



REVIEW OF ACADEMIC LANGUAGE AND LEARNING SUPPORT

FINAL REPORT

DECEMBER 2008

Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor

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Objective

As part of the general review of Teaching and Learning at La Trobe University, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Belinda Probert, has initiated a review of the Academic Language and Learning (referred to here as ALL¹) support across the University. The objective of the review is to make recommendations on how the University, through its provision of language and learning support, can best achieve its strategic goals to improve student retention and progression rates, and to achieve equity of outcome in terms of the acquisition of academic skill and literacies.

Terms of Reference

1. Determine who is currently providing academic language and learning support to students across the University.
2. Establish what services are provided.
3. Determine the current cost of providing academic language and learning support.
4. Determine which cohorts of students currently access academic language and learning services and the percentage of students from these cohorts who access it.
5. Identify groups who may be under-represented in their use of academic language and learning support.
6. Review models for the provision of academic language and learning support from across the sector.
7. Make recommendations about the best focus of the activities of language and academic skills support at La Trobe University.
8. Make recommendations about organisational structure, processes and/or models of delivery to facilitate the provision of appropriately focused language and academic skills support within existing resource levels.

Review Panel

Dr Kay Souter, Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, (Chair)
Ms Barbara Paton, Deputy University Librarian
Mr Gary Thomas, Executive Director, Equity and Student Support Services
Ms Carolyn Webb, Educational Consultant
Ms Sally Went, Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Executive support to review)

¹ ALL is the acronym used by the Australian Professional body, the Association of Academic Language and Learning. Although no group at La Trobe in fact uses this title, it is used here to cover the range of names adopted by the various teams across the university.

Executive Summary

The first priority of La Trobe University's Strategic Plan 2008-2012 is 'to develop sustainable, high quality and relevant teaching programs'. Operational objectives include improving retention and progression rates in general, and in particular improving 'access, participation, retention and progression of students from DEEWR-designated equity groups'.

The provision of effective academic skills support is a fundamental part of this process, and like all Australian Universities, La Trobe University employs a number of Academic Language and Learning advisers to assist with this work. La Trobe University's ALL staff/student ratio is about average (and mid-point) for the IRUA Universities. The ALL staff are employed in all Faculties except Education, and at all campuses. The expertise and performance of ALL advisers is much appreciated and praised by the wider academic community, but the strategic change underway in La Trobe University will impact on the current mode of provision of language and learning support.

The panel concluded that ALL support at La Trobe should be developed in such a way as to:

- align it with the University's strategic goals and priorities,
- provide an equitably distributed service for students with transparent and visible processes for accessing the service,
- ensure that ALL staff expertise in language and learning support is appropriately harnessed in the University's systemic curriculum renewal initiatives,
- provide equitable working conditions and appropriate career pathways for ALL staff.

Recommendations

Focus of the Unit

1. That the expertise and capacity of ALL staff be deployed to serve the University's strategic goals.
2. That the expertise of ALL staff be utilised in the design and implementation of relevant institutional initiatives, for example, a systematic institutional research-based approach to monitoring the impact of ALL strategies on retention and progression.
3. That a cost-benefit analysis be undertaken of programs offered to students who have not yet enrolled, with these programs being phased out unless they can be shown to yield significant results in new enrolments to the University.
4. That consideration be given to the addition of numeracy skills support to the ALL support portfolio, and to the related resourcing issues.
5. That the development of a formal student mentoring and peer tutoring program and related resourcing requirements be investigated, led by ALL staff who would also train student mentors/peer tutors.
6. That the expertise of ALL staff be utilised through committee processes in developing relevant University policies, concerning, for example:

- Admission policies and processes regarding English language and literacy
 - Language of instruction
 - Assessment and examinations
 - Inclusive curriculum
 - Academic integrity
 - Pathways for students at risk of failure.
7. That units *Academic Skills For Tertiary Study A* (ENG1 ASA) and *Academic Skills For Tertiary Study B* (ENG1 ASB) be coded to reflect the fact that they are tertiary preparation rather than English subjects: perhaps as EDU1 ASA and EDU1 ASB.

Unit structure and staffing

8. That a single ALL support unit be established, operating in a dispersed way with service points at all campuses, and that all ALL staff be transferred to the new unit (including the ESL unit staff).
9. That funding allocations within existing budget units supporting ALL (salaries and operations) be aggregated and transferred to the new unit. The budget allocation should be sufficient to develop operations including administrative support and the appointment of the Head of the unit.
10. That a Head position be recruited (either from within the group, or by external recruitment) to Level C or above.
11. That the University consider making transition funding available for the Head of the ALL Unit position, either for a new position, or for a higher duties allowance for a current staff member.
12. That all ALL staff be assigned as reporting to the Head, and that the Head report to a Senior Manager role. There may be scope for developing one extra level within the hierarchy to reduce the supervisory load on the Head position.
13. That position descriptions be developed for ALL staff. These need to be consistently framed, and to clarify the mix of work activities, including the balance between individual consultations with students and other work, as well as the special nature of their academic roles (for example, as practical, applied, and institutional research).
14. That an ALL staff workload policy be developed as a framework for planning of staff work and to support the professional development and review processes.
15. That existing University staff-related policies (for example, access to study leave and conditions for promotion applications) be reviewed or new ones developed that are sensitive to the special nature of ALL staff roles.²
16. That there be opportunity for ALL staff positions to have a 'teaching only' designation.

