

Coventry online writing lab JISC final report

Ganobcsik-Williams, L.

Published version deposited in CURVE March 2011

Original citation & hyperlink:

Ganobcsik-Williams, L. (2011) Coventry online writing lab JISC final report. JISC.

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearning/cowlfinalreport.pdf>

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JISC Final Report

Project Information			
Project Hashtag	#cddcowl		
Project Title	Coventry Online Writing Lab		
Project Acronym	COWL		
Start Date	1 st November 2008	End Date	31 st October 2010
Lead Institution	Coventry University		
Project Director	Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams		
Project Manager	Penny Gilchrist		
Contact email	p.gilchrist@coventry.ac.uk		
Partner Institutions	n/a		
Project Web URL	COWL Project URL: http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl URL for the Coventry Online Writing Lab component of the Centre for Academic Writing website: http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/caw/Pages/COWL.aspx		
Programme Name	JISC Capital Programme: Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology		
Programme Manager	Lisa Gray		

Document Information			
Author(s)	Author: Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, Project Director (with input from: Penny Gilchrist, Project Manager; Dr. Mary Deane, John Tutchings, and Dr. Christine Broughan, workpackage leaders; and Ray Summers, CAW Learning Technologist).		
Project Role(s)			
Date	14 th January 2011	Filename	COWL Project Final Report January 2011
URL	The final report will be uploaded to the COWL Project website (http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl)		
Access	This report is for general dissemination		

Document History		
Version	Date	Comments
1.0	21.11.10	Version 1 COWL Project Final Report prepared by LG-W
2.0	14.1.11	Version 2 COWL Project Final Report prepared by LG-W

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1. Acknowledgements

The Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) Project was funded by JISC as part of its 'Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology' Programme. The project was led by the Centre for Academic Writing at Coventry University, in collaboration with staff based in Coventry University's e-Learning Unit (eLU), Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE), Student Services, Languages Centre, Faculty of Engineering and Computing (FEC), and the departments of Paramedics and Economics, Finance and Accounting.

The COWL Project benefited from feedback offered by its Steering Group, comprising stakeholders from across Coventry University as well as Brett Lucas of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) English Subject Centre; Dr. Colleen McKenna, expert in Academic Literacies and online learning from the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching, University College London; and the COWL Project's 'Critical Friend', Professor Peter Hartley, Director of the Centre for Academic Practice at the University of Bradford.

2. Report Summary

2.1 Project Overview

It is increasingly recognised that university students benefit from explicit teaching in the modes and conventions of scholarly writing. It is also clear that academics require support in cascading the teaching of writing into modules and degree courses.

The Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) Project has enabled the creation of an online writing centre component to enhance and extend the work of the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) at Coventry University. Since 2004, CAW has utilised a highly successful face-to-face writing consultation model with students and staff. The challenges for CAW, as for all writing centres and writing support programmes, were that this provision was not scalable and that it was not accessible to distance-learners or to staff working remotely. The construction of CAW's online writing centre, COWL, has enabled the development of a seamless teaching and learning environment cross-housed on the CAW website and on the University's e-learning platform (Moodle). As COWL is rolled out for use across the institution, the goal is for academics to be able to utilise the COWL environment with their students as well as for students to book and engage in online writing tutorials with Academic Writing Tutors at CAW.

The overall achievements of the COWL Project have been to appraise the provision of online writing tutoring in UK universities and elsewhere and to develop an integrated platform of technologically-enhanced writing support mechanisms, trialled at Coventry University and made available for use and further evaluation at other Higher Education institutions.

2.2 Project Outputs

- **COWL Project website** (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>) housing documents and information related to the COWL project. Access is public.
- **Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) website** that is part of the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) website (<http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/caw/Pages/COWL.aspx>). Access is public but CAW writing support services are restricted to Coventry University students and staff, and to external consultancy.

- **COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform** in Moodle that will enable Coventry University students to book online tutorials, upload assignment briefs and drafts, connect to their online tutorial sessions, and access post-tutorial feedback uploaded by Academic Writing Tutors (or by Tutors/Lecturers in the disciplines). Access is limited to Coventry University students and staff but screenshots and information about the platform will appear in *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*. Guest viewing access may be granted on request.
- **The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring** for institutions seeking to establish Online Writing Labs (OWLs) or systems for offering online writing tutoring. Aimed at university managers, academics, writing centre/writing development professionals, writing tutors, and administrators, this brief, updatable guide will discuss the concept, challenges and goals of online writing tutoring: explaining COWL as an exemplar system, outlining an implementation strategy based on the COWL model, and discussing common types of issues that the COWL project team encountered and the pedagogy and technology choices that were made. The *Guide* will supply screenshots (e.g. of the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform), handouts, and other Open Educational Resources to be used and re-used at other institutions. The *Guide* will be housed in Coventry University's open-access CURVE digital repository. There will be a link to it from the COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>) and from the main COWL website (<http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/caw/Pages/COWL.aspx>).
- **Exemplar institution-wide roll-out plan for online writing tutoring provision** The roll-out plan, including a staged timeline for CAW to incorporate COWL fully as a new aspect of its provision, was drawn up by the COWL Project Director/Head of CAW and the COWL Project Manager/CAW Centre Co-ordinator, and agreed by Senior Management (the Coventry University Librarian) and the COWL Steering Group in September 2010. The roll-out plan appears on the COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>).
- **User guidance on online writing tutorials for students, Academic Writing Tutors/Academics in the Disciplines, and COWL Administrators** has been developed. Initial guidance for the COWL trials, on using MegaMeeting web-conferencing software and an in-house asynchronous system coupled with Riffly audio-feedback software, was created by Dr. Anne Dickinson and Clive Teed (eLU) and is available on the COWL Project website <http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>. Although this guidance has been superseded, it is useful for showing how this software can be used to conduct online writing tutorials and for its expert presentation of user guidance. The current user guidance, on using Skype/Mikogo and Microsoft Word's 'track changes', 'comments', and 'audio comment' facilities, was created by Ray Summers (CAW Learning Technologist) and Dr. Mark Childs (Teaching Fellow, FEC) and is housed in the CURVE repository. Coventry University students and staff can access this guidance on the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform and it will be available publicly via *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*.
- **Session plans and materials for a training course for Academic Writing Tutors on online writing tutoring techniques and pedagogies** were developed by Dr. Mary Deane (Senior Lecturer, CAW), Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams (Head of CAW), and Dr. Dimitar Angelov (Academic Writing Tutor, CAW). They delivered the 6-week course to the Academic Writing Tutors at CAW in Spring and Autumn 2010, with technical support from Ray Summers, the Library IT Technician, and the University's e-learning 'Flying Squad' (eLU). These materials are available publicly in *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*.

- **Session plans and materials for Faculty-based workshops on working with students' writing online** are being developed by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, Dr. Mary Deane and Dr. Mark Childs for delivery in 2011. These materials will be available publicly in *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*.
- **The 'COWL Project Review of the Origins and Current Practices of Online Writing Labs (OWLs) and Online Writing Support'** was researched and written by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams in February 2009. This review is publicly available on the COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>) and will inform the introduction to *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*.
- **Materials to illustrate and exemplify new practices introduced by COWL** (e.g. screenshots of online writing tutorials and resources, photos and videos of staff and students using these materials, writing tutorial record sheets, and examples of student writing that have been commented on synchronously and asynchronously) are under development and will be made part of *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*, the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform, the COWL website (<http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/caw/Pages/COWL.aspx>), and the COWL Project Website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>).
- **Academic Writing learning and teaching resources** (e.g. updated CU Harvard Referencing Style resources). These CAW/COWL-produced Open Educational Resources (OERs) have been uploaded onto Coventry University's CURVE open-access repository and links will be provided from the main COWL website (<http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/caw/Pages/COWL.aspx>). A FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) section on CAW/COWL/online writing tutorials, developed as part of the COWL Project, will also be uploaded.
- **COWL Project documents** including the COWL Project Bid (written by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams and Professor David Morris (Director, eLU)), the *COWL Project Plan* (written by Sharon Simkiss (CSHE), Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams and Professor David Morris), the September 2009 and March 2010 *COWL Project Interim Reports* and the *COWL Project Final Report* (written by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams), the *COWL Evaluation Plan* (written by Dr. Christine Broughan (CSHE/Student Services)), the *COWL Project Pedagogic Approaches Report* (written by Dr. Mary Deane and Billy Brick, (Manager, Languages Centre)), the *Revised COWL Pedagogic Tools Report* (written by Dr. Mark Childs and Dr. Mary Deane), the *Synopsis of Discussion: COWL Project Pre-Pilots* (written by Dr. Mary Deane), a PowerPoint presentation on online writing peer review, survey questions asked of all students who took part in the COWL trials and a summary of students' responses, a summary of student data collected through AccuTrack (CAW's electronic record-keeping system), a summary of COWL Project interview data, and a summary of data collected via a 'COWL Questionnaire for Writing Development/Writing Centre Professionals' will be available publicly on the COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>). Elements of these documents and materials will be integrated into *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*. Some will appear on the COWL project page in the JISC Design Studio.
- **Three conceptual maps** of CAW's model of providing whole-university writing development and the impact of the COWL project on transforming the CAW model. These maps have replaced two earlier maps on the COWL Project website and are entitled: 'The Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) Model and Coventry University Student Journey in accessing Academic Writing Support at CAW (2004-2010)'; '*Anticipated* Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) Project Enhancements to the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW)

Model of Academic Writing Support'; and the Coventry University Student Journey in accessing COWL (from 2010-11), and 'Future-Gaze Map of the Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) and Coventry University Student Journey in accessing Academic Writing Support via COWL'. The maps were conceptualised by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams with input from the COWL project team and Steering Group. The maps are on the COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>) and on the COWL page of the JISC Design Studio (<https://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/COWL-Project>).

- **Promotional materials and activities** including a COWL Project flyer, three videos, and a poster conceptualising the COWL Project, were created by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams and Ray Summers, and involved John Tutchings (eLU), and Dr. Dimitar Angelov and John Morley (Academic Writing Tutor, CAW). The videos are on the COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl/>), the COWL page of the JISC Design Studio (<https://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/COWL-Project>), and YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ap9YnpciPN0>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9k0V940R4s>, and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kqA7QwAMFI>). The flyer was disseminated at Academic Writing conferences in 2009 and 2010. Promotional articles are planned for submission to HEA Subject Centre newsletters.
- **Presentations at academic conferences and other events** relating to COWL thus far include:

Ganobcsik-Williams, L. (2011) 'Writing Development for Students and Staff: Face-to-Face and Online'. Invited Talk. 11th Learning and Teaching Symposium: 'Writing Development in Higher Education'. Edge Hill University, England

Thompson, B., Childs, M. et al. (2011) 'Labor in, and of, the Digital Humanities' roundtable session for the Committee on Professional Rights and Responsibilities and the Committee on Information Technology. Dr. Mark Childs will present on COWL findings regarding issues involved with including staff and students in the implementation of new e-learning technologies. January, Los Angeles, California. <http://www.mla.org/convention>

Ganobcsik-Williams, L. and Gilchrist, P. (2010) 'COWL: The Coventry Online Writing Lab'. JISC Experts Meeting, Birmingham, England, 20th October

Patalong, S. (2010). 'Skills for Success: Study Skills in Higher Education', University College and Research Libraries Cilip (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) East Midlands event 'Skills for Success! Study Skills in Higher Education', University of Lincoln, England, 8 June. PowerPoint available at: <http://www.slideshare.net/marienicholson1/ucr-east-midlands-event-slides-8th-june-2010-skills-for-success-study-skills-in-higher-education-sally-patalong>

Ganobcsik-Williams, L. (2010) 'The Role of the Writing Centre in Developing Academic Writing as a Key Competence for University Students and Staff'. Invited Keynote, Das Forum Wissenschaftliches Schreiben/The Forum Academic Writing, Zurich University of Teacher Education (PH Zurich), Switzerland 10-11 June. PowerPoint may be made available at <http://www.phzh.ch/content-n1260-sD.html>

Ryan, L., Cleary, L., O'Sullivan, I., Deane, M., Childers, P., Daniels, S. and Nichols, P. (2010) 'WAC/WID and the Writing Center: Collaborating Internationally to Address Concerns', European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) Conference, the American University of Paris, France, 24-28th May

http://www.aup.edu/news/special_events/ewca2010_abstracts.htm#WAC/WID and the
[Writing Center: Collaborating Internationally to Address Concerns](#)

Ganobcsik-Williams, L. and Broughan, C. (2009) 'Creating and Evaluating Online Writing Support: The Coventry Online Writing Lab ('COWL') Project', European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW) 2009, Coventry University, England
<http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/eataw2009/Documents/EATAW%20B%20of%20A%20FINAL.pdf>

- **Publications** relating to COWL thus far include:

Ganobcsik-Williams, L. (forthcoming 2011) 'The Writing Centre as a Locus for WiD, WAC and Whole-Institution Writing Provision' in Mary Deane and Peter O'Neill, eds. *Writing in the Disciplines*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, page numbers tbc.

Ganobcsik-Williams, L. and Broughan, C. (forthcoming 2011) 'Using the "Balanced Scorecard" Method to Evaluate Writing Centre Provision: a Case Study of the Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) Project', submitted for consideration to *The Journal of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing*.

Ganobcsik-Williams, L. (2010) 'Academic Writing in Higher Education: A Brief Overview'. *Research Intelligence* (British Educational Research Association)

- **Bids for further projects, events and fellowships** related to COWL thus far include:

A bid to give a seminar and write a briefing paper entitled 'Giving Effective Feedback on Student Writing: Face-to-face and Online' was submitted by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams to the HEA 'Seminar Series 2011 on Assessment and Feedback' funding call in November 2010. (Unsuccessful)

An application for a SCORE (Support Centre for Open Resources in Education) Fellowship, including a residential course in developing Open Educational Resources (OERs) at the Open University, was submitted by Sally Patalong (COWL Steering Group Member) in Autumn 2010. (Successful)

A proposal to write a case study on COWL and the use of online writing tutorials for a new JISC guide to innovative practice in a digital age was submitted by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams in October 2010. (Unsuccessful)

A 'COWL 2' Project Bid for further development of the Coventry Online Writing Lab resource was submitted by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams to JISC's 'OER Collections' funding call in June 2010. (Unsuccessful)

2.3 Impact and Benefits to the Community

The COWL Project has transformed the ability of the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) to provide writing development to students at Coventry University. The project has enabled CAW staff to work with colleagues and stakeholders from across the University, as well as with external experts in writing development and online learning, to develop an online platform answering the two key writing support challenges facing CAW and Coventry University: *access to* and *scalability of* writing support services.

Because these challenges are faced by all universities and colleges, and by all writing centres and writing programmes, the benefits of the COWL model are widely applicable and

its impact will be widespread. As a member of staff at a UK university who learned about the project through COWL dissemination activities has commented, 'I think you will find that the more people are made aware of the project, the more interest there will be in it and in replicating online writing tutoring elsewhere' (Shields 2010).

Students at Coventry University now have access to personalised online Academic Writing support as a result of the COWL Project. The project has also enhanced the professional skills of writing centre staff. Through the COWL Project, a workable model of 'whole institution' writing support has been developed and made available to the sector.

2.4 Main Lessons Learnt

The main lessons learnt from the COWL Project are:

- Online writing support is a focus of Academic Writing pedagogy and scholarship internationally,
- Most students who took part in the COWL online tutoring trials found online writing tutoring to be efficient and said that as a result of the tutorial they felt more confident about writing at university,
- Online writing tutoring can be utilised not only by students and writing centre tutors, but also by subject academics with their students and as a student peer review tool,
- Students, writing tutors and academics in the disciplines require clear guidance for engaging in online writing tutorials,
- Writing tutors and academics need training and ongoing support in conducting online writing tutorials,
- Technologies for online writing tutoring and other types of online writing engagement need to be simple and deployable,
- Technologies need to be housed on a single platform or integrated seamlessly,
- Technologies need to be stable and supported by one's institution as fully as possible,
- Institutional roll-out plans for online writing support need to be staged,
- The perspectives and expectations of all stakeholders must be taken into account when shaping online writing provision,
- The creation of online writing support facilities will have an effect on staff members' job roles and responsibilities.

3. Main Body of Report

3.1 What did you do? (Methodology)

Writing development for all students is a growing concept across the UK higher education sector. Teachers, tutors and researchers of Academic Writing have focused on student writing in the UK context since the 1990s (Ganobcsik-Williams 2006: pp. xxi-xxvi), but in the

early years of the twenty-first century the movement to teach and research Academic Writing has expanded as educational stakeholders have realised the benefits that university students gain from explicit teaching in writing. As a result, writing scholars and other university staff increasingly are working together to formulate 'whole-institution' strategies to support student writers (Ganobcsik-Williams 2004: 37-39;¹ Ganobcsik-Williams 2009b). The Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) Project, led by the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) at Coventry University, is an integral part of such a strategy.

Project Background and Context

A leading centre for Academic Writing teaching and research, CAW was established at Coventry University in 2004. Within the first few years of its operation, CAW staff agreed a three-pronged mission statement to enable the centre to offer comprehensive writing support to students and staff:

CAW is an innovative teaching and research centre whose mission is to enable students at Coventry University to become independent writers, and to equip academic staff in all disciplines to achieve their full potential as authors and teachers of scholarly writing. (CAW Mission <http://www.coventry.ac.uk/cu/caw>)

In fulfilment of these whole-university writing development goals, CAW offers many different types of writing support, including Academic Writing modules, writing workshops for undergraduates and postgraduates, 'Protected Writing Time' and Scholarly Writing Retreats for academics to work on publications, and a 'Writing in the Disciplines' (WiD) programme through which CAW lecturers collaborate with academics to cascade the teaching of writing within a range of disciplines.

CAW's hallmark activity—and the hallmark activity of writing centres worldwide—is the individualised writing tutorial. As noted in the research review undertaken for the COWL Project:

The classic writing centre model is that of a central unit offering individualised tutorials in writing, open to all students and accessible to students at the point of need when writing or preparing to write coursework assignments. Philosophically, writing centres are intellectual, student-centred spaces, with staff who are able to advise students on the mechanics of writing (e.g. spelling, punctuation and grammar) but who are not limited to this function (North 1984). Indeed, the ethos of the writing centre model is that students mature in their knowledge and independence as academic writers through collaborative discussion with a writing tutor and through opportunities to work in guided ways on writing processes and assignment structures (Lunsford 1991). (Ganobcsik-Williams 2009a: 1)

In keeping with its three-fold mission, CAW has extended the individualised writing tutorial between students and CAW's Academic Writing Tutors, to also offer individualised consultations between CAW lecturers and academic staff in the disciplines on writing for publication and on teaching writing (Figure 1). As a further iteration of the writing

¹ On comprehensive institutional strategies for writing development, also see Dai Hounsell's keynote address, 'Developing Students' Writing Expertise: Strategic and Institutional Dimensions', given at the 2008 Writing Development in Higher Education (WDHE) conference: <http://www.writenow.ac.uk/wdhe/presentation/Hounsell.pdf> and <http://www.writenow.ac.uk/wdhe/wdhe2008.html>; and Sally Mitchell's keynote address "'Now you don't see it; now you do": Writing Made Visible in the University', given at the 2009 European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW) conference <http://www.coventry.ac.uk/eataw2009/Pages/KeynoteSpeakers.aspx>.

consultation, one key strategy that CAW lecturers offer colleagues for teaching writing in any module across the University is student peer review.



Figure 1. CAW Academic Writing Tutor holding face-to-face writing consultation with a student OR CAW Lecturer holding face-to-face writing consultation with an academic

There is research on the effects of writing tutoring itself, as well as an extensive body of literature on teaching Writing in the Disciplines (WiD)/ Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and on peer review of writing within the field of Composition and Rhetoric in the United States (e.g. Anson 2001; Monroe 2003; Harris 1986; Gillespie and Learner 2003). There is also a growing body of literature on these topics in the field of Academic Writing in the UK and internationally (e.g. Borg and Deane 2011, Deane 2009, Deane 2008). CAW lecturers and Academic Writing Tutors are firmly involved in writing development, both as practitioners who are learning from and as researchers who are contributing to this scholarship.

A major challenge for CAW and its staff, however, is that we now need to extend CAW in a different way, to meet the needs of 'twenty-first century' learners. In 2008, we were given the opportunity to articulate what is effectively a sector-wide challenge in our COWL Project research proposal to JISC:

A key challenge faced by universities in the 21st century is the need to make writing support appropriate to a more flexible learning and teaching environment. Even as universities have begun to address the current demand for student writing support, it is clear that university managers and academics will have to consider how this provision is going to be made available to meet the requirements of a very different type of learner. Support for learning will have to be provided in ways that can be accessed at the point of need by students who are geographically dispersed and studying at different times. [. . .] In short, universities need to transform the delivery of academic writing support through technology in order to reach and help all student groups. (Ganobcsik-Williams and Morris 2008: 1)

In local terms, this means that while CAW's current provision is focused on a traditional face-to-face model serving campus-based students, the University has increasing numbers of non-campus based students (e.g. on distance, blended, and work-based learning programmes). A key effect of this type of learning experience is that students may expect more flexible and personalised learning that can provide more choice in how, where and when they study.

In facing this challenge, CAW staff proposed that the fundamental way in which CAW services need to be transformed is to take CAW online—not to replace, but to extend CAW's highly-valued on-campus writing support services. Our starting premise for COWL, therefore, was that many students would welcome the accessibility of online writing tutorials and other writing resources. We also sought to make CAW's writing development opportunities more scalable, by empowering academics in the disciplines to offer academic writing support through using online writing tutorials with their students.

Project Aims and Objectives

The aim of the COWL Project has been to develop an integrated platform of technologically-enhanced writing support mechanisms for direct implementation at Coventry University and as a model for other universities to utilise. An important function of COWL as a project has been to appraise the existing provision of online writing tutoring and support in UK universities and elsewhere, to develop and trial the platform, and to make it available for use and further evaluation at other institutions. Although 'TELE' (Technology Enhanced Learning Environment) is the most accurate term for the learning and teaching environment that the COWL Project has aimed to create, the project team chose to use the term 'OWL' (Online Writing Lab) because 'OWL' is already an established name internationally for electronic writing centre work (Parkinson 2008).

The major objectives of the COWL Project were to:

- Investigate and learn from experience of teaching Academic Writing skills in other countries,
- Explore the affordances/appropriateness of existing e-learning tools, whether currently used to support Academic Writing or in other curriculum areas, that can be customised for online tutoring of Academic Writing at Coventry University and be re-used elsewhere,
- Deploy new technologies imaginatively in the area of Academic Writing,
- Develop new pedagogical models for Academic Writing,
- Develop new approaches to exploit social software tools for collaborative learning in the Academic Writing domain,
- Help discipline-based teaching staff to develop the teaching skills to, in turn, help their own students develop skill and confidence in writing,
- Move towards more collaborative group teaching approaches, both in face-to-face environments and online.

These aims and objectives remained constant throughout the project, except for one; the project team did not attempt to develop new approaches to using social software tools to enhance Academic Writing support because, through JISC's AWESOME Dissertation project (<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/usersandinnovation/awesome.aspx>), members of the project team had already researched and helped to produce a successful example of using a social software environment to support the writing of third-year dissertation students. At the start of the COWL project we considered that we might develop writing provision within a social software environment, but as the project took shape we decided to explore another type of technologically-enhanced writing support mechanism by adapting online conferencing software for the teaching of writing.

How the Project was Carried Out

Work on the COWL Project was carried out between November 2008-October 2010. The project was divided into seven workpackages:

- WP1: Review current practices
- WP2: Develop new curriculum delivery plan
- WP3: Develop new pedagogic approaches
- WP4: Integrations and adaptations of new technologies and tools
- WP5: Pilot implementation
- WP6: Embedding new practices across the University
- WP7: Evaluation

The project team adhered to the activities and milestones laid out in the workpackages, and progress reports were included in the *COWL Project Plan* and in the project's interim reports.

At the first meeting of the COWL Project Board (comprising the Project Director, Project Manager, and workpackage leaders) in November 2008, it was agreed that the project would be organised into three main phases: project definition, trialling, and initial implementation. As the project evolved throughout the two-year period, however, the work fell naturally into the following six phases:

- project definition
- research preparation
- research trials
- analysis and consolidation
- revision and redevelopment
- roll-out and dissemination

The remainder of this section will discuss how the project was carried out in terms of these six phases and the methodology the project team followed, including evaluation activities, technical implementations, and stakeholder engagement.

Phase 1: Project definition (November 2008-February 2009) Writing development practice at Coventry University, elsewhere in the UK and overseas was reviewed during this phase (Ganobcsik-Williams 2009a). Focusing on online writing support, this research and scholarship laid a basis for the project team to refine and clarify the project vision and to complete the full project plan.

In the first three months, the project's technology, pedagogy and evaluation workpackage teams; the project team; and the Project Board held a series of meetings. The COWL Project Steering Group was also formed and met for the first time. The Steering Group was set up to ensure wider stakeholder input into the project, and was made up of a range of project stakeholders, including the Director of the e-Learning Unit (Chair), nominees of the four Deans, the University Librarian, the Director of Student Services, Professor Hilary Nesi of the English Department, CAW Academic Writing Lecturers and Tutors, and two external experts: Brett Lucas of the HEA English Subject Centre and Dr. Colleen McKenna, an expert in Academic Literacies and online learning from University College London.

These meetings enabled the project team to decide the aims and activities that would be achievable within the COWL Project. The first iteration of maps detailing the CAW model of writing support and the Coventry University student journey in accessing this support (2004-2010) and the anticipated COWL Project enhancements to the CAW model and the student journey in accessing writing support from 2010-2011 were developed (Figures 2 and 3).

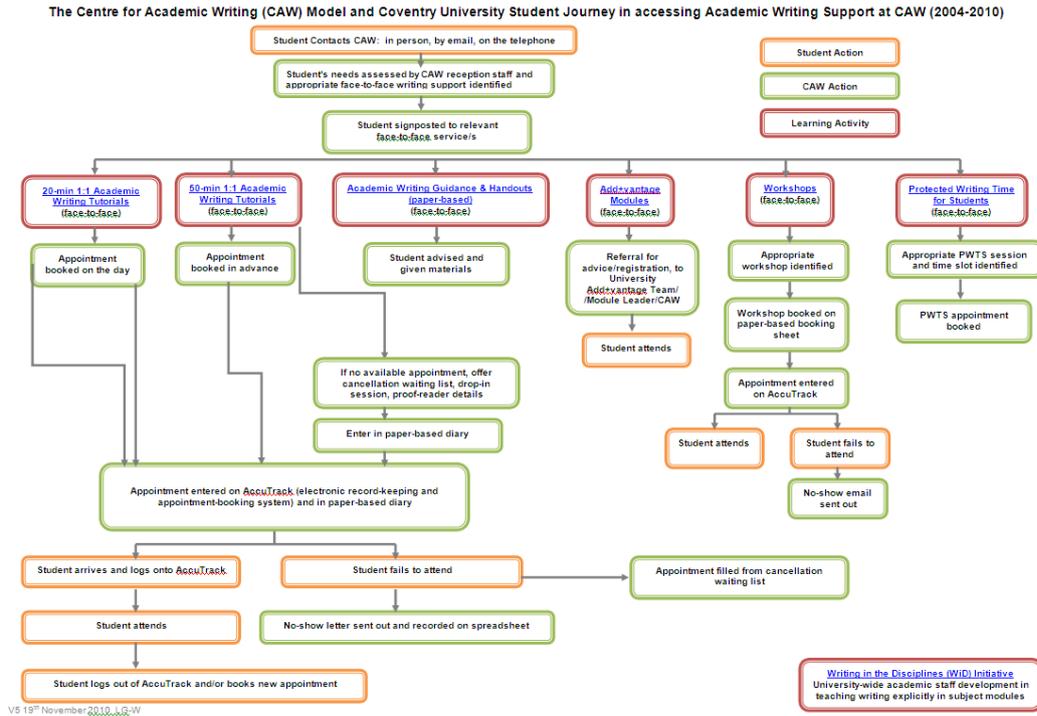


Figure 2. The CAW Model and Coventry University Student Journey in Accessing Academic Writing Support at CAW (2004-2010)

