

# Changing international student and business staff perceptions of in-sessional EAP: using the CEM model

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## Abstract

This article addresses the question of whether the existing approach to EAP delivery implemented at the University of Northumbria is supporting the learning needs of the international student body. In addressing this the article documents the background, research and preliminary findings relating to provision of an in-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme to international students studying in a business context. The article focuses on the management of the delivery of the EAP programme and is based on the experiences of two 'subject champions' from the English Language Centre and the postgraduate (PG) area of Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University. It documents research which has begun with an analysis and critique of past practice. This has led to the recognition of key issues which can influence the attendance and participation of overseas students on an in-sessional EAP programme. The article identifies and discusses the role of the three key concepts of contextualisation, embedding and mapping of the programme, as the foundation for managing in-sessional EAP delivery. The resulting model, the CEM Model, is designed to facilitate improved management of the provision of the EAP programme in a postgraduate business context. The findings show that application of the model can demonstrate added value in the key areas of design and content of an in-sessional EAP programme impacting on student attendance, understanding and integration of the programme with PG degree programme learning objectives and outcomes. To address the issue of sustaining the practice and benefits of the CEM Model the work concludes with the articulation of a framework which establishes the integration of the EAP programme within academic programmes both at the strategic level through Teaching and Learning policies and operational processes.

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**Keywords:** International students; EAP; Contextualisation; Embedding; Mapping; CEM model; Business education; Postgraduate; Northumbria University

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## 1. Introduction

As observed by Turner (2005) the internationalisation of Higher Education is now a key area within the academic sector. Newcastle Business School is one of 10 Schools within Northumbria University attracting more than 3000 international students into the institution. As Northumbria University ranks twelfth in the UK of largest recruiters

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of international students (UKISA, 2009), the content (the ‘what’) and in particular the pedagogic delivery (the ‘how’) of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes now presents a major challenge not only to Northumbria but to all other Higher Education recruiting institutions in the UK. Within Newcastle Business School, relatively few of the students have the opportunity to attend the University’s summer pre-sessional courses, and their first experience of EAP is on the in-sessional programme running in parallel with their degree studies. This research has evolved in response to concern expressed across the University about the perceived unwillingness of international students to attend and engage in an in-sessional EAP programme. The article presents the research and findings of two ‘subject champions’ from the English Language Centre and the Postgraduate area of Newcastle Business School focussing on the question ‘Is the existing model of EAP delivery at the University supporting the academic literacy learning needs of the international student body?’ The majority of Masters students in Newcastle Business School are from the Pacific Rim countries, but with increasing numbers from India, Russia, Germany, Vietnam and Nigeria. The existing approach to EAP delivery at Northumbria University is explained in the section reviewing the current in-sessional EAP programme.

Based on research carried out from 2005–09 the article presents emerging issues relating to the delivery of the EAP programme from the perspective of business tutors, students and an EAP tutor. The discussion identifies the complexity of in-sessional EAP management, design and delivery, and how these issues are informed by, and can inform, current EAP literature and practice. This is achieved through research and findings leading to the development of the CEM Model, a practice-based model designed to improve the management, design and delivery of EAP through establishing a stronger working partnership between EAP tutors and business tutors. The strategic framework responds to recognition of the complex changing context of academic provision both in relation to practice and individuals. The framework provides a solution to sustaining the application of the CEM Model through integration within institutional learning and teaching strategy and processes.

## 2. Background

A subject-based approach to the teaching of EAP, as promoted by Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002), relies on collaboration between subject specialists and the EAP tutor. Such collaboration can lead to the EAP tutor having a better understanding of the aims of the degree programme and what is required of students in their subject-based learning activities and also in their summative assessments. With this knowledge the EAP tutor can organise the syllabus around subject-specific purposeful activities (Bruce 2005; Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998). Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) argue that students are likely to be more motivated to improve their EAP when the content of the EAP syllabus has relevancy to the goals on their degree programmes.

Hyland (2002, p 394) has argued that “effective language teaching in the universities involves taking specificity seriously”, but the move towards specificity must also recognise that EAP tutors have limited field specific knowledge and are not always the best judge of what will interest and motivate students (Murray & McPherson 2004). Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p 3) hold the view that EAP tutors tend to “...work for rather than with subject specialists”. Professor Edwards, Director of the National Centre for Language and Literacy, at the University of Reading is reported by Newman in the Times Higher Education of February 2008 arguing for collaboration:

.... there is scope for exploring ways in which EAP tutors can collaborate with subject tutors to ensure that teaching and learning materials are more sensitive to the needs of students speaking English as a foreign language (Newman 2008, p 7).

This article presents a model that supports the complex nature of collaboration between EAP and business tutors. The model can be used as a vehicle by which this collaborative relationship can be identified, explained and promoted. The value of knowing the intended learning outcomes is emphasised by Biggs and Tang (2007) who advocate the system of constructive alignment whereby good teaching supports the activities that result in students attaining intended learning outcomes. This article develops the theme of constructive alignment by showing how the EAP tutor working in synergy with the business tutors, as opposed to the common approach of simply in parallel, can develop a more cohesive and integrated approach. The article will demonstrate that addressing the complex area of collaboration with business tutors will enable the EAP tutor to know and prepare EAP learning materials reflecting the diversity of written genres that students have to produce, the texts types that students have to read and the intended learning outcomes of the business modules. As part of Newcastle Business School’s postgraduate aims and objectives students are required to reflect, hypothesise on and apply theories and principles to real world contexts.

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