The new landscape of academic communication: transformations of writing practices in the contemporary university.

The Dynamics of Knowledge Creation
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Academic writing as workplace practice

- Much work in academic writing analyzes aspects of the language, genre and structure, in relation to discipline and discourse community
  - Eg Hyland (2012), Swales (2004), Myers (1990)
- And / or focuses predominantly on learning academic writing
  - Eg Ivanic (1997), Murray (2015)
- This project approaches academic writing as a workplace practice – what do professional academics *do* in academic writing work?
  - Following eg Lillis and Curry (2010), Lea and Stierer (2009, 2011)

Knowledge Creation as workplace practice

- What are the writing practices people engage in to create and communicate knowledge?
  - Many different kinds of writing > Interested in all types of writing, not just scholarly
  - Carried out in particular working conditions > How changing context and conditions of academic workplace in the UK are shaping processes of knowledge creation

Transformations in the Higher Education workplace in the UK

- Transformations in <u>relationships with students</u>
  - Massification - from an elite to a mass system
  - Consumerisation and marketisation - fees
- Transformations in <u>managerial practices</u> in universities
  - Accountability and audit (Strathern 2000)
  - Research excellence framework
  - League tables

Transformations in the Higher Education workplace in the UK

- Transformations in <u>tools and resources, particularly digital</u> (Goodfellow and Lea 2013)
  - Facilitating distance and blended learning and collaboration (Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), video conferencing, file sharing, online library resources, ...)
  - Social networking; public online persona required
  - Smartphones and portable devices
- Changing <u>spaces of work</u> (Temple and Barnett 2007), from personal offices to corporate spaces

Negotiating contradiction

- > multiple contradictory expectations around writing – how do people negotiate these?
  - Nygaard (2015): different expectations from
    - local, national and international expectations
    - discipline-focused, thematic, linguistic social communities
  - > academic writing as a site of negotiation
    - Requiring strategies for choosing
  - > what do these choices look like as they play out in academics' workplace practices?

Research questions

- How are academics' writing practices affected by changing resources (including space), relationships, disciplinary locations?

- How are changes in digital communications technologies affecting writing?

- How do changes in managerial practices influence this?

- Is all of this changing the nature of academic professional and scholarly identities?

Research design

- Adopting a social practice approach to literacy and a sociomaterial perspective
- To understand academics' writing practices in detail, conceived of as literacy practices (Barton 2007)
  - In their current context
  - In their life history
  - In relation to their institutional and disciplinary position
  - Attending to their experiences and perspectives
  - Analysing the materiality of tools and resources as part of these practices

Case sites

- To enable comparison across disciplines and across types of university

	Maths	Marketing	History
University A: research-intensive, non-Russell group	UniA-Maths	UniA-Marketing	UniA-History
University B: Russell group	UniB-Maths	UniB-Marketing	UniB-History
University C: post-1992 university	UniC-Maths	UniC-Marketing	UniC-History

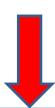- Plus pilot work in our own disciplines, and auto-ethnographic work

Research phases

Phase 1: working with individuals

- Interviews with individuals about their work practices, technobiographies, and typical days' practices

Phase 2: detailed study of writing processes

- Recording the detail of writing processes using screen capture, digital pens, keyboard tracking, informed by interviews

Phase 3: understanding the community

- Interviews with managers, administrative staff, colleagues and collaborators

We are here

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> Today: sharing some preliminary data and findings from some of the phase 1 interviews with (pseudonyms):

- Dean Robinson, senior lecturer in History
- Rebecca Allen, senior lecturer in History
- Charles Cooper, lecturer in Marketing
- Diane Simmons, reader in Marketing
- Ian Fairclough, lecturer in Pure Mathematics
- Gareth Wareing, professor of Statistics
  - Interviewed by Ibrar Bhatt and Sharon McCulloch

- A few key aspects of the new communicative landscape (Kress 2013) of academic writing
  - Working and writing spaces
  - Patterns of collaboration
  - Managerial demands
    - Particularly associated with the Research Excellence Framework exercise in the UK

Changes in the academic landscape 1: Working and writing spaces

- Many people have been moved to smaller, refurbished offices

- Seminar teaching now 'delivered' in centrally bookable spaces, not academics' offices

- Most people say their office is not where they do 'serious' writing work either

Working and writing spaces: Move to smaller offices

- Rebecca Allen (History):
  - "We're used to something that's three times this size that we would hold classes in."
  - "The new regime is much more ordered, and 'We will do things like this, and we will keep people in their little places'."

