Writing at School

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Literacy has always been contested within the United Kingdom (UK) education system; content, delivery and assessment. One area of contestation is the many government initiatives that have impacted on the teaching and outcomes of literacy in schools, which has affected pupils' attitudes and behaviours towards reading and writing, and ultimately their abilities. It is important that those working in higher education have an appreciation of the school context in which literacy is taught so they can gain a greater understanding of students' prior experiences and hence facilitate their writing. This chapter, therefore, will give a brief overview and context of the teaching and assessment of literacy (reading and writing) within schools in the UK, then focus on the current situation, and discuss the experiences of students transitioning to Higher Education.

The responsibility for teaching literacy in schools was first enshrined in the 1870 Elementary Education Act for England and Wales, and in Scotland in the Education (Scotland) Act 1872. These acts made provision for the elementary education of all children aged 5-13, which provided for mass education and state intervention. State intervention was via school boards who oversaw the network of schools and brought them all under some form of supervision. The main subjects taught were reading, writing and arithmetic and schools were paid for students who passed examinations in these subjects.

> … [the] Act fulfils general expectation by securing a larger and more effective diffusion of knowledge among the people … that the taxpayers of the country should know according to what methods and under what guarantees this portion of the national income is expended … to which the Government Inspector has access at all times for the purposes of examination in any subject except religious knowledge … Six shillings per scholar is paid on the average attendance in the year, and a variable sum for every scholar present at the Inspector's examination … Children between four and seven years old are counted as "infants" and paid at the rate of 8s a head, or 10s if taught in a separate department. Pupils above seven years are subject to examination in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and, if passed, are paid for at the rate of 4s. a head in each of the three subjects (Times Feb 27, 1871, p9).

Pupils were examined according to one of six standards, roughly corresponding to ages 7 to 12, (see table one) which restricted the curriculum. In addition schools "pursued other, less clearly defined, aims including social-disciplinary objectives (acceptance of the teacher's authority, the need for punctuality, obedience, conformity etc)" (Gillard, 2011, online). By the end of the 19th century there was a national system of elementary education, which was free with compulsory attendance (Elementary Education Act of 1881 and 1880) and a new government department to oversee it (Board of Education Act 1899).

Table one: The six Standards of Education contained in the Revised code of Regulations, 1872

	Reading	Writing
Standard I	One of the narratives next in order after	Copy in manuscript character a line of

Age 7	monosyllables in an elementary reading book used in the school.	print, and write from dictation a few common words.
Standard II Age 8	A short paragraph from an elementary reading book.	A sentence from the same book, slowly read once, and then dictated in single words.
Standard III Age 9	A short paragraph from a more advanced reading book.	A sentence slowly dictated once by a few words at a time, from the same book.
Standard IV Age 10	A few lines of poetry or prose, at the choice of the inspector	A sentence slowly dictated once, by a few words at a time, from a reading book, such as is used in the first class of the school.
Standard V Age 11	A short ordinary paragraph in a newspaper, or other modern narrative.	Another short ordinary paragraph in a newspaper, or other modern narrative, slowly dictated once by a few words at a time.
Standard VI Age 12	To read with fluency and expression.	A short theme or letter, or an easy paraphrase

Source: Attwell, G., 2007.

According to Gillard (2011) there was a lot of opposition to this system, with teachers objecting to the methods of testing and to the principle of 'payment by results' because "it linked money for schools with the criterion of a minimum standard", therefore "it was becoming difficult to dissociate reading and writing from qualification and examination. Teachers had to be trained; pupils had to achieve rigidly defined standards" (Vincent 1989, p68).

> Furthermore, the standards themselves were defective because they were based not
> on an experimental enquiry into what children of a given age actually knew, but on
> an a priori notion of what they ought to know. They largely ignored the wide range of
> individual capacity, and the detailed formulations for the several ages were not
> always precise or appropriate (Gillard 2011).

The standards gradually fell into disuse and were abandoned around the turn of the century and the curriculum was expanded with the obligatory subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic (and needlework for girls) and optional subjects; payment by results finally abandoned. In 1902 (Education Act) the Local Education Authorities were established with the authority to support teacher training colleges and the basis for a national system of secondary education was established. With the implementation of mass education, literacy rates continued to increase, and in the last full year of peace, following the First World War, the official literacy level in the UK first peaked at 99% (Vincent, 1989, p4), measured by the number of children completing the first three or five grades of schooling (Street, 1995, p23).

The period between the wars was one of consolidation in education and preparation for the Education Act of 1944. The school leaving age was raised from 12 to 14 in 1921, and to 15 in 1935. Government policy from 1928 was for pupils to transfer from primary to secondary schools at the age of eleven, although according to Gillard (2011) the secondary schools "continued to provide a curriculum based on the arid drill methods of the elementary schools".

