embedded in the organisational structure, for instance) which determine how operationally and functionally the English language and University work together. It is the Evaluator’s view that the example at UWA is a positive and constructive one which provides a mutually beneficial arrangement and that results in a more comprehensive English language learning and development experience for international students.

The Evaluation process enabled a number of recommendations to be raised for consideration by UWA and include the following:

1. UWA has a demonstrated commitment to supporting its international students as evidenced by the range of initiatives currently in place and the philosophy of the University enshrined in policy and practice. A broad recommendation, which is clearly embedded in current practice and policy, is that UWA continue to maintain this focus and ensure that students have ongoing and increasing opportunities for English language enhancement.

2. UWA is undergoing the initial stages of implementing its new degree structure to include the embedding of communication and research skills. As this implementation is carried out and monitored, it is recommended that UWA monitors the impact on the professional development needs of academic teaching staff and assess what further resources should be allocated to meet these needs.

3. UWA will also find it valuable to monitor the staff that is available to provide program-level support with the implementation of the embedded communication skills framework and review the relative resource allocation accordingly.

4. To further enhance UWA’s processes in setting, monitoring and reviewing English language entry standards, it is recommended that UWA consider extending its mechanisms for monitoring the English language performance of students who have articulated from an undergraduate degree where the entry requirement is IELTS 6.5 (6.0) to a postgraduate degree where the entry level may be as high as IELTS 7.5 (7.5). It would be valuable for UWA to ascertain through qualitative and quantitative research, the level at which students’ English language proficiency develops throughout their undergraduate degree in preparation for their next entry point.
BACKGROUND: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

As part of UWA’s application to “opt-in” to the provisions for streamlined visa processing, the requirement for an independent expert to evaluate the institution’s English language entry standards and ongoing support for international students has hereby been fulfilled.

On March 14 and 15, an independent expert evaluator (“Evaluator”) visited the Crawley campus of UWA and conducted a series of interviews with key staff to evaluate the following requirements of UWA’s application to DIAC:

Requirement 4: Strategies in place to ensure that students have appropriate levels of English at the commencement of their course.

Requirement 5: Strategies in place to ensure that students continue to develop their English language skills during their studies.

In advance of the visit to the UWA campus, the Terms of Reference (Attachment 1) for the evaluation were discussed and agreed to and the following documentation was made available to the Evaluator. Additional documentation was gathered by the Evaluator or provided during the visit and is included in this list. The documentation listed below indicates the breadth of focus on English language skills that cover UWA’s entry requirements, communication to staff and students regarding the University’s expectations, services available and periodic quality assurance monitoring of English language skills requirements and services provided.

General
1. UWA ‘opt-in’ application for Streamlined Visa Processing
2. Relevant extracts from the AUQA Performance Portfolio prepared in advance of the AUQA audit in 2009
3. Profile information regarding UWA English language entry requirements
4. University Policy on English language competence for admission to degree study
5. List of English language tests recognised by UWA and relevant entry scores.
6. List of English language entry requirements for UWA programs including range of requirements for specified postgraduate programs.
7. Overview of pathway or articulation agreements that are used in lieu of English language tests (eg pathways from the English language institution).

Staff and students: Awareness and Communication
10. Postgraduate Students’ Almanac 2012
11. Statement of Learning Skills Good Practice (in accordance with an Academic Council Resolution)
12. UWA Teaching and Learning Educational Principles
14. Report conducted by Student Services and the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning entitled Perceptions and Expectations of English Language Requirements and Support.

Monitoring of English language skills
15. Process for identifying students “at risk” as a result of language difficulty.

English language support
18. Overview of English language support services available to international students including language skills support workshops, drop-in centre, individual support as well as credit-bearing programs, adjunct programs or English language skills embedded in formal programs.
19. Annual Evaluation Report 2011 outlining the activities of the STUDYSmarter unit of UWA
20. Detailed information regarding the content and structure of two credit-bearing units: English Language and Academic Communication.
21. Overview of social, mentoring or other activities where the development of English language skills occurs informally.
22. Student-staff ratio for support services such as the academic language and literacy unit.
23. Detailed information on the new course structure for undergraduate programs implemented from 2012: Embedding Communication and Research Skills.

