Writing Mentors: Further Details

1. Aims of the Project and Links to University Strategy

This project will improve students' academic performance and employability through a system of Writing Mentors. It will enhance current provision in the School of English by focusing particularly on writing style and accuracy; highlighting the relationship between effective writing and employability; providing a quick response to the needs of individual students; and allowing postgraduate students to develop their teaching profiles. By combining one-on-one tutorials with innovative workshop provision, this project will help our students to develop the excellent communication skills prized by employers. In broad terms, it will contribute to the University key strategic aim of ‘develop[ing] an exceptional student experience’. More specifically, it connects strongly with the University’s ‘Employability Strategy’ and particularly ‘the provision of opportunities, by Schools, Faculties and Professional Services through which students can develop the skills and attributes for their future career choice’.

2. Outcomes/Delivery

The award money will be used to pay carefully selected and trained postgraduate students to act as Writing Mentors, under my overall supervision. We will aim to employ four mentors, who will each work for forty hours over the two semesters of 2013-14. Each Mentor will be attached to approximately six undergraduate core modules in the School. Academics will refer students with particular writing problems to see the relevant Mentor, who will be available for individual consultations to be booked via the VLE. Personal tutors will also be able to refer tutees and students will be able to refer themselves. Attendance at these meetings will be carefully recorded. Mentors will also have a more strategic role, working with colleagues and undergraduate interns to organise workshops featuring invited experts. These workshops will focus on the relationship between clear, accurate writing and employability by helping students to navigate the different forms of writing encountered across professional and academic contexts: reports, applications, e-mails, tenders, proposals, and so on.

3. Timeline

September 2013: Advertise the role to PhD students in the School.
October 2013: Interview and appoint Writing Mentors. Training session for Writing Mentors (run by me). Scheme advertised to undergraduate students across all levels and to academic staff.
November to December 2013: Online sign-up Wiki available. Mentors meet individually with students. First writing workshop organised and takes place.
January 2014: Meeting between me, the Mentors, and the Director of TSE to discuss progress. Scheme re-advertised to undergraduate students and academic staff.
February to May 2014: Online sign-up Wiki available. Mentors meet individually with students. Second and third writing workshops organised and take place.
June 2014: Project report written (based primarily on feedback from students and Mentors).
January 2015: Project presented at the University’s Student Education Conference.

This project is funded by a University Student Education Fellowship.

David Higgins
10 September 2013