² The University of Western Sydney's policy on Academic Staff Working in Educational and Learning Development Policy, <http://policies.uws.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00105>, provides an interesting example.

17. That the Head of the ALL support unit ensure staff receive appropriate career development and mentoring, including opportunities to contribute to institutional governance as appropriate.

Management of service provision

18. That transparent processes for accessing ALL support be developed.
19. That a consistent approach regarding the optimum balance of the time devoted to diverse ALL activities be developed, with a shift of the balance from time spent providing 1:1 consultations towards more embedded work within academic programs in accordance with sector wide good practice.
20. That a clear statement of base-line ALL support services provided across all campuses and faculties is developed and promulgated.
21. That ALL support services are distributed fairly across all campuses and faculties, taking account of special contexts and needs.
22. That access to ESL staff be optimised according to the needs and language backgrounds of particular cohorts of students.
23. That ALL support be evaluated and quality assured in relation to stated performance indicators and targets.
24. That a single information management system of ALL students be developed. This should ideally interface with the University student record system, to enable institutional research into the impact of ALL support and initiatives.
25. That the possibility of an ALL support 'help desk' be explored, operating from within a designated learning space, such as the Library or the proposed student hub, enabling students more open access to brief consultations.
26. That ALL support continue to be provided in an embedded way within academic programs as appropriate, and enhancements made to such initiatives to improve the distribution of ALL support to more students and to make ALL support more systematically related to their academic programs.
27. That a clear statement of the relationship between ALL support services and other services relevant to learning and teaching be developed cooperatively with these other service providers, and promulgated within the University community.
28. That a coordinated approach be taken to the development of learning resources for students (in print and online), ensuring the development of resources which meet the needs of diverse students, the potential for staff in the disciplines to adapt such resources to their teaching contexts, and the optimising of the ALL support unit's capacity and expertise by avoiding duplication of effort.

Policies and procedures regarding ALL support to students

29. That the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Committee of Academic Board commission a Working Party, with membership including staff from the ALL support unit, to develop a discussion paper examining key issues regarding language and academic literacy (and numeracy) skills development. Such a discussion paper may canvass the issues related to the following recommendations.
30. That greater clarity is developed in distinguishing between the roles and responsibilities of academic staff in the disciplines and ALL staff to support student learning, ensuring that ALL staff do not take up de facto tutor roles which should be undertaken by discipline staff.
31. That criteria be developed regarding which students should get access to 1:1 tuition and upper limits for an individual student's access to this service be determined and consistently applied.
32. That the University develop and promulgate policy regarding students' access to ALL support, and whether student work which has not yet been submitted for assessment can constitute a focus of ALL support provision.
33. That a policy interpreting confidentiality in the context of ALL support service provision be developed.

REPORT OF THE REVIEW

Preamble

The first priority of La Trobe University's Strategic Plan 2008-2012 is 'to develop sustainable, high quality and relevant teaching programs'. Operational objectives include improving retention and progression rates in general, and in particular improving 'access, participation, retention and progression of students from DEEWR-designated equity groups'. The provision of effective academic skills support is a fundamental part of this process, and like all Australian Universities, La Trobe University employs a number of Academic Language and Learning advisers to assist with this work.

La Trobe University's total number of ALL advisers puts it comfortably within the average range of the Australian higher education sector ALL staff/student ratio. This ratio varies widely across the sector, from 1:900 (Australian National University) to 1:6,800 (University of Queensland). La Trobe's ratio, based on 26,535 students in 2008 and an estimated 13.2 EFT staff, is 1:2010³. This is about average (and mid-point) for the IRUA Universities. The ALL staff are employed in all Faculties except Education, and at all campuses.

The expertise and performance of ALL advisers is much appreciated and praised by the wider academic community. ALL staff were said to provide an invaluable service, and to work patiently, tactfully, skilfully and extremely hard. Student feedback, when it is available, is also enthusiastic. It is clear, however, that the service has grown in an unplanned way and operates differently in different parts of the University. ALL teams are known by different titles across the University, have different reporting lines, and although they meet fairly frequently and describe themselves as having collegial relations, they do not operate as a department in any sense. They are not guided by uniform policies or consistent procedures, and they lack a sense of unified strategic purpose.

The so-called 1:1 model of delivery is a common *modus operandi* to which ALL advisers are committed. The service is based on a 'case-work' model in which the results of intense work with individuals who are deemed to be representative are extrapolated to the wider student population. Indeed, the ALL response to student need seems to be largely reactive, responding to student requests for assistance and to a lesser extent to requests from academic staff, often framed in terms of the work of a particular individual ('X is doing a great job'; 'I send students with problems to X', and so on). Evidence provided of the effectiveness and efficiency of the ALL services is framed in terms of the satisfaction of students and staff who access them. There is no evidence of a broader investigation of impact of the ALL services upon the whole student population, nor upon the whole teaching and learning milieu. Student feedback is not sought in a systematic way. This is a 'cottage industry' model of provision, not very visible to students, not easily scalable and not easily directed to strategic ends. For staff not familiar with the nature of ALL services, it is confusing, and it must be still more bewildering for students new to the university.