24. Outlines of Communication units embedded across a range of disciplines including Business, Engineering, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Science, Architecture, Health and Computing

Using the documentation that was made available by UWA, and other relevant publicly available information from the UWA website, the Evaluator prepared for the visit and the subsequent probing questions that would be focussed on during the interviews.

A schedule for the Evaluator was drafted in advance of the visit with meetings arranged with the following members of staff over the 1.5 day visit. Meetings ranged in length from a minimum of 50 mins to 2 hours.

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<tr>
<th>Staff member</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor Jane Long</td>
<td>Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education)</td>
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<td>Mr Marius Porojan</td>
<td>Admissions Coordinator, Admissions Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Garry Hendy</td>
<td>Assoc Director (Admissions), International Centre</td>
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<td>Ms Fiona Birt</td>
<td>Manager, International Postgraduate Students Admissions, International Centre</td>
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<td>Ms Sato Juniper</td>
<td>Associate Director, Graduate Research and Scholarships Office</td>
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<td>Ms Siri Barrett-Lennard</td>
<td>Team Leader/English Language and Learning Skills Adviser, StudySmarter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Judy Skene</td>
<td>Associate Director, Student Services (Student Support Services) and Equity and Diversity Adviser, Student Support Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Kelly Smith</td>
<td>Director International Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Anthony Turner</td>
<td>Manager, International Quality Assurance, International Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Bianca Panizza</td>
<td>Director, Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT)</td>
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The combined desk audit and in-depth interviews with these key members of staff enabled the Evaluator to make a comprehensive assessment of UWA’s strategies for setting and monitoring English language entry requirements and the provision of support available to international students.

UWA PROFILE

UWA’s programs are located within nine faculties:

- Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts
- Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Business School
- Education
- Engineering, Computing and Mathematics
- Law
- Life and Physical Sciences
- Natural and Agricultural Sciences
- Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences

In 2011 UWA enrolled more than 23,000 students comprising just over 5,200 international fee paying students (22% of the total load). A small proportion of these students were located offshore but with the majority enrolled at the Crawley campus of the University. UWA’s international enrolments are at approximately 75% of the national average. This lower proportion of international student intake, as stated by UWA, is “consistent with its principle of focussing on quality rather than on maximising student numbers”.

In 2007-2011 the programs (excluding Exchange and Study Abroad) attracting the highest proportion of international onshore students comprised the following:

1. Bachelor of Commerce (38% of the total intake)
2. Bachelor of Engineering (29%)
3. Doctor of Philosophy (35%)
4. Bachelor of Economics (51%)
5. Master of Oil and Gas Engineering (70%)
6. Master of Commerce (69%)
7. Master of Professional Accounting (95%)
8. Master of Architecture (24%)
9. Graduate Diploma in Oil and Gas Engineering (49%)
10. Master of Manual Therapy (54%)

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1 Page 36, UWA AUQA Performance Portfolio (2009)
2 Data provided in Attachment 2B, UWA Opt-in Application for Streamlined Visa Processing, 2012

Independent Evaluation: UWA

Cynthia Kralik, March 2012
In 2007-2011 the highest number of international onshore students was sourced from China, Singapore and Malaysia.3

UWA SUBMISSION TO DIAC: OBSERVATIONS AND EVALUATION

The following section of the report provides a summary of UWA claims in its opt-in application to DIAC and the Evaluator’s observations during the visit and an evaluation of the UWA strategies observed.

Requirement 4 (Strategies in place to ensure that students have appropriate levels of English at the commencement of their course) and Requirement 5 (Strategies in place to ensure that students continue to develop their English language skills during their studies) are considered separately.

**Requirement 4:** Strategies in place to ensure that students have appropriate levels of English at the commencement of their course.

**UWA claims**

1. Admission to all degree courses benchmarked for international students against a minimum of IELTS 6.5 with no band less than 6.0 for undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) degrees. Higher levels of English competence are required for admission to courses which may be deemed more demanding, or where professional industry requirements specify a higher level of English competence (up to 7.5) for professional membership and registration.

2. Other approved tests are benchmarked against IELTS and undergo a thorough assessment process prior to being approved.

3. External organisations recognised as a means of meeting UWA’s English language requirements undergo a thorough assessment process prior to being approved.

