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## **Contextualising, Embedding and Mapping (CEM): A model and framework for rethinking the design and delivery of an in-sessional academic literacy programme support.**

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### **Abstract**

The paper documents the background, research and preliminary findings relating to a key area emerging in Higher Education institutions in the UK: providing academic language and study skills to support international students running concurrently with their degree programmes. The paper presents research carried out by an academic literacy specialist and a Programme Director in the postgraduate area of Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University. The paper documents a critique of past practice and research leading to identification of key issues influencing the attendance and participation of overseas students on an in-sessional academic literacy programme. To address these issues, a model was developed which identified **C**ontextualisation, **E**MBEDDING and **M**APPING (CEM) as the foundation for improving academic literacy programme provision. The findings show that application of the CEM model is already demonstrating added value in the key areas of student attendance, understanding of the relevance of the academic literacy programme and integration within degree programme learning objectives and outcomes. To address the issue of sustaining the benefits of the CEM model the work concludes with the development of a framework which establishes the integration of an academic literacy programme within postgraduate programmes both at the strategic level through teaching and learning policies and at operational level through programme and module development.

### **Introduction**

In the past 10-15 years the international student market has grown to represent a significant impact on Higher Education, (Verbik, 2007). As identified by Turner (2005) the internationalisation of Higher Education is now a key area within the academic sector. Northumbria University currently attracts more than 3000 international students, with Newcastle Business School being one of the main destinations. This paper documents research arising from concern expressed within both the university and Newcastle Business School about the perceived unwillingness of international students to attend an in-sessional academic literacy programme running concurrently with their degree study. Whilst it was designed to solve a perceived problem in Newcastle Business School, the CEM model has since been adopted by other schools within the university. Following presentations at

conferences and internal and external staff development workshops it is now being considered by other universities in the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

### **The Academic Literacy Context**

The teaching of academic literacy to international students in Higher Education is informed by research and practice in what has been called English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). More recently there has been a drift towards adopting a more specific subject-based approach to the teaching of EAP (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons 2002). Supporting this approach, Hyland (2002 p.394) argues that “*effective language teaching in the universities involves taking specificity seriously*”. For academic literacy tutors this means understanding the language used in specific academic contexts and organising the learning around subject specific, purposeful activities (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998). The approach suggests too that it is important that the content should be relevant to learners’ goals and that this is most likely to motivate them (Flowerdew and Peacock 2001). This presents academic literacy tutors with two problems: one, they have only limited field specific knowledge to allow them to design such content and two, they are not always the best judge of what will interest and motivate their students (Murray & McPherson 2004).

Dudley-Evans (1984) suggests the solution to these problems is collaboration between subject specialists and the academic literacy tutors with different levels of cooperation across disciplines. Much has been written of his experience at Birmingham University in the 1980s (Johns and Dudley Evans, 1980; Dudley-Evans 1984, Dudley Evans, 1995), where the collaboration catered for sessions with a small group of students who were considered to need help with English language skills.

However such collaboration is not as easy to achieve as is frequently assumed (Tajino, James and Kijiima, 2005). Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, (2002, p.3) hold the view that academic literacy tutors tend to “work for rather than with subject specialists.” Collaboration, where it is achieved, rarely extends beyond two or three disciplines. Saunders (2006) suggests that results and findings from degree programmes should inform the design of academic literacy programmes. Pilcher (2006) reported on the effectiveness of teaching academic literacy from the students’ perspective while completing their master dissertations and recommended that there should be more links between academic literacy tutors and academic departments in order to improve the quality of academic literacy support.

In an interview by Newman (2008) Professor Edwards, Director of the National Centre for Language and Literacy, University of Reading supports this in the Times Educational Supplement of February 2008 when he says:

*“... there is scope for exploring ways in which EAP tutors can collaborate with subject teachers to ensure that support materials are more sensitive to the needs of students speaking English as a foreign language”*

The above literature and Professor Edwards’ comments imply that collaboration between the academic subject specialist and the academic literacy tutor is a key issue requiring further investigation. This paper therefore focuses on the issue of how to meet the need of

delivering an in-sessional academic literacy programme running concurrently with degree programmes and fully integrated within the content of the subject discipline.

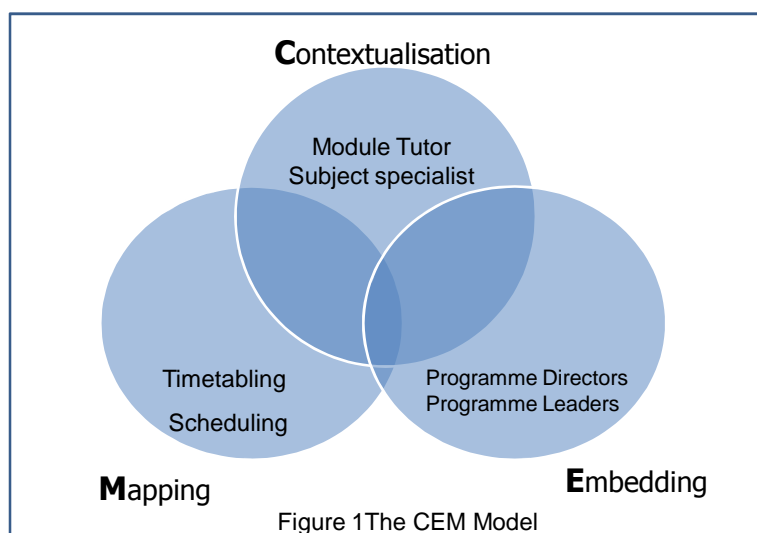
### Newcastle Business School Postgraduate Context

With the increasing growth in the international student base within the postgraduate area of Newcastle Business School has come the realisation of the importance of ensuring a quality learning environment and experience to complement academic programmes. Key to this is the recognition of the role of academic literacy and the need to increase staff and student understanding of the importance of integration of academic literacy skills as part of the academic learning programme. The paper documents work which:

- examines the management of the academic literacy programme for postgraduate students by developing a model to underpin a collegiate approach involving academic literacy and subject specialists.
- enhances the learning experience of the students through induction and guidance procedures aligned to their academic development.

The three key concepts of contextualisation, embedding and mapping of the academic literacy programme were identified in this research as the foundation for the CEM model (See Figure 1), designed to facilitate improved provision of the academic literacy programme in a postgraduate business context.

**Figure 1: The Contextualisation, Embedding and Mapping (CEM) Model**



The paper discusses the evaluation of current methods used to inform the content and timing of academic literacy support and provides information as to how this could be enhanced. The paper concludes by demonstrating how the CEM model and framework contribute to the quality of the learning agenda by assisting in understanding and addressing

the diverse needs of the international student and improving the context in which the academic literacy programme is delivered and maintained.

#### **Methods used in the study**

The findings are based on a series of surveys using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools used to explore the learning styles and experiences of the Masters students based in Newcastle Business School.

Two survey groups were established: a group of 150 full time international postgraduate students and a group of 7 Business School postgraduate Programme Directors. Data was collected using questionnaires and focus groups. The focus groups held midway through each of the semesters explored students' work patterns and the importance that the students attached to mapping delivery of the programme to their learning needs. Additional data was collected via questionnaires distributed as students submitted their dissertations, producing 134 responses. The views of the staff group were collected at both key academic meetings and through informal discussions. The data was collected via meeting minutes and note-taking which were then later confirmed as being accurate by the relevant parties.

A basic grounded theory approach was applied to qualitative data to identify the key issues and themes (Silverman 2001, Gill & Johnson 1991) with quantitative results summarised via the Excel spreadsheet.

#### **Findings from the staff group**

The in-sessional academic literacy programme at Northumbria University, had been informed for many years firstly by the expertise of the academic literacy tutors and secondly by a needs analysis process carried out with students in the first week of the programme. By contrast, the role of Newcastle Business School was solely an administrative one in that they supported registration of students on to the academic literacy programme and invited the academic literacy tutor to programme inductions, to encourage students to attend the optional, in-sessional, academic literacy programme. The presentations were aligned with non-academic satellite services such as Student Services, the Counselling Service and the Chaplaincy. Interviews with staff, focus groups with students and feedback from student representatives at Course Committee Meetings, identified the following issues about this approach:

- The academic literacy programme was seen by students and staff as an 'optional extra' outside the academic programme.
- A lack of synergy between the subject specialists and the academic literacy tutor led students to undervalue the academic literacy teaching and fail to recognise the transferability of the academic literacy programme across their business modules.
- The delivery of the academic literacy programme ended at Easter, 5 months before students submitted their dissertations.