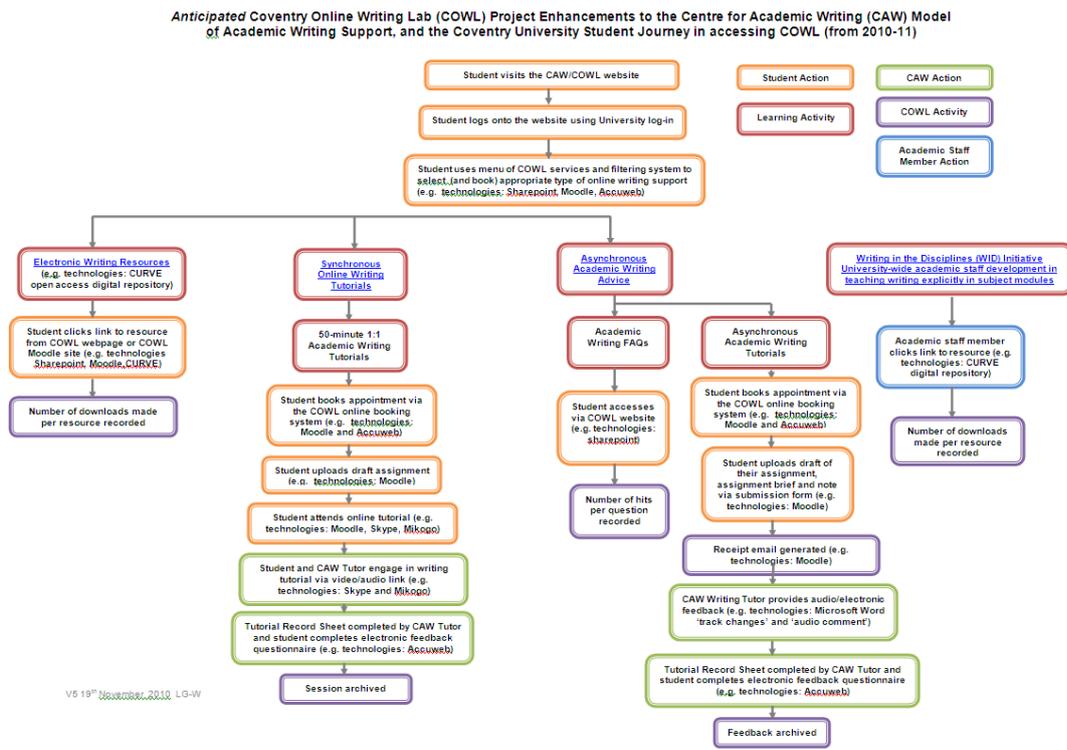


Figure 3. Anticipated COWL Project Enhancements to the CAW Model of Academic Writing Support, and the Coventry University Student Journey in accessing COWL (from 2010-11)

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC), a strategic management tool that encourages the connectedness of key organisational elements through the exploration of cause-and-effect relationships (Kaplan and Norton 1992), was also introduced early in the COWL Project's lifecycle. The project team and Steering Group used the BSC as a framework for keeping the project's priorities and developments 'in balance' throughout the project.

Balanced Scorecard: Introducing COWL into CAW

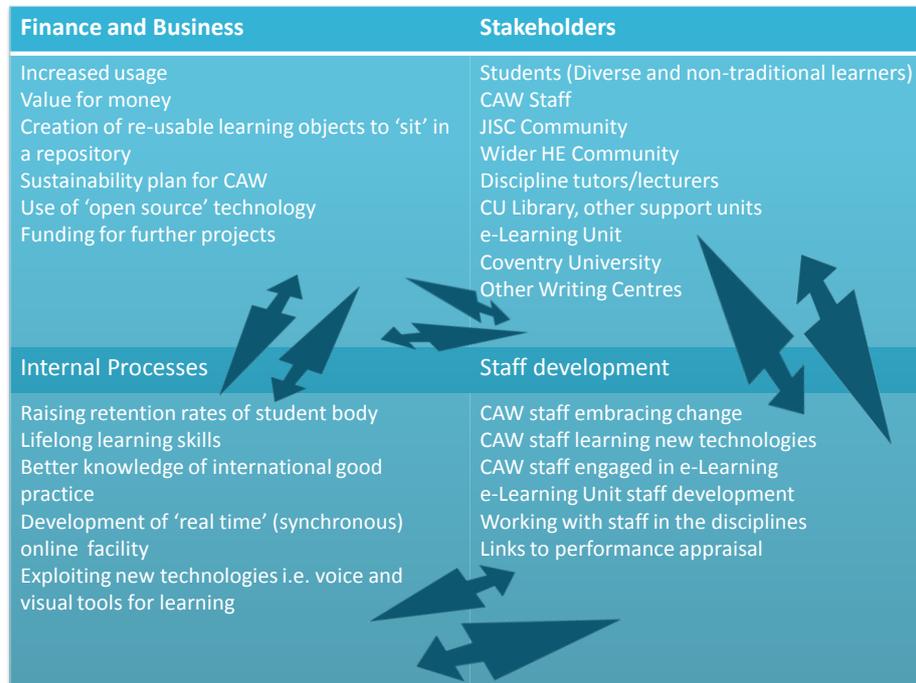


Figure 4. Balanced Scorecard: Introducing COWL into CAW

In applying the BSC approach to COWL, the project team realised the complex nature of the writing centre's position in developing viable services. Using the BSC helped us to focus, for example, on the perspectives brought by different stakeholders, internal and externally-driven University processes, CAW and COWL's own staff development remit, and allocated budgets (Figure 4). The COWL Project evaluation team used the BSC as a review tool by considering and reviewing, through discussion at project team and Steering Group meetings, the aspects we had mapped on COWL's 'Scorecard' at the start of the project. We did not use the tool to quantify our perceptions of the balance between topics on the scorecard, but as a prompt to articulating and exploring our perceptions of, for example, stakeholder needs as offset by the staffing levels CAW could reasonably supply. The use of the BSC for the COWL Project was reported on at the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW) conference in June 2009 and is detailed in a journal article by Ganobcsik-Williams and Broughan (forthcoming 2011).

By the end of the project definition phase, the main focus of the COWL Project was clearly on developing a platform and pedagogical methods for conducting both synchronous live, real-time) and asynchronous (delayed-response) online writing tutoring.

Phase 2: Research preparation (March-August 2009). This phase consisted of discussion and development of technologies and pedagogic approaches, the conducting of two surveys that informed these developments, gathering of student profile data, the production of user guidance, and training in online tutoring systems for Academic Writing Tutors, Academic Writing Lecturers, and the Administrative team in CAW.

In considering potential technologies, we were mindful of JISC's principle for projects funded under the 'curriculum delivery' programme that technologies should be already available, in order to make the project's outputs easily-available to all students and staff and usable by the wider Higher Education sector. The project team agreed that the functions required for synchronous online tutoring were the ability for the student to upload his/her assignment brief and draft paper and for the Academic Writing Tutor to access these documents, the ability for the student and Academic Writing Tutor to see and hear each other, the ability for both to share their desktops so that both could make suggestions and changes on the students' paper during the writing conference, and the ability for the Academic Writing Tutor to upload the students' draft with any post-tutorial suggestions and for the student to be able to access and download this draft. Numerous technologies were considered, and it was decided that in the first instance we would trial a new type of online conferencing software, MegaMeeting, that would need to be purchased by the University but that appeared to be able to offer this functionality. MegaMeeting is a Flash-based web conference application that runs on a wide range of browsers and operating systems and does not require an account with an external company or provider. Another benefit of MegaMeeting is that it would be supported by the University's IT infrastructure.

For the asynchronous tutorials, the project team decided that a system for receiving students' assignment briefs and paper drafts, and for commenting on the drafts and uploading them for the students to access, was needed. Because we could not identify an existing freely-available system that would allow these functions, a member of the University's e-Learning Unit (eLU), Clive Teed, was tasked with developing a system that would do so and that would include the integration of a free audio/video-commenting software, Riffly (<http://riffly.com>), that allows for audio and video to be recorded directly in the web browser and saved on the internet for the student to access.

As a result of training for CAW's Academic Writing Tutors in using these technologies to conduct online writing tutorials in August 2009, during which both MegaMeeting and Riffly failed to operate reliably, it was decided to also trial another type of synchronous web-conferencing application, Skype, as a comparison to MegaMeeting. Skype requires users to set up an external account and the installation of an 'extra' called Mikogo to allow desktop sharing, and it was not supported formally by the University because it is not a programme for which the University has purchased a license. However, it was deemed worth trying because many students and staff are already familiar with Skype and because it is freely-available, easy to use, and appeared to be very reliable.

At the time these discussions and developments were taking place, Coventry University was in the process of moving its institutional Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) from Blackboard to Moodle. In the trialling phase, therefore, the synchronous online writing tutoring system for COWL was set up within a Moodle module on a version of Moodle that the University was using for development purposes. In contrast, the asynchronous system was written in asp.net. The view was that as more knowledge of Moodle was developed by the University's and the COWL Project's technical staff, the asynchronous system could be moved to sit within Moodle as an 'activity', therefore integrating the two systems into one platform.

Informing these discussions and developments were the results of two surveys conducted by the COWL project team: a 'COWL Student Survey' and a 'COWL Questionnaire for Writing Development/Writing Centre Professionals'. The COWL evaluation workpackage team conducted the student survey to gauge the writing development needs of Coventry University students and their knowledge of and level of access to technologies relevant to online writing tutoring. A student questionnaire (Appendix A) was developed in March 2009 and data collected between April and July 2009. An iTouch (donated by the eLU) was

offered as a prize for completing this survey. The number of questionnaires returned was 141 and the COWL project team had access to the final results from August 2009, prior to the start of the research trials.

The second survey, the 'COWL Questionnaire for Writing Development/Writing Centre Professionals' (Appendix B) was conducted at the EATAW biennial conference in June 2009. An iPod was offered as a prize for completing this survey and the number of questionnaires completed was 74. Data was analysed during Summer 2009 and findings were made available to the project team in September 2009, at the start of the research trials. The aim of the survey was to explore the advantages, risks, and limitations of setting up and running an online writing laboratory through feedback gained from writing centre and Academic Writing professionals. The data gathered from this survey proved to be extremely rich and will be a lasting legacy of the COWL project, as the international 'snapshot' it provides of writing development professionals' experiences and perspectives of online writing centre work will inform further research in the area of online writing support. From this survey, the project team gained strong reassurance that online writing support is a major focus, internationally, of Academic Writing pedagogy and scholarship. We also learned that other institutions across the world are making decisions to offer online writing support for the same reasons of accessibility that Coventry University is facing.

In preparation for the COWL trials with students, the evaluation workpackage team also gathered Student Profiling Data (i.e. demographic data including students' year/level of study, gender, and degree course) in order to compare the demographics of students who chose to book online writing tutorials with the demographics of students who chose to book traditional face-to-face appointments in CAW. Through the use of AccuTrack, the electronic booking and record-keeping system used at CAW, Penny Gilchrist (COWL Project Manager) compiled a report on students who booked face-to-face tutoring appointments, which is available on the COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl/workpackages/evaluation/>), and this data was presented to the April 2009 Project Board meeting. However, due to the project team's later decision to utilise pre-defined student cohorts instead of 'self-presenting' students for the COWL trials, the demographic comparison was deemed inappropriate and it was decided that future research to learn more about the profile of students who choose online writing tutorials could be carried out once the service is rolled out to the University.

In the five months leading up to the trials, the COWL Project faced a number of unexpected challenges, some of which affected—and others which resulted from—the project:

- **Changes to the project team** A major challenge resulted from the University's decision to disband its academic staff development unit in Summer 2009. Sharon Simkiss had to resign from the role of Project Manager. Penny Gilchrist, the CAW Centre Co-ordinator, took on the role and a 'hand-over' period was conducted in July and August 2009.
- **Changes to CAW's Academic Writing Tutor contracts and staffing** An important consequence of the COWL Project has been to introduce online writing tutorials into the work of CAW's Academic Writing Tutors. In summer 2009 the Academic Writing Tutor job description and person specification had to be rewritten to incorporate the ability to communicate with and respond to students on their writing in an online environment. The Head of CAW had already been negotiating a change of contractual status for the Academic Writing Tutors, to move them from temporary hourly-paid contracts to permanent salaried contracts. These changes were approved by the University and came into effect in August 2009. Two Tutors decided not to accept the new contract. Another Tutor chose to take a job related to his PhD research in September 2009, leaving only three experienced Academic Writing Tutors at CAW, just as the COWL trials and the busy Autumn term were due to start. New Tutors were appointed but could not be trained in

time to be involved in COWL's online writing tutorial trials. As a result, the project team decided to trial only asynchronous writing consultations (not both asynchronous and synchronous) with the 240 Economics students, and to train an Economics lecturer to read and respond to the Economics students' texts online.

- **Limitations of the online conferencing software** During the August 2009 Academic Writing Tutor training session, participants were unable to launch two-way desktop sharing with MegaMeeting web-conferencing software. This left two options in using MegaMeeting (either the student uploads his/her draft and can work on it during tutorial, or the Academic Writing Tutor uploads the student's draft and can make comments and incorporate the student's comments on it during the tutorial and save it for the student to access). This experience with web-conferencing technology led to a decision to trial Skype as well.
- **Academic Writing Tutors' Initial Lack of Engagement with New Technologies** Partly as a result of the MegaMeeting web-conferencing software not being fully operational during the Academic Writing Tutor training session in August 2009, some of the Academic Writing Tutors expressed serious reservations about conducting online writing tutorials. *The Pre-Trials Synopsis Report* on the COWL Project website provides more detail on the outcomes of this training session. This issue contributed to the decision to trial Skype (the Academic Writing Tutors' stated preferred method of conducting synchronous online writing tutorials) in conjunction with MegaMeeting. It also caused project decisions about technologies and accompanying deliverables (e.g. user guides and the website and Moodle module for accessing the tutorials) to be put back by a few weeks, but these were ready as planned for the start of the trials.

Another, productive, challenge during this period centred around the pedagogies of online writing tutoring. Through discussion, reading, and learning from the Academic Writing Tutors' experiences during training, from international colleagues at the EATAW conference, and from Steering Group colleagues, the project team began to consider that online pedagogy would be different than face-to-face tutoring, and that the relationship between tutor and student, as well as the pacing and duration of tutorials, would need to be adapted.

Phase 3: Research Trials (September-December 2009) This phase concentrated on running online writing tutorial trials with Economics and Paramedics students at Coventry University. The rationale for choosing these two student groups was that they appeared to represent extremes of the contexts in which today's university students find themselves. The 20+ paramedic students were in a highly mobile, work-based situation, studying online with relatively little attendance at the university. Many were mature students. The students were also dispersed geographically. The economists, in contrast, were predominantly full-time students in the 18-23 age bracket studying on campus.