4. UWA has access to English language test verification systems pertaining to IELTS, TOEFL and Pearson which are the English language tests recognised by UWA.

5. The Academic English and Study Skills Bridging Course (Bridging Course) delivered by the UWA Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT) is the only direct entry pathway into tertiary studies. To be recognised as a direct entry pathway, a formal submission process was undertaken by CELT. CELT monitors the quality of the Bridging Course by periodically reviewing its exit grades and tracks the academic performance of its graduates once in their tertiary programs.

6. UWA periodically reviews the English language capabilities and needs of its international students and action is taken accordingly. The most recent review was conducted in 2009 and recommendations from this review are being implemented.

7. The AUQA review in 2009 found UWA’s English language admissions standards to be robust.

**Observations**

There are two aspects to this requirement: the first being the processes in place to verify that students meet the English language standards; and the second the processes in place to set, monitor and review the English language entry standards used by the University to ensure they are appropriate.

In interviews with the Director International Centre, Associate Director (Admissions), Manager, International Postgraduate Students Admissions and the Director CELT (Centre for English Language Teaching), the Evaluator was able to confirm that UWA has rigorous processes to verify that students meet the English language entry standards set by the University. These entry standards are enshrined in policy (Univeristy Policy on English Language Competence for Admission to Degree Study), a copy of which was provided to the Evaluator. Verification processes include clear communication to students, staff and agents about what these entry requirements are, access to online verification systems pertaining to the three recognised English language test providers IELTS, TOEFL and Pearson, and clear and transparent processes with CELT that offers the direct entry English language Bridging Course for students on a pathway to tertiary studies.

The Evaluator’s observations combined with auditing mechanisms such as those conducted by AUQA and the state regulatory body in WA provide assurances that UWA meets any requirement that verification processes be robust.

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3 Data provided in Attachment 1C, UWA Opt-in Application for Streamlined Visa Processing, 2012
With respect to setting, monitoring and reviewing English language entry standards, the Evaluator was able to consider the entry requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate programs, the processes for reviewing entry standards and reviews that have been undertaken to this regard by UWA.

Underpinning UWA’s entry (and exit) requirements for international students is the UWA Senate Resolution which is also enshrined in the University’s International Plan. Alongside the University’s commitment to maintaining diversity in its recruitment of international students; ensuring that international students have an appropriate level of English; and providing students with a high level of student support services and opportunities for social interaction with local students, is the requirement that entry and exit requirement for international students are equivalent to those for domestic students. This commitment is observable from a practical point of view in the University’s Educational Principles, Good Practice Guides, course structures, assessment practices and other related documentation with is accessible to students and staff. It is also evidenced by the entry requirements for postgraduate programs in particular, which have been calibrated to the high academic standards the University sets for different programs.

UWA’s English language entry requirements for all undergraduate programs are benchmarked against an IELTS 6.5 (no band lower than 6.0).

The Evaluator was provided with a list of postgraduate programs that have varying English language entry requirements up to IELTS 7.5. The variations in the entry requirements indicate that consideration has been given to the linguistic demands of such programs and the desired English language levels of graduates of these programs to ensure they meet the requirements of professional bodies (for registration or accreditation purposes) and prospective employers. The varying English language entry requirements that fall above the minimum 6.5 (6.0) indicate that careful consideration is given to the linguistic demands of different disciplines and the professional language skills students will need to have throughout their studies (for work placements, for instance) and to prepare them for employment on graduation.

Students are able to articulate from undergraduate to postgraduate study with no further formal English language testing including articulation to programs that have a higher English language entry requirement.

The process for increasing the English language entry requirements for postgraduate programs is usually instigated at faculty level but must go through the Faculty Board in the first instance, then the Admissions Committee that finally makes a recommendation to Academic Council. The Admissions Committee is responsible for setting and monitoring all entry standards and for assessing new English language testing regimes as they emerge. This provides a rigorous and considered process for establishing and reviewing English language requirements.