The current strategic change underway in La Trobe University will impact on this way of providing academic language and learning support. The intention to increase the total numbers of international and postgraduate students, to ensure excellent learning outcomes in all

³ One position will be lost from the LAS staff profile in 2009, which would take it to 1:2175 if student numbers remained stable

students, and to provide good-practice service for apparently increasing numbers of students with a disability, all mean that it is becoming increasingly urgent for the University to ensure that academic language and learning support is distributed equitably across the whole student population, particularly ensuring access to those students deemed to be most at risk. The role of ALL staff will therefore need to become increasingly directed to supporting the University's strategic goals, and this must be accompanied by an accordingly strategic use of their services, rather than reliance on a haphazard method of tutor-initiated or self-initiated referral, as well as development of systematic policies and procedures around the service, and the improvement of the career pathways and status of ALL advisers.

At present the ALL staff are distributed across faculties and campuses. Currently, each group determines its own priorities, sometimes in conjunction with faculty leaders in learning and teaching. While the staff apparently meet regularly, they do not appear to undertake policy development or develop consistent procedures as there are no channels or incentives for them to do so. Their working conditions vary and their career opportunities are limited—most of them remain at Level A or B. Their channels for engagement with the wider University community are limited, as are their opportunities to contribute to institutional governance processes. Some ALL staff reported that they felt isolated and even vulnerable because of their peripheral organisational locations and lack of critical mass. In spite of their academic status, many of the ALL staff seem somewhat insulated from aspects of academic life: some were for example alarmed by the very idea of a review, although reviews are an integral aspect of quality assurance in all academic programs and units in higher education.

The panel concluded that ALL support at La Trobe should be developed in such a way as to align it with the University's strategic goals and priorities, to provide an equitably distributed service for students with transparent and visible processes for accessing the service, to ensure that ALL staff expertise in language and learning support is appropriately harnessed in the University's systemic curriculum renewal initiatives, and to provide equitable working conditions and appropriate career pathways for ALL staff.

Terms of reference – 1

Determine who is currently providing academic language and learning support to students across the University.

The various bodies providing ALL support lack a common statement of purpose and role, and a strategic approach. Because the University has not, until now, articulated its rationale for providing ALL support, nor planned for this provision in a systematic way, it has tended to operate as a 'cottage industry' with its success being based upon the integrity, commitment, and capabilities of many loosely-connected individuals or small teams. The capacity to align ALL support with institutional priorities is limited by its being organisationally splintered and dispersed.

It is important to point out that the review scope is limited to those staff/units for whom ALL support is their exclusive role, rather than other staff/units for whom ALL support is not the primary role. The scope of this review is the following staff/units, distinguished by the fact that their exclusive role is to provide ALL support:

- Humanities Academic Skills Unit - FHSS
- Language and Academic Skills – FSTE
- Language and Academic Skills Unit - FLM
- Study Skills Scheme - FHS
- Language and Academic Skills (ESL) – CTLC
- Language and Academic Skills Unit – Mildura
- Academic Skills Unit – Shepparton
- Academic Skills Unit – Albury-Wodonga
- Language and Academic Skills Unit – Bendigo.

The following staff/units are not the subject of this review. Their roles are primarily something else, although to different extents they also provide some aspect of ALL support (as indicated in brackets):

- Library (information literacy)
- Residential Colleges (subject tutoring, peer tutoring)
- Equality and Diversity Centre (managing access to services for students with a disability)
- Indigenous Education (tutoring support under ITAS funding – Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme).

The following units, again not the subjects of this review, do not provide ALL support, although they have strong points of connection with ALL support units (as indicated in brackets):

- Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Centre (focus on the curriculum/teaching side of the learning/teaching nexus)
- Alternate Format Service (conversion of materials for students with special needs)
- Postgraduate Association (overall support for postgraduate students)
- International Office (overall support for international students).

Terms of reference – 2

Establish what services are provided.

ALL support staff/units provide support for students via diverse strategies, as detailed below. However, the lack of a common reporting process, based on agreed definitions and consistently captured data, makes it impossible to have a consolidated University-wide summary of the extent of this provision, the proportions across different types of activity, and the uptake by students across the University.

2.1 One-to-one consultations with students

Individual consultations with students are provided by all of the ALL support staff/units. Separate reports from the ALL support groups provide a picture of the variation in the way that 1:1 consultations are provided, and the extent of students' access to this service. At one campus, 864 sessions are provided to 345 students in one year (this figure is described as 'an average'), although the length of time of each session is not reported. At another campus, the hours of 1:1 consultations are reported based on how many hours this work constitutes as a weekly average for the staff member. Some reports provide a breakdown of statistics by student demographics (eg gender) or other characteristics (eg year of study, consultation topic). However, there are no consistently used variables enabling the painting of a complete picture across the University.

In one faculty, the report outlines the trend in numbers of students and sessions over several years, showing how the balance has shifted between 1:1 consultations and other types of support provision to students. Whereas some reports like this latter one provided insights into the impact of shifting this balance, other reports did not appear to identify the more equitable distribution of services to students as an issue to be addressed. Access to 'drop-in sessions' (that is, individual consultations without an appointment) is not equally available across faculties or campuses, and there are no consistent policies on who can access services and how, or limits on consultation topics, frequency or length.