The importance of the 1944 Education Act cannot be overemphasised. It replaced almost all previous education legislation and set the framework for the post-war education system in England and Wales. There were similar Education Acts for Scotland (1945) and Northern Ireland (1947) (Gillard 2011).

> The Act divided responsibility for education between central government, which was to set national policies and allocate resources; the local education authorities (LEAs), which were to set local policies and allocate resources to schools; and the schools themselves, whose head teachers and governing bodies would set school policies and manage the resources (Gillard 2011).

The Act therefore strengthened the role of central government in education, but also encouraged decentralisation, with no "… stipulations about curriculum and pedagogy, teachers had considerable capacities to initiate school-level change …" (Jones 2003:20 cited in Gillard 2011). Although the act did not stipulate a tripartite system of secondary education, one was soon established, with grammar schools for the most able, being selected on the basis of the 'eleven plus' examination (tests of intelligence and attainment in English and arithmetic), secondary modern schools for the majority (those who 'failed' the 'eleven plus'), and secondary technical schools for those with a technical or scientific aptitude (Gillard 2011). This system had a damaging effect on primary schools, as success of the schools was judged on the success of those pupils in the 'eleven plus' examination. "Once again, the fate of the junior school and its educational role depended on developments at the upper levels" (Galton, Simon and Croll 1980:38 in Gillard 2011), meaning that the primary schools had to continue with a teaching approach emphasising basic literacy and numeracy, "In fact the tradition derived from 1870 was still dominant" (Galton, Simon and Croll 1980:36 in Gillard 2011). It was not until 1967 and *The Plowden Report* that the individual child was put at the heart of the educational process, and children were encouraged to learn for themselves rather than by "drill methods", but this pedagogy was not to last. In 1976, the then Prime Minister James Callaghan gave a speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, calling for a return to a "core curriculum" and a "national standard of performance" that is inspected (Callahan, 1976).

At the same time (during the 1970s) there was a move from the field of 'reading', which was mainly "grounded in psychology and associated with time-honoured methods of instruction for teaching new entrants into school how to decode printed text and, secondarily, how to encode text" (Lankshear and Knobel ,2005, p3), which is what the "drill method" entailed, to a formal educational discourse of literacy studies and development. Lankshear and Knobel (2005) identified a number of reasons why the change from reading to literacy occurred:

1. A rise to prominence of Paulo Freire's work, who suggested that learning to read and write was an integral part of learning to understand how the world works socially and culturally, which produces unequal opportunities and outcomes for different groups of people (ibid p6);
2. The increasing development and popularity of a *socio-cultural* [their italics] perspective within studies of language and the social sciences, using anthropological and ethnographic approaches to study literacy. Literacies are bound up with social, institutional and cultural relationships and can only be understood when they are situated within their social, cultural and historical contexts (opcit, p8); and

3. The discovery of widespread illiteracy (what Lankshear and Knobel call "the invention of illiteracy") among adults in the US during the 1970s, which then spread to other Western nations, including the UK.   Lankshear and Knobel infer that this 'literacy crisis' coincided with early awareness of profound structural change in the economy, as the US moved toward becoming a post-industrial society, which entailed a restructuring of the labour market and employment, and changes in the institutions of daily life.   Governments responded to this 'literacy crisis' by intervening in the school curriculum, making changes to ensure that all learners became literate enough to live effectively under contemporary conditions (opcit p6).

Today, statistics are collected regularly on literacy levels internationally by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) for children and adults.[1] This is a continuation of the gathering of systematic statistics on literacy by Governments and International Agencies that began in the 1950s, as concern about the levels of literacy in the general population grew (St. John Hunter and Harman, 1979, pp9-12).

The testing of literacy amongst both adults and children is based on a functional view of literacy, which became prominent with Governments and UNESCO (United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organisation) in the 1960s.   Functional literacy is promoted as a response to economic demand, with a focus on the reading and writing skills required to increase productivity of the individual and hence the nation (UNESCO 2003, pp8-9).

Based upon the results of testing in the 1970s the government concluded that large numbers of individuals have not got the necessary literacy skills and so established literacy programmes for both adults and children.   In the UK the first national Agency for improving adult literacy was set up in 1975, becoming the Basic Skills Agency.   Originally it was only concerned with adult literacy programmes, but in 1995 their work was extended to work with schools and children. The Basic Skills Agency was merged with the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in 2007 and responsibility for literacy for under 16s was given to the Department for Education and Skills, who established a National Literacy Strategy in 1999.   The strategy was developed to increase literacy standards amongst primary schoolchildren and came to an end in June 2011; so far has not been replaced.

