

# I believe I can write: exploring the impact of writing workshops on self- efficacy beliefs of Foundation degree students

Doctorate in Education

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## Declaration of original authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

## Abstract

Developing academic writing skills is crucial to degree outcomes but can be specifically challenging for widening participation students. Research suggests that writing support offered to university students should also attend to the affective dimensions of writing, particularly self-efficacy beliefs. This thesis explores the benefits of a writing workshop designed to foster self-efficacy beliefs with the broader aim of contributing to understanding of widening participation into Higher Education.

The thesis reports on the impact of a writing self-efficacy intervention, using a quasi-experimental design, to assess the effectiveness of three writing workshop conditions. Forty-two students, following a Foundation degree programme, completed writing self-efficacy questionnaires at three time intervals. Correlational analysis investigated the relationship between assignment grades, academic goals and performance self-efficacy, and further statistical analysis assessed the impact of the different workshop conditions. In addition, qualitative research, in the form of eight semi-structured interviews, explored the relative influence of each of the four sources of self-efficacy (mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and physiological and emotional state) on writing beliefs.

The relationship observed between self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and academic goals evidenced the importance of self-efficacy beliefs to academic attainment. Crucially, a lack of correlation was observed between self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment, with students interpreting their grades inconsistently. While students within the writing self-efficacy workshops experienced an uplift in self-efficacy for writing scores, this was not maintained over time. Mastery and vicarious experiences were fundamental in fostering self-efficacy beliefs, as was having an internal academic locus of control.

The research contributes new insights into the importance of an internal locus of control to long-term increases in self-efficacy beliefs. In addition, it contributes to the evidence that it is the student's interpretation of their grade, not the grade itself, which impacts on their self-efficacy beliefs. This not only furthers our knowledge on the sources of self-efficacy beliefs but has implications for those supporting students to become more efficacious, particular with regards their academic writing.

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## Glossary of terms

**Foundation degree students** – follow a Foundation degree programme, which combines academic and vocational skills equivalent to the first 2 years of an honours bachelor degree. These were established with the dual aim of *widening participation* and increasing economic competitiveness. When compared to the average university student, Foundation degree students are more likely to come from low participation neighbourhoods and have lower *socio-economic status*. They are also more likely to be over 21 and less likely to possess academic qualifications, meaning many fall into the category of the *non-traditional student*.

**Non-traditional student** – a student from an underrepresented group within the UK Higher Education system. This may be due to the route they have taken to university; they may have taken time away from studying or not taken traditional A-level qualifications. They may also have family responsibilities or financial restraints, such as being financially independent from parents or having dependents. They may have been recruited through *Widening Participation* strategies.

**Socio-economic status** – the social standing of an individual or group. A combination of the education, income and occupation is used to determine a person's socio-economic status. In education, this is often determined using factors such as neighbourhood characteristics linked to postcodes and eligibility for free school meals. Those within the lower socio-economic groups are underrepresented in UK Higher Education and are one of the categories targeted in *widening participation* strategies.

**Widening participation** – a UK government strategy to designed to increase the take up of Higher Education by underrepresented groups. Underrepresented groups include those from lower *socio-economic* groups and low participation neighbourhoods and schools. It also encompasses students from families where no parent has attended Higher Education and students who are returning to study after a break in their education. These groups are statistically less likely to go on to Higher Education and may be termed as *non-traditional students*.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an overview to the study. It begins by explaining the motivation for this research. As a Doctorate in Education, the study is driven by personal experiences and my observations as an educational practitioner. Some further context is then given, offering background to the research problem and supporting the rationale for the study. Whilst the aim of the overall study will be outlined, the specific research questions will be discussed in the chapter following the literature review. This introductory chapter will also summarise the overall approach taken to research and conclude with an outline of the structure of this thesis.

### 1.2 Why this study: my personal motivation

Addressing social inequality has long been a motivating force for me and ultimately led me to a career in education. I believe that it is through education that individuals can alter their own socio-economic status, due to the economic rewards derived from a higher education (HE) qualification. Education is a key driver of intergenerational mobility (Crawford, 2014): a leveller, or at least it has the opportunity to be so. Our universities have evidenced their widening access since the 1990s, but unless we support students to navigate through the systems, language and assessments, we are arguably failing them. This is especially true for those students who are first in their family to university and perhaps lack the social and cultural capital of the traditional university student. Education is the key if we are truly seeking the ideals of a meritocracy, and ensuring that no group is disadvantaged should be a driving principle.