Indeed, the variation across ALL support units in terms of local guidelines regarding access to 1:1 consultations is extreme, resulting in a high degree of inequity for students at different campuses and in different faculties. These examples, taken from the individual websites of each ALL support unit, demonstrate the range regarding the stated limitations on access to the services:

- Individual advice and assistance is available to students throughout the year.
- ... (access to the service is)... allocated on a "first come, first served" basis. However, staff are very busy most of the year – so make appointments well in advance!
- Individual appointments will be available only to students in their first year of studies at La Trobe University (first, second or third year of undergraduate studies) and postgraduate students.
- Work with drafts of your essays will only occur if you have already been attending (the service) to develop your skills. An appointment is necessary and available hours vary. Evening appointments can be arranged for students who cannot attend between 9am and 5pm.

- Appointments are for 30 or 60 minutes, depending on your requirements. There is a maximum allowance of one hour per week per student.
- Individual consultations are usually limited to one half-hour consultation per week, unless special circumstances prevail.
- You can have a regular appointment of up to one hour per week. We recommend you seek help when you first start writing. Undergraduate students: You can have a weekly appointment of up to 30 minutes. The advisers will usually only see your essay once. You can, however, make an appointment before you write an essay to discuss the essay question, or the plan or rough draft, and you can make another appointment for advice on the finished essay. You cannot make multiple appointments for the same essay.

The evaluation of the provision of 1:1 consultations typically depends on a measure of satisfaction amongst those students who participate, based on the fact that they do participate. That is, it is assumed that students will only attend such voluntary sessions if they find the sessions valuable. For most of the ALL support staff/units, an increase in the numbers of 1:1 consultations provided, or the numbers of students who received them, is considered to provide evidence of a performance improvement. Broader evaluation approaches, such as tracking the progress of students who participate according to entry characteristics and relative to the whole cohort, are not typically used. Thus, questions about students who do not participate are not asked.

2.2 Group workshops with students

Workshops for students are provided variously across the ALL support staff/units, although it is not often clear what is the basis of students' registration (whether voluntary, recommended, or mandated). Some generic topics (such as essay writing) appear to be promoted to all students, whilst other workshops are provided only for targeted students and have a focus on discipline-specific aspects. Often the reports on these group workshops do not include the number of hours provided, nor a breakdown of the characteristics of students who participate. The evaluations of workshops are typically dependent on perceptions of student satisfaction collected by surveying participants. As with 1:1 consultations, there is a generally held assumption that students will 'vote with their feet' and simply not participate in voluntary sessions that they do not find useful. Whilst this assumption is not being questioned by the review panel, the issue is that the evaluation processes in general use are not sufficiently robust or sustained to enable commentary on the institutional impact of these workshops or services more broadly.

2.3 Embedded ALL support

Teaching in partnership/ teams alongside discipline specialist staff who coordinate subjects of study is identified as being a positive aspect of ALL support. Typically, this type of teaching entails significant amounts of collaboration with the subject staff, and often results in designing learning resource materials that integrate language and learning support as an explicit component of the learning and assessment activities. However, in other cases, the participation of ALL support staff/units appears to be less well-integrated within the subject, with the ALL staff member simply providing a 'guest lecture' on an ALL-related topic.

A form of evaluation referred to in the joint submission from ALL support staff/units to the review is interesting here:

'The success of classes offered as part of teaching in a discipline subject can be assessed by the traffic generated from that subject to the unit for 1:1...'

This relationship between 1:1 consultations and discipline-based class teaching could be seen as beneficial for students in promoting more transparency about how any student can access the services. However, it is also potentially concerning in that students may perceive this as entitling them to unfettered access to 1:1 support, that demand may (or possibly already has) outstripped supply, and in that discipline staff may be transferring some of their responsibilities to enhance students' learning within the teaching and assessment of the discipline. Little information was available to determine the nature of 1:1 consultations. It was not clear to what extent ALL staff are supporting language skill development in this group of students or interpreting assessment tasks set by academic staff.

In some cases of embedded ALL support, and these are seen as highly desirable both by the ALL support staff/unit and the faculty subject specialist staff, the work entails introducing processes of diagnostic assessment of students' ALL capabilities, and systematic cross-referral of students identified as being at risk of failure. Several examples of such extensive work presented to the review panel were clearly showing productive impacts on the experience of whole cohorts.

On occasions, this type of collaborative teaching activity does not result in the ALL support staff/unit being engaged in the direct teaching or assessment of students, but rather only in the preparation for teaching and/or assessment of learning and/or evaluation of such initiatives. Often the focus of this work is the collaborative preparation of learning and teaching activities, assessment tasks, or learning materials, but it may also entail working with discipline staff, in a collaborative co-expert partnership, on developing processes for marking of students' assessable work.

The evaluation of this aspect of ALL support staff/unit's work is quite challenging to do, given that its hallmark of 'embeddedness' makes it quite difficult to separate the ALL elements. As with other types of ALL work, the evaluation is typically based on the assessed satisfaction of staff with the experience (they will engage if they find it satisfying), and on the measures usually used to evaluate teaching and subjects in accredited programs.