One outcome of the 'literacy crisis' and criticisms of education in the '70s and early '80s was the Education Reform Act (1988). It was the most important Act since 1944, making provision for a National Curriculum to be introduced in all maintained schools which set the groundwork for what subjects should be taught and attainment targets. English became a core subject, with mathematics and science, and children were tested in these subjects at the ages of 6/7, 10/11 and 13/14. The National Curriculum in England was revised in 2000, and continues to be revised periodically.

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[1] PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) measures literacy levels of 15 year olds on a 3 year cyclical basis and began in the late 1990s. IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey) measures literacy levels of 16-65 year olds on a cyclical basis and began in 1994). Both are organised by the OECD.

The National Curriculum The National Curriculum applies to pupils of compulsory school age in maintained schools and provides a framework for what pupils should be taught. Each subject is underpinned by a Programme of Study: "The programmes of study, in relation to a key stage, are the matters, skills, and processes which are required to be taught to pupils of different abilities and maturities by the end of that key stage. In short, they set out what pupils should be taught in each National Curriculum subject at each key stage" (Department of Education 2012). It is organised on the basis of four key stages.

Primary education

Key Stage 1: Ages 5-7 (Years 1-2)

Key Stage 2: Ages 7-11 (Years 3-6)

Secondary education

Key Stage 3: Ages 11-14 (Years 7-9)

Key Stage 4: Ages 14-16 (Years 10-11). This incorporates GCSEs and vocational qualifications such as GNVQ, BTEC).

Post-16 qualifications include A levels and vocational qualifications such as GNVQ and BTEC, but are not part of the national curriculum.

Each key stage in all subject areas has attainment targets: the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of that key stage. There are currently eight level descriptions of increasing difficulty plus a description for exceptional performance above level 8, which provide the basis for making judgements about pupils' performance and are the main means of assessing attainment in National Curriculum subjects.

The level descriptions provide the basis for making judgements about pupils' performance at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3. At Key Stage 4, national qualifications are the main means of assessing attainment in National Curriculum subjects (Department of Education 2012). English is a statutory subject at each of the four key stages and will be the focus for discussion within this chapter as it is where most literacy teaching occurs. While brief information on the current National Curriculum focussing on English is provided here, it is important to note that at the time of going to print the Government has announced a review of the National Curriculum with a new curriculum for all subjects from 2014.

The 2000 framework, in addition to core subjects, introduced Key Skills; communication, numeracy, information communications technology, problem-solving, working with others, improving own learning and performance. These were compulsory for those working at levels 1, 2 and 3 of the new National Qualifications Framework. The intention was that whether students remained in full-time education or took other routes such as apprenticeships, they would continue to develop these key areas. External tests were established for the first 3 subjects, with moderated coursework for the other subjects. UCAS points were attached to Level 2 (equivalent to GCSE) 10 points and Level 3 (equivalent to A2) 20 points, although it was the decision of Universities whether they accepted them. Additional funding for Further Education Colleges was attached to the successful completion

of key skills. Over the last decade these key skills have lost prominence and have been replaced by Functional Skills designed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) as found in Diplomas, apprenticeship frameworks and in some elements within GCSE English Examination Board specifications, eg AQA.

Literacy within the National Curriculum (English)

On the Department for Education website it is clear that English is for pupils to "develop skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing that they will need to participate in society and employment. Pupils learn to express themselves creatively and imaginatively and to communicate with others confidently and effectively" (2012). Currently the English Programme of Study, at all levels, has 3 key areas: Speaking and Listening; Reading; Writing. The skills and processes that students should learn for level 4 English are shown in table two below

Table two: Skills and processes for level four English in the National Curriculum

Reading - students should be able to:	Writing – students should be able to:
Reading for meaning	**Composition**
a. analyse and evaluate information, events and ideas from texts	a. write imaginatively, creatively and thoughtfully, producing texts that interest, engage and challenge the reader
b understand how meaning is constructed within sentences and across texts as a whole in media, moving-image and multimodal texts.	b. write fluently, adapting style and language to a wide range of forms, contexts and purposes
c recognise subtlety, ambiguity and allusion within sentences and across texts as a whole	c. present information and ideas on complex subjects concisely, logically and persuasively
d develop and sustain independent interpretations of what they read, supporting them with detailed textual reference	d. establish and sustain a consistent point of view in fiction and non-fiction writing
e select, compare, summarise and synthesise information from different texts and use it to form their own ideas, arguments and opinions	e. use a range of ways to structure whole texts to give clarity and emphasis
f reflect on the origin and purpose of texts and assess their usefulness, recognising bias, opinion, implicit meaning and abuse of evidence	f. use clearly demarcated paragraphs to develop and organise meaning
g relate texts to their social and historical contexts and to the literary traditions of which they are a part	g. use a wide variety of sentence structures to support the purpose of the task, giving clarity and emphasis and creating specific effects, and to extend, link and develop ideas
h recognise and evaluate the ways in which texts may be interpreted differently according to the perspective of the reader	h. support and strengthen their own views by incorporating different kinds of evidence from a range of sources
i analyse and evaluate the impact of combining words, images and sounds	i. select appropriate persuasive techniques and rhetorical devices
The author's craft	j. draw on their reading and knowledge of linguistic and literary forms when composing their writing
j analyse and evaluate writers' use of language in a range of texts, commenting precisely on how	k. summarise and take notes