To assist with decisions about English language, the Committee seeks advice from the language experts within UWA. More recently, for instance, CELT (Centre for English Language Teaching) reviewed the recent changes to TOEFL scores benchmarked against IELTS (which would result in lowering the TOEFL score requirement) with a recommendation not to adjust the UWA accordingly as the University needed more evidence of its impact. It is conservative practices such as these that indicate that UWA has a strong focus on quality and the calibre of its students and that it maintains a level of independence in setting its entry standards.

The English language centre, CELT, which provides the only English language direct entry program to UWA tertiary studies (supplying approximately 13% of the University’s international student intake) is embedded in the organisational structure of the University. This governance arrangement results in close collaboration between the University and CELT and ultimately benefits both organisations. CELT evaluates its Bridging Course content and assessment through close communication with staff within the University and the collection of data regarding the academic performance of its graduates. It is also able to contribute to University initiatives by offering its English language expertise with respect to English language entry standards and support. More generally, this close relationship promotes a culture of good practice in the broader teaching community.

Evaluation
The Evaluator’s observations and interviews provide strong evidence that UWA has robust processes in place to set and monitor its English language entry standards and that these processes are underpinned by a strong ethos of quality and due diligence with respect to its students.

It was reassuring for the Evaluator to confirm UWA’s claims that it makes conservative and independent decisions about English language entry standards to protect the quality of the education it provides to students. Also
reassuring was the principle, evident in practice, that there is an expectation that international students be assessed at entry and exit points in the same way as their domestic counterparts.

As for the English language entry standards themselves, UWA has demonstrated that it takes into account the linguistic demands of different disciplines and programs by setting English language entry requirements that are well above the minimum of IELTS 6.5 (6.0). This is consistent (albeit with respect to postgraduate programs only) with the recommendations provided by IELTS which stipulate that a score of 6.5 may not be adequate for linguistically demanding disciplines.5

The Centre for English Language Teaching plays a crucial and embedded role in the University’s international admission processes by offering expert English language advice to the University’s Admission Committee.

CELT’s Bridging Course for students on a pathway to the University and the inherent quality assurance processes in place to review and monitor the course’s content and assessment scores provide a valuable pathway addition to international students.

To further enhance UWA’s processes in setting, monitoring and reviewing English language entry standards, it is recommended that UWA consider extending its mechanisms for monitoring the English language performance of students who have articulated from an undergraduate degree where the entry requirement is IELTS 6.5 (6.0) to a postgraduate degree where the entry level may be as high as IELTS 7.5 (7.5) as is the case for Law and the Master of Pharmacy, for instance. Whilst it can be argued that the combination of high calibre students, an intensive English language social and academic environment and the provision of a comprehensive array of social and support services (discussed further below), should lead to progressive English language development, it would be valuable for UWA to ascertain through qualitative and quantitative research, the level at which students’ English language proficiency develops throughout their undergraduate degree in preparation for their next entry point.

Requirement 5: Strategies in place to ensure that students continue to develop their English language skills during their studies.

UWA claims
1. The University places emphasis on English language skills and has ongoing strategies to assist students through their studies.
2. UWA has a process whereby students can package their tertiary studies with English language courses prior to commencement if such students do not meet the English language entry requirements.
3. UWA has a range of strategies in place to ensure students continue to develop their English language skills during their studies. These include:
   - Free online and campus services delivered by STUDY Smarter (the academic language and learning skills unit of the University). These are central services offered to all students requiring academic language, learning and acculturation assistance.
   - Discipline-specific support services involving STUDY Smarter advisers teaching into units in almost every faculty.
   - Embedded communication and research skills units delivered throughout the UWA degree structures.
   - The provision of credit-bearing English Language and Academic Communication units which international students can access.
   - An online Communication and Research Skills module which forms part of the first year program for all students.
4. UWA has a range of transition services including social networking, peer mentoring and study group programs.
5. Information about UWA's expectations and assistance regarding English language is comprehensive and disseminated via a range of channels including the UWA Survival Guide and orientation as well as in the Good Practice Guides accessible via the UWA website.
6. The English language skills of UWA students are reviewed independently every seven years.