2.4 ALL units for credit

Several ALL support staff/units have responsibility for the design and implementation of whole subjects which are accredited as subjects within particular academic programs. To what extent these subjects integrate within programs was not clear, and the review panel recognises that there may be programs in which an ALL-type subject for credit is an integral part of the program, tied in by its part in achieving specified graduate capabilities, and required professional accreditation standards.

Evaluation measures are typically those used for accredited subjects, although the outcomes of such evaluations were not provided to the review. Nor was there information for the review panel on whether these subjects had been part of program reviews. It is not clear how many students have enrolled in such units, how the subjects are promoted, how students are 'captured', whether passing such a subject represents a hurdle (eg if a pre-requisite), and whether outcomes from these subjects are associated in any way with overall course outcomes.

The panel acknowledges that ALL units for credit were not identified as being necessarily part of the review. Rather, it is assumed that Faculty and program leaders will continue to determine requirements for such units as part of their normal academic management of programs. However, what is relevant for the review is the funding arrangements for the involvement of ALL staff as unit coordinators and tutors, since there appear to be different arrangements in place currently regarding recompensing ALL units for this work.

An anomaly was brought to the attention of the review panel in the coding of one of the ALL units for credit: ENG 1 ASA and ENG1 ASB (*Academic Skills For Tertiary Study A* and *Academic Skills For Tertiary Study B*) offered at the Bendigo campus are coded as English subjects, although they are explicitly designed as academic preparation. This is misleading, as these subjects could seem to be part of an English major on an academic transcript, for example when application is made to be accepted into English method in a Diploma of Education.

2.5 Self-access resources for students

The publication and dissemination of learning resource materials for students to access independently is a universally agreed critical strategy by the ALL support staff/units to support student learning and distribute access to such support more widely. The ALL support staff/units have developed a website on 'Student Learning' which provides an excellent resource hub: www.latrobe.edu.au/learning/. This resource hub is a commendable initiative, and a professionally presented rich collection of learning support material, organised from a student-centred perspective and providing essential links to other services. No information was provided to the review panel about the evaluation of this resource.

2.6 ALL for non-enrolled students

The range of services provided by ALL staff to non-enrolled students varies greatly from single workshops (including preparation for the STAT) to semester long bridging or enabling programs. For the most part, these programs are aimed at increasing participation in higher education by non-school leavers and seek to build their study-readiness. An evaluation of the Albury-Wodonga program was provided by the Equality and Diversity Centre and highlights consistent progress by graduates of the program. It is not possible however to gauge the impact for La Trobe given the small numbers involved and absence of data comparing their success to non-enabling enrolments with similar demographics. Evidence of positive benefit for the cost was not clear.

What is clear across the ALL support staff/units is that monitoring and evaluation processes are patchy to say the least. This is not to say that the services are viewed negatively. On the contrary, there is abundant evidence that those students who use the ALL services are very happy with the services. Equally, staff in some faculties attest to the quality of services provided and the value of increasingly embedded curriculum initiatives which adopt a holistic approach to academic literacies as a seamless component of subject content and learning. However, what is missing is any evaluation of the overall impact of ALL support provisions at an institutional level. This is difficult enough to do in universities with a single coordinated ALL service; it is nigh on impossible to do given the state of disaggregation of services provided at La Trobe.

Terms of reference – 3

Determine the cost of providing academic language and learning support.

Information for this part of the report was still being collected at the time of printing.

Terms of reference – 4

Determine which cohorts of students currently access academic language and learning services and the percentage of students from these cohorts who access it.

Information on the cohorts of students currently accessing ALL services was contained in both the various submissions from ALL staff and in the annual reports of the ALL units. However there was no consistency in the way in which the data were presented, nor was the 'authoritativeness' of the information apparent. For example, it was not clear if the student data was drawn from SIS or from records maintained independently by the ALL units. Also, data presented to the review were not presented in a way which enabled aggregation across the diverse ALL reports and submissions. Furthermore, the panel concluded that the data did not allow identification of unique interactions by students with ALL services, i.e. students may have attended multiple group sessions or had more than one consultation.

Acknowledging the uncertainty of the data, the following comments, based on information drawn from the submissions and reports, provide a flavour of the reach of the ALL support units.

In 2007, 400 students were registered for individual consultations with LAS (ESL). 63% of these were undergraduates and 78% were international students. This would indicate that LAS (ESL) consulted with 9% of the onshore international student enrolment (3,463 students enrolled all campuses 2007). In addition, LAS (ESL) addressed 800 students at orientations, the Language Centre, Schools and Colleges. Also, some international students would be contacted through ALL units of faculties and campuses. The review panel noted that international students tend to have a well-articulated pathway for referral to ALL support, and processes for tracking and following them up, unlike local students with language backgrounds other than English.

At the Albury-Wodonga campus, 507 students (55% of the campus enrolment) accessed ALL services in individual or small group consultations (but this is unlikely to be 507 separate individuals) during 2007. The majority of the students were first and second year undergraduates, with fewer third year and fourth year students. Only two postgraduate students were reported as accessing the services. There was a fairly even distribution between full-time and part-time students. Nursing students (99) were the most numerous, followed closely by Arts (86), and Social Work (73), with Business (37), Behavioural Science (34), and Environmental Management and Ecology (18) having less representation among the students reached.