texts are crafted to shape meaning and produce particular effects	
k identify the purposes of texts, analysing and evaluating how writers structure and organise ideas to shape meaning for particular audiences and readers	l. use planning, drafting, editing, proofreading and self-evaluation to revise and craft their writing for maximum impact
l analyse and evaluate how form, layout and presentation contribute to effect	**Technical accuracy**
m compare texts, looking at style, theme and language and exploring connections and contrasts	m. use the grammatical features of written standard English accurately to structure a wide range of sentence types for particular purposes and effect
n compare and analyse the connections between texts from different cultures and traditions.	n. use the full range of punctuation marks accurately and for deliberate effect
	o. spell correctly, including words that do not conform to regular patterns and words that are sometimes confused in use

Source: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2007

English, Key Stage 4, in common with all subjects in the national curriculum, has a consolidated set of eight level descriptors (plus exceptional performance) against which students are judged for each of the skills and processes. This can mitigate against 'holistic marking' whereby students can do well on some of the skills and processes, and badly on others: as one English teacher in a secondary school recently said to us "pupils can get a grade 5 on summarising and taking notes, but grade 2 on the use of punctuation marks". Generally speaking, those students who have achieved GCSE grade C (the minimum entry qualification for English to higher education) are performing at level five overall, but there will be variation in the levels of the individual skills and processes achieved. The descriptors are shown in table three below.

Table 3: level five descriptors for English Key Stage 4

Reading	Writing
Pupils show understanding of a range of texts, selecting essential points and using inference and deduction where appropriate. In their responses, they identify key features, themes and characters and select sentences, phrases and relevant information to support their views. They understand that texts fit into historical and literary traditions. They retrieve and collate information from a range of sources.	Pupils' writing is varied and interesting, conveying meaning clearly in a range of forms for different readers, using a more formal style where appropriate. Vocabulary choices are imaginative and words are used precisely. Sentences, including complex ones, and paragraphs are coherent, clear and well developed. Words with complex regular patterns are usually spelt correctly. A range of punctuation, including commas, apostrophes and inverted commas, is usually used accurately. Handwriting is joined, clear and fluent and, where appropriate, is adapted to a range of tasks.

Source: Department for Education, 2011b

Within the National Curriculum, therefore, there is a focus on assessment, the results being used for school 'league tables'. This focus, particularly in the use of reading materials, has been criticised by many, Bell (2005) in particular:

> Too often we see teaching of reading, the shared consideration of texts, that stops short of discussing issues of meaning and content. Some teachers see all texts as a means of teaching about writing. So, a poem is mined for use of adjectives, metaphors and contrasting short and long sentences without attempting to engage pupils' personal response to the ideas and feelings in the poem. The text becomes a type of manual rather than a personal response to lived experience (Bell 2005)

Bell asserts that reading instruction in schools, and the pursuit of high test results, is mitigating against children deriving pleasure from reading, and making reading 'functional'. Text, in some schools, is not used to encourage children to gain pleasure from reading but instead is used for learning about writing. This leads to less engagement and involvement in the text and so reading is a less pleasurable experience. As Resnick and Resnick said in 1989 "A test, as in school literature courses, for example, can change the context for even the best of literary texts, from pleasure giving literacy to functional literacy" (p188).

In 1999 Gallik found, in common with other studies, that recreational reading habits are acquired early in an individual's school life, probably in elementary school, and that if a student is to have good reading skills and positive attitudes toward reading these must be developed during the elementary years. In their research, Cox and Guthrie (2001) concluded that although the cognitive and motivation variables showed simple associations with the amount of reading for enjoyment, only motivation accounted for a significant amount of variance in reading for enjoyment after all other factors were held constant statistically (Cox and Guthrie 2001, p127).