Observations
Attachment 2 provides a detailed overview of the English language development initiatives in place at UWA. During the Evaluator’s visit to the UWA campus and the associated meetings with relevant staff, each of these

5 IELTS Handbook, 2007, Page 5
initiatives was explored thoroughly and further evidence was provided as to their implementation. The Evaluator was also able to peruse the Annual Report written by the STUDY Smarter unit which provides a comprehensive account of its activities in 2011. The report highlights the incremental range of support services introduced at UWA in the last 7 years in particular. The University has significantly increased its resources devoted to academic language and learning in recent years with the current student:staff ratio sitting at 2,000:1 which is considered adequate by academic language and learning standards.

Without question, UWA students are able to access a range of complementary services to enhance their social and study experiences and which guide them towards their integration into tertiary study life. Whilst these services are available to all students, international students benefit from each of these and, as a result of the nature of some of these services, gravitate towards some in particular. For example, the “English language corner”, academic writing clinics, Study Skills workshops including speaking, grammar and writing, the Language and Cultural Exchange Program (LACE), pre- and post-arrival mentoring services and one-on-one consultations with the two English language skills advisors located in the STUDY Smarter unit (and funded by the Centre for English Language Teaching).

The STUDY Smarter unit also works at faculty/program level to assist academic teaching staff in specific programs with the development of academic language and literacy skills of their students. This service is usually instigated by the faculty or program and whilst resource intensive, reflects a sound pedagogical and evidence-based approach that is favoured by academic language and learning practitioners.

UWA has not implemented a university-wide post-entry English language test but on request, the STUDY Smarter unit assists with diagnostic testing to identify students who may need specific support. CELT also provides an ad-hoc English language testing service.

The UWA ethos underpinning the support services available to students is that these should not discriminate or stigmatise international students and that they be communicated and therefore perceived in positive terms (rather than remedial). This approach is consistent with current thinking and research in the area of academic language and learning skills support which considers that integrating services to reach both international and domestic students will lead to higher access rates and student satisfaction.

Communication about what services are available to students is extremely comprehensive and available in a range of locations including the website, the UWA facebook page, student handbooks, diaries, posters and promotional campaigns (in orientation and during the semester via email) with students and teaching staff by the Student Services and STUDY Smarter teams.

UWA further communicates the importance of English language skills development by referring to its importance in its Educational Principles (website), the UWA Survival Guide (student handbook) and the relevant Good Practice Guide (Teaching and Learning site) which outlines staff and student responsibilities with respect to developing the English language skills of UWA students.

Postgraduate (PG) students are supported by three Graduate Education Officers, one of whom works more closely with international students. On commencement and to assist with transition, PG research students undergo an orientation program (called FIRST). Progress reports for Higher Degrees by Research students have a clearly articulated focus on English language competency.

Undergraduate students are also offered an opportunity to undergo up to two broadening units that are credit-bearing and focus on English language and academic communication. Originally targeting Study Abroad and Exchange students, these are also taken up by international degree students. Since 2009, approximately 137 students have chosen to integrate these units into their undergraduate programs.

From 2012, UWA has begun implementing a new course structure for undergraduate degrees which progressively embeds communication and research skills throughout the degree program. This innovative change to the structure of UWA undergraduate programs and its distinct focus on communication skills in content and assessment should have a significant positive impact on the English language skills of international (and other) students at UWA. The Evaluator was provided with documentation that details the Communication Skills Framework and the various dimensions inherent in this framework (writing, oral presentations, critical information and literacy skills and interpersonal skills). The Framework clearly shows the progressive level of skills students will acquire throughout their program. All new course proposals at UWA in the future will be required to identify how the course will demonstrate the development of communication (and research) skills.
Evaluation
UWA provides its students with a comprehensive suite of academic language and learning support services that are complementary, well-considered, highly accessible and based on pedagogically sound principles. The location of the Centre for English Language Teaching, STUDY Smarter and Student Services in the same organisational unit results in a cohesive approach to supporting international (and domestic) students. These areas are staffed by highly qualified practitioners who, on behalf of the University and in their own right, publish extensively, are recipients of awards and engage in a range of professional development activities.

In 2009, UWA commissioned an independent review of the English language skills of UWA graduates and the recommendations flowing from this review are currently in various stages of implementation. This review is highly visible and has been disseminated widely; evidenced by the number of references to it during interviews.