An unexpected challenge that occurred just prior to the start of the trials was an exponential increase in student numbers on Economics trials. In March 2009 the Economics course leader advised the COWL Project Director to expect approximately 80 students for the Economics trials. However, student numbers increased to 120—and then to 240—for reasons of equity in offering the same level of writing support to all students on the first-year Economics module and due to an increased intake of Economics students for 2009-10. The project team remained committed to conducting the trials with this student group and we adapted to the increased student numbers by deciding not to attempt to offer synchronous online writing tutorials to the Economics students. Due to unexpected staffing shortages in CAW, it also was no longer feasible for the COWL Project to offer Academic Writing Tutors' support to the Economics students. A positive consequence of this situation is that it led us

to introduce the concept of student peer review of writing in Economics and to engage an Economics academic to provide asynchronous feedback to the students on their writing, providing a key opportunity to develop the 'cascading' of writing support within a discipline and thus to address the scalability of online writing tutorial technologies and pedagogies.

Details of the COWL research trials are as follows:

- **Economics Trials: Assignment 1: COWL asynchronous peer review workshops (November 2009).** Approximately 240 first-year students studying Economics and Accounting and Finance attended compulsory workshops (in their normally-scheduled seminar times) to trial COWL's asynchronous website and software for online peer review (Riffly). Dr. Mary Deane, workpackage leader for the COWL trials and for developing new pedagogies of online writing tutoring, delivered a lecture introducing students to COWL and the peer review activity. As well as academic staff members from the Department of Economics, CAW's Academic Writing Lecturers and Academic Writing Tutors attended the COWL workshops on the Economics module to facilitate students in carrying out online peer review of other students' writing assignments.
- **Economics Trials: Assignment 2: COWL asynchronous writing tutorials (December 2009).** All first-year students studying Economics and Accounting and Finance were offered the opportunity to receive formative asynchronous feedback via the COWL website, and 11.25% of students submitted their draft assignments to the COWL site. Written feedback was provided by Economics lecturer, who had been trained to give feedback on writing by Dr. Mary Deane and who had facilities for giving written feedback and for using Riffly to provide audio feedback through the COWL asynchronous website.
- **Paramedics Trials: Assignment 1 and 2: COWL synchronous writing tutorials (October 2009).** Following a preparatory lecture delivered by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, 18 distance-learning Paramedics students were offered synchronous feedback on their writing via the COWL website (Moodle and Skype). Thirteen of these students (72%) produced draft assignments, which they submitted to the COWL Moodle site, and real-time discussion and feedback were provided by CAW's Academic Writing Tutors and Lecturers through using Moodle and Skype with a Mikogo plug-in. A further three students accessed a synchronous online writing tutorial for their second coursework assignment.
- **Paramedics Trials: Assignment 1 and 2: COWL asynchronous writing tutorials (November 2009).** Following a preparatory lecture delivered by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, 14 distance-learning Paramedics students were offered asynchronous feedback on their writing via the COWL website. Two students (14%) produced draft assignments, which they submitted to the COWL site, and asynchronous feedback was provided by CAW's Academic Writing Tutors and Lecturers, who had access to giving written feedback and to using Riffly to provide audio feedback. Two students also chose to have an asynchronous online writing tutorial for their second coursework assignment.

Data was collected throughout this phase with the aim of gaining insight into students' perceptions of online writing tutoring and into the perceptions of CAW's Academic Writing Tutors, discipline-based academic staff, CAW Administrative staff, and the technology staff involved in the project:

- **Student Feedback on Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Writing Tutorials**
Feedback was provided by Economics and Paramedics students following each online tutorial. At the conclusion of each tutorial, students were automatically directed to a fill in an online questionnaire comprising ten questions, and 53 students gave feedback. This questionnaire was housed in SurveyMonkey and is available on the COWL Project

website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>) (also see Appendix C). Initial data was presented at the January 2010 Project Board meeting and final data was presented at the February 2010 Steering Group meeting. Key findings are discussed in Section 3.2.

- **Focus Groups with Economics Students on Online Peer Review of Writing** Despite careful scheduling and the opportunity to win an iTouch, no students chose to participate in these focus groups. The evaluation workpackage leader, Dr. Christine Broughan, judged that the project team did not need to reschedule the focus groups because COWL project team members from the pedagogy and technology workpackages had been involved in facilitating the peer review sessions and these staff members gave feedback on their observations of students engaging in the online peer review in follow-up interviews. Also, the same technology was used to conduct the asynchronous tutorials with the Economics and Paramedics students (between students-discipline lecturer and students-CAW Academic Writing Tutors) and it was felt that enough information had been gathered regarding the students', discipline staff members', Academic Writing Tutors', CAW Administrators' and COWL technology team's experiences of the asynchronous technologies and pedagogies used. This information was presented at the January 2010 Project Board meeting and again at the February 2010 Steering Group meeting.
- **Interviews with Staff Involved in COWL Trials** During Autumn 2010 interviews were conducted with eleven staff members involved in the COWL Project. Interviews were between 45 and 90 minutes long, and most lasted an hour. Data was presented at the January 2010 Project Board meeting and the February 2010 Steering Group meeting. The 'Participant Information Sheet' and interview questions are available on the COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>) (also see Appendices D and E). Key findings are discussed in Section 3.2.

Phase 4: Analysis and consolidation (January-July 2010) Analysis drew upon the findings of the feedback and evaluation activities outlined in the previous sections. Key findings are discussed in Section 3.2.

Phase 5: Revision and redevelopment (April-October 2010) As a result of the COWL trials and evaluation findings, the project team made major changes to the planned technologies for online writing tutoring. It was decided that Skype, rather than MegaMeeting, would be used to conduct synchronous online writing tutorials. Trialling Skype and Mikogo had taught us that Mikogo could be pre-installed on CAW computers and that this would reduce the preparation required of students and Tutors. User guidance for students, Academic Writing Tutors/Academics in the Disciplines, and COWL Administrators was re-developed for using Skype and Mikogo.

Another revision based on our findings was that we decided not to use the asynchronous system that had been developed in-house. The project team considered a number of alternatives, including the freely-available software JING, based on a recommendation by Dr. Florence Dujardin of Sheffield Hallam University to EATAW listserv members on using JING for giving students audio-feedback on their writing (Dujardin 2010). However, because students would have to access feedback at a separate URL with JING, we decided instead to try Microsoft Word 'track changes', 'comment', and 'audio comment' facilities. We also considered GradeMark, on the recommendation of Dr. Andy Syson, Assistant Director of the eLearning Unit at Coventry University. In some ways, GradeMark seemed ideal because academics and students at Coventry University will be using this product in future, but we discovered that there would be interference between using GradeMark for writing tutorials and the Turnitin software and databank to which GradeMark is linked. Once the decision

was made to use Microsoft Word and its in-built commenting and audio-commenting facilities, user guidance was re-developed.

These synchronous and asynchronous technologies were tested during the 6-week online writing tutoring training course for Academic Writing Tutors that was developed and taught at CAW in Spring 2010 (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5. COWL Online Writing Tutoring Training Course for Academic Writing Tutors



Figure 6. Academic Writing Tutors giving Asynchronous Feedback Using Microsoft Word Comment Boxes and Audio Comments

In response to feedback on the training sessions that had been offered in August 2009, the revised Online Writing Tutoring training course focused on both practical hands-on experience of using the technologies and on pedagogical issues and theories relating to online writing tutoring. Academic Writing Tutors' reactions were captured through session notes and reflective writing. The following comments are by Academic Writing Tutors reflecting on the use of Microsoft Word 'track changes', 'comment', and 'audio comment':

- 'Using this is fantastic—it's so easy!'
- 'This has been incredibly efficient—in just minutes we've mastered the voice recording facility in Microsoft Word'.
- 'I'm not very good with technology and I find it really easy and fun to use'.
- 'This is great—I want to use comment blurbs and audio comments all the time, now. It's so easy'.
- 'The asynchronous system we tried was a lot "busier". There were quite a lot of options that were not adding to the tutorial'.
- 'This is much more natural than the previous asynchronous system we trialled—this is the way you would actually approach a draft, as a whole piece. The previous system required us to cut and paste our feedback into boxes'.
- 'One thing that makes me really happy about audio feedback is that it avoids the plagiarism issue. You are able to speak informally. You can give students options, like, "she stated, she said, she argued . . . ". It makes me more comfortable and not worried about the plagiarism threat that could come with giving written suggestions'.
- 'You can do an introductory audio comment and then re-order your written comments in the margins. You can make written and audio comments work together for the student to get the best understanding of your feedback'.

For the synchronous tutorials, Academic Writing Tutors said they found it easier to use Skype and Mikogo than MegaMeeting. At present, the project team has chosen (for ease of use and for security reasons) to use Mikogo to enable one-way desktop-sharing only, so that the Academic Writing Tutor can upload the student's draft to his/her desktop and share this with the student. This means that the Academic Writing Tutor can make changes on the document with the full functionality of Microsoft Word, but that the student cannot write on the document. The student can use his/her cursor to point to specific words/paragraphs that s/he would like to discuss. The Academic Writing Tutors who participated in the Spring 2010 training session asked if there is a chat facility in Skype, to enable a more 'face-to-face' type of tutorial interaction through which the writing tutor can ask the student to write or rewrite sentences, paragraphs, or sections. This was found to be an existing function and was incorporated into COWL's user guidance for synchronous online writing tutorials.

Another important decision taken by the COWL project team during the revision and re-testing phase was on how best to integrate and manage COWL services. The public COWL Project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl>) will continue to serve as an important site housing documents and information related to the COWL Project. It was decided, however, that the official Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) website will be part of the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) website (Figure 7). In this way, access to the Coventry Online Writing Lab (including electronic writing guides/handouts, 'Frequently Asked Questions', and other services) will be public, but online writing tutorials, conducted via Moodle, will be restricted to Coventry University students and staff.



Figure 7. The Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) website as part of the public CAW website (SharePoint)

The COWL Moodle 'module', renamed the 'COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform', will enable Coventry University students to book online tutorials, upload assignment briefs and drafts, connect to their synchronous and asynchronous online tutorial sessions, and access post-tutorial feedback uploaded by Academic Writing Tutors (or by Tutors/Lecturers in the disciplines). The online booking facility linked to this platform will be provided by 'AccuWeb', the online booking facility in AccuTrack (a commercial booking and recordkeeping programme for writing centres that has been used at CAW since 2004).

Between July and October 2010, members of the project team revised the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform in Moodle, simplifying the 'student view' (Figure 8), the 'Academic Writing Tutor' view, and the 'COWL Administrator view'. The addition of a 'Lecturer' view for use by lecturers in the disciplines, as well as a 'Student Peer-to-Peer Review' view are envisioned as further developments.

Revising the Online Writing Tutorial Platform prompted the project team to make other changes based on the feedback gathered from students and staff. For example, the names 'synchronous online writing tutorial' and 'asynchronous online writing tutorial' were changed to 'Live Online Writing Tutorial' and 'Email Writing Tutorial' for ease of understanding. We also removed the Academic Writing Tutors' forum from the COWL Moodle site because in Spring 2010 the University introduced departmental intranets, so there is now a CAW intranet that includes a 'threadable' discussion forum for use by CAW staff. The COWL Project Director/Head of CAW decided, with input from the CAW Learning Technologist and Academic Writing Tutors, that it would be logical to conduct all discussions, whether CAW or COWL-related, on this forum.

It is predicted that further revisions to the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform and to the COWL website will be undertaken on an ongoing basis.

CUOnline  Coventry Online Writing Lab Logged in as Ray Summers from Moodle Hub: Student (Return to my normal role)

Uni ► cowl Return to my normal role

Topic outline



Welcome to the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform

The Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) is the online component of Coventry University's Centre for Academic Writing (CAW). To access the full range of COWL services, see the main [COWL](#) webpage.

The COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform in Moodle provides a gateway to conducting online writing tutorials. Two types of individualised online writing tutorial are available: 'Live Online Writing Tutorials' [[insert link to PDF description blurb?](#)] and 'Email Writing Tutorials'. [[insert link to PDF description blurb?](#)].

To book and prepare for your online writing tutorial, follow the steps below .

- Step 1: Book an Online Writing Tutorial Appointment**

Select and book either a 'Live Online Writing Tutorial' or an 'Email Writing Tutorial' appointment from the [schedule of available appointments](#).

[How to Book an Online Writing Tutorial Appointment](#)
- Step 2: Upload Required Documents**

In order for your online writing tutorial to take place, you must upload:

 - *An electronic copy of your assignment brief
 - *A draft of the writing you have done for the assignment
 - *A note for the Academic Writing Tutor identifying the issues on which you would like the writing tutorial to focus

If you have not uploaded these three items by 10am on the day before your appointment, your online writing tutorial will be cancelled automatically and reallocated to another student.

[Upload your assignment brief, draft and note here](#)
- Step 3: Ensure that you and your computer are ready for an online writing tutorial**

Please note: This step applies only to students who have booked a 'Live Online Writing Tutorial'. It does not apply to students who have booked an 'Email Writing Tutorial'.

Make sure that you and your computer are ready for your 'Live Online Writing Tutorial' by following the guidelines below.

[Getting ready for an Online writing tutorial](#)
- Step 4: Access feedback from the Academic Writing Tutor**

During an 'Email Writing Tutorial', an Academic Writing Tutor will read and make suggestions on your draft based in part on the points laid out in your assignment brief and in your guiding note. S/he may include both written and audio comments on your draft.

In a 'Live Online Writing Tutorial', you and the Academic Writing Tutor will be able to see and discuss your draft in a live online meeting. The Academic Writing Tutor will be able to make changes to your document online. At the end of the session, the Academic Writing Tutor may upload the copy of the draft you discussed during the tutorial with any changes you agreed.

[Access your feedback here](#)

Logged in as Ray Summers from Moodle Hub: Student (Return to my normal role)

[Home](#)

HVS-ITS-MDL02 August 23, 2010, 2:47 pm

Figure 8. Student View of the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform (Moodle)

Phase 6: Roll-out and dissemination (from October 2010) During this phase, the project team made final preparations to implement COWL as a new curriculum delivery system. The implementation will be across all appropriate areas of CAW's work, both directly with students and through cascading the teaching of writing via academics in the disciplines. Although full-scale implementation across the institution will be phased, we expect to complete it over a one-year time period (January 2011-January 2012).

A second session of the Online Writing Tutoring training course took place in Autumn 2010 for both continuing and new CAW Academic Writing Tutors. Staff development sessions for academics in the Faculties at Coventry University will take place in 2011, as part of the COWL roll-out activities. The project team wants to make sure that the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform in Moodle is working to plan when used by students and Academic Writing

Tutors, as well as from a COWL/CAW Administrator perspective, before diversifying the platform's audience and functions and promoting it to staff in the disciplines for use with their students and for use as a peer review tool between students.