With the review of the National Curriculum in 2000, and the subsequent revision, emphasis was put on the need to encourage positive attitudes towards reading as a major objective (Mullis et al 2001, p48). In March 2005 David Bell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, in a speech to mark World Book Day, acknowledged that the National Literacy Strategy is "having a positive effect on the quality of reading and writing" (p9) and that "standards of reading have improved significantly in recent years" (p10), but that reading is not seen as a pleasurable activity for many children. When children are asked about why they think reading is important they gave pragmatic answers: it helps to get a job, helps to do well in tests, helps to do well at school by teaching good words to use or helping spelling (p3). He goes on to say that "it is disappointing how few mention the joy of reading" and that they do not mention the wider benefits. He suggests that some schools have forgotten to instil into the pupils the pleasure of reading in their "pursuit of higher test results that will improve their position in the league tables. You will find no pleasure in books if you cannot read, but it is equally possible to be able to read and derive little pleasure" (p3).

Over the last 4 decades, there has been a focus, within the UK the Government, on the development of reading, writing and communication skills, with the term 'literacy' being increasingly used within Government discourse; but it is interesting to note that in more recent discourse the term is being superseded by communication (Wolf Report (2011).

In 2008 OfSTED (the inspectorate for standards in schools in England) drew together key inspection findings on the standards of English in schools from 2005-2008 in a report titled 'English at the Crossroads'. The title in itself provides the view that the English curriculum in schools needed review, due to a 'context of broadly static standards' (p1). The work argued that 'the most effective schools are those that have revised their English curriculum to meet changes in modern technology and pupils' developing literacy needs' (p4) and called for a review of the English curriculum in schools. The report was critical of the lack of clear school plans to develop independent reading (para 44) and a need 'to reinvigorate the teaching of writing' (para 48).

In 2009 the Rose Review was published which has had significant impact on the teaching of literacy in primary schools. This followed a previous report in 2005 by Rose which emphasised the importance of engaging young children in interesting reading through worthwhile pre-reading activities. This 2005 report indicated that the teaching of phonics was key to developing speaking, listening, reading and writing. The 2009 report followed a review of the primary curriculum making recommendations including a focus on literacy and development of training for teachers in the use of phonics. In 2010 changes were made at GCSE level in English with 'controlled assessments' under supervision replacing coursework.

In 2010 the Department for Education produced 'The Case for Change'. This document drew on the results of the latest PISA studies from across the world to provide evidence that English students came 17th in reading, behind countries such as Finland and Canada. Shepherd (2010) in the *Guardian* commented on the results as follows:

> It shows the UK's reputation as one of the world's best for education is at risk, and has tumbled several places since 2006. … The UK is ranked 25th for reading, 28th for maths and 16th for science. In 2006, when 57 countries were included in the study, it was placed 17th, 24th and 14th respectively. Poland has stretched ahead of the UK in maths, while Norway is now ranked higher in reading and maths. Andreas Shleicher, head of the Pisa programme, said the picture for the UK was "stagnant at best". "Many other countries have seen quite significant improvement," he added. (Shepherd 2010)

The report also drew on evidence of the need for a workforce with high levels of literacy to succeed in a global economy.

Most recently the 2011 guidance for OfSTED inspectors draws on the Wolf Report (2011) to support the importance of all young people being able to communicate effectively. This guidance to OfSTED inspectors refers to literacy being different to English making reference to the National Curriculum programmes of study which 'are organised according to the skills of speaking and listening (attainment target AT1), reading (AT2) and writing (AT3)' (p10), stating that the

> actual programmes of study are set in a context of study which goes beyond 'the ability to read and write', taking in skills of analysis and response to literature and other texts, and exposure to the work of particular authors and poets. It is reasonable to suggest that literacy is a very important element within the English curriculum but that the two are not wholly the same. The curriculum and

programmes of study for English extend far more widely than the acquisition of literacy skills (p10).

If individuals develop positive attitudes towards reading in primary school, then it is important that children be encouraged to see books as giving pleasure, as well as a tool for learning. Indeed the OfSTED (2008) report referred to this and supported the view of an international reading survey (Twist, 2006) 'which showed that enjoyment amongst pupils in England was poor when compared with many other countries, and had declined since 2001'.

The next section of this chapter will consider the experience of students in their pre-university education regarding their learning, paying particular attention to literacy. To inform the discussion data was collected through two studies: student focus groups and an annual survey of a sample of students (data from 3 years) offered places at a large East Midlands University.

Literacy experiences prior to attending university

Nine student focus groups (a total of 28 students) were run; four in Art and Design (A&D) and five in Arts and Humanities (A&H), across all taught levels of study (undergraduate years one, two and three and post-graduate) to explore students' reality of academic literacy. They were asked to discuss their experiences of reading and writing prior to attending university.

The annual experience and expectations survey asks students questions about their choice of university and course; their current experience of education, based on their current behaviours in studying including time spent in various activities; their expectations of university, including expected behaviours, confidence and expected difficulty in aspects of studying and how prepared they are for university; and the importance of various university provision regarding learning and teaching. Questionnaires were sent out electronically to a sample of students who had been offered places within two schools in May/June in the years 2009, 2010 and 2011. The samples and response rates are shown in table four:

Table 4: Samples and response rates for the annual experience and expectations survey

	Academic School A (hereafter called department A)			Academic School B (hereafter called department B)		
	No. of responses	Base	Response rate	No. of responses	Base	Response rate
2011	42	493	9%	78	799	10%
2010	183	1136	16%	110	1345	8%
2009	228	672	34%	83	383	22%

The data from both departments and across years were combined and averaged in the analysis, percentage frequencies being used. If there were any emergent trends over the three years, or differences between departments, these are commented upon.

Focus groups

From the focus groups, it was clear that student reading and writing experiences prior to coming to university vary depending on where they were studying and the subjects that they were studying.

Regarding reading, most students had 'directed reading' with set text books and '[got] information from their tutors in terms of the subject and the content' (final year A&H). Those who were studying English experienced 'group reading' where they were expected to read a chapter of a book prior to the class (although few did) and then it was analysed in class; rarely was the whole book read. Very few did reading outside of school hours, even if directed to do so. Even though students were not reading a lot, they were writing a substantial amount; doing more writing than reading. International students, in particular, reported that they did a lot of writing, both in English and their first language, writing articles and essays for homework and examinations, one student writing "two or three times a week" (second year A&H) another "every week … 2,000 words" (second year A&H). On access programmes, students also experienced a large amount of writing, essays of 2,000 words "four or five for each subject over the year" (first year A&H), having three essays on the go at any one time with three essays each half term. With those students who did 'A2'[2] level, the amount of writing varied with the subjects studied, the examination board and the approach of the teacher.

Experience of writing is dependent on subject(s) chosen for AS/A2 study. For example: Students studying the sciences did not write many essays but had practical assessments and examinations where they had to write two or three paragraphs on a topic. Those studying arts, social sciences and humanities were expected to write many essays, sometimes with a focus on examinations, including having 'timed essays' in class every week or one for 'homework'. Students reported that the essays they wrote at school for some subjects were quite long, 2,500-3,000 words, and that they received a lot of support and formative feedback from teachers to develop their skills in writing:

> … you would write something and then … I remember for my coursework in History, I
> would hand it in, he would mark it and tell me what I needed to improve on, and I
> would get it back and I could do some more and then hand it in. So I think that was –
> it was 'spoonfed' to you I guess, you got a lot of support. It was the same for English
> (final year A&H).

For those taking more practical subjects or vocational subjects the amount of writing would not be as substantial. For example, for those taking information communications technology (CT) the examinations mainly consisted of fairly short answer questions; coursework required more significant writing but was mainly associated with specific projects such as database creation.   For those taking vocational courses such as BTEC the writing appears again to be limited. For those on Art Foundation courses, the writing was minimal, the focus being on practical work "I got away with doing the bare minimum of reading and writing … I did an Art Foundation, which is all practical … we did one essay throughout the whole of the year" (first year A&D). Consequently some students reported some "anxiety" about reading and writing at university.

Questionnaires

Respondents answered questions about how much reading and writing they currently did in their pre-university educational establishment. Regarding reading assigned books and other materials given by their pre-university establishment, across the whole sample only 22% did this a lot, 44% some, 21% very little and 12% none. For applicants to department A (an Art and Design department with mainly female respondents) reading these materials a lot increased from 2009 to 2011, but for

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[2] In the UK students take AS in Year 12 (16-17 years) and A2 in Year 13 (17-18 years).

the other department (B: a Design and Built Environment department with mainly male respondents) it decreased. When asked about reading recommended books respondents indicated that they read recommended books less than they did those that were assigned: 14% reading them a lot, 48% some, 30% very little and 9% never; for applicants in department A the percentage reading other materials went down from 2009 to 2011 while in department B it increased slightly over the same period. Other materials, eg journal articles, were read more regularly than other recommended texts: 22% reading them a lot, 48% some, 24% very little and 8% none; over time these figures were consistent, although in department A more students read these types of materials a lot than in department B. The most popular reading undertaken by all respondents was researching subjects on the internet: 51% of respondents doing this a lot, 41% some, 6% very little and 1% none.

Applicants to both departments were asked about their current writing experiences, focusing on the length of their writing. For short essays or reports (5 or fewer pages) 31% of respondents did them a lot, 41% some, 18% very little and 9% none. In comparison when asked about longer pieces of writing (more than 5 pages) only 10% wrote longer pieces a lot, 26% some, 38% very little and 26% none. There was a slight increase for applicants of both departments from 2009 to 2011 that did some.