Working and writing spaces: Find places to 'escape'

- Rebecca Allen (History): "<u>Only in extremis</u> would I write within the university, on the campus, and the bottom of the places that I would use on campus is my office ... <u>I have almost never written in my office</u>." Not conducive to work, because people call in. All writing, including emails, admin, lecture-writing, done at home.

- Gareth Waring (Maths) works a day a week at home – too many interruptions in the office. Needs an hour to read what he's been writing in previous session – so needs longer uninterrupted time.

Working and writing spaces: Where do the 'real' books go?

- Rebecca Allen (History): Books are now there for a different purpose, no longer to pass on immediately to students. Most books used for writing and teaching kept at home; office becomes a storage space.

- Ian Fairclough (Maths): Books at home that he's working from. "If I use something almost every day I'll take that home." Books in the office are old ones, for storage.

Working and writing spaces: Where do the 'real' books go?

- Diane Simmons (Marketing): Books, that's another really important thing. Books are kind of your intellectual identity, but <u>the books I keep at work aren't my intellectual identity</u>, right? So most academics will come in and say, "Oh gosh, I wouldn't have thought she was interested in that." You can't do that in my office because that exists at home, because that's where I do my writing.

Working and writing spaces: 'Always on'

- Implicit expectation of being constantly in contact using digital devices
  - Gareth Waring (Maths): feels he emails too much, answering emails all through the evening
  - Rebecca Allen (History): "We're expected to be on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

Working and writing spaces: 'Info freako'

Charles Cooper (Marketing): The iPhone makes it hard to separate work and life: "I find myself constantly on the bloody thing. […] What was that track? Info freako. I feel like I'm an infofreak. I walk past it to the kettle, click it. Walk past it here, click it. […] The last thing I do at night is check my emails. The first thing I do in the morning is check my emails. I don't get huge amounts. I probably get, on a good day I only get 50. On a bad day maybe get 100.

Working and writing spaces:
A disciplined writing retreat

Diane Simmons (Marketing): It's like every time you sit down to do some writing, an email comes in that takes you away from it. [...] I have taken up those wooden balls in the wood [...] I've done that a few times and it has been really productive. In a busy day, it means thinking ahead instead of grabbing an hour to write. [...] <u>They're not very good for internet access</u>. If you want to do your <u>disciplined writing retreat</u> without going away from home and still being in time for tea, you can take that out for two or three hours.

Photo by Clem Rutter (www.clemrutter.net), used under Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0

Changes in the academic landscape 2: Patterns of collaboration

- Disciplinary distinctiveness in patterns of collaboration, in both research writing and writing related to teaching
    - Historians: 'lone scholars' in writing, more collaborative teaching beginning
    - Mathematicians: in research, 'nearly everything is collaborative now, it didn't used to be'
    - Marketing: collaboration in research unremarkable and assumed, but facilitated more by digital tools nowadays; teaching largely lone

Patterns of collaboration: historians 'lone scholars' in research

- Rebecca Allen (History): "Mostly it's books … the heavyweight, solely authored piece of research work … the result of years of research in archives", the readership of which would be the "very small group of other academics" in her field.

Patterns of collaboration: Beginnings of more in History teaching

- Rebecca Allen and Dean Robinson (History): Starting to move slowly towards a little more collaboration in teaching
  - Working with academic colleague on delivering a course
  - Working with Faculty and computing staff on a blended learning course
  - Working with administrative colleagues in liaising with students by email

Patterns of collaboration
Maths: Collaborative writing in writing research, but not teaching

- Ian Fairclough (Maths): Vast majority of research papers in his field co-authored now, a relatively recent development. "I don't think that was true even in the late '90s."

- Teaching is a more solitary activity. Courses: writes extensive notes and creates exercises for students – no other text book needed.