As detailed in the March 2010 COWL Project interim report, dissemination of COWL project research, developments, and outputs has been occurring internally and externally through Academic Writing and other conference presentations and networking activities as well as through publications. Full dissemination, however, will begin following the publication of *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring* on the COWL Project website and on the main COWL website. Staff at other institutions have already begun to express interest in the *Guide* and the project team will publicise it via HEA subject centre newsletters and other channels. The project team also envisions that COWL staff development sessions will be advertised to staff members across the sector (e.g. see the bid to host an HEA seminar in Section 2.2).

3.2 What did you learn?

The COWL Project focused on creating effective online writing support services and on developing accessibility and scalability of these services within a higher education institution. The project enabled the project team to learn about the functions of technologies for holding online writing tutorials, to gain insight into the use of online writing tutoring internationally, to find out more about the IT skills of current students and staff, to identify what approaches would work best, to develop pedagogies for staff training and student engagement in online writing tutoring, and to ascertain what measures to put in place to ensure long-term sustainability of online writing tutoring provision.

The main lessons learned from the COWL Project are:

- **Online writing support is a focus of Academic Writing pedagogy and scholarship internationally.**

The 'COWL Project Review of the Origins and Current Practices of Online Writing Labs (OWLs) and Online Writing Support' undertaken at the start of the COWL Project demonstrated that online writing tutoring is an increasing interest for writing centres and writing development work that began in US universities and colleges and has spread internationally (Ganobcsik-Williams 2009a).² The results of the 'COWL Questionnaire for Writing Development/Writing Centre Professionals' (Appendix B) which surveyed writing development professionals from European and UK universities and from across the globe, also indicated that online writing support is a focus of Academic Writing pedagogy and scholarship internationally. In addition, this survey showed that institutions worldwide are looking to online writing tutoring to provide students with more accessible writing support.

- **Most students who took part in the COWL online tutoring trials found online writing tutoring to be efficient and said that as a result of the tutorial they felt more confident about writing at university.**

Feedback provided by 53 Economics and Paramedics students via the online questionnaire following their online writing tutorials indicated that:

² A survey by Tom Parkinson, CAW Academic Writing Tutor, of fifty-five US Online Writing Labs (OWLs) found that the majority of OWL sites he was able to access offered asynchronous/email tutorials (Parkinson 2008). This matches the finding by Yergeau et al. (2008) that '[o]ver the past fifteen years or so, the phrase "online [writing] tutoring" has largely signified asynchronous email tutoring' (Anderson cited in Yergeau et al. 2008).

- 87% (46 students) said the Academic Writing Tutor made them feel comfortable,
- 81% (43 students) said the online learning experience was efficient,
- 77% (41 students) said the Academic Writing Tutor addressed their questions and concerns,
- 75% (40 students) said the length of the tutorial was about right,
- 74% (39 students) said as a result of the tutorial they felt more confident about writing at university,
- 72% (38 students) said the use of technology enhanced the learning experience,
- and 68% (36 students) said they would be interested in participating in future online writing tutorials.

Less than half of the students who participated in online writing tutorials (42% or 22 students) said they would prefer to a face-to-face writing tutorial rather than an online writing tutorial.

Students' qualitative remarks indicated that many found the online tutorials to be a valuable experience. Many indicated that technical problems got in the way and that they hoped that these could be resolved by making the technology more straightforward and by ensuring that technical problems were 'troubleshooted' in advance and more technical support provided. Comments included:

'I found this a very positive experience, with worthwhile constructive criticism given, with particular emphasis on the positive points achieved'.

'The tutorial was very helpful and gave me the confidence I need to write at university'.

'I found the online tutorial a valuable experience for my distance learning course. The tutor was encouraging and helpful. Any technical problems were down to my lack of experience with the system'.

- **Online writing tutoring can be utilised not only by students and writing centre tutors, but also by subject academics with their students and as a student peer review tool.**

The COWL trials with Economics students found that online writing tutoring can be utilised by academics with their students and as a student peer review tool. As explained in Section 3.1, COWL trials with 240 Economics students took the form of two types of asynchronous writing consultations: student-to-student and an Economics lecturer-individual students. Observations by COWL Project members during the online student peer review sessions and discussions with students as they engaged in the process of online peer reviewing found that the majority of students were able to navigate and utilise the reviewing system that had been designed for COWL but that it did not appear to be intuitive and that students required clear guidance on both how to use the technology and how to conduct a review of another student's paper. At the final COWL Steering Group meeting in Autumn 2010, the Economics lecturer who had carried out the online writing tutorials with students and the module leader stated that they wanted to continue to embed online peer review of writing and lecturer-student online writing tutorials into the module. As COWL is rolled out, the project team will continue to investigate if it would work better for students and staff in the disciplines to utilise

the existing platform or to build separate platforms for use by academics with their students and for online peer reviewing by students.

- **Students, writing tutors and academics in the disciplines require clear guidance for engaging in online writing tutorials.**

Focus groups conducted with Paramedics students indicated that many students saw the value of online writing tutorials but felt the dates on offer for the tutorials were mis-timed, and because they did not have their drafts ready, they did not book tutorial appointments.³

The interviews with staff involved in the online writing tutorial trials in Autumn 2009 revealed that staff felt there was a need to manage student expectations in terms of what they should do and know about the tutorial, such as how to prepare and when to expect feedback. Staff pointed out that often these issues are negotiated by the CAW receptionist or during a face-to-face writing tutorial, but in the online tutoring situation they need to be made explicit on the COWL website or Online Writing Tutorial Platform, or by the Academic Writing Tutor. There was a sense that the online trials had made the Academic Writing Tutors really think about 'what' they do and 'why' in a way that they had not had to before. Tutors felt students needed to be clear about the role of CAW in terms of writing provision; for example that it is not a service for correcting grammar or spelling but that it is intended to develop students' writing style and competencies.

CAW staff felt they benefited from the online writing tutoring guides that had been written as part of the COWL Project and would have welcomed these earlier. Staff felt a sense of security in having these step-by-step guides to hand, both in terms of online writing tutoring pedagogies and software.

- **Writing tutors and academics need training and ongoing support in conducting online writing tutorials.**

A major finding of the COWL trials, as articulated by CAW staff members interviewed in Autumn 2009, was that success in terms of the COWL project relies heavily on the skills, attitudes and understanding of the front line staff 'delivering' the online writing tutorial service. Staff requested more training, particularly during the early stages of the trials. They reported being happy with the quality of the training sessions that were offered in August and September 2009 and were conscious of the difficulties the trainers faced in terms of technologies not working. Academic Writing Tutors reported initial doubts about their ability to deliver online tutorials and lacked confidence in their own ability and the functionality of the software. They suggested that the timing of some of the training might have been better. Academic Writing Tutors were very grateful of the IT support available to them during the trials and felt they still needed IT support on-hand until they were comfortable with the technology. In many cases, just knowing that someone else was around if the technology went wrong was enough to alleviate some of the stress involved with engaging with this new type of learning environment.

The project has presented a steep learning curve for Academic Writing Tutors and other CAW staff, and it was noted in the interviews that there was a sense of becoming closer as a team in supporting each other through the process.

- **Technologies for online writing tutoring and other types of online writing engagement need to be simple and deployable.**

³ Focus groups with these distance-learning students took place when the cohort reconvened for an on-campus teaching session in July 2010.

An initial research task for the COWL Project was to determine the extent to which students already have the technological skills necessary for booking and engaging in online writing tutorials. The 'COWL Student Survey', to which 141 students from across the University responded, found that in terms of knowledge of and access to technologies:

- 96% of those surveyed (133 students) had sole use of a personal computer or laptop,
- 94% (130 students) had home broadband,
- and 93% (129 students) had used Microsoft Word and 80% (110 students) had used Internet Explorer in the past three months.

As illustrated in Figure 9, students also reported being familiar with using internet services that require the ability to follow online instructions, search online, play videos, and use online audio/video software and live chat software including: Google 88% (122 students), Facebook 71% (98 students), YouTube 66% (91 students), MSN Messenger 51% (70 students), iTunes 40% (55 students), eBay 36% (49 students), and Skype 27% (37 students).

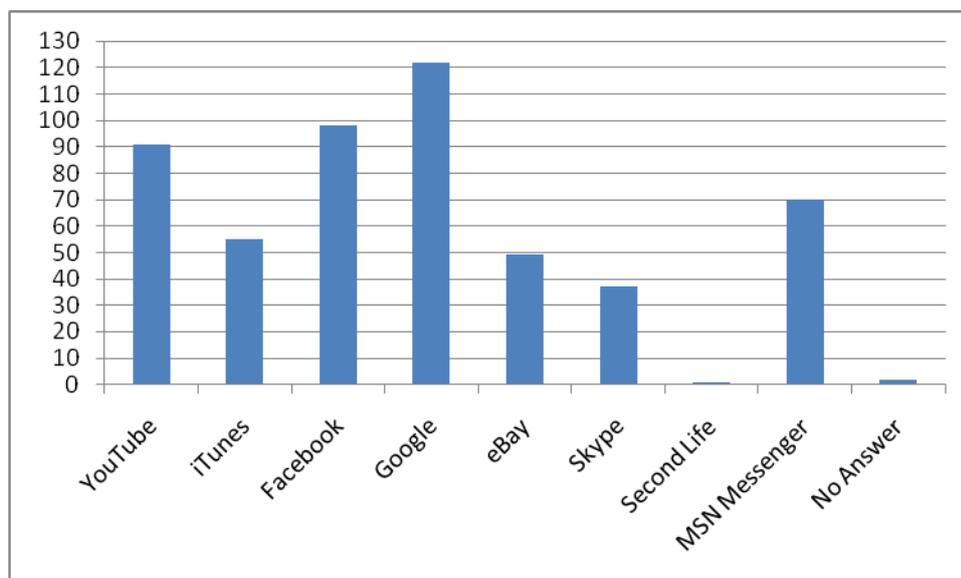


Figure 9. What internet services do you commonly use?

When asked which platforms and devices they typically use for studying, 58% (80 students) said 'laptop', 28% (38 students) said 'desktop at home', and 11% (15 students) said 'desktop on campus', while only 2% (3 students) said 'MP3 player' and 'Notepad' and 1% said 'Smartphone' and 'PDA' (Figure 10).

However, during the COWL trials, it was found that students were not all as 'technology-savvy' as the survey results had led the project team to believe. In the online writing tutorial feedback reported above, some students commented on experiencing problems with the technologies. During the focus groups in July 2010, the majority of students present requested simple tools and a simple process, so that tutorials could focus on the writing.

Staff also raised concerns over tools and software, both in the interviews and in subsequent Project Team and Steering Group meetings. Many said they would like a common platform for both synchronous and asynchronous tutorials and noted that the COWL interface needs to be made simple and straightforward to use. They felt the in-house asynchronous system was not intuitive and in was some ways over-complicated. Some thought the tools got in the way of the pedagogy. Staff overall said that there was a sense that they needed to develop

something 'special' to deliver this service when in fact simple, widely-available tools like Skype and Microsoft Word 'Track Changes' might be more appropriate solutions.

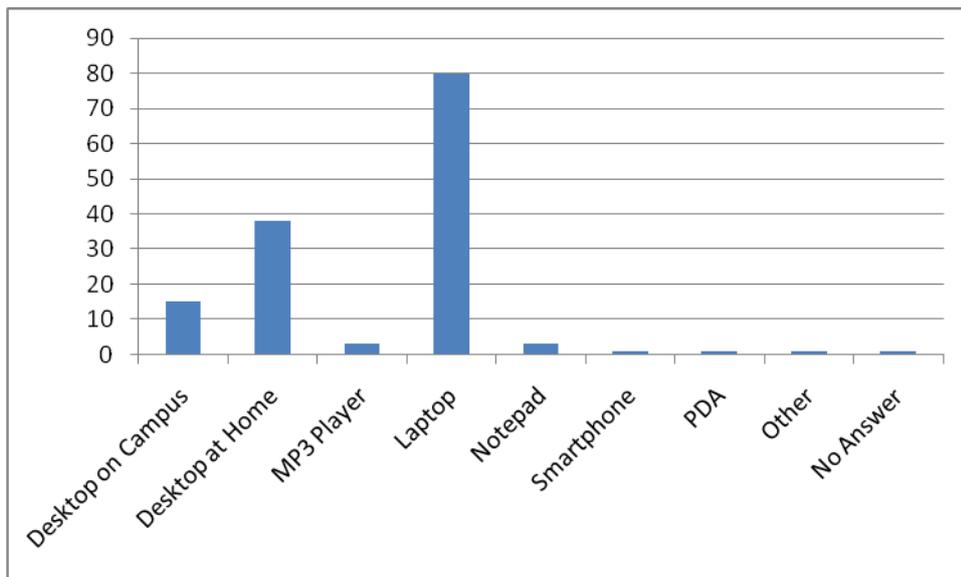


Figure 10. Please tell us which platforms and devices you typically use for studying.

- **Technologies need to be housed on a single platform or integrated seamlessly.**

One way of making tools and technologies simple and straightforward for students, Academic Writing Tutors, the CAW Administrative team, and lecturers in the disciplines to use is through housing them on a single platform and/or integrating them as seamlessly as possible so that they can function as a conduit and not impede the learning experience. As outlined, staff interviews, students' post-tutorial feedback, and student focus groups reporting on their experiences during the COWL trials indicated that the synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutoring systems need to be integrated.

- **Technologies need to be stable and supported by one's institution as fully as possible.**

At the second JISC programme meeting, colleagues from the 'Making the New Diploma a Success' JISC project at Lewisham College pointed out that using one's institutions' IT systems and approved technologies (or seeking approval to use technologies) can be crucial to the success of an initiative because institutions can block the use of unapproved technologies. For the COWL Project, therefore, we attempted to use web-conferencing software supported by the University in the first instance, and when after trialling it we decided on Skype, we took the time to ensure that Skype would be supported. We have learned that tools and technologies need to tie in as much as possible to University systems and platforms (e.g. Moodle, Microsoft Word) so that the both the technologies and the users (i.e. students, CAW staff, academics) will be supported by the University.

- **Institutional roll-out plans for online writing support need to be staged.**

The 'COWL Student Survey' provides evidence that a potential 'market' exists of students who would be interested in accessing CAW's services at a distance. While 49% of respondents (67 students) said they had already accessed CAW's services for help with

their Academic Writing, 67% (93 students) indicated that they tend to do their coursework and other studying at home as opposed to on-campus (Figure 11).

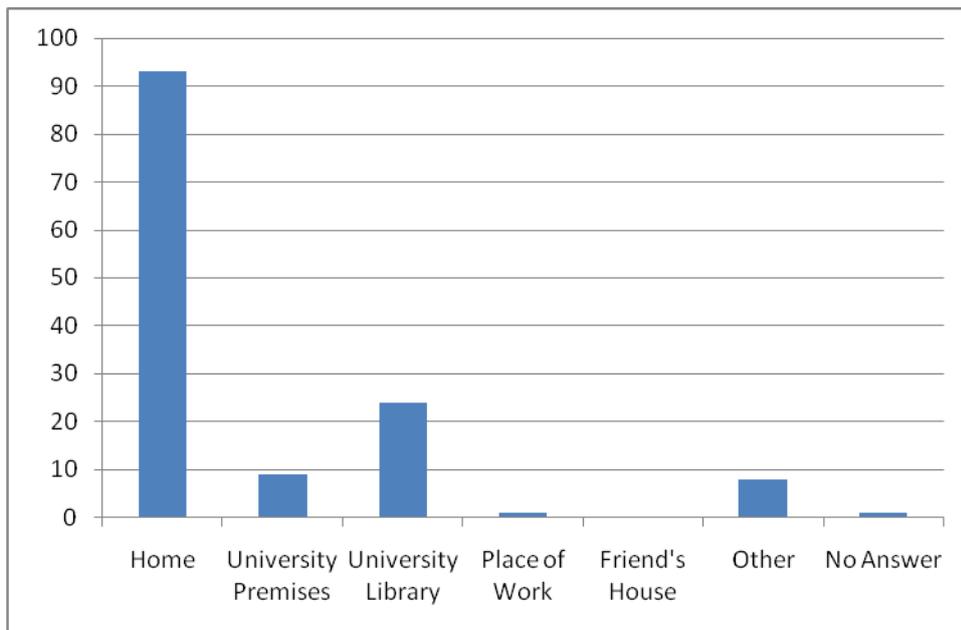


Figure 11. Where do you do your coursework and other self-guided study?

When asked for their perspective on any limitations of CAW's services, 35% (48 students) said 'Have to wait a long time for an appointment', and 16% (22 students) said 'Need to be physically on campus' (Figure 12).

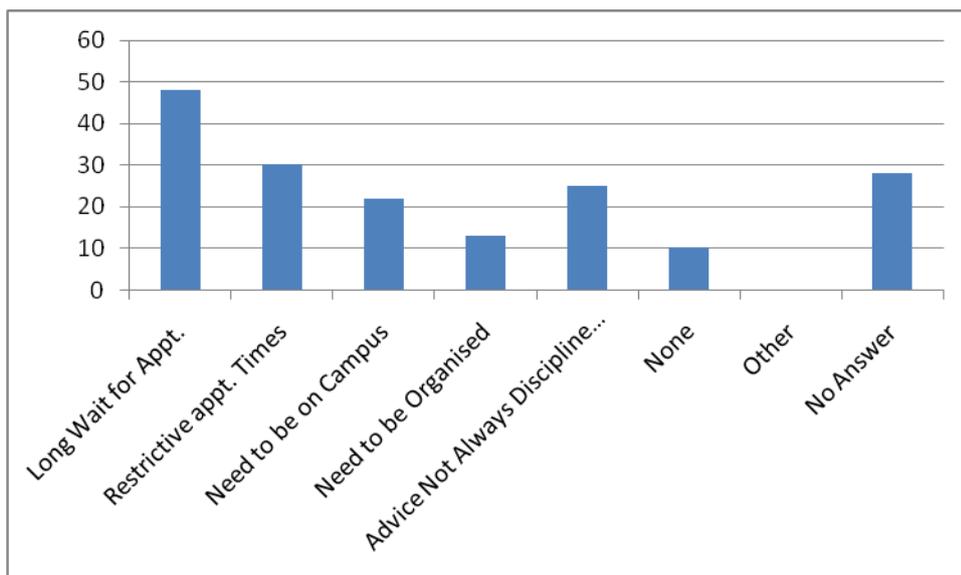


Figure 12. What are the limitations of CAW's service?

Significant numbers of students also indicated that they would be interested in using CAW writing tutorials by email, online writing support materials, online writing seminars, and online one-to-one writing tutorials using web-conferencing software (Figure 13).

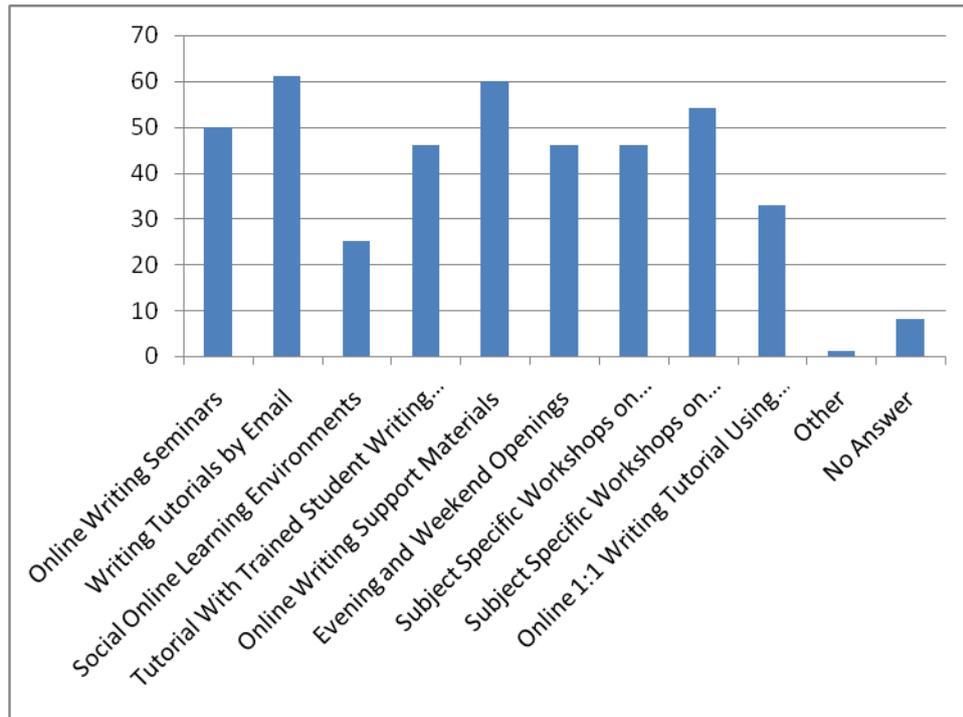


Figure 13. If CAW were to offer the following services, which would you use? (Please check all that apply)

From Autumn 2010, students at Coventry University's new London Campus (CULC) could benefit from having the option of online writing tutoring provision, because they will need to access CAW's services from a distance.

While students who will make use of COWL's online writing tutoring facility clearly exist, therefore, attention to issues raised throughout the project (e.g. through use of the Balanced Scorecard Approach) has convinced the project team that institutional roll-out of online writing tutoring needs to be staged. The Head of CAW must, for example, decide which staff members' roles will need to include the responsibility to provide learning technology support and/or on-call technical support. The roll-out must also take into consideration the period of adjustment to online tutoring needed by CAW Academic Writing Tutors and the period of adjustment to online appointments scheduling needed by the CAW Administrative team.

CAW's goal in embedding COWL into its services, therefore, is to try not to do too much all at once. The focus will be on rolling out the online booking software, online tutoring platform, and pedagogies for online writing tutoring before developing CAW's online provision further.

- **The perspectives and expectations of all stakeholders must be taken into account when shaping online writing provision.**

At the start of the project, the Steering Group was set up to ensure wider stakeholder input. As the project entered the pre-trialling phase at the end of the first year, however, it became clear that the project was not engaging all stakeholders fully in that the Academic Writing Tutors, who would be the main people conducting CAW's online writing tutorials, had not been involved enough in the choice and development of online tutoring tools, policies, and structures. As indicated in the staff interviews, whilst most staff were enthusiastic about the project, it had also proven to be a source of stress in the pre-trialling and trialling stages in terms of staff feeling that they did not know fully what the online tutoring would entail. On reflection, CAW and COWL Project staff felt that the Academic Writing Tutors should have

been involved in the project development at an earlier stage. It was also felt that students should have been included on the Steering Group in order to help shape technology choices and pedagogical approaches.

An important lesson learnt from testing the tools and pedagogic approaches initially selected for the trials is that the Project Director needs to listen to and manage stakeholders' expectations and reservations and to allow these to help shape developments. Stakeholder perspectives reported in the staff interviews and at Steering Group meetings revealed, for instance, that Academic Writing Tutors felt much more comfortable with the synchronous than asynchronous tutorials and that they were less comfortable with the asynchronous element of the provision and talked about it being faceless and confusing, of drafts coming from nowhere and being sent back into a void.

Another, major concern was that online writing provision will not be able to provide the emotional support students' require. In the interviews, Academic Writing Tutors and lecturers talked about the emotional aspect of their role when working with students on their writing and how much they enjoyed this aspect of their job. They felt that online provision might not allow them to develop this kind of relationship with students which they felt was vital in building students' confidence in their writing. It was suggested that training needs to be not only at the level of learning how the technology for conducting online tutorials functions, but must also explore the relational aspects of teaching and learning online. These points were incorporated into the Online Writing Tutoring training course offered to Academic Writing Tutors in Spring and Autumn 2010 and required of new CAW/COWL tutors.

- **The creation of online writing support facilities will have an effect on staff members' job roles and responsibilities.**

The introduction of online writing support necessitated changes to the working practices, job roles and responsibilities of CAW's academic staff, Administrative team, and Learning Technologist. Initially, the project team and Steering Group were so focused on creating an online writing support service for students that we did not fully appreciate the impact COWL would have on these core members of CAW staff. As the project moved through trialling and honing the systems for online appointment-booking and online tutoring, however, the extent to which these staff roles would be affected became increasingly apparent.

For example, as reported in Section 3.1, online writing tutoring had to be written formally into the Academic Writing Tutor job description. As online writing tutoring is embedded into the work of CAW, it may also affect Academic Writing Tutors' working patterns by potentially allowing more freedom about where and when they work (especially when completing asynchronous tutorials), and may give them the opportunity to register on the University's 'Location Independent Working' scheme.

The CAW Administrative team, comprising the Centre Co-ordinator, Administrative Assistant, and Receptionists/Clerical Assistants, will also be affected significantly by the introduction of an online appointments booking system containing an online appointments diary that will replace CAW's longstanding paper diary system.

Furthermore, as demonstrated throughout the COWL trials and underscored by the responses of students and staff in the focus groups and interviews, IT support is crucial for online writing tutorials to be successful. Students, Academic Writing Tutors, the CAW Administrative team, and academics in the disciplines making use of COWL will require clear, up-to-date guidance on the technologies being used and on-call technical support. A new requirement of the CAW Learning Technologist role, therefore, will be to keep abreast

of the technologies being used for COWL and to research new products and developments in order to advise CAW staff on an ongoing basis. From Autumn term 2010, substantial technical support for the COWL Moodle platform and online writing tutoring has also been provided by an IT Technician from the University's IT Services Department and by members of the University's 'Flying Squad' of on-call e-Learning support experts. As part of the institutional roll-out plan for the new COWL 'arm' of CAW provision, the terms and conditions of IT support for COWL will need to be finalised.

3.3 Impact

This section highlights the impact of the COWL Project on learners, CAW staff, the University and the wider Higher (and Further) Education community.

Impact on learners: Students at Coventry University have access to personalised online Academic Writing support as a result of the COWL Project. By conceptualising and creating a new Coventry Online Writing Lab 'arm' of CAW, the project has produced a platform and associated resources to transform students' access to writing support through synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutorials. This provision will be of particular value to non-campus based students (e.g. students on distance, blended, and work-based learning programmes and students based at franchise institutions and CULC), but, as the 'COWL Student Survey' shows, students in general have expressed interest in using the online writing development services and resources provided by COWL.

The COWL Project has also been instrumental in assisting two specific groups of students, Paramedics and Economics, with Academic Writing development. Economics students historically had not made use of CAW's services (e.g. in 2007-8, no level one Economics students attended a 1:1 writing tutorial at CAW and in 2008-9 only three level one Economics students utilised this service). As part of the COWL trials in Autumn 2009, all 240 level one Economics students took part in an asynchronous peer review writing tutorial and a further 27 of these students (11.25%) chose to take part in an asynchronous writing tutorial with a subject lecturer in Economics who was being trained and supported by CAW. The COWL Project offered a small taster of the support available and the structured peer writing support activity during the COWL Economics trials encouraged these students to seek additional individualised writing support. As a result of the COWL Project, therefore, there was a ten-fold increase in the number of level one Economics students formally choosing to seek help with their writing.

Impact on CAW staff: The COWL Project has had a significant impact on CAW staff, both in terms of introducing formal changes into their job roles and responsibilities (as discussed in Sections 3.1 and 3.2) and in terms of adding to their professional skills.

Staff development attended as a result of the COWL Project included:

- Prince II project management training (Project Manager)
- Wimba Live Classroom training (Pedagogies Workpackage Leader)
- JISC 'Dev8D Developer Days' event (Technology Workpackage Leader and member)
- MegaMeeting web-conferencing training; Riffly training; Skype and Mikogo training; Microsoft Word 'track changes', text comment, and audio comment training (Academic Writing Tutors and other project team members)
- Online Writing Tutoring training course (Academic Writing Tutors, Coventry University 'Flying Squad' staff, COWL project team members, and external visitors interested in the COWL model (e.g. University of Derby, University of Bath))
- AccuTrack advance scheduler training (CAW Administrative Assistant)

- Online essay peer review training (240 Economics students and Economics teaching team members)
- SCORE (Support Centre for Open Resources in Education) Fellowship (Steering Group Member)

Professional skills developed by staff as a result of the COWL Project include:

- Academic Writing Tutors developed the ability to use web-conferencing software to hold synchronous online writing tutorials and to use Microsoft Word 'track changes', text comments, and audio comments to provide asynchronous feedback on students' writing,
- Academic Writing Tutors gained experience in considering how online tutoring pedagogies would differ from face-to-face tutoring approaches through the Online Writing Tutoring training course developed and taught as part of the COWL Project and embedded into CAW's ongoing professional development training for staff,
- The project team and the CAW team developed improved teamwork, communication skills, and knowledge and appreciation of each others' roles.

