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Project Report

Step Up to Masters: Supporting the academic skills transition for taught postgraduate students

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Abstract

The article in question introduces research conducted by the Learning Development Team at the University of Leeds on the academic literacy skills development needs and expectations of taught postgraduate students, and the subsequent creation of an innovative new online resource, Step Up to Masters. As well as focusing on key topics highlighted by the research, the resource encourages students to reflect on their individual development priorities and to select the most relevant support options for their successful transition to taught postgraduate (PGT) study. The rationale behind this reflect and select approach has been informed by a synthesis of (a) the outcomes of key studies on the diverse needs and challenges faced by PGT students when making the transition to Masters study, and (b) the team's own research findings on PGT students' academic development priorities and preferences. Step Up to Masters received the Digital Award for Information Literacy 2020, and was central to the online PGT induction programme initiated at Leeds for 2020/21 in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

The Learning Development Team at the University of Leeds conducted research on the information literacy (IL) and academic skills support needs and expectations of taught postgraduate (PGT) students, with a view to developing our Skills@Library provision accordingly through the creation of high-quality, adaptable content and support.

This project was prompted by a growth in PGT student numbers at the institution, combined with the impact of a disproportionately heavy demand from this cohort for Skills@Library support. Previous UK Higher Education (HE) sector studies have indicated that new PGT students can be unclear about what is expected of them when studying at Masters level, and that institutions

and academic staff might hold inaccurate assumptions about students' capabilities on arrival (Bamber et al., 2019; Brown, 2014; Macleod et al., 2019). We were also keen to challenge our own preconceived ideas and working practices in terms of PGT academic skills development.

Large-scale surveys of PGT students at the University of Leeds, conducted at the beginning and end of academic years 2016/17 and 2017/18, identified their priority areas for support as: critical thinking; academic writing; academic reading; presentation skills; independent learning; time management; and adapting to a different academic culture and expectations. We facilitated focus groups with PGT students to explore the survey responses in more detail, and to identify preferred methods and timing of delivery of academic skills support. The participants favoured a wide range of support methods, including in-curriculum sessions, online resources and options for self-selection, and felt these should be available throughout their studies. There was a strong steer towards giving students options to personalise their development. Participants also said they valued the opportunity given to them by this research to reflect on their own development needs.

These research outcomes led to the creation of an innovative new online resource for 2019/20, Step Up to Masters, which is designed to meet this audience's diverse needs. As well as focusing on key topics highlighted by the research, the resource encourages students to reflect on their individual development priorities and to select the most relevant support options for their successful transition to taught postgraduate study. Students also have the opportunity to explore key strategies for Masters study in more detail through an accompanying suite of workshops. In 2020/21, the resource was central to the online PGT induction and transition programme initiated at the University of Leeds in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Firstly, this report will provide a brief overview of the diversity and preparedness of PGT students identified through a review of the relevant literature. Then, we will outline our research design and findings regarding PGT students' perceptions of which academic literacy skills are important and / or challenging, and their preferences in terms of academic development methods. Next, this report will discuss the significance and implications of our recent findings in relation to the wider research and institutional contexts. Finally, we will outline how we applied our findings to developing our academic skills provision for PGT students, and will introduce our plans for future research and development. This report argues that (a) the academic development needs and expectations of individual PGT students are diverse, and (b) that the key to addressing this challenge is to provide opportunities for students to reflect on their own development needs and to select and access a variety of academic support options according to their individual priorities and preferences.

2. Diversity and preparedness of taught postgraduate students

Until recently, the transition to PGT study had not been regarded as challenging for students, with this level of study seen as a continuation of undergraduate study in UK Higher Education institutions (HEIs), and PGT students are perceived to have considerable experience of academic practices (Hallett, 2010; O'Donnell et al., 2009; Spearing, 2014, as cited in Macleod et al., 2019; Tobbell et al., 2010). This assumption has been reflected in HEIs' lack of provision

and resources designed specifically to support PGT transition and development of academic practice. However, increased research in this field over the last decade, prompted by the rapid growth of UK PGT programmes, has led the sector to recognise the diversity of the PGT student population and their support needs, and the complexity this brings with it (Barnes et al., 2018; Macleod et al., 2019; O'Donnell et al.; 2009, Tobbell et al., 2010; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). For example, for international students who are without previous academic experience in the UK, not studying in their first language and acclimatising to the UK HE environment are perceived to be major challenges (Barnes et al., 2018). For UK domiciled postgraduates, balancing the competing demands of academic work, paid jobs and family commitments is often reported as challenging (Macleod et al., 2019; Tobbell et al., 2010). For students returning to university after a significant period out of education, a lack of familiarity with academic practices and new technologies can be a barrier to their success (O'Donnell et al., 2009).

The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) 2015 report identifies the intensive nature of PGT programmes, including heavy academic workload, higher level of academic challenge, and the short timeframe in which to complete the degree, as a key challenge for successful academic study (Leman, 2015). Therefore, as Brown (2014) and Bamber et al. (2019) argue, greater attention needs to be paid in developing clear awareness of Masters level expectations and in better preparing students in advance for M-level study. Bamber et al. (2019) suggest that universities and their staff may be better able to support student learning and skills development if they are more aware of students' perceptions of these Masters level academic expectations their readiness to study at this level.

Although some research has considered M-level expectations and student preparedness (Bamber et al., 2019; Brown, 2014; Macleod et al., 2019), until recently there has been limited investigation into the academic skills needs and study support demands of PGT students. For example, Hallett's 2010 study focused only on the perspectives of a narrow cohort of part-time students on one PGT programme when researching their study support experiences (Hallett, 2010). Additionally, a recent report commissioned by the UK Council for Graduate Education (Barnes et al., 2018), has highlighted some shared academic skills concerns and challenges that cut across the heterogeneity of the PGT student population. Academic programme directors reported poor academic writing and underdeveloped critical analysis as common academic study problems faced by PGT students, regardless of subgroup differences (international/UK domiciled students; full-time/part-time students; on campus courses/blended/online courses).

The need to provide PGT students with better guidance and support, including academic literacy skills development, is also evident in the results of recent Postgraduate Taught Experience Surveys (Leman, 2020; Neves & Leman, 2019). Students ranked 'learning and project support' (for example, understanding assignments and academic writing) third in their list of areas for improvement of the PGT experience in the 2019 survey (Neves & Leman, p.16). Clear communication in advance about the demands of specific PGT programmes was also identified as important by participants in 2020 (Leman, 2020).

Turning to the local institutional context, the University of Leeds has seen a significant growth in its PGT student population, with a 52.9% increase in PGT student numbers from 2015/16 to

2019/20. PGT students are disproportionately heavy users of the University's co-curricular academic skills support service, Skills@Library, accounting for 49% of individual users in 2018/19, whilst representing only 20% of the total student body. In addition, student feedback has indicated that PGT students often prefer to attend sessions marketed as 'Masters only'. This phenomenon is observed by Humphrey & McCarthy (1999), noting that postgraduate students prefer to be treated differently from undergraduates and expect postgraduate-specific support. Despite such preferences and expectations, we have noted that many PGT students have engaged with Flying Start (University of Leeds, 2020), our well-established transition resource and workshop suite designed for first year undergraduates and originally launched in 2012. We believe this has been due to a lack of distinctive provision to support the transition to PGT study, both from our service and from the institution in general.

These local factors prompted us to conduct our own research into PGT student academic skills needs and expectations, with a view to developing our provision accordingly through the creation of high-quality, adaptable content and support. We were also keen to challenge our own preconceptions and working practices in terms of PGT academic skills development, and to make a positive contribution to a relatively unexplored research field.

The research questions we sought to address are:

- What are the academic challenges PGT students identify when making the transition to taught postgraduate study?
- Are there any differences between subgroups regarding these challenges, e.g. international/UK domiciled students and full-time/part-time students?
- What academic skills support do PGT students expect to receive / choose to access?
- What value do PGT students place on different methods of development?

3. Research design

Large-scale surveys of PGT students across all subject areas at the University of Leeds were conducted at the beginning of academic years 2016/17 and 2017/18, promoted via email and targeted announcements in the University's Virtual Learning Environment. The first survey, conducted in 2016/17, had an overall response rate of 21% (1,348 students), and the repeat in 2017/18 had a response rate of 19.74% (1,315 students). This provided a large data set with which to inform our research and subsequent service development. The respondents were asked a series of questions to assess their own perceptions of their preparedness in terms of academic skills when making the transition to taught postgraduate study, and to provide insight into the value students' place on a variety of study support approaches. We subsequently facilitated focus groups with PGT students to explore the survey responses in more detail, and to identify preferred methods and timing of delivery of academic skills support. Respondents to each of the initial surveys were invited to participate in a follow-up survey at the end of the academic year, in order to learn what their experiences had been and whether their development needs had been met (81 respondents in 2016/17, 142 in 2017/18). All of the surveys were designed to provide both qualitative and quantitative data on these topics.

4. Research findings

Our research produced a large data set that continues to inform our practice and future service developments. In this section, we focus specifically on those research findings that influenced our decision making in producing the Step Up to Masters offer.

4.1 Academic development needs and challenges for PGT students

Participants identified a variety of academic development needs and challenges through our surveys and focus groups, including coping with the intensive nature both of the transition to Masters study and the academic work that is involved. A common theme was that there are institutional assumptions about their level of academic preparedness for M-level study:

> … I think the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate is quite intense for a lot of people and can also be quite different to what they are used to. Also, some may have a gap between undergrad and postgrad and thus it can be hard getting back into the swing of writing, structuring and researching. Perhaps even if it was just a reminder/recap… (Survey participant #1548, 2017/18 beginning of the year)

> I think many people come from many different academic backgrounds and it is too widely assumed that everyone is on the same level… (Survey participant #1114, 2017/18 beginning of the year)

Participants also expressed their preference for PGT-specific opportunities to develop their academic literacy skills:

> Having been out of education for 20 years, the challenge for me is to quickly get on board with all the necessary skills required for M-Level work. Thus, workshops that are aimed at individuals like me would be very helpful. I have found some workshops that would be of interest but are directed at UG level specifically. I am therefore supplementing any workshops with online resources and webinars. (Survey participant #476, 2017/18 beginning of the year)

Overall, our research identified students' priority areas for support as: critical thinking; academic writing; academic reading; independent learning and time management; presentation skills; and adapting to different academic culture and expectations. Our research participants identified these topics as important and challenging, both when they began their PGT study and when reflecting on their experiences towards the end of their course, based on results synthesised from the surveys and focus groups.
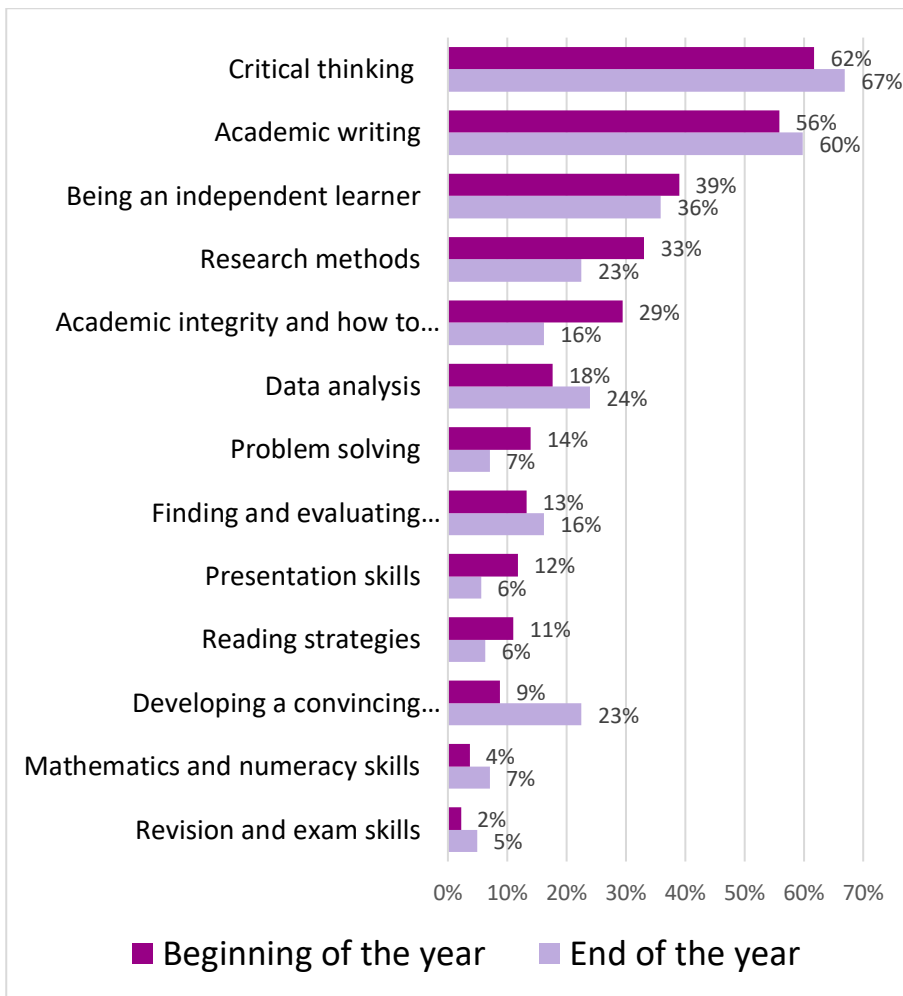
Figure 1: 2017/18 beginning vs end-of-year responses to Question 9 – beginning vs end-of-year responses to question 9 – which academic skills do you think are particularly important for Masters level study?

Academic writing and critical thinking were identified by respondents across all surveys as key academic skills for Masters-level study. As indicated in Figure 1, a higher percentage of students indicated their importance at the end of the academic year, compared with the perception when they first started their Masters studies. When students were asked at the beginning of their PGT studies what they believed might be challenging academically, many of the qualitative responses included long lists of skills; many respondents appeared to have undertaken a significant level of reflection and demonstrated strong self-awareness in relation to their development needs.

4.2 Subgroup differences on perceived importance and challenge of skills

Both international and home/EEA student groups value academic writing and critical thinking most highly as important skills for taught postgraduate study, with no correlation between the international/home factor. When it comes to which skills they find more challenging, it is evident

that international students find adapting to different teaching and learning styles and avoiding plagiarism more challenging than home students. As shown in Figure 1, a higher proportion of international students evaluated these as 'very' and 'extremely challenging'. Similar trends were observed for critical thinking and academic writing, with international students finding them more challenging. However, the trend is the opposite for giving presentations and group work, with home/EEA students finding them more challenging than international students. A summary of all findings for this question is provided in Figure 2 in the form of a graph that indicates the mean for each skill (levels of difficulty are represented in a numerical range, where 1 is not at all challenging and 5 is extremely challenging).
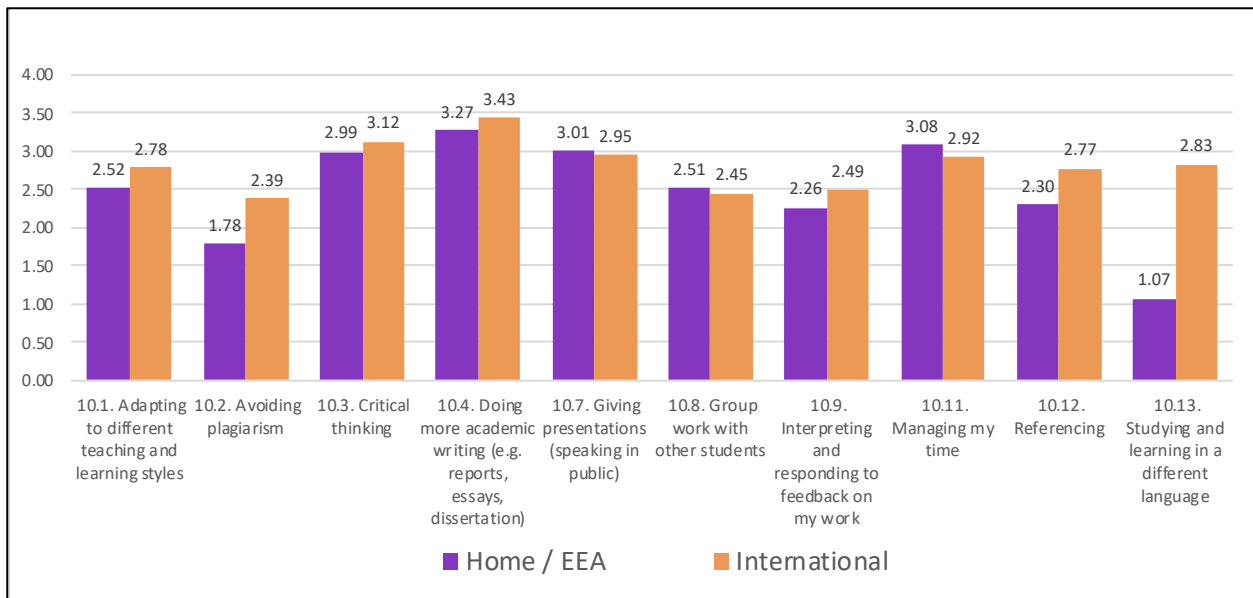

Figure 2: The means of responses to Question 10 – how challenging do you expect to find each of the following during your Masters study?

Regarding part-time and full-time PGT students, the data suggests no significant differences in terms of which academic skills were perceived as the most important and challenging, except for giving presentations, with most of the part-time students evaluating this as 'extremely challenging' (31%), while the majority of full-time students regarded it as 'very challenging' (28%).

Our research findings indicated limited significant variation overall between the most important skills needs and expectations of PGT students from different subgroups, though a wide range of topics were identified. Therefore, rather than providing predefined support tailored for each subgroup, i.e. international/UK domiciled students and full-time/part-time students, we recognise the value of instead enabling individual students to reflect on their personal academic literacies development needs and then to select appropriate development options.

4.3 Student preferences on academic development methods

Our research participants favoured a wide range of development methods, including workshops, online resources and options for self-selection, and felt these should be available both before their courses start and throughout their studies. There was a strong steer towards giving students options to choose from in order to address their individual academic skills development. Participants also said they valued the opportunity given to them by this research to reflect on their own development needs.

The pie charts in Figures 3–9 and comments below demonstrate that research participants favoured a variety of academic development methods provided by the University. They were asked to indicate their preferences in terms of in-curriculum sessions, co-curricular workshops, one-to-one appointment, academic skills books, and online resources hosted in their module VLE areas and on the University's website, by selecting between most preferred to least preferred (1 is most preferred and 7 least preferred).
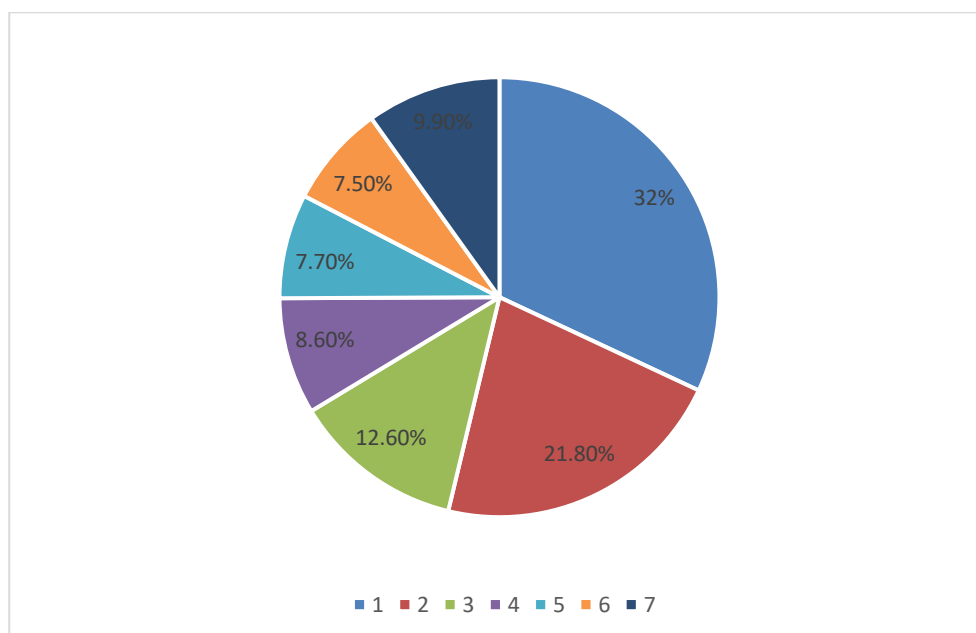

Figure 3: Responses to Question 11.1 – academic skills lecture/workshop as part of your module (mean ranking 3.01)

> *Integration of academic skills into modules early in the academic year (would be useful).*
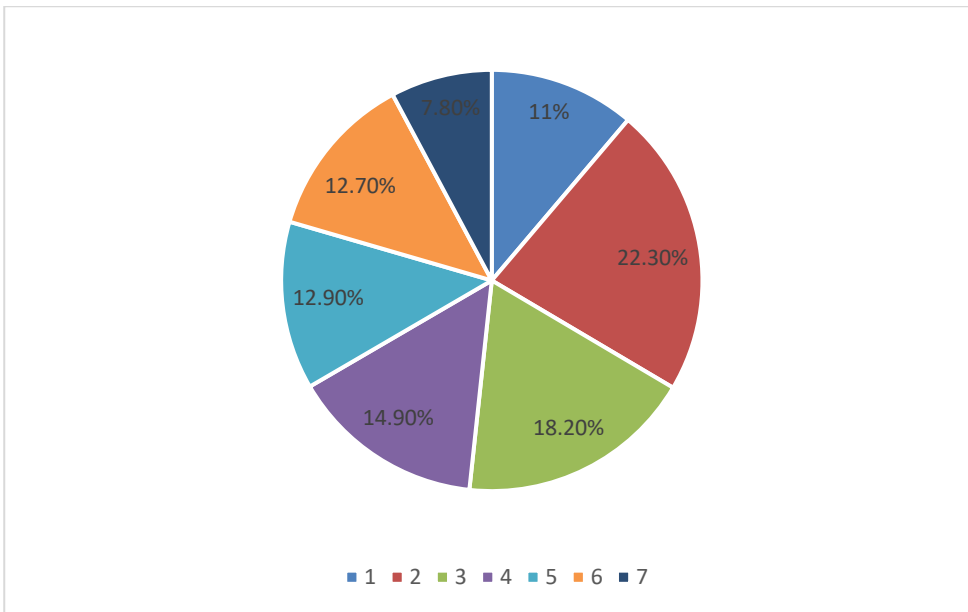> *(Survey participant #81, 2016/17 end of the year)*

Figure 4: Responses to Question 11.2 – academic skills content in the Virtual Learning Environment (mean ranking 3.65)

> *Leeds are putting on a wide range of tutorials [workshops], but many clash with timetable, so it would be useful if these could be videoed, and resources uploaded for those of us that can't access physically. (Survey respondent #1723, 2017/18 beginning of the year)*
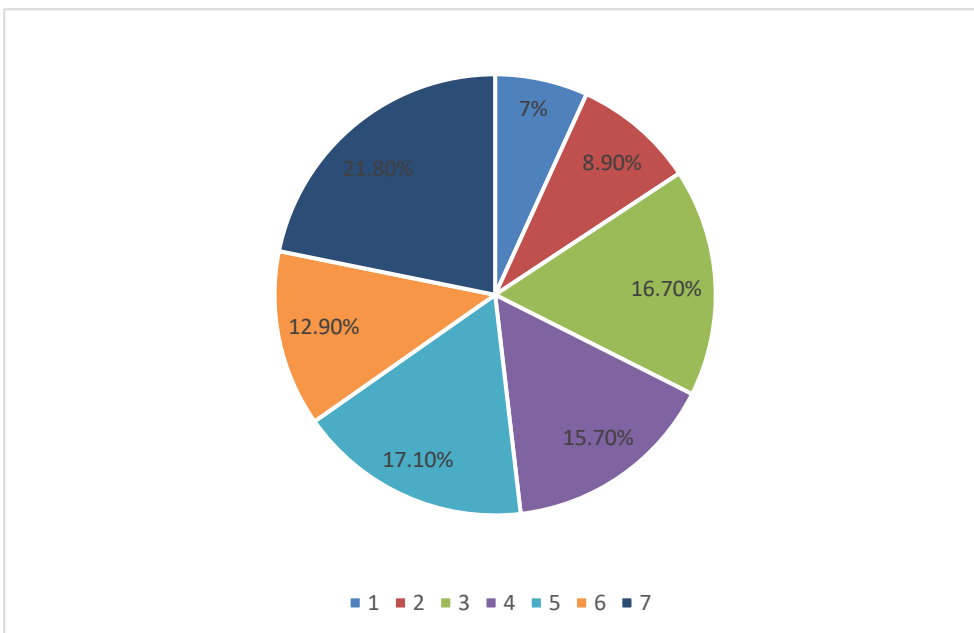

Figure 5: Responses to Question 11.3 – books on developing your academic skills (mean ranking 4.54)
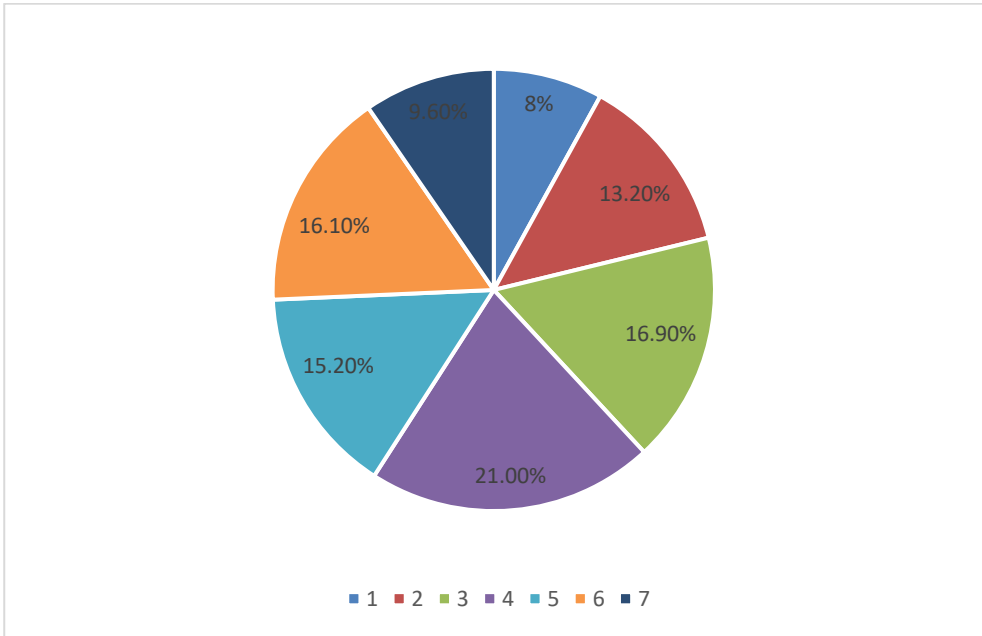
Figure 6: Responses to Question 11.4 – open, bookable workshop(s), hosted on campus (mean ranking 4.09)
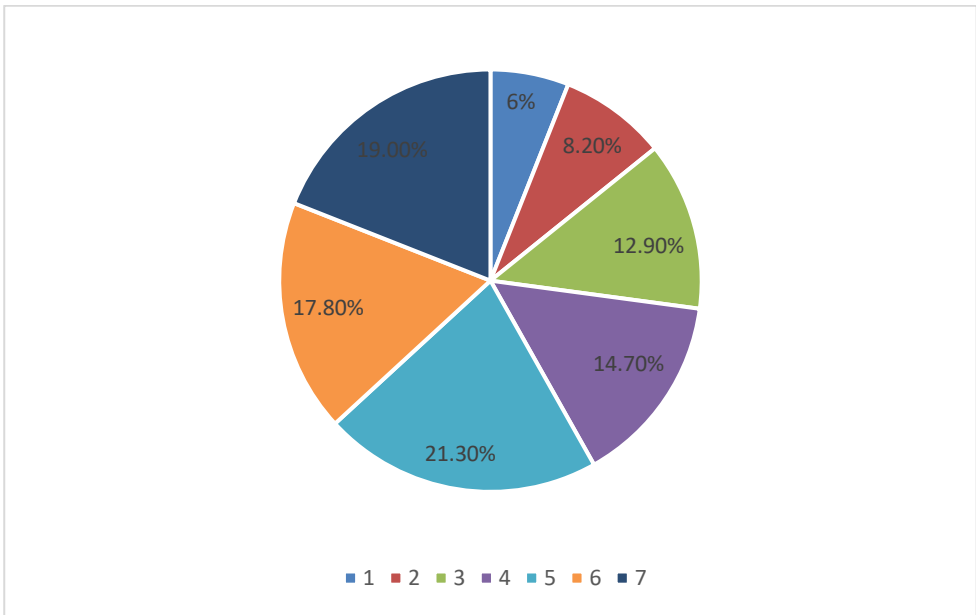

Figure 7: Responses to Question 11.5 – open, bookable webinar(s), hosted online (mean ranking 4.67)
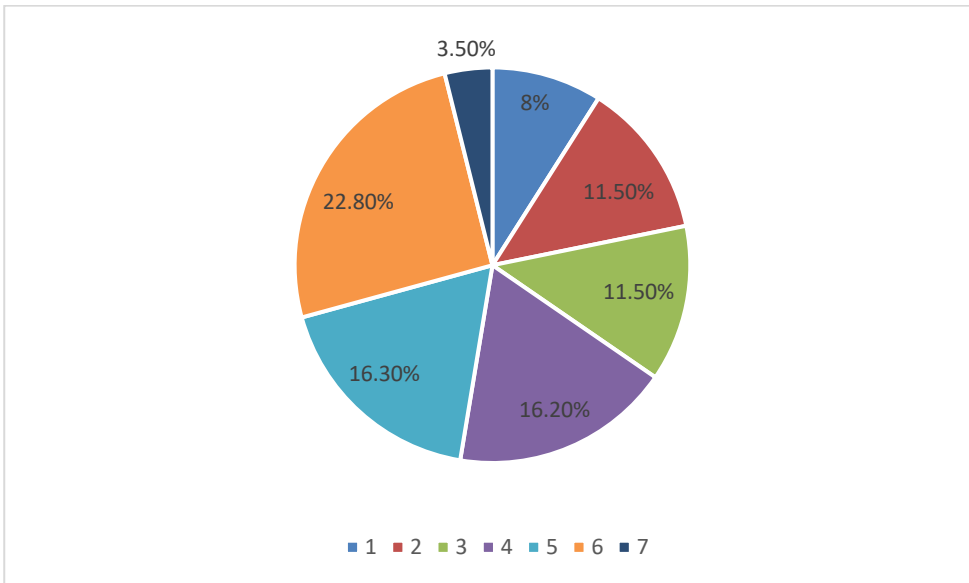
Figure 8: Responses to Question 11.6 – academic skills webpages provided by the University (mean ranking 4.44)
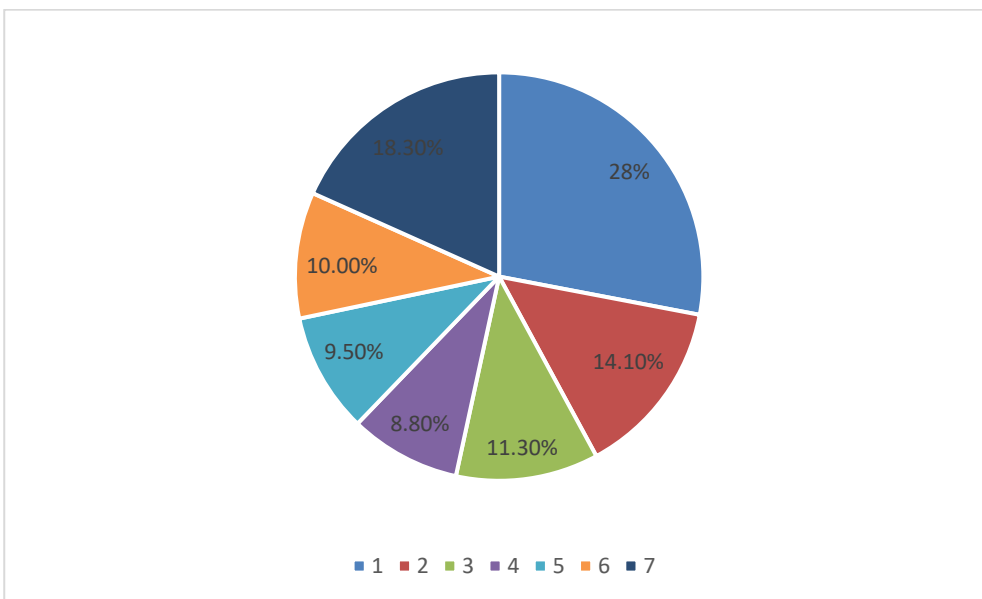

Figure 9: Responses to Question 11.7 – one-to-one appointment with a Learning / Study Advisor at the University (mean ranking 3.61)

Despite individual preferences, the mean ranking of the methods suggests that PGT students overall most favour embedded academic skills sessions (mean ranking 3.01) and one-to-one

appointments with a Learning Advisor at the University (mean ranking 3.61), and least favour using academic skills books (mean ranking 4.54) and attending webinars (mean ranking 4.67).

Comments made by participants in the surveys and focus groups also indicate students' preference for having options to personalise their academic development. Focus group participants also said they valued the opportunity given to them by taking part in this research to reflect on their own development needs:

> *Would like to see a more personal approach… Like to review materials to look back and reflect – workshop booklet and online are helpful. The skills survey was an opportunity to reflect on own development needs. (Participant comments in focus groups, 2016/17.)*

> *As a mature student returning to study after a significant period it would be useful to have an audit of skills you will need and virtual links to study modules you can then access independently. I have found some on the library site, and the academic integrity tutorial was useful as an introduction. (Survey respondent #149, 2017/18 beginning of the year)*

In summary, our research findings suggest that PGT students are very self-aware of their diverse needs and challenges in terms of academic development. They perceived and subsequently found academic writing, critical thinking, and being an independent learner and time management to be important skills needed at Masters level. However, also of note is the diversity of other topics on which students wanted to focus their development, including academic reading, presentation skills, and adapting to different academic culture and expectations. PGT students value a wide range of methods for developing their academic skills and prefer to reflect, self-select, and access support according to their own developmental needs and aspirations.

5. Discussion and project outcomes

As the literature suggests, the diverse previous academic experience of new PGT students can impact on their preparedness for this study experience (Barnes et al. 2018; Leman, 2015; O'Donnell et al., 2009). However, a previous lack of institutional acknowledgement of their diverse needs has resulted in a lack of appropriate support in academic practices in UK HEIs at this level. The increasing heterogeneity of the PGT student population and the intensive nature of PGT study make support for their learning development particularly important, especially at the early stage of a student's PGT journey. Transition support, including explicit discussion of Masters-level academic expectations, helps students to identify their level of readiness and to make use of opportunities to develop their skills appropriately (Bamber et al., 2019). Our solution to addressing the diverse needs of PGT students is to enable them to reflect on their own academic experiences and challenges, and to provide a variety of opportunities for them to personalise their development. We therefore created an online transition resource and accompanying suite of optional workshops that are designed to encourage student reflection and to provide students with access to a wide range of co-curricular support, selected by and

tailored to, each individual. This provision is intended to complement our existing in-curricular academic skills development work that is embedded across many PGT programmes.

…Find out what kind of skills need developing and which way is most helpful to do so. Best thing would be to do that before the Master's degree starts, because during the studies, it is extremely hard to have enough time for that. (Focus group participant, 2016/17)
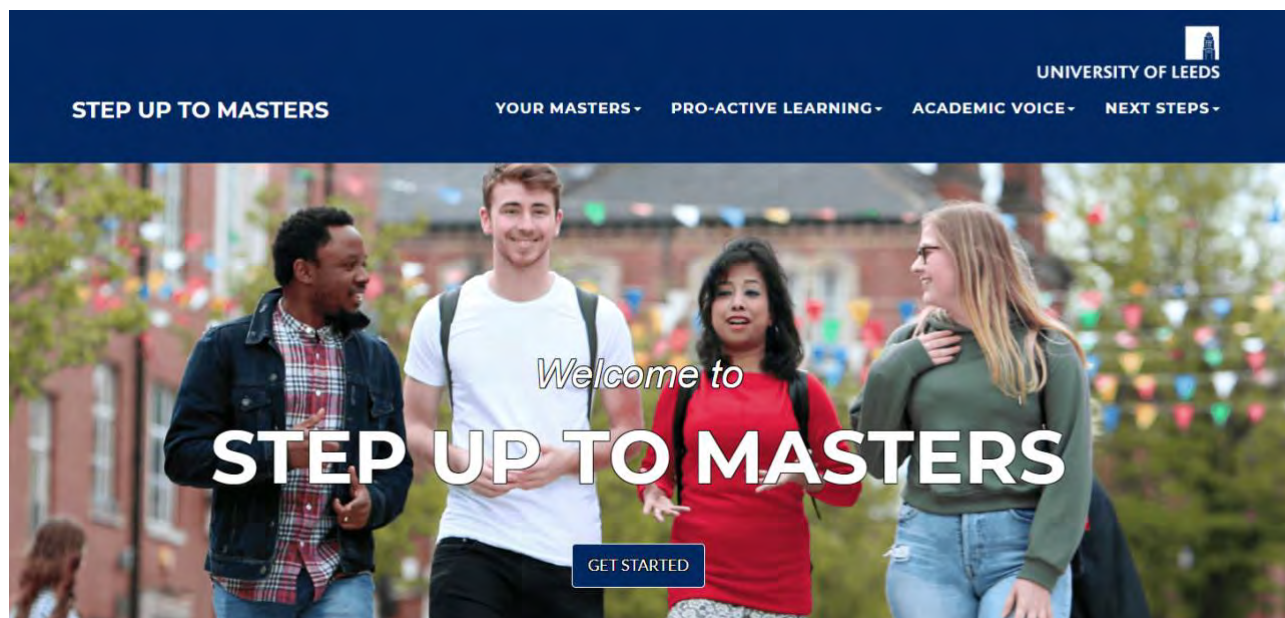
5.1 Step Up to Masters

Figure 10: Screenshot of the home page of Step Up to Masters, reproduced with permission of Leeds University Library, licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

In Spring 2019, the Library's Learning Development and Learning Technologies Teams developed the online Step Up to Masters resource, which focuses on key topics highlighted as important at PGT level by both the literature and our own research, including managing the transition, independent learning, critical thinking, dealing with complexity, and academic writing and voice. The 'How confident are you?' section under the 'Next steps' strand of the resource encourages students to reflect on their individual development priorities. A personalised feedback form is generated based on their responses; feedback is grouped into a three-tier priority list, from 'Not very confident' to 'Somewhat confident' to 'Very confident', according to the level of confidence that the student selected under each topic in the previous section. The feedback form signposts relevant academic skills content and enables the students to engage with the most relevant development options to support their successful transition to taught postgraduate study (see figures 9 and 10). Our early evaluation feedback suggests that the students who engaged with the activity appreciated the opportunity to reflect and to receive personalised feedback according to their level of confidence in each topic:

This was a really useful resource, especially all the links to other pages. The end of module [resource] feedback based on my responses has given me the information I need to start targeting my MA prep. (End of resource evaluation feedback on Step Up to Masters, November 2020)

Step Up to Masters also features staff and student voices, allowing students to compare their own experiences and perspectives with those shared in the resource. Situated in the academic context of the University of Leeds, Step Up to Masters welcomes and supports students in gaining a deeper understanding of the 'institutional academic rubric' and culture (Hallett, 2010, p. 236). Students are also given the opportunity to explore key strategies for Masters study in more detail through an accompanying suite of short workshops on academic confidence, managing reading, academic voice, and intercultural group work. Although presentation skills were also highlighted by students as a challenging topic, this was already addressed appropriately through longer, bespoke sessions in our wider workshop programme and in our teaching embedded in programmes.

Figure 11: Screenshot of the student reflective exercise in Step Up to Masters, reproduced with permission of Leeds University Library, licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0
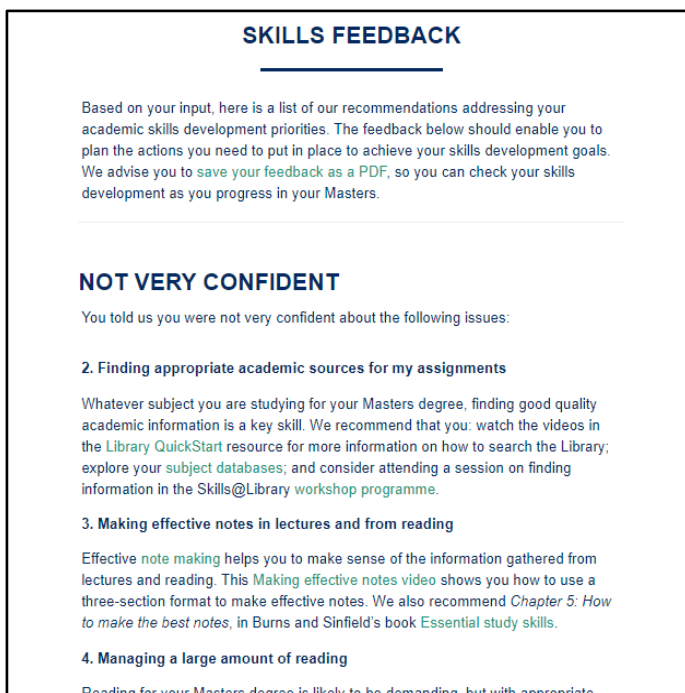
Figure 12: Screenshot of personalised skills feedback and signposting that students receive after their reflection, reproduced with permission of Leeds University Library, licensed under

Step Up to Masters was not designed as a replica of Flying Start (University of Leeds, 2020), our guide for undergraduate students on transition from school to university, nor to duplicate topics and content covered elsewhere in our online provision. That is to say, it does not provide a merely 'symbolic' separation of provision (Humphrey and McCarthy, 1999, p.384) in support of UG and PGT transition, but instead is an original resource specifically designed both to meet the diverse needs of its PGT audience, and in response to the literature and our research findings. Our early evaluation suggests that this tailored provision is valued by a diverse range of PGT students who appreciate the opportunity to select the content that is most relevant to their individual academic skills development:

> *This was actually really helpful. Most of the other Masters support is dedicated to international students so tends to be unhelpful and pretty condescending. I liked that this wasn't dumbed down too much and provide practical ideas and support. (End of resource evaluation feedback on Step Up to Masters, November 2019)*

> *Useful for international students. I clicked on the relevant parts directly based on the keywords, because I only used it after the course started, and I already knew where I didn't do well. (Student feedback on Step Up to Masters, June 2020)*

The resource addresses PGT students' apparent preference for resources and sessions badged as 'only for Masters' (Humphrey & McCarthy, 1999). In addition, the Step Up to Masters suite of workshops, delivered at the start of the academic year, provide opportunities for PGT

students to interact with other postgraduates; such opportunities are valued by PGT students (Humphrey & McCarthy, 1999), and help them to establish ongoing social relationships and a clear postgraduate identity (Tobbell et al., 2010; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013).

> *Having studied as an undergraduate at Leeds I was already familiar with some of the expectations. However, Step up to Masters has helped me become more aware of what to expect from my MA studies and what resources are available to help me. (End of resource evaluation feedback on Step Up to Masters, November 2020)*

5.2 Impact of the research

The large-scale research we have conducted on PGT students' academic skills challenges, needs and expectations, across different disciplines and PGT programmes at the University of Leeds, makes several significant contributions to the research landscape. First, this research has expanded our understanding of PGT students' own perceptions of their preparedness in terms of academic skills when they make the transition to taught postgraduate study. Participants in the end-of-year surveys and focus groups stated that they had experienced varying degrees of difficulty during the transition. They also perceived and subsequently found a wide range of academic literacy skills expectations as being both important and challenging when making the transition into PGT study: academic writing; academic reading; critical thinking; learning independently and time management; presentation skills; and adapting to a different academic culture and expectations. In addition, our findings also provide fresh insight into the value students' place on a variety of study support approaches. They favoured a wide range of academic development opportunities, including in-curriculum academic skills sessions, one-to-one appointments, online resources and workshops.

Since the launch of the resource and workshops, we have conducted small-scale evaluative research to understand the usefulness of Step Up to Masters to its target audience. When asked to respond to the statement 'Step Up to Masters has helped me to feel more confident about studying at Masters level', 68% participants selected 'strongly agree' and 32% chose 'agree', which equates to an overall 100% positive response. Student users of the online Step Up to Masters resource have found it to be a useful guide that has helped them to develop their academic literacy skills and make a successful transition to PGT study. Non-users who were introduced to the resource and given opportunity to explore its features also indicated that they would have made use of it if they had encountered it earlier. The accompanying suite of workshops were also well received by attendees:

> *This resource is very thoughtful and useful. I have read all of it, and the benefits were plenty. In my opinion, it is a good starting point for new Masters students, especially after a long stoppage period of study after the bachelor's degree. (End of resource evaluation feedback on Step Up to Masters, April 2021)*

> *All sessions were helpful… the resources supplied are so useful! They'll no doubt help take me to the next level. Thanks so much. (Step Up to Masters workshop participant, December 2020)*

As a practical output of our research, the Step Up to Masters programme now plays a key role in the University of Leeds' new institutional Welcome, Induction, and Transition offer, as it is designed to complement institutional and departments' own induction and transition programmes. The availability of the online resource meant that the University was well positioned to address the challenges of delivering online transition support to taught postgraduate students during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.3 From transition to embedded skills development

Providing generic study skills support can be seen as universities trying to 'respond to diversity by not making assumptions about prior knowledge, skills and experience' (Hallett, 2010, p. 235) of the students. However, Hallett argues such a response might foreground student deficit and does not consider the institutional culture and context in which academic practices are situated. Embedding academic literacy (Lea & Street, 2006) into a specific disciplinary context and in collaboration with academic staff, to support PGT students entering an academic community of practice as a peripheral member (Lave & Wenger, 1991), is therefore argued as an ideal alternative to a deficit model of study skills support (Hallett, 2010). Therefore, we are conscious of the limitations of the Step Up to Masters approach and are keen to embed the resource into a disciplinary context that enables students to reflect on their academic literacies development in relation to subject-specific examples and assessment tasks. The following section of this report will discuss our future plans regarding the role of Step Up to Masters in the embedding of academic literacies development into the Leeds curriculum.

6. Conclusion

Our research with a large taught postgraduate cohort at the University of Leeds revealed that: the academic development needs and expectations of PGT students are diverse; there is no significant variation overall between the most important skills needs and expectations of PGT respondents from different subgroups; they value a range of methods for enabling their development; and that the key to addressing this challenge is to provide opportunities for students to reflect on their own development needs and to select and access a variety of academic support options according to their identified individual priorities and preferences. We acted on these findings with the creation of an online resource and accompanying workshops that introduced topics that PGT respondents had identified as a priority, whilst also enabling students to reflect and to personalise their own academic skills development journey.

Work is now underway at the University of Leeds to develop further the institutional offer for PGT students, with online Welcome, Induction and Transition provision set to continue indefinitely as a precursor to face-to-face, school-level support. Step Up to Masters will continue to play a key role in this provision.

We will conduct additional evaluation of the Step Up to Masters resource and workshops with the 2020/21 cohort of PGT students at Leeds, with a particular focus on their preferences for online vs face-to-face delivery and appropriate timing of this support. We are also keen to

understand how the embedding of the online resource in the institution-wide transition programme has impacted on the level of student awareness of Step Up to Masters.

We recognise the value of delivering academic literacies development within a disciplinary context wherever possible, and this is reflected in our team's wider service delivery in support of taught programmes. As outlined above, 31% of student respondents to our surveys also identified an 'Academic skills lecture/workshop as part of your module' as their first choice for how they would like this development to be provided. Therefore, we are keen to explore further the role our transitional Step Up to Masters package could play in bridging the gap between institutional and school-level support for academic literacies development. Given the intensive nature of taught postgraduate programmes and the limited time available for scaffolding of support, the provision of contextualized, pre-arrival developmental opportunities for PGT students is also worthy of further investigation. Future research into PGT transition support might also consider how to measure the impact of such interventions on student confidence, retention and attainment.

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