As the new course structure which embeds communication (and research) skills is implemented in 2012, UWA will find it valuable to monitor the impact on the professional development needs of academic teaching staff and assess what further resources should be allocated to meet these needs. The new course structure constitutes a significant shift in teaching and learning practices at UWA and will require dedicated programs to support teaching staff to manage the communication (and therefore, language) skills of their students.

UWA has a dedicated and hard-working academic language and learning skills development unit (ie STUDY Smarter). It is to be expected that the implementation of the embedded communication skills framework and UWA’s ongoing commitment to supporting the English language skills of its international students will lead to an increased emphasis and therefore demand, on the services provided by this unit. The demand is likely to be within programs that require intensive support for staff. UWA will find it valuable to monitor the staff that is available to provide this level of support and review the relative resource allocation accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UWA has a demonstrated commitment to supporting its international students as evidenced by the range of initiatives currently in place and the philosophy of the University enshrined in policy and practice. A broad recommendation, which is clearly embedded in current practice and policy, is that UWA continue to maintain this focus and ensure that students have ongoing and increasing opportunities for English language enhancement.

2. UWA is undergoing the initial stages of implementing its new degree structure to include the embedding of communication and research skills. As this implementation is carried out and monitored, it is recommended that UWA monitors the impact on the professional development needs of academic teaching staff and assess what further resources should be allocated to meet these needs.

3. UWA will also find it valuable to monitor the staff that is available to provide program-level support with the implementation of the embedded communication skills framework and review the relative resource allocation accordingly.

4. To further enhance UWA’s processes in setting, monitoring and reviewing English language entry standards, it is recommended that UWA consider extending its mechanisms for monitoring the English language performance of students who have articulated from an undergraduate degree where the entry requirement is IELTS 6.5 (6.0) to a postgraduate degree where the entry level may be as high as IELTS 7.5 (7.5). It would be valuable for UWA to ascertain through qualitative and quantitative research, the level at which students’ English language proficiency develops throughout their undergraduate degree in preparation for their next entry point.

CONCLUSIONS

This Independent Evaluation of UWA’s English language entry requirements and provision of support services to international students highlighted the breadth, integrity and quality of UWA’s processes and practices.

The interviews conducted and documentation reviewed demonstrate strongly that UWA is committed to providing its international students with every opportunity to succeed and that it protects the education that is offered to its students.

Relevant support areas such as Student Services, STUDY Smarter, the Graduate Research and Scholarships Office and the Centre for English Language Teaching are staffed with dedicated, highly qualified and committed practitioners who take a highly student-centred approach to their activities.
Whilst many universities across Australia have an English language centre that is attached to it, there are varying arrangements in place (fully owned commercial entities, embedded in the organisational structure, for instance) which determine how operationally and functionally the English language and University work together. It is the Evaluator's view that the example at UWA is a positive and constructive one which provides a mutually beneficial arrangement and that results in a more comprehensive English language learning and development experience for international students.
Terms of Reference: Independent Evaluation of English language entry standards and support strategies

Purpose
To provide an overview of the structure and outcomes of the Independent Evaluation to be conducted at the University of Western Australia

1. Context
There are two elements to this Independent Evaluation required by DIAC:
   1. Strategies in place to ensure that students have appropriate levels of English at the commencement of their courses.
   2. Strategies in place to ensure that students continue to develop their English skills during their studies

2. Evaluation Approach
Whilst DIAC has not prescribed how the Independent Evaluation is to be conducted or the structure of the evaluation report, these Terms of Reference suggest that the outcomes of a desk audit and interviews at the University be aligned, albeit in broad terms, to the Good Practice Principles endorsed by DEEWR in 2009 (http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/Pages/GoodPracticePrinciples.aspx).

The University’s response to DIAC in February 2012 will be evaluated via a desk audit of information and documentation and face-to-face interviews with key staff at the University. UWA’s application to DIAC relating to Streamlined Visa Processing has been made available and will be referenced in the report (ie points 4 and 5 which refer to English language).

The desk audit will include an analysis of the following documentation.
   1. Profile information regarding UWA: i.e number of international students as a proportion of total
   2. List of English language tests recognised by UWA and relevant entry scores.
   3. List of English language entry requirements for UWA programs.
   4. Pathway or articulation agreements that are used in lieu of English language tests (eg pathways from the/an English language institution).
   5. List of English language support services available to international students. These may include language skills support workshops, drop-in centre, individual support as well as credit-bearing programs, adjunct programs or English language skills embedded in formal programs. This may also include conversation classes.
   6. List of social, mentoring or other activities where the development of English language skills occurs informally.
   7. Student-staff ratio for support services such as the academic language and literacy unit.
   8. Process for identifying students “at risk” as a result of language difficulty.
   9. Tools used (if any) to measure English language proficiency post-commencement. These may include a commercially available English language tool or ones that have been internally developed.
   10. Data that provides information on the academic performance of international students compared to the domestic cohort.

Interviews with key staff at the University will also be used to gather further information. Staff participating in interviews include:

- Associate Director (Admissions), International Centre and/or Admissions Coordinator
- Team Leader/English Language and Learning Skills Adviser, Study Smarter
- Associate Director, Student Services
- Manager, International Postgraduate Students
- Director International Centre
- Manager, International Quality Assurance, International Centre
- Director, Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT)

3. Evaluation Visit and Report
The Evaluation Report will provide an outline of the Terms of Reference used to conduct the evaluation, an overview of the aforementioned elements, conclusions and recommendations.

The Evaluation will take place week beginning 13 and 14 March and will comprise a 1.5 day visit to the UWA campus. The Final Evaluation Report will be submitted to UWA by no later than Monday 19 March with a draft ready for discussion during the Evaluation visit.
ATTACHMENT 2: UWA STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

(Prepared by Ms Siri Barrett-Lennard, STUDY Smarter team, March 2012)

UWA strategies to ensure students continue to develop their English skills during their studies include:

1. Explicitly communicating English language development expectations and support to incoming students.
2. Providing a diverse range of free STUDY Smarter learning, language and research skills services on-campus and online.
3. Offering credit-bearing, adjunct and English language skills embedded in formal programs.
4. Continuing to support academic and learning language proficiency throughout students’ study, including at Honours and postgraduate levels.
5. Assisting student transition through targeted friendship programs, social networking, peer mentoring and study groups.
6. Developing English language skills through online social networking and through on-campus speaking clubs and events.
7. Regularly reviewing and adjusting staff-student ratio for support services devoted to academic language and learning.
8. Requiring all UWA staff who have direct contact with students to assist in identifying students “at risk” as a result of language difficulty.
9. Monitoring international research postgraduate students’ English language skills and providing early intervention where appropriate.
10. Requiring UWA students to successfully complete a communication and research skills online quiz in their first semester of studies.

These strategies are outlined below.

1. The University communicates English language development expectations and support through the:

   - UWA Educational Principles
   - Good Practice Guide for Developing the English language skills of UWA students
   - Learning Skills Good Practice Guide
   - UWA handbook unit descriptors
   - UWA Survival Guide distributed to all new students
   - Studying at UWA webpage
   - Studying at UWA Orientation Week sessions for each degree

2. The University provides a diverse range of free STUDY Smarter language, learning and research skills services on-campus and online:

   - Workshops
   - Workshop podcasts
   - Consultations
   - Daily drop-in advice sessions
   - Self-access resource area and Survival Guides
   - Academic writing clinics
   - Jump Start
   - Critical thinking corner
   - Plagiarism portal
   - English language corner

These services assist all students in developing English language skills, and in transferring these skills within and beyond their areas of study.

3. The University offers credit-bearing, adjunct and English language skills embedded in formal programs:

   Two accredited units (HUMA1901 and HUMA1902) develop the English language and academic communication skills of international students with English as an additional language.
The University has embedded communication and research skills throughout its degree structures, with students in all majors completing units that develop the speaking, writing, critical information literacy and interpersonal skills required for their studies and their profession:

- New major proposal form
- Embedding Research Working Party Report
- Communication Skills Working Party Report
- Curriculum development guide for UWA staff
- Communication skills framework and Communication skills guide

STUDY Smarter academic language and learning advisers teach into units in almost every faculty, assisting students to develop English language skills as part of their studies.