The cumulative effect of these issues raised questions at a senior level in the university about the relevance and timing of the in-sessional academic literacy programme.

As a result of the meetings with the staff group, three key themes emerged as pivotal in the project; *contextualisation*, relating to the context in which the academic literacy programme

was presented and communicated to the students; *embedding*, the position of the academic literacy programme within the overall academic programme; and finally *mapping*, the identification and understanding of the postgraduate student needs in relation to academic literacy and the appropriateness and timeliness of the academic literacy programme throughout the academic year. These three key themes and how they were addressed in the project are discussed below.

#### **Contextualisation of academic literacy: specificity versus generic**

Specificity implies teaching academic literacy skills in the context of the subject which is being studied. To achieve this, links were required between the business module tutors and the academic literacy tutor. To ensure inclusivity, two core modules, taken by all postgraduate students on their Masters programmes, were identified and analysed from an academic literacy perspective. The academic literacy tutor had access to business module descriptors, assignment briefs, marking criteria and subject-specific teaching and learning plans and materials.

The subject and academic literacy tutors shared their understanding of the key weaknesses in assessment performance. Based on this, a revised academic literacy Teaching and Learning Plan was presented to Business School Programme Directors and Leaders for further analysis and comment. This draft Teaching and Learning Plan was then negotiated with the Module Tutors, who are ultimately responsible for the delivery of the subject modules. The final syllabus for the academic literacy programme was agreed between the academic literacy tutor and the subject tutors.

#### **Embedding of the academic literacy programme**

Embedding relates to changing the perception of subject specialist staff and international students from one where the academic literacy programme is seen as separate from their postgraduate programmes to one where it is recognised as a core part of the postgraduate academic programme.

Analysis of the data collected revealed that in order for the embedding to be effective, five key areas had to be addressed:

1. The placement of the academic literacy presentation in the Postgraduate induction programme week was considered. It was realigned with business modules, not satellite services.
2. The timing of the academic literacy programme delivery was altered from commencing in Week 3 to Week 1, thereby taught concurrently with business modules.
3. The academic literacy seminars were included in the business programme timetable. On the surface this would appear to be a minor change but in practice this represented a major cultural shift by the Business School and reflected recognition of the importance of the academic literacy programme at both staff and student level.
4. The integration of the academic literacy tutor within the subject teams. Past practice created a relationship of "them and us". A more inclusive and supportive partnership was achieved through active invitation and participation of the academic literacy

tutor in regular management meetings at Programme Director and Programme Leader levels, ensuring understanding of what the academic literacy programme could provide and how this could be incorporated more effectively into each specific Masters programme.

5. The extent of Newcastle Business School management support for the academic literacy programme was critical. None of the above changes could have taken place without support occurring at a number of management levels. At a macro level, key decisions relating to the central timetabling of the academic literacy seminars were sanctioned at Associate Dean level, whilst at a micro level, the supporting role of the Programme Directors, Programme Leaders and Module Tutors was essential. With such initiatives the role of the project 'champion', a senior subject specialist, cannot be underestimated. This key role is needed to promote, drive and maintain the profile of the project to key individuals and staff with the purpose of achieving visibility and co-operation.

### **Mapping of the academic literacy programme**

The results of the focus groups showed that students wanted to study features of academic literacy as they needed them, not at a time determined by a set syllabus. Thus it would seem appropriate to identify their patterns of working on their dissertation more accurately so that the academic literacy programme could provide support in key areas at the right time. The question arose as to whether the traditional delivery of academic literacy over twenty four weeks between September and March was appropriate and met student needs for support on their dissertation.

It was also felt that effective mapping could only be achieved by creating better communication channels between the academic literacy and subject tutors. Weekly reports to the group of key subject specialists regarding the content of the academic literacy seminars and the responses of the international students to their teaching and learning were initiated. Such has been the interest generated that the group has been expanded to include the Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching and the School's Teaching and Learning Group. The subject tutors responded to the reports, commenting on the focus of the academic literacy seminars and raising issues for further consideration.

### **Findings from the student survey group**

#### **Contextualisation and embedding**

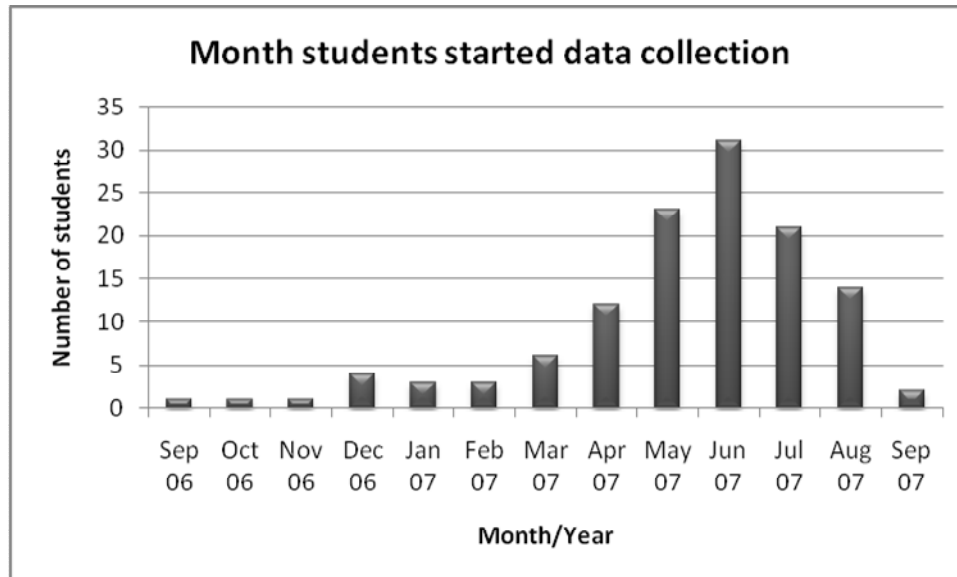
Following the contextualisation and embedding described above, the data showed that 93% of the respondents believed that the academic literacy programme was an integral part of their degree programme. This was in sharp contrast to the perception of students in previous years when the academic literacy programme was seen as separate, an optional extra, and not important to their degree programme. Findings from the focus group meetings supported initial findings about the student perceptions of the academic literacy programme.

#### **Mapping**

At the start of this study the academic literacy programme did not map to the students need for support at the time they were writing their dissertation. Students produced predicted

schedules of their research which indicated that they spread their study across the period January to July. The data analysed shows that their actual work patterns were very different and that much of their research was done in a period between May and September after the academic literacy programme had ended as shown in Graph 1 below.

**Figure 2: Month students commenced data collection for dissertations**



There may be several reasons for this, ranging from time constraints (exams and assignment submission deadlines in mid May) to the wish to collect data from sources on their return to their own countries.

### **Discussion**

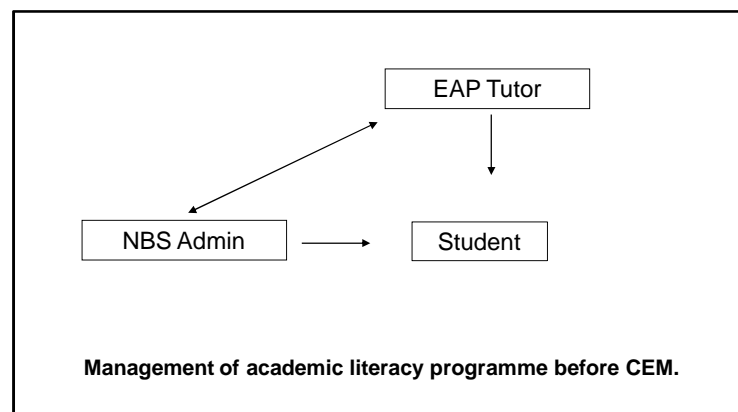
Understanding the impact of the CEM model led to the realisation that more “actors” had to contribute to the management and delivery of the academic literacy programme if it was to be more effective in supporting students’ learning.

Prior to the introduction of the CEM model, only two key actors had been involved as illustrated in Figure 3 (a). By contrast, Figure 3 (b) shows the participation of all the actors needed to ensure the adoption of the CEM model in Newcastle Business School Postgraduate area.

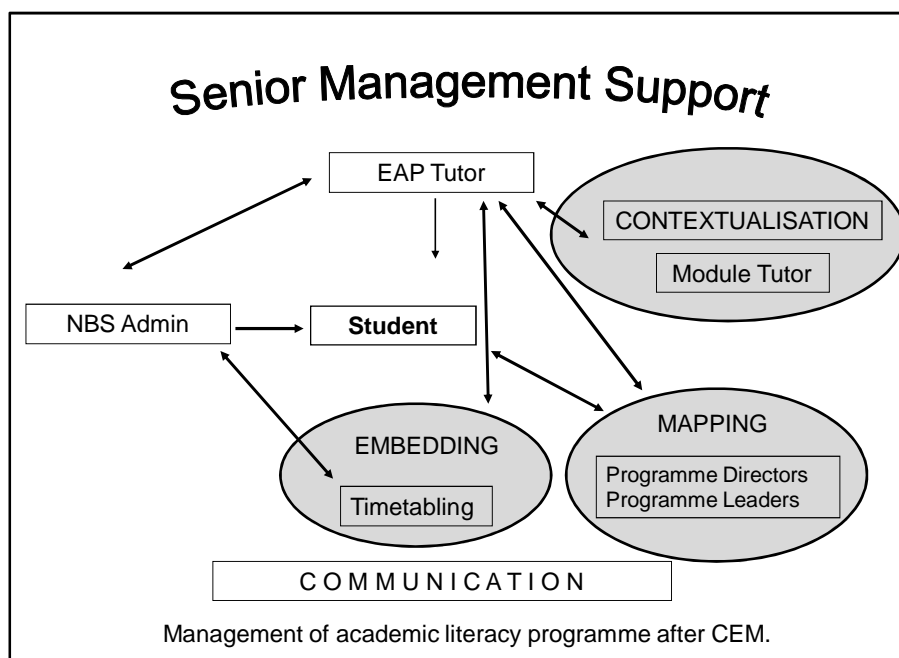


Figure 3: Management of Academic Literacy Before and After CEM

(a) Before



(b) After



The explicit inclusion of the Newcastle Business School Module Tutor directly addresses the issue of contextualisation, in particular the argument of specificity versus generic contexts. It

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also ensures that the content of the academic literacy sessions are relevant to the programme and furthermore appears relevant to the student.

The inclusion of Senior Management Support, the Programme Directors and the Programme Leaders addresses the issue of embedding. Without the support of Senior Management, the physical placement of the academic literacy seminar on the student timetable, an indirect, but subtle signposting of the importance of the sessions within the overall academic programme, would not have been possible. This latter point was reinforced more explicitly through the involvement of the Programme Directors and Programme Leaders in the design of the academic literacy Teaching and Learning Plan. Furthermore the inclusion of Senior Management recognises not only the importance of strategic support in driving through the initiatives, but also the importance of ensuring inclusivity and dissemination of findings. This, in turn, contributes to operational support and feedback from academic colleagues.

An analysis of the attendance figures for the academic literacy programme following the implementation of the CEM model revealed that student attendance had increased threefold (Table 1(a) and (b)).

**Table 1(a): Attendance statistics (before CEM)**

Week Number:	Semester 1			Semester 2		
	2	7	11	2	7	10/11
Group 1	10	6	4	17	16	0
Group 2	25	10	4	18	16	0
Group 3	18	13	11	12	13	3
Group 4	25	13	8	8	4	3
TOTALS	78	42	27	55	49	6

**Table 1(b) Attendance statistics (post CEM)**

Week Number:	Semester 1			Semester 2		
	2	7	11	2	7	10/11
Group 1	40	31	25	19	12	6
Group 2	47	33	29	43	17	8
Group 3	67	64	50	43	38	33
Group 4	50	42	42	16	24	14
Group 5	46	42	41	37	40	16
TOTALS	250	212	187	158	131	71

Data from student focus groups and questionnaires indicated that students understood the relevance of the programme and transferability of the academic literacy skills to other modules.

As illustrated in the following quotes from the focus groups:

*"We're being briefed the detail of things, how this should be done, how the assignments have to be done and everything is explained."*

(Chinese student)

*"I learned more from the English session, more than my expectation. I thought skills or report writing skills I should learn from my (business) tutor. "*

(Thai student)

Students commented on the transferability of the skills they were learning on academic literacy, despite the teaching context being based on only two of their degree modules:

*"It's quite relevant to other subjects because we can totally understand how to go on with that exactly. It really helps us with writing assignments."*

(Egyptian student)

*"This is to inform to you that I am a student of your ASk seminar group. I got 74 marks in my Developing self assignment. This all because of your guidance and support I am able to get this much marks. Thanks a lot for helping me and making this assignment for distinction level without your support and guidance I can't imagine this much marks."*

(Indian student)

Since its adoption in Newcastle Business School postgraduate programmes, the CEM model has shown that it can allow for different levels of contextualisation in other Schools. For example in the school of Computing Engineering and Information Sciences (CEIS), it was thought appropriate to link academic literacy to two existing postgraduate modules, Research Methods and Project Management Studies. The academic literacy teaching and learning plan mirrors the content of these two modules. Academic literacy is presented to students as an integral part of the modules and the academic literacy tutor is embedded in the module teams and is involved in the formative assessment.