Patterns of collaboration Marketing: Collaborative research writing, lone teaching

- Charles Cooper (Marketing), hugely collaborative writing process
  - "I firmly believe it's more possible if you work with more experienced academics, than trying to do it on your own. I think there are superbly brilliant academics out there who can do it on their own, but I think they're few and far between."
- Teaching "a lone job." "I was given this 10 week course to run. I said, "Right. What do I put in it?" "I don't know. It's up to you." I was like, "Shit.""

Patterns of collaboration: Marketing: Large international collaborative research bids

- Diane Simmons: Lots of collaborative research writing

- International collaborative H2020 research bid, 13 universities in 6 countries

Patterns of collaboration: facilitated by digital tools

Diane Simmons: Preparation of H2020 bid depended on combination of distant collaboration facilitated by both digital tools, and face to face meetings.

- Happened very quickly – between 1st May and 11th June

- "It started off with the proposal coming to me. There were a couple of Skype discussions. The forms that needed to be filled in were sent out. I then went to Scandinavia for two or three days. […] So then we wrote pieces, and then that's been circulated around."

Patterns of collaboration:
But digital tools are not enough

Getting everybody together in one room still essential

- DS: "IT becomes crucial. Skype and email conversations are misunderstood, plus you've got an interdisciplinary thing going on. […] Everybody was in the room. We all talked about the whole process. We heard different peoples' perspectives, which was immensely helpful. [Otherwise] I couldn't have written it. I went there thinking, 'I don't understand where I fit in this.' I came away going, 'okay now we need to…'."

Changes in the academic landscape 3: Management pressures on research writing

- Increased involvement from university management in research writing, more control over where you publish and 'what counts'
- Ever-higher expectations
  - Charles Cooper (Marketing): "Back when I started it was 'Just get a couple of twos, maybe a couple of threes, if you get included in the REF that's brilliant.' Now […] you hear talk throughout the university from here there and everywhere of teaching only contracts, what constitutes a teaching only contract? Well, less than two fours in the REF. Five years ago nobody was getting fours."

Overall quality profile: Definitions of starred levels

Four star	Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Three star	Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence.
Two star	Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
One star	Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Unclassified	Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment.

http://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/assessmentcriteriaandleveldefinitions/

Management pressures: clashing with disciplinary writing practices

- Rebecca Allen (History): value of monographs within the discipline not recognized more broadly

- "Increasingly, because we're encouraged to think about impact, we are being stretched away from the monograph […] a core part of our discipline"

- Timescales of history as discipline not recognized

  - "We are more attuned to working on our own, and locking ourselves away in a little room for years on end, burrowing away in these archives to produce a piece of work. Which a lot of people then turn around and say, … 'What's its impact? So what?' "

Management pressures:
where to publish

- Marketing: list of 'good' (mainly US) journals produced by Association of Business Schools
- Diane Simmons: this has changed the culture and understanding of the discipline, and of what it is to be an academic
  - "When I came, it was about your integrity as a scholar, and that you had a body of work, maybe in different places, that represented you as an intellectual. When you became a professor, you could profess something, right? That seems to be vanishing very quickly. Now you have to have four really good papers in the right journal."

Management pressures: impact on the discipline

- Diane: last four submissions to journals on list, but not in her discipline. "That gives you a bit of a crisis […] Nobody knows where you fit."

- Charles: "The only UK marketing journal that's of real prevalence, General Marketing Management, you know what they've done? They've taken it from a three to a two. Ah thank you very much. Thanks for that. So it's like somebody said to me in an email, "Well that's the death of marketing in the UK.""

Summary: Aspects of the changing communicative landscape

- Working and writing spaces changing
  - Need to 'escape' from offices and digital demands
- Changing patterns of collaborative writing
  - Varying by discipline
  - Facilitated by digital tools – but these are not enough alone
- Managerial pressures
  - Privilege particular kinds of writing beneficial to the institution
  - Privilege particular places to publish, change 'what counts' in the discipline

Further explorations

- These interviews all located in one institution
- Next steps: analysis of more interviews to test these patterns and identify others
- Phase 2, detailed observations, will begin in the autumn
- To follow the project's progress:
  - http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/acadswriting/

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Questions and responses

- Does this sound familiar?

- Are similar patterns experienced in academic writing life outside the UK?

- What other kinds of contradictions are academics negotiating in their writing practices that we should pay attention to?