Such a belief in the need to support all students to reach their potential, has long been the motivating force for the job that I do and the research that I undertake. I have worked as a learning developer for over ten years, in 2 different universities. My role is to support students to develop the academic skills needed for university level study, through workshops, one-to-one sessions and on-line resources. I believe we, as learning developers, have a key role to play in ensuring all students, regardless of their background, reach their full potential at university.

My experience working in universities has not only confirmed that the academic essay is still the main medium by which we assess students but also that academic writing is a source of anxiety for some students. I deliver workshops on academic writing, with the aim of developing students' skills and understanding in interpreting assessment criteria and structuring a well-balanced academic argument. These writing workshops are contextualised to the subject, embedded into programmes and developed through effective partnerships with academic staff, as evidenced good practice (Elton, 2010; Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996; Wingate, 2015, 2018). However, in my one-to-one sessions with students I have often been struck by the lack of self-belief some students present regarding their ability to write academically. The assessment language we use does little to help and, as Bernstein (2011) argues, is particularly alienating to widening participation students (French, 2013). But more than this, on reflection, my role in one-to-one sessions has been as much about developing students' beliefs in their capability to write, as developing their writing skills. Students' beliefs in their writing capability, or rather lack of it, appeared to me to greatly hinder their progression. It was this reflective insight, coupled with my drive for social equality, which led me on this research journey and to my interest in self-efficacy and academic writing, with a focus on widening participation students.

### 1.3 Why this study: the case for research

#### 1.3.1 The changing landscape

Universities have undergone a number of fundamental changes in the last few decades, which have impacted on not only the number of students attending but also the socio-economic make-up of the student body. A restructuring of the economy and increasing integration into Europe led to the belief that a mass system of HE was necessary and inevitable for a 21st century Britain (Halsey, 1997). Such changes in the political and economic environment in the 1990s brought about a widening participation agenda, aimed at increasing HE participation whilst redressing structural inequalities, by targeting underrepresented groups (Burke, 2008). In May 1991, the Conservatives announced "the beginning of a new educational era" (Halsey, 1997, p. 645). Mass education was planned to accommodate one in three school leavers, polytechnics became universities and a single funding body was put in place.

To some extent, the government's policy was successful. Since 1997, despite the increase in tuition fees, student numbers have continued to rise. The Department for Education estimates 49% of those who turned 18 in 2015/6 will participate in HE study by the time they are 30 (DfE, 2017a). We also know that this rise has included those from widening participation backgrounds. In 2009, just 10% of students on free school meals entered university and by 2014 this had risen to 15%. This has been largely attributed to the successful interventions to support students in secondary schools, such as pupil premiums (Ofsted, 2012), resulting in twice as many students eligible for free school meals achieving the basics at GCSE in 2013 as there were in 2005 and the majority of these continuing their studies at level 3 (DFE, 2014). The removal of student number controls in 2015/6 (Hillman, 2014) and recommendations from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty commission (DFE, 2014) for universities to recruit 5000 students from widening participation backgrounds by 2020, will certainly help to ensure our student body is more diverse.

One specific intervention to increase HE access to non-traditional students was the introduction of Foundation degrees. Launched in 2001, by the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, the Foundation degree combines academic and vocational skills equivalent to the first 2 years of an honours bachelor degree (Harvey, 2009). Delivered through a partnership between universities and further education (FE) colleges, they were established with the dual aim of widening participation and increasing economic competitiveness (DfES, 2004). In 2001 just over 4000 students enrolled on to Foundation degree programmes and by 2009 this had increased to over 57 000, close to the government's initial target (HEFCE, 2010); although this has dropped in recent years to around 40 000 in 2016 (HESA, 2018). There is also evidence to suggest the aim to attract students from widening participation backgrounds has also been met, with Foundation degrees attracting higher proportions of students from low participation neighbourhoods, those over 21 and those less likely to possess academic qualifications than for undergraduates as a whole (Harvey, 2009). There is also evidence to suggest that a Foundation degree leads to progression to an honours degree and favourable employment outcomes. