

HR Excellence in Research Award – Case Study

Supporting Academic Writing at the University of Hull

There are a number of different initiatives to support academic writing within the University. These have different aims and structures, but all with the overall objective of supporting the academic writing process. Writing groups are proving to be an effective and motivational approach for researchers. Such groups may operate at Faculty, School or research group level but are usually initiated locally in response to particular requirements and preferences. Two examples are given below of writing groups operating in different areas each with their own structure, focus and aims.

Writing Group in the School of Environmental Sciences

A school-wide initiative.

This is an informal peer-accountability group which aims to meet once per week over coffee on campus. The session offers the opportunity for members to discuss their writing plans, set goals and celebrate successes, small or large. The group is open to any academic and research staff within the School.

Writing tasks are self-assigned and can be of any type: papers, conference presentations, grant proposals, blogs etc. Individuals set semester goals and then break these down into smaller chunks that can be achieved over a week or two. Members find that this approach motivational, helping to keep writing projects on track and achievable, particularly during the busier periods of the academic year.

Members do not discuss the content of their writing, rather they share ideas regarding issues that are experienced as a writer such as dealing with writer's block, responding to reviewers etc. As the group consists of a mixture of staff at different stages in their careers, it therefore provides an exchange of ideas and experience. The Writing Group is supplemented by an off-campus writing day two times per year based on a writing retreat structure.

Writing Group in Maternal and Reproductive Health (MARH)

A research group based initiative.

For the last few years the Maternal and Reproductive Health (MARH) research development group in the School of Health and Social Care has been running writing groups. These have consisted of between three and six members who work jointly on a paper. So far these have all been literature reviews and several have been published or presented at conferences. The groups tend to consist of academics with a range of backgrounds and experiences enabling members to learn from each other, for example, practice sharing between clinical academics and researchers. The writing groups have also been very successful in providing support to those less experienced in writing academic publications, who have used this experience as a stepping-stone towards further academic writing. Publications can also be used to support applications for research funding, with the literature reviews providing a solid basis for proposals. Up to now, topics have largely been decided based on

the interests of members but the group is taking a strategic approach, using the opportunity to work on future research proposals and funding applications.

While the writing groups have been productive and successful, a common problem has been lack of time; with so many other demands on time, tasks for the writing projects tend to drop to the bottom of the list. In response, the group are working towards establishing 'protected time' associated with monthly MARH meetings, where the meeting would take place in the morning with the afternoon set aside for the writing group.