Just under 2,000 'students' (again, not necessarily individuals) were contacted through activities of the Academic Skills Unit at the Bendigo Campus in 2007. These included 343 students in individual consultations and 1,656 students in group sessions (excluding STAT preparation). As at other campuses and in faculties, students sought multiple individual consultations (the number of individual consultations was 857 for 343 students). Health

Sciences students were the most numerous seeking individual consultations (90), followed closely by Education (88), then Humanities and Social Sciences (60), Law and Management (48), and Science Technology & Engineering (43). Students undertaking the elective unit Academic Skills for Tertiary Study (total 87) were drawn primarily from Social Work/Human Services (36) with the remaining students distributed across other courses.

At the Mildura campus approximately 186 students attended group sessions. These included academic skills orientation for first year students (90 students), sessions on essay writing (60 students) and a short course for mature age students (36 attendees). An estimated 130 students took up the opportunity for 1:1 consultations. With 322 enrolments in 2008, this could indicate a high level of contact overall between ALL staff and students at the campus if the numbers represented unique individuals, but they probably do not.

Activities at the Shepparton campus include individual consultations with 80 students each semester with approximately 60% of these being first year students, and 70% being Nursing students. The comment was made in the Shepparton campus submission that attendance at group sessions is not high. In 2008, 100 students attended orientation/transition sessions, 20 students attended generic sessions (e.g. essay writing) and 146 students attended tutorials for unit specific study skills across six subject areas. With a campus enrolment of 355 in 2008, some 30% - 50% of students could be receiving some form of ALL support.

The following data has been extracted/deduced from the reports of the faculty ALL reports, excluding Education for which there is no ALL unit.

	Health Sciences	Humanities & Social Sciences	Law & Management	Science, Technology & Engineering
Group session attendees	1,446	1,651	1,291	1,464
Individuals in consultations	220	209	226	240
Total	1,666	1,860	1,517	1,704
2007 Faculty enrolments (all campuses)	6,763	4,725	7,599	4,743
% contact for ALL support	25%	39%	20%	36%

If these figures are accepted as an indicator of students accessing ALL services, as few as 20% of students and as many as 40% of students may be availing themselves of academic language and learning support across the faculties (excluding Education). The total number may be much less, as students may have been counted multiple times.

The primary conclusion from this analysis of the available data is that there is no central University source of data on the students who are accessing ALL support. Nor is there a consistent approach to the recording of ALL activity.

Terms of reference – 5

Identify groups who may be under-represented in their use of academic language and learning support.

The review panel found it difficult to confidently identify those groups of students who may not be using ALL support. Just as there is no consistent process to collate data on students currently accessing ALL services, there appears to be no mechanism to identify students in need of such support but not availing themselves of the services, or having access to the services.

There were some reports of long waiting times, however these were anecdotal and inconsistent. For example, it was commented that some students sought help elsewhere (eg the Library) as they needed assistance promptly and could not get an appointment with an ALL unit for some time.

A number of comments were made during interviews or in submissions that suggested potential gaps. These included domestic students with parents from non-English speaking backgrounds, and postgraduate students (especially international students). The summary of the joint LAS response also suggested that males may be under-represented compared with females.

It appears that students at risk of failure may not be being identified as, except for international students and students registered with Equality and Diversity, there is no mechanism for identifying such students. Also, there is no model or University- wide process for referral to ALL support if a student is considered by academic staff to be at risk or needing assistance to improve their language and academic skills.

The extent to which the services are accessed by a proportionate representation of the student population is unclear, and whether those student cohorts who are known to be at risk are those who are accessing the ALL services is also not known.

Terms of reference – 6

Review models for the provision of academic language and learning support from across the sector.

The key source of information used by the review has been the benchmarking data on ALL units in Australian universities, collected by the national professional network of ALL staff (July 2008). La Trobe's ALL support units are not dissimilar from cognate units across Australian universities in the range of activities undertaken, including the common commitment to 1:1 consultations for students. Student:staff ratios are in the middle of the range. Like 60% of their counterparts Australia-wide, La Trobe's ALL staff are in academic positions. The organisational location of ALL units is difficult to compare because of different university structures, but a scan of the benchmarking information reveals that the majority of universities have a single central ALL unit. Some multi-campus universities distribute the staff from their central ALL unit to service points at their campuses. Some universities have a central ALL unit plus one or more faculty-based units, most often a business faculty. Reporting lines of units, through unit heads, are to various positions, including:

- director/dean/manager of student services (17 universities)
- director of academic development (7 universities)
- DVC/PVC/Assoc Dean L&T (7 universities)
- Library (1 university) although at Griffith the ALL support appears to sit alongside the Library.

Relative to the sector, La Trobe appears to have the most dispersed organisational model of provision of ALL support. Some 43% of ALL units provide support for non-ALL skills development (for example, numeracy skills).

Terms of reference – 7

Make recommendations about the best focus of the activities of language and academic skills support at La Trobe University.

The time and expertise of ALL advisers should be utilised strategically and efficiently. There is a clear need to rebalance their workloads, which seem to be at risk of becoming unsustainable, particularly if increasing demands from students for ALL support in 1:1 consultations are simply allowed to expand the workloads. It is also essential to provide triage guidelines about which students should have access to 1:1 tuition (e.g. disadvantaged students, or students at risk of failure), as at present access to service is usually on the basis of first come, first served, with long waits for appointments at certain times.