In CEIS, in the undergraduate area, the nature of the linguistic challenges facing direct entry third year students led to academic literacy being developed as a 10 credit module, Academic Communication. The CEIS undergraduate Programme Director was able to influence the content of the module and the nature of the assessment.

In Newcastle Business School's undergraduate portfolio a review of all first year programmes in 07-08 led to the introduction of a series of core modules. It has been possible for the academic literacy tutor to analyse the content of three core modules, identify key learning points that can be supported by academic literacy and tailor the academic literacy Teaching and Learning Plan to meet the needs of students to build on their existing academic literacy skills. The final academic literacy Teaching and Learning Plan was the result of cooperation between the academic literacy tutor and Newcastle Business School undergraduate Programme directors, leaders and module tutors.

In Schools with relatively small numbers of international students, such as Applied Sciences, it is not always possible to group those students in year groups or programme groups for

academic literacy. It can also be difficult to identify a common core module and this has meant that in these cases the context of academic literacy teaching remains generic. However the communication between the academic literacy tutor and the subject specialists, implied in the CEM model, does allow the subject specialists to inform the academic literacy tutor of key areas which need support and to offer a context for some but not all of the academic literacy teaching and learning materials. For cases where the context of academic literacy is not transparently connected to a single module, embedding and mapping become even more important if the students are to recognise the validity of the academic literacy programme for their studies.

### **Strategic Framework**

Having established the CEM model to support the operational delivery of academic literacy, the next stage was to develop a framework which could be used to successfully transfer and consolidate the practice from these exemplars both within Newcastle Business School as a whole and for dissemination of the model to other Schools. It was also considered important to provide a strategic underpinning of the CEM model, so that any future staffing changes would not impact negatively on academic literacy delivery.

The pivotal tangible area of policy refers to using recognised academic learning and teaching processes as vehicles for ensuring Contextualisation, Embedding and Mapping.

Table 3 illustrates the framework and its seven levels.

Level 1 recognises that the responsibility for resourcing academic literacy within Newcastle Business School lies with both the Head of the English Language Centre and the Newcastle Business School Postgraduate Associate Dean. At Level 2, the framework involves the academic literacy tutor as a member of the School's Learning and Teaching Committee. This is considered essential to ensure that at a strategic level the academic literacy tutor can feed back on teaching and learning issues from both a language and study skills perspective. The inclusion of the academic literacy tutor in the School's Learning and Teaching Committee ensures recognition of the model within Teaching and Learning Policy, combined with explicit references within documentation. Operationally the framework at this level allows for cooperation between the academic literacy tutor and the Newcastle Business School Programme Director for E Learning.

At Level 3, the framework supports meetings between the Programme Director for Student Services and the Master's Dissertation and ensures that the academic literacy tutor is kept aware of any changes in the context of the Dissertation guidance teaching.

Level 4 allows for formal reports from the academic literacy tutor to Programme Directors to ensure that the experience of the academic literacy tutor can contribute to the development and design of programmes. Operationally the academic literacy tutor will become part of the annual review process reporting initial planning, updating and final review.

**Table 3: Newcastle Business School Strategic Framework for CEM model Integration.**

<b>Contact</b>	<b>Context</b>
Level 1: Head English Learning Centre & Associate Dean.	Establishing staff resource
Level 2: Academic literacy tutor and Newcastle Business School Teaching & Learning Committee & Academic literacy tutor.  Programme Director for ELearning	Strategic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting Teaching &amp; Learning policy</li> <li>• Definition of Academic literacy role</li> <li>• Explicit in Newcastle Business School programme documentation</li> </ul> Operational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blackboard sites</li> <li>• Podcasts, vodcasts</li> </ul>
Level 3: Academic literacy Tutor & Programme Director for Student Services & Masters Dissertation Co-ordinator)	Operational detail
Level 4: Academic literacy tutor & Programme Director team	Operational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting 3 x semester inform, update and reviewing</li> </ul> Strategic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusivity</li> <li>• Contributing to development and design of programmes</li> </ul>
Level 5: Academic literacy tutor & Programme. Leader team	Operational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting 3 x semester inform, update and reviewing</li> </ul>
Level 6: Academic literacy & Module Tutor/s	Strategic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct participation in module team meetings to inform and advise</li> </ul> Operational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shadowing staff</li> <li>• Access to Blackboard sites</li> <li>• Ongoing development of teaching and learning materials</li> </ul>
Level 7: Administration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic literacy administrator</li> <li>• Programme Committees</li> <li>• Student representatives</li> <li>• Module feedback questions.</li> </ul>	Strategic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior administration support</li> <li>• Dedicated Academic literacy administrator</li> </ul> Operational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Briefing of student representatives</li> <li>• Specific agenda item Programme Committees</li> <li>• Establishing specific Academic literacy module questionnaire feedback form</li> <li>• Schedule of meetings and reports for Academic literacy tutor</li> </ul>

Levels 5 and 6 relate to the intangible areas of team involvement and communication. Essentially, as identified with the CEM model, these elements are critical to ensure the policy is acted upon and there is support for the establishment of key communication channels and developing team commitment and participation. At Level 5 and 6 of the framework the

academic literacy tutor can participate in discussions with Programme Leaders and key Module tutors on programme and module review, as well as design and development meetings for new initiatives. Thus the academic literacy tutor will be informed of developments in modules that can impact on contextualised academic literacy teaching and learning materials.

Level 7 is the role of the Administration where the research has shown strategically the need for support not just at an academic level but also via the administrative staff with the development of a designated academic literacy administrator. Operationally the model is supported through briefing of student representatives, a standard agenda item on programme committee meetings, specific module feedback questionnaire and finally a recognised schedule of feedback and reports from the academic literacy tutor.

## **Conclusion**

This paper presents a critique of an approach to the design and delivery of in-sessional academic literacy programmes in response to the increasing number of postgraduate international students entering Newcastle Business School. In the current climate of expanding numbers of international students in the university, Newcastle Business School has had to respond to varying language and learning skills. The critique of past practice and preliminary research has identified the key areas of Contextualisation, Embedding and Mapping as emerging issues in providing quality of provision at an academic level, whilst ensuring participation and 'added value' for the student. From the associated definition and discussion on how to incorporate these into the academic experience, these three areas emerged as critical in the future planning and development of the academic literacy programme.

The resulting CEM model (See Figure 1) promotes and sustains collaboration between academic literacy tutors and subject specialists in order to increase the learning opportunities for the students. As previously discussed, much research has focused on pre-sessional programmes, which run prior to commencing full time study (Dudley-Evans, 1998). This research attempts to contribute to the gap identified in existing research by facilitating the crossing of boundaries between academic literacy and subject tutors encouraging inclusivity and synergy.

As a result of implementing the CEM model in Newcastle Business School, all students are presented with a clearer link between their academic literacy programme and their subject specific modules.

The effort to embed the academic literacy programme into the postgraduate programme area has met with considerable success. The academic literacy tutor is now perceived as part of the Business School academic team attending relevant meetings and providing regular feedback through recognised communication channels.

Finally, mapping the academic literacy programme to students' needs involves delivering the support at the best time in the academic year to meet the needs of international students. The research shows that what is required is regular delivery of the programme for the full academic year with focused support when students are working actively on their research.

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Whilst the paper has identified key areas to address in understanding the issues of delivering academic literacy support to postgraduate international students, elements of the CEM model are already being applied at undergraduate level and within other schools at Northumbria. The findings continue to inform pedagogic debate relating to the design of the postgraduate curriculum in Newcastle Business School with changes to the e-learning portal, teaching and learning plans and the development of podcasts and vodcasts. Acknowledging the relevance of the findings within Newcastle Business School the research is ongoing. In academic year 2009-2010, further research will be undertaken to investigate the extent of the implementation of the model in other Schools at Northumbria University. In addition, collaborative research will be undertaken with universities in the UK, Australia and New Zealand with the aim of evaluating the transferability of the model to other target institutions.

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