The COWL Project has also impacted upon the attitudes of CAW staff toward online tutoring:

- Academic Writing Tutors who thought that they would not enjoy online writing tutoring and that it would be a 'cold', technology-mediated experience, are now much more confident and enthusiastic about online tutoring. 'I never thought I would get so excited about online writing tutoring' exclaimed one Tutor following the Autumn 2010 online tutoring training.
- Academic Writing Tutors are now interested in developing pedagogies for synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutoring that are distinct from face-to-face writing tutoring approaches, and Academic Writing Lecturers at CAW are interested in researching the development of these approaches.
- The CAW Administrative Team changed their attitude toward online booking because of the relevance of the COWL Project to the everyday administrative practices of the Centre. Prior to the project and throughout its first year, the CAW Centre Co-ordinator, the CAW Administrative Assistant, and the CAW Clerical Assistants expressed reservations about the idea of online booking for writing tutorials because they felt it would lessen the control over bookings that they currently have with CAW's paper diary and booking procedures. As a result of the COWL Project, however, the Administrative team have fewer reservations about online booking and some members have said they are looking forward to bringing in online booking not just for online tutorials but for all CAW tutorials, because they feel it will be a more efficient system.

Impact on the University: The COWL Project has had significant impact on the ability of CAW to provide writing development to students at Coventry University, and has resulted in:

- Extended, cutting-edge, accessible writing provision for students,
- Extended, scalable support for academics across the University in incorporating the teaching of writing into modules across the disciplines,
- The potential to provide extended support for academics and professional staff via online writing consultations in writing for publication.

Because COWL activities have been embedded into CAW's work, this impact will continue to grow.

The project has also impacted on lecturers in the disciplines and has reinforced CAW's role as a provider of staff development in the teaching of writing within the University. As noted in Section 3.2, the Economics lecturers involved in the COWL trials reported that they see peer review as a sustainable result of the COWL project and would like to continue to use online peer review with their students and to cascade staff training in utilising COWL to enable this activity. Such cascading fits squarely into CAW's role as a hub for writing development.

CAW is a distinctive feature of Coventry University in the UK Higher Education sector because of the range of support for students' writing it provides. CAW has also gained national and international standing for its high-quality Academic Writing teaching and research. As demonstrated by the following testimony, the COWL Project is set to contribute further to CAW's and the University's reputations for innovative practice in Academic Writing:

'I am extremely impressed with the scope, progress and future potential of the COWL project. In particular, I am very interested in the digital tools which are being modified and evaluated and the accompanying pedagogical processes that are being developed for supporting students' writing. The possibility of supporting students' writing development using remote conferencing is exciting, as is the possibility of a wider set of digital writing development resources'. (Dr. Colleen McKenna, Academic Literacies Lecturer, Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching, University College London) (McKenna 2010)

Impact on the wider Higher Education/Further Education community: Challenges of accessibility and scalability of writing support services are faced by all universities and colleges and by writing centres/writing programmes. The benefits of the COWL model, therefore, are widely applicable and there is potential for its impact to be widespread:

'I was at a skills conference at Lincoln University where I was introduced to the COWL project. We at Leeds Met would be very interested in the COWL model of synchronous and asynchronous tutorials, sufficiently interested to consider setting up our own version of COWL'. (Michael Shields, Academic Skills Tutor, Leeds Metropolitan University) (Shields 2010)

'I am very interested in consultancy for my staff to learn more about COWL and online writing tutoring'. (Dr. Lesley Gourlay, Director of CAPLITs, Institute of Education, London) (Gourlay 2010)

Institutions seeking to establish Online Writing Labs (OWLs) or systems for offering online writing tutoring will have the opportunity to learn from the *COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*. Dissemination events including CAW/COWL seminars will also help to enable the use of online writing tutoring in other universities and colleges. In these ways, the COWL Project has great potential to impact on the setting up of 'whole-university' and 'whole college' student writing support that assists learners, including distance-learners, in developing graduate-level writing, argumentation and communication skills.

The Academic Writing teaching and research community internationally is also benefiting from the COWL Project's research, particularly as it is being disseminated through academic conference papers and publications. US Composition and Rhetoric scholar Professor Joan Mullin, for example, has been the first to make use of data from the 'COWL Questionnaire for Writing Development/Writing Centre Professionals' in her own research (Mullin 2010).

The COWL Project has also contributed to the wider intended outcomes and benefits of the JISC e-learning programme, which are to enable 'the development and effective use of digital technologies to support learning and teaching in universities and colleges, so that staff

benefit from e-learning and students enjoy a more flexible learning experience' (JISC 2010). As a result of the COWL Project, a model of online writing support is now available for adoption and adaptation by other institutions.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

This section summarises key conclusions drawn from the COWL Project and offers recommendations for future research in the area of online Academic Writing development.

Articles chosen for the COWL online tutoring training course, the report on current practice (Ganobcsik-Williams 2009a), and the 'COWL Questionnaire for Writing Development/Writing Centre Professionals' results reveal that online writing support for tertiary students is a focus for Academic Writing pedagogy and scholarship internationally, but that technologies and protocols for online writing tutoring are still at a developmental stage. This report recommends that both technologies and pedagogical approaches for online writing tutoring continue to be explored, adopted, and adapted for the benefit of students across the sector.

The COWL Project has demonstrated that it is possible to make use of available tools, such as Skype and Mikogo web-conferencing software, to conduct effective synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutorials with students in academic settings. The project has also shown that online writing tutoring can be utilised not only by students and writing centre tutors, but also by subject academics with their students and as a student peer review tool. This report recommends that research continues to be carried out into identifying technologies and pedagogical approaches for enabling academics in the disciplines and students-as-peer-writing-reviewers to take part in online writing tutorials. A further area for research and development is the use of online writing consultations by writing development professionals in supporting subject academics in writing for publication.

Research to gauge the effects of individualised face-to-face writing tutorials at CAW took place in 2008-9 alongside the COWL Project and used discourse analysis techniques to examine the changes that students made to their writing assignments as a result of participating in a face-to-face writing tutorial at CAW (Borg and Deane 2009, 2011). This report recommends that this type of research be carried out with online writing tutorials, both as a method of learning about the effects of online writing tutorials and for use as a comparison with other studies on student learning in individualised writing tutorials.

The COWL Project has taken a crucial first step in harnessing tools and helping to formulate pedagogies for conducting synchronous and asynchronous writing tutorials in an online environment. This report recommends that future research concentrates on compiling a full collection of Open Educational Resources (OERs) to further support students' Academic Writing needs. Preliminary searches of open-access repositories and services (e.g. JorumOpen, the OCWC and the OER Commons) demonstrate that many different Academic Writing OERs already exist. These resources could be repurposed into a dedicated collection categorised around key Academic Writing issues that would compliment and underpin online writing tutorials.

5. Implications for the future

The implications of the COWL project for students and staff at Coventry University are that accessible writing support of the same high quality as the writing support available on campus at CAW will be offered online, as CAW/COWL become an integrated learning environment. For writing development professionals, COWL will have the potential to serve as a site for conducting research into theories and practices of online writing tutoring. For the Higher and Further Education sectors, COWL will offer a replicable model of 'whole-institution' writing development mechanisms that feature the human contact and

personalised tuition provided by face-to-face writing tutorials *and* supply real accessibility and scalability.

There are numerous ways in which new development work could be undertaken to build on the COWL Project and carry it further. The CAW team is grateful to JISC for supporting the COWL Project, because if not for this project and the expertise provided by the staff it brought together, CAW staff would not have had a sustained opportunity to discuss, develop, trial, and implement online writing support, or to contemplate the future of such curriculum development. A key way in which the project enabled us to envision further developments was through the drawing up of the map of CAW's current writing support mechanisms and the follow-on map of the curricular enhancements that COWL would make possible (Figures 2 and 3). Crucially, in addition to these maps the COWL project team created a third map: a 'future-gaze' of the Coventry Online Writing Lab that foresees a widening of COWL's facilities into group teaching and increased cascading of writing development to students through Writing in the Disciplines (WiD) work with academic staff (Figure 14).

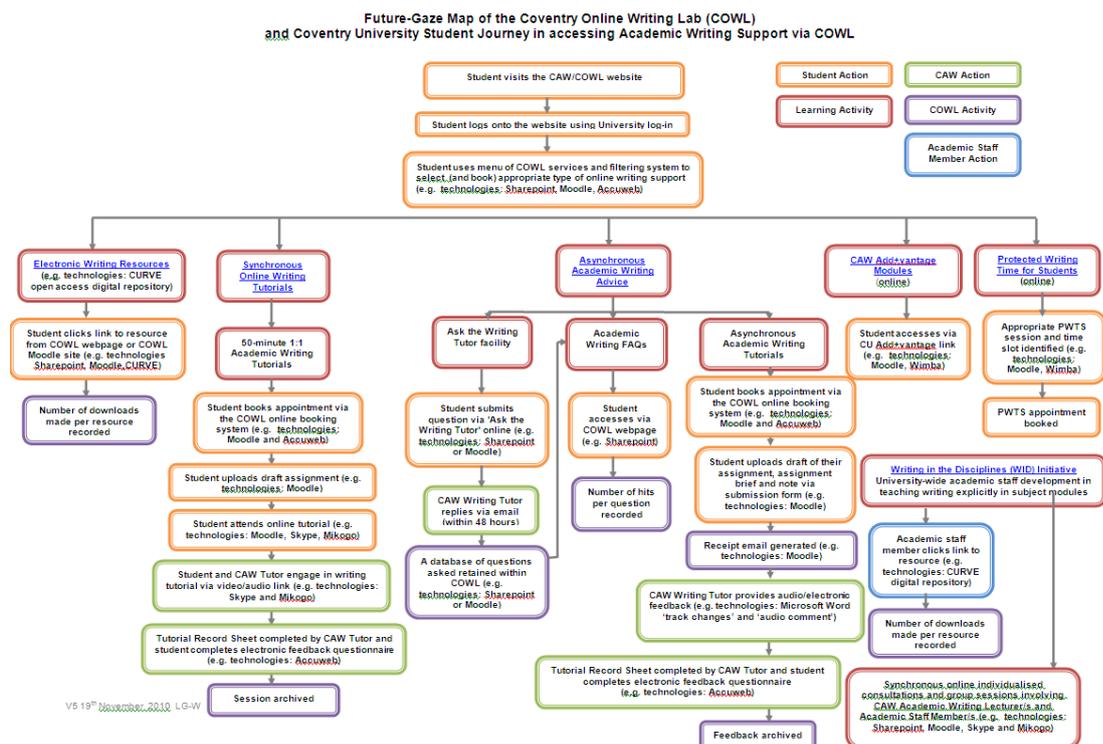


Figure 14. Future-Gaze Map of COWL and Coventry University Student Journey in accessing Academic Writing Support via COWL

One result of this mapping and of the input of the project's Critical Friend was that a 'COWL 2 Project', for further development of COWL to include a well-researched and updatable collection of Academic Writing Open Educational Resources (OERs), was written by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams and submitted to JISC's 'OER Collections' funding call in June 2010. Although this project was not successful in gaining funding, the COWL project team views the activities it outlines as a logical next step for COWL, and will revise the proposal and re-submit it for consideration by potential funders.

Another 'further research' implication of the COWL Project is that the establishment of the Coventry Online Writing Lab will enable studies into the pedagogical effects of online writing tutoring to be conducted using COWL. As noted in Section 4, research conducted by two of the project team members into the effects of individualised face-to-face writing tutorials at

CAW, which took place in 2008-9 alongside the COWL project and which used discourse analysis techniques to examine the changes that students made to their writing assignments as a result of participating in a one-to-one writing tutorial at CAW (Borg and Deane 2009), sets a precedent for this type of research. This study found that individualised writing tutorials that take place at CAW 'assist students in moving from a writer-based perspective on their work to a reader-based approach'. Students 'begin to perceive the weaknesses of clarity, argumentation, and evidence in their own work,' and to 'see the improvement that is possible through revision'. Students 'are encouraged to analyse their approach to assignment briefs and to consider the overall structure of their papers. They learn how to relate their introduction to the topic and how to make their response[s] coherent' (Borg and Deane 2009: 1, 16-17). Staff at CAW believe in the value of extending this research to online writing tutorials, both as a method of learning about the effects of this type of writing tutorial and for use as a comparison with the findings of CAW's face-to-face tutorial study.

A third implication for further development as a result of the COWL Project is that the COWL Online Writing Tutorial Platform in Moodle may provide a model for online/electronic assignment submission and handling. As per the recommendation of one of the project team members/Faculty stakeholders, the COWL interface might have the potential to be customised for assignment submission and handling in the Faculties because it could provide a secure way for students to submit assignments remotely; ensure that copies of assignments are retained; enable lecturers and administrators to access assignments; and allow lecturers to read, provide written and spoken comments on, and return assignments remotely.

In terms of sustainability, COWL has become an integral part of CAW. Online writing tutoring will be offered in a scalable way—as CAW's face-to-face model of writing tutoring is offered—directly to students but also to academics in the disciplines for use with their students and as a student peer review tool. One implication of which CAW must be mindful is that Academic Writing Tutors' workloads will shift as COWL is implemented; the balance of conducting face-to-face and online writing tutorials will change as the online provision is rolled out. Whilst the introduction of online writing tutoring into CAW initially will not require additional resourcing, rolling out online writing tutorials to new constituencies such as CULC and partner institutions would require increased funding to employ more Academic Writing Tutors.

Finally, it should be noted that the Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) will be managed and maintained by the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) at Coventry University and that resources will be housed in the open-access area of the University's digital repository (CURVE). *The COWL Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring*, which will be accessible via the main COWL website and the COWL project website, will be updated regularly as new technologies for online writing tutoring are introduced and as CAW and other Coventry University staff gain expertise in working with learners and their writing online. The intention is that COWL will continue to develop in response to the needs of students and staff, and that it will provide an important model of technology-enabled 'whole institution' writing provision in which students, academics, university managers, writing developers, and other scholarly communities and educational stakeholders will find value now and in the future.

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7. Appendixes

Appendix A. COWL Student Survey to gauge the writing development needs of Coventry University students and their knowledge of and access to technologies that are potentially relevant to online writing development.

1) Which School or Faculty are you from?

- School of Art and Design
- Faculty of Business, Environment and Society
- Faculty of Engineering and Computing
- Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
- School of Lifelong Learning

2) What level of study are you at?

- 1st year undergraduate
- 2nd year undergraduate
- 3rd year undergraduate

Masters student
 Doctoral student
 Other

3) Are you a:
 Full time student
 Part time student

4) How much time does it take you to travel to campus each visit from your usual term time residence?
 Less than ten minutes
 11-30 minutes
 31-60 minutes
 61-120 minutes
 more than 2 hours

5) Where do you do your coursework and other self-guided study?
 Home
 University premises (open access room, common room, lab)
 University Library
 At my place of work
 Friend's house
 Other:

6) When doing coursework or self-directed study, do you:
 Prefer to work alone
 Prefer to work with others

7) What issues cause you difficulty in your academic study (check all that apply)?
 Time (work, home, social and study time conflicts)
 Social problems (e.g. domestic, loneliness)
 Financial pressures
 Difficulty of the course content
 Difficulty in getting the right help and support
 Motivational
 Other:

8) Do you feel you have adequate academic writing support from your subject tutors?
 True

False

9) Have you initiated a meeting with your personal, module or course tutor to discuss a writing assignment or other academic writing related matter?

Yes

No

10) Where do you go for help with academic writing (check all that apply)?

Course/personal tutor

module tutor

Centre for Academic Writing

Talk to peers

Library

English Language Support Unit / EFL Unit

Use study skills books

Look online

Don't access help

Other:

11) Do you know about the services offered by the Centre for Academic Writing?

Yes

No

12) Have you accessed the services offered by the Centre for Academic Writing?

Yes

No

13) If you answered 'yes' to the previous question could tell us how many times you have used the Centre for Academic Writing's services?

Once this academic year

2-3 times this academic year

4-6 times this academic year

more than 6 times this academic year

14) Please indicate which, if any, of the following Centre for Academic Writing's services you have used (check all that apply):

One-to-one writing tutorial

Handout material

Enrolled on a CAW Add+Vantage Module

Group session/workshop

Drop-in writing tutorial

15) Please indicate what was the subject of your visit to the Centre for Academic Writing (check all that apply):

Essay writing

Report Writing

Dissertation/thesis writing

Exam preparation

Forming an argument

Improving grammar and sentence structure

None

16) The current service offered by the Centre for Academic Writing has helped my academic progress.

Strongly agree

Agree

Not sure

Disagree

Strongly disagree

17) What are the perceived benefits of using the services offered by the Centre for Academic Writing (check all that apply)?

Improved marks on coursework

Feel more motivated to engage in academic writing

Feel more confident in my academic writing

A chance to talk about my ideas/work

A personalised learning experience

Perceived improvement in writing style

None

Other:

18) What are the limitations of the service?

Have to wait a long time for an appointment

Appointment times are restricted (only open Monday - Friday day times and a couple of evenings)

Need to be physically on campus

Need to be organised

Advice not always relevant to my discipline

None

Other:

19) If CAW were to offer the following services, which would you use (please check all that apply)?

Online writing seminars

Writing tutorials by email

Social online learning environments for discussing your writing

Tutorial with a trained student writing tutor

Online writing support materials

Evening and weekend openings

Subject specific workshops on writing delivered in the CAW

Subject specific workshops on writing delivered within your School/Faculty

Online one-to-one writing tutorial using web-conferencing software

Other:

20) Do you have sole use of a personal computer or laptop?

Yes

No

21) Do you have home broadband?

Yes

No

22) What software have you used in the past three months (check all that apply)?

Excel

Word

Movie maker

PowerPoint

Publisher

Internet Explorer

Firefox

Photoshop

Other:

23) What internet services do you commonly use?

YouTube

iTunes

Facebook:

- Google
- eBay
- Skype
- Second Life
- MSN Messenger
- Other:

24) Please tell us which platforms and devices you typically use for studying

	1 (use most of all)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
desktop on campus	<input type="radio"/>							
desktop at home	<input type="radio"/>							
MP3 player	<input type="radio"/>							
Laptop	<input type="radio"/>							
Notepad	<input type="radio"/>							
Smartphone	<input type="radio"/>							
PDA	<input type="radio"/>							
Other	<input type="radio"/>							

25) When you use software and Internet services for studying, do you use them for communicating with other students or mainly for gathering information?

- Communicating with other students
- Gathering information
- Both

Appendix B. COWL Questionnaire for Writing Development/Writing Centre Professionals

1) Please enter your email address (you can leave this field blank if you would rather your answers remain anonymous)

2) What is the name and location of your university or college?

3) How long has your writing centre been in operation?

4) Is the writing centre a stand-alone operation or is it part of another academic unit (like a learning centre or an academic department)?

- Stand-alone
 Part of another academic unit

5) If you have answered 'part of another academic unit' to the previous question, please tell us which academic unit your centre belongs to.

6) Is your writing centre located within easy reach of students on campus?

- Yes
 No

7) How is the writing centre staffed?

- Administrators/Assistants/Clerical Support
- Full time tutors
- Managers/Co-ordinators
- Part time tutors
- Peer tutors

8) What is your role in relation to the teaching of writing?

- Teach writing
- Teach English as a second or additional language
- Teach English for Academic Purposes
- Manage a writing centre
- Member of staff in a writing centre
- Support writing in Studies Skills centre or unit
- Work in professional development unit of University
- Other:

9) How many students does your writing centre serve in a typical year?

10) Have the number of students served increased, decreased or stayed the same over the last couple years (if you have been in operation that long)?

- Increased

- decreased
- about the same

11) Please describe the stages of a face-to-face tutorial in your centre.

12) Does your writing centre offer any online services?

- Yes
- No

13) Why did you decide to offer online support?

14) What ratio of your centre's time is spent online:face-to-face tutoring?

15) Do you offer synchronous and asynchronous online facilities?

- synchronous
- asynchronous
- synchronous and asynchronous
- neither

16) Which resources do you provide (check all that apply)?

- A website
- A Wiki
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Online submission of work
- We don't provide resources
- Other:

17) What type of technology do you use for one-to-one tuition (check all that apply)?

- Instant Messenger (MSN, Google chat, etc.)
- Videoconferencing (Skype, etc.)

We don't provide one-to-one online tuition
 Other:

18) What type of technology do you use for online groupwork (check all that apply)?

Forums, discussion boards
 Chatrooms
 Virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life)
 Web-conferencing (Elluminate, Wimba etc.)
 We don't do online groupwork
 Other:

19) What facilities/types of support do you think can/cannot be replicated online?

one-to-one tutorials 
handout material 
module 
group session/workshop 
drop-in writing tutorial 

20) Do you think your online writing support has been effective?

Strongly Disagree
 Disagree
 Undecided
 Agree
 Strongly Agree

21) Do you have any concerns about providing online writing support or tuition?

Yes
 No

Which resources do you provide (check all that apply)?

A website
 A Wiki
 Podcasts
 Videos
 Online submission of work
 We don't provide resources
 Other:

17) What type of technology do you use for one-to-one tuition (check all that apply)?

- Instant Messenger (MSN, Google chat, etc.)
- Videoconferencing (Skype, etc.)
- We don't provide one-to-one online tuition
- Other:

18) What type of technology do you use for online groupwork (check all that apply)?

- Forums, discussion boards
- Chatrooms
- Virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life)
- Web-conferencing (Elluminate, Wimba etc.)
- We don't do online groupwork
- Other:

19) What facilities/types of support do you think can/cannot be replicated online?

- one-to-one tutorials
- handout material
- module
- group session/workshop
- drop-in writing tutorial

20) Do you think your online writing support has been effective?

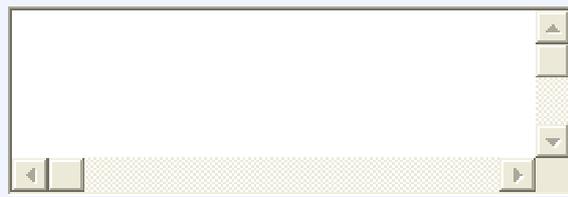
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

21) Do you have any concerns about providing online writing support or tuition?

- Yes
- No

22) If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, please tell us what these concerns are.

23) How do your students feel about the online services you offer?



24) How do your tutors feel about the online services you offer?



25) Do you feel your online writing support is more or less effective than in-person tutorials?

- More effective
- Less effective

26) Do you feel your online writing support is more or less expensive than in-person tutorials?

- More expensive
- Less expensive

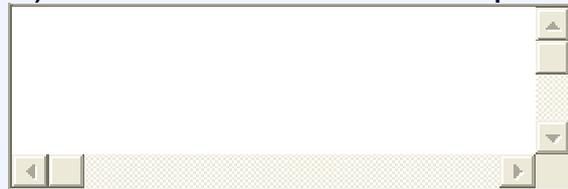
27) Do you feel your online provision has changed the type of students that access your service?

- Yes
- No

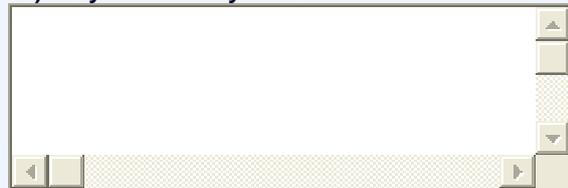
28) Why did you/your centre decide not to offer online writing support at this stage?



29) What are the issues that seem most important to you in designing an on-line writing laboratory?



30) Do you have any advice for someone embarking on developing an online learning environment?



31) What questions would you ask in order to evaluate the effectiveness of an online writing laboratory?



32) Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your writing centre?



Appendix C. Student Feedback Following Online Writing Tutorials Autumn 2009

Student feedback was collected at the end of each synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutorial. After completing the tutorial the student was automatically directed to SurveyMonkey to complete the following eight yes/no questions as well as a final question. Qualitative comments were invited in addition to these quantitative response prompts.

1. I found the learning experience to be efficient.
2. The tutor made me feel comfortable.
3. Did the use of technology enhance the learning experience?
4. The tutor addressed my questions and concerns.
5. The length of the tutorial was about right.
6. I would be interested in participating in future online writing tutorials.
7. I would prefer an online writing tutorial to a face-to-face writing tutorial.
8. As a result of the tutorial I feel more confident about writing at University.
9. How long was your online tutorial (to the nearest five minutes)?

Appendix D. COWL Interview Participant information Sheet Autumn 2009

Study title: Evaluating the COWL Project: Interviews of staff involved

What is the purpose of the study?

As you know, CAW has been involved in a JISC funded project to develop an online writing laboratory called COWL.

This research forms part of a number of activities that are going on to help the project team examine the efficacy of the COWL project. By interviewing staff and students engaged in COWL at this stage it is hoped that their aspirations and reservations can be used to inform and shape the project's direction.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you one of team involved with either developing or delivering the COWL project. We hope that all members of the team will consent to be interviewed.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in any part of this study. Taking part in this study is not compulsory but it is hoped that you would wish to take part in this element of planning of the project's future.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part in this study you will be interviewed by a member of the COWL Project Team, Christine Broughan. The interview will most likely take place on campus at a mutually convenient time. It is expected that the interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes. You will also be given the opportunity to read the report that will be prepared for the project team.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The interview is an opportunity for you to share your aspirations/reservations about the project. Being a part of this research will contribute to the body of knowledge on online writing laboratories at Coventry University and help to identify 'what works' in terms of enhancing the students' writing experience.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There are no real disadvantages of taking part in this study that can be foreseen. The study will require you spend some time thinking about issues regarding the efficacy of an online writing laboratory. If you take part in the interview this will probably take between 30-40 minutes.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All interview question responses will be kept, as much as possible, confidential and anonymous. When interviewing people from such a small department it is difficult to guarantee 100% anonymity as others may be able to identify the speaker because of incidences particular to them. Anything mentioned expressly confidential will be kept that way. If you take part in an interview then a pseudonym will be used on the transcripts. Data will be kept on a secure computer at the researcher's office and the data will be destroyed after a period of 12 months.

If you take part in a focus group then you will be required to agree to keep the identities of other focus group members confidential and not to discuss the content of the focus group with any third party. Interviews/focus groups will be electronically recorded. The report will be shared with participants for comment before being published.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will form part of a report that will be presented to the department and to JISC. It may form part of a journal article or be published on the web.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research will be conducted by Dr. Christine Broughan and it has been funded by JISC.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams and the University's ethics committee.

Contact for further information.

Dr. Christine Broughan – c.broughan@coventry.ac.uk 02476 792322

Appendix E. Interview Questions: Staff Involved in COWL Trials Autumn 2009

Thank for agreeing to take part in this study. My name is Christine Broughan and I am a researcher at Coventry University. Could you please confirm that you have read the participant information sheet sent and that you are happy to take part in this research.

About you

- How do you feel about the online services that COWL proposes to offer?

- Are you happy about the implementation of COWL?
- Do you feel sufficiently able to provide online writing support?
- Do you have any concerns about providing online writing support or tuition?
- How might the implementation of COWL affect the way you feel about your job?

About COWL

- Do you think your online writing support has been/will be effective?
- Do you feel your online writing support is more or less effective than in-person tutorials?
- Do you feel your online writing support is more or less expensive than in-person tutorials?
- What are the issues that seem most important to you in designing an on-line writing laboratory?
- Do you have any advice for someone embarking on developing an online learning environment?
- What questions would you ask in order to evaluate the effectiveness of an online writing laboratory?
- Are there any issues regarding asynchronous support and the synchronous support that you might like to discuss in relation to COWL?

About the students

- How do your students feel about the online services you offer?
- Do you feel your online provision has changed the type of students who access your service? (e.g. widening participation)

Appendix F. Glossary of Acronyms and Technical Terms

Academic Writing Tutor	A member of staff who specialises in working with students on their writing for university courses, in a department/ Faculty or in a writing/learning centre.
AccuTrack	A commercially-available recordkeeping system for use in writing and other types of student support centres.
AccuWeb	Online appointment booking system in AccuTrack.
Asynchronous Writing Tutorial	A writing tutorial that does not take place in real time (e.g. an email tutorial).
BSC	The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach (Kaplan and Norton 1992): a strategic management tool to gauge the connectedness of key organisational elements through the exploration of cause-and-effect relationships
CAW	Centre for Academic Writing, Coventry University
COWL	Coventry Online Writing Lab
CURVE	Coventry University's digital repository

JING	A type of freely available audio commenting software
MegaMeeting	A type of commercially available web conferencing software
Mikogo	A plug-in or 'add in' for SKYPE that enables desktop sharing between users during a web-conference
Moodle	A 'Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment' is a type of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)
OWL	Online Writing Lab
Riffly	A type of freely available audio commenting software
SKYPE	A type of commercially available web-conferencing software
Synchronous Writing Tutorial	A writing tutorial that takes place in real time (e.g. through web-conferencing)
WAC	Writing Across the Curriculum
WiD	Writing in the Disciplines
Writing Centre	An established feature of higher education in the United States, writing centres and writing labs are growing in popularity in university systems around the world.