ALL staff have tended to provide 'emergency' and 'band-aid' services which fall outside their area of responsibility, such as back-filling for academic staff by explaining assignments.

ALL staff should contribute to future university projects in a strategic way, for example, the design and implementation of capstone and cornerstone units, including the use of diagnostic (formative) assessment processes embedded in curriculum design to build the profile of students at or near the point of entry to programs.

Recommendations

1. That the expertise and capacity of ALL staff be deployed to serve the University's strategic goals.
2. That the expertise of ALL staff be utilised in the design and implementation of relevant institutional initiatives, for example, a systematic institutional research-based approach to monitoring the impact of ALL strategies on retention and progression.
3. That a cost-benefit analysis be undertaken of programs offered to students who have not yet enrolled, with these programs being phased out unless they can be shown to yield significant results in new enrolments to the University.
4. That consideration be given to the addition of numeracy skills support to the ALL support portfolio, and to the related resourcing issues.
5. That the development of a formal student mentoring and peer tutoring program, and related resourcing requirements, be investigated, led by ALL staff who would also train student mentors/peer tutors.
6. That the expertise of ALL staff be utilised through committee processes in developing relevant University policies, for example:
 - Admission policies and processes regarding English language and literacy
 - Language of instruction
 - Language and communication skills
 - Assessment and examinations
 - Inclusive curriculum
 - Academic integrity
 - Pathways for students at risk of failure.
7. That ENG1 ASA and ENG1 ASB be coded to reflect the fact that they are tertiary preparation rather than English subjects: perhaps as EDU1 ASA and EDU1 ASB.

Terms of reference – 8

Make recommendations about organisational structure, processes and/or models of delivery to facilitate the provision of appropriately focused language and academic skills support within existing resource levels.

At present there is no structure to speak of in this group. Reporting lines and the nature of supervision arrangements vary, with consequent inconsistency in the level of mentoring and support provided. There is no evident career progression pathway, few opportunities for engagement in a wider scholarly milieu, and inconsistent access to leave for professional / study purposes. The current staffing profile reflects the lack of available career development for ALL staff with only one senior academic in the group and very few research active staff. There are likewise few opportunities to contribute to University governance and no evidence of a succession plan.

The panel agreed that the current organisational structure does not effectively support ALL staff and the provision of their specialist expertise to the University. There are different reporting lines and some anomalies, as well as gap areas: the Faculty of Education does not have an ALL support team; the ESL group, which does not work in a discipline-based mode as do the other ALL support staff, seems somewhat isolated and describes itself as relatively 'unprotected'. There are a number of ways to re-structure the organisation of ALL to provide greater efficiencies, strategic use of staff expertise, appropriate career paths for staff, and so on, although the review panel was mindful of the need to protect the demonstrated strengths of ALL staff working closely with staff in the faculties and across the campuses.

The most fundamental need is for ALL staff to be constituted as a formal department, with a Head in place to lead, manage and have supervisory responsibility for the group. This role is necessary to ensure that:

- this relatively large group of staff (currently about 13 EFTS) has an appreciation of their significance as a collective body of staff to the University's strategic goals, and are enabled to align their efforts with University strategic goals;
- the group can develop consistent and transparent processes for operational effectiveness, equitable distribution of services, and quality oversight;
- the group can be provided with structured support including administrative support;
- the positioning in faculties is systematically built into the role and function of the group and the positions of individuals, for example through participation in faculty and curriculum planning processes;
- there is a clear link to the senior manager to whom the group will report.

The position might be filled by appointment from within the group (with a salary loading), or advertised externally. If by external recruitment, it seems highly likely that such a position would attract considerable interest. The constituting of ALL staff as a formal department would facilitate greater clarity and definition of ALL support roles, make it easier to reduce unproductive duplication, and facilitate ALL staff collaboration with other learning and teaching related support areas. It would also facilitate student input into training and development programs for ALL staff – to incorporate realistic strategies for inclusive design, internationalisation, etc within such programs. The ESL function should not be separated out from the ALL, again, in order to prevent duplication, and to maximise transparency of access

points for students, and so it is recommended that this group be constituted within the new ALL unit ⁴.

This proposal would necessitate a shift of reporting lines for all of the ALL staff from their current supervisors to the new Head. It would also necessitate a shift of budgets from current budget configurations to establish a new consolidated budget unit. Consultations would need to be undertaken in accordance with the EBA and the Facilitation of Change policy as described in Section 1.5 of the Human Resources Manual. Importantly, it was the view of the panel that ALL advisers should continue to work in an 'embedded' capacity within the disciplines, working closely with the relevant Dean/Associate Dean and/or program coordinators, on context-specific initiatives to support student learning. The panel also acknowledged the importance of the way in which ALL support at the smaller campuses is more closely integrated with other service providers as well as with the Faculties.

To minimise disruption of these evidently successful collaborations between ALL support and the faculties and campuses, a new model will need to be articulated explaining how such collaborative work can be continued and further enhanced from within a coordinated ALL support unit. This will entail outlining how reporting and decision-making processes will work, and how staff in the new ALL support unit will develop and maintain this unit as a cohesive and well-functioning unit in spite of working at dispersed locations.

The question of to whom the Head of the ALL group should report is a difficult one. The most logical line of reporting and management is clearly - as the name indicates - to the new Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Centre. The panel was of the opinion that, all things being equal, this positioning would improve the standing, accessibility and career possibilities for ALL staff. This was also the finding of the previous review of the former ADU, headed by Professor Ross Chambers. However, it was also argued that the CTLC and the ALL advisers serve different client groups (staff on the one hand and students on the other). The potential advantages are nevertheless clear in terms of enhancing the nexus between services supporting these two groups. A second possibility would be placement within Student Services. By contrast with the placement in the CTLC, the 'client' group is common, but the career pathway for ALL staff may not be as well supported, given that they are currently academic appointments.

While in some universities ALL advisers are in fact classified as general staff, it is clear that La Trobe's ALL advisers are very strongly opposed to this idea. Reclassification as general staff would certainly have a severe effect on morale and make career development even more difficult, and for these reasons does not seem a useful outcome. Likewise, ALL advisers are positioned in the library in some universities, but this seems more a matter of convenience than structural logic.

Finally, there is a need for policies or guidelines both to guide the provision of language and academic literacy and numeracy skills support, and to guide the management of staff positions in ALL support. The recommendations outline those areas where policies, guidelines, or new ways of operating are seen as being required.

⁴ Although not part of the review's terms of reference, the Alternate Format Service made representations to the review that they wished to be confirmed as a unit within CTLC where there are the greatest synergies in terms of curriculum and technologies.

Recommendations

Unit structure and staffing

8. That a single ALL support unit be established, operating in a dispersed way with service points at all campuses, and that all ALL staff be transferred to the new unit (including the ESL unit staff).
9. That funding allocations within existing budget units supporting ALL (salaries and operations) be aggregated and transferred to the new unit. The budget allocation should be sufficient to develop operations including administrative support and the appointment of the Head of the unit.
10. That a Head position be recruited (either from within the group, or by external recruitment) to Level C or above.
11. That the University consider making transition funding available for the Head of the ALL Unit position, either for a new position, or for a higher duties allowance for a current staff member.
12. That all ALL staff be assigned as reporting to the Head, and that the Head report to a Senior Manager role. There may be scope for developing one extra level within the hierarchy to reduce the supervisory load on the Head position.
13. That position descriptions be developed for ALL staff. These need to be consistently framed, and to clarify the mix of work activities, including the balance between individual consultations with students and other work, as well as the special nature of their academic roles (for example, as practical, applied, and institutional research).
14. That an ALL staff workload policy be developed as a framework for planning of staff work and to support the professional development and review processes.
15. That existing University staff-related policies (for example, access to study leave and conditions for promotion applications) be reviewed or new ones developed that are sensitive to the special nature of ALL staff roles.
16. That there be opportunity for ALL staff positions to have a 'teaching only' designation.
17. That the Head of the ALL support unit ensure staff receive appropriate career development and mentoring, including opportunities to contribute to institutional governance as appropriate.

Management of service provision

18. That transparent processes for accessing ALL support be developed.
19. That a consistent approach regarding the optimum balance of the time devoted to diverse ALL activities be developed, with a shift of the balance from time spent providing 1:1 consultations towards more embedded work within academic programs in accordance with sector wide good practice.

20. That a clear statement of base-line ALL support services provided across all campuses and faculties is developed and promulgated.
21. That ALL support services are distributed fairly across all campuses and faculties, taking account of special contexts and needs.
22. That access to ESL staff be optimised according to the needs and language backgrounds of particular cohorts of students.
23. That ALL support be evaluated and quality assured in relation to stated performance indicators and targets.
24. That a single information management system of ALL students be developed. This should ideally interface with the University student record system, to enable institutional research into the impact of ALL support and initiatives.
25. That the possibility of an ALL support 'help desk' be explored, operating from within a designated learning space, such as the Library or the proposed student hub, enabling students more open access to brief consultations.
26. That ALL support continue to be provided in an embedded way within academic programs as appropriate, and enhancements made to such initiatives to improve the distribution of ALL support to more students and to make ALL support more systematically related to their academic programs.
27. That a clear statement of the relationship between ALL support services and other services relevant to learning and teaching be developed cooperatively with these other service providers, and promulgated within the University community.
28. That a coordinated approach be taken to the development of learning resources for students (in print and online), ensuring the development of resources which meet the needs of diverse students, the potential for staff in the disciplines to adapt such resources to their teaching contexts, and the optimising of the ALL support unit's capacity and expertise by avoiding duplication of effort.

Policies and procedures regarding ALL support to students

29. That the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Committee of Academic Board commission a Working Party with membership including staff from the ALL support unit to develop a discussion paper examining key issues regarding language and academic literacy (and numeracy) skills development. Such a discussion paper may canvass the issues related to the following recommendations.
30. That greater clarity is developed in distinguishing between the roles and responsibilities of academic staff in the disciplines and ALL staff to support student learning, ensuring that ALL staff do not take up de facto tutor roles which should be undertaken by discipline staff.

31. That criteria be developed regarding which students should get access to 1:1 tuition and upper limits for an individual student's access to this service be determined and consistently applied.
32. That the University develop and promulgate policy regarding students' access to ALL support, and whether student work which has not yet been submitted for assessment can constitute a focus of ALL support provision.
33. That a policy interpreting confidentiality in the context of ALL support service provision be developed.