Questions were asked about their current study behaviour and the following relate to reading and writing and teacher support. When asked whether they went to class without completing homework, coursework or reading, nearly half the respondents (43%) said never, 49% sometimes, 3.2% often and 1% never. There was consistency across both departments and an increase over time in those that never went to class without completing work. Regarding support from teachers, applicants were well supported: 19% discussing grades or coursework with their teacher very often, 48% often, 30% sometimes and 3% never. Applicants also asked their teacher for help with their coursework: 15% very often, 36% often, 45% sometimes and 5% never. This help extended to marking drafts of coursework; when asked about preparing two or more drafts of coursework before handing in 21% did that very often, 31% often, 36% sometimes and 12% never.

Applicants were then asked about their expectations of university. The majority of students thought that they would have to work on a project that requires integrating ideas or information from various sources very often (45%) or often (48%), only 0.1% felt that they would never have to do it. They also expected support from the tutors particularly discussing grades or assignments with a tutor with 21% expecting to do this very often, 48% often, 30% sometimes and only 3% never, this expectation has increased slightly from 2009 to 2011. Regarding receiving prompt feedback from tutors 28% expected this very often, 52% often, 19% sometimes and 0.9% never.

They were then asked about how confident they expected they would be to undertake certain tasks around reading and writing. When asked about finding additional information for course assignments when they did not understand the materials, they were confident that they would do that (36% very certain, 45% towards very certain on the Likert scale), however they were less confident about reading recommended texts when they were not sure why they were reading them, although still confident, with 21% being very certain, 43.1 towards very certain and 27% neither certain or uncertain.

Students were then asked about how difficult they expected aspects of university to be and how prepared they felt to undertake aspects of reading and writing. They expected that getting help with academic work to be 'not that difficult', and interacting with tutors to be 'not that difficult'. Regarding understanding requirements and the rules, they felt that that too would be 'not that difficult'. Overall they felt prepared to write clearly and effectively, think critically and analytically, analyse problems and analyse written materials. An overwhelming majority felt that support to help them to succeed academically was 'important' or 'very important'.

In summary students whilst at school did not do that much reading of assigned texts, recommended books or other materials, but they did read materials found on the internet. The writing they undertook tended to be shorter (less than 5 pages) rather than longer pieces and they felt that they were well supported in their writing, with their tutors marking drafts. They prepared for their classes and felt well supported at school in their learning.

Their expectations for university tended to be based on their pre-university experiences. They expected to receive support in their studies and were confident that they could access this easily. They felt that support to help them to succeed was very important, and they expected to receive prompt feedback on their work. Overall they felt confident in their reading and writing behaviours and abilities going into university and that they would understand assignment requirements and the 'rules of the game'.

Feedback to school pupils at school

At this point it is worth considering the feedback on developing literacy skills. This is often the focus of English staff in secondary schools. Prior to 2011 those applying to become teachers of subjects other than English were required to have GCSE English (or equivalent), and were required to take a text in English as part of their teaching qualification. Their standard of literacy is therefore at GCSE level (C grade). This may limit the level of support they can give to their students in terms of literacy. There is also rarely a policy or consistency in secondary schools giving all teachers a responsibility for developing literacy. Thus students' experience prior to University, depending on the subject chosen for AS/A2 level may not result in high levels of literacy, ie not developed beyond GCSE level. The new Teaching Standards (2011) includes a new standard, strengthening the development of literacy skills across all subject areas, but this will only impact on new trainee teachers from September 2012 when they will have to:

> … demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject (Part 1, point 3).

The management of reading and writing transitions into Higher Education

Drawing together the key points from this chapter thus far it is clear that students arriving at University will have mixed experiences of reading and writing depending on the school/college they attended, the focus on developing writing skills within their pre-institution, and the subjects they have taken post-16. Students entering higher education appear to believe that they are more prepared for the reading and writing they will encounter, than they actually are – they may fail to appreciate the 'step up' and getting beyond the 'false confidence'. Part of becoming an

undergraduate is about becoming more independent, which could cause problems when they have experienced an 'assessment led' culture that has promoted dependency. Those coming from further education colleges may have greater independence than those coming from school sixth forms where they tend to experience smaller groups and greater individual support from teachers. Thus, many undergraduates need support in many aspects of literacy; we are considering literacy in the widest sense here, so include digital literacy (see Boulton and Hramiak, chapter 6). The areas we are going to focus on here include: finding sources of information and using them in their work, referencing, how to understand marking criteria, and an introduction to aspects of academic writing which will be new to these students (see Hardy and Clughen, chapter 3). We make recommendations of what to cover in this transition period and possible sources of help for the student.