(4) The University continues to support, academic language and learning proficiency throughout students’ study, including at Honours and Postgraduate levels:

- The Honours hub
- MasterMine
- Graduate Research School research skills and thesis writing workshops
- Facilitated writing groups and research retreats
- The Research Journey

(5) The University offers comprehensive transition services that encourage students from outside Perth to form social connections on campus pre-arrival, and to participate in social activities, peer mentoring and study groups once they have commenced their studies:

- ConnectMe@UWA
- UniMentor
- Befriending program
- Skillshops
- Peer assisted learning (Science)
- Peer assisted study sessions (Business)
- UniSkills
- Language and Cultural Exchange program

(6) The University develops English language skills through online social networking and through on-campus speaking clubs and events:

- UWA Students Facebook page
- Get Smart electronic newsletters
- UniSpeakers club
- UWA Toastmasters Club
- UWA’s three minute thesis competition

(7) The University regularly reviews and adjusts its staff-student for support services devoted to academic language and learning.

The University has significantly increased its resources devoted to academic language and learning in recent years. The relative proportion of staff full-time equivalents (FTEs) in academic language and learning compared to student equivalent full-time study loads (EFTSLs) changed dramatically in the five year period between 2006 and 2011 (see University Statistics).

In 2006, the staff-student ratio for support services devoted to academic language and learning was approximately 3,000:1. Staffing FTE was 5.0, including 3.0 FTE Language and Learning Advisers and 2.0 FTE Graduate Education Officers. These staff supported 17,275 students with an EFTSL of 14,648.

In 2011, by comparison, the staff-student ratio for support services devoted to academic language and learning was approximately 2,000:1. Staffing (10.4 FTE total) included:

- The STUDY Smarter team (6.6 FTE)
- The Graduate Education Officers (3.0 FTE)
- The Business School Postgraduate Student Centre (0.8 FTE)
In 2011, these staff supported 23,292 students with an EFTSL of 19,939

(8) The University requires all staff who have direct contact with students to assist in identifying students “at risk” as a result of language difficulty:

These requirements are outlined in The Good Practice Guide for Developing the English language skills of UWA students (excerpt below).

Responsibilities of UWA staff

All professional and academic staff members who have direct contact with students are normally expected to:

- identify students who may require additional English language skills development when they are interacting with students
- know where additional English language skills training is available and provide details of facilities available, and
- advise students of their responsibilities for English language development (see over page).

Some simple ways of determining whether additional English language training is required include asking students about their studies, getting them to repeat information, checking how well they have completed forms, seeing how well they follow instructions, observing their interaction with others, and listening for gaps in their communication.

University staff members who develop curricula and co-ordinate academic programs are normally expected to:

- ensure curricula, teaching and assessment practices develop English language communication skills as part of the normal academic program
- ensure that each level of a major requires students to demonstrate English language communication skills
- apply increasing standards of satisfactory communication in English progressively during the course, and
- include in all unit outlines the following statement or similar:

  Assistance with study skills, including English language skills, is available free of charge to all enrolled students from Student Services.
  o Website: www.studysmarter.uwa.edu.au
  o Location: Student Services, First Floor, Social Sciences South
  o Telephone: (+61 8) 6488 2423.

University staff members who teach academic programs are normally expected to:

- integrate English language development with teaching practices, for example by modelling the discourse of the discipline and indicating appropriate standards
- identify students who may require training in additional English language skills through informal means, for example by engaging students in dialogue and monitoring in-class activities and discussions
- integrate English language development with assessment practices so that students’ English language development needs can be detected early
- provide students with reasonable levels of feedback to assist them to improve their skills or to remedy deficiencies
- know where additional English language skills training is available and provide details of facilities available to assist English language development, and
- know where staff development support is available for integrating, assessing and providing feedback on English language communication skills and access such support as required.

(9) The University monitors international research postgraduate students’ English language skills of and provides early intervention where appropriate:

FIRSTatUWA (Facilitating International Students Research Transition)

(10) Undergraduate students are required to successfully complete a communication and research skills online quiz in their first semester of studies:

The Communication and Research Skills (CARS1000) quiz is based on a series of modules on starting assignments, finding evidence, writing assignments, delivering oral presentations and working in teams.