Undergraduate students should be able to support an argument, but this will depend again on the subjects they have taken at AS/A2. Those who have taken subjects such as English, Law and Politics will have more experience, while those who have taken more practical subjects such as design, multimedia and ICT will need support in developing these skills. Students need to know that they will need to refer to several sources of information in their written work; that these sources need to be up-to-date (with the exception of some disciplines, such as history, or accessing key texts), varied so they can present an argument, and reliable. Reliability of resources tends to be left to the ICT programme of study within the National Curriculum where they will have been taught to find resources and know how to locate reliable sources, particularly via the internet, in Year 7 (when they are 11). This does not focus again in the National Curriculum for ICT so much of their learning may have been forgotten by the time they arrive at university.

Conclusion

This section draws together the key points of the chapter in terms of how students may need to be supported in developing their academic writing and drawing on the research discussed above.

It is unlikely that undergraduates will have had experience of using more than one resource to inform an essay, and may not understand how to present an argument. Undergraduates may also need support in how to search for sources of information and how to recognise reliable sources; librarians can often provide support with this. It is likely that undergraduates will not have had access to journal articles prior to university, so it is essential that they are introduced to the key periodicals within the disciplines they are studying, and are shown how to search the journal databases. It is important undergraduates understand that journal articles have generally been peer reviewed to they are reliable sources of information. Undergraduates need to be taught how to find articles that present different views and develop skills in how to structure an article/argument. Many undergraduates will lack experience of reading groups so tutors may want to create these so that students can support each other in reading and discuss some of the key texts for their course. Using some of the new technologies can help with this, such as community web blogs, discussion boards, and wikis so that students can share key findings from the literature and start to share with other students how to carry out literature searches, and how to store useful information to refer back to later, as well as share reflections on readings in order to develop and co-construct meaning and understanding. . It is important to remember that the education processes in England do not always encourage reading for pleasure (Bell 2005) so establishing reading groups can have far

reaching benefits for undergraduates. In managing expectations of reading some undergraduates may need help in organising their time and recognising the importance of setting aside time each week, outside of class contact time to engage with reading lists, taking notes from texts, and becoming the independent learners that universities strive to develop.

Undergraduates will also need to know how to reference correctly the articles they are using. This is very likely to be a new skill for them to learn. There are on-line bibliographic databases such as Endnote and RefWorks which undergraduates will need introducing to which will simplify the process of referencing, but they need to understand the correct way, in their subject discipline, to reference a range of materials such as texts, articles, newspaper articles, interviews, web sites, videos, etc. It is also important while encouraging them to reference correctly and that students understand plagiarism and the penalties for this. Undergraduates may have been encouraged to work together in school and may not understand that at university collusion can have serious consequences.

Undergraduates will need to understand what may be new language in terms of assessment and marking criteria, for example what does 'accurate, broad and deep' mean in criteria. Providing information with a brief explanation of key assessment terms such as 'we're looking for a wide appreciation of the issues that demonstrate real thought, not just a regurgitation of lecture materials or an online podcast' will help to reduce their anxieties. Also what does 'evaluate' mean for those aiming for higher marks, for example it's not sufficient for them to simply quote from materials provided by tutors, instead undergraduates need to critically assess the validity of sources, see how they agree, or not, with other sources and establish what (if anything) they add to their argument. In school students may well have had coaching in what the right answer needs to include, while at university, in becoming independent learners they need to read a variety of materials that reflect a range of type and provide depth for their responses. They will need help in assembling their reading and drawing out the 'evidence' to support their argument which they will need to ensure is coherent and well-structured. Undergraduates may, as part of their transition need help with the overall structure and discipline requirements through tutor and peer feedback on aspects such as their plan, their literature search, their introduction and conclusion.

In terms of feedback, undergraduates, pre-university, will have received regular formative feedback, and often support in writing assignments on an almost one-to-one basis. There is therefore real anxiety in the transition into university when faced with being part of a large cohort. It is important to ensure undergraduates know where and how to access academic writing support, know and understand what feedback they will get and when. In higher education in the UK there is a cultural shift to providing more formative feedback, but this is still rarely to the degree the undergraduates will have received at school or in college. They also need to know how to engage with targets and improve their marks.

In this chapter we have provided a brief overview and context of the teaching and assessment of literacy (reading and writing) within schools in the UK. We have also provided an overview of the current situation and concluded with a discussion of the experiences of students transitioning to Higher Education and provided insight into the areas of writing that undergraduates may require additional support. The following chapter will consider the expectations and experiences of

students when they arrive at university regarding literacy and academics' expectations for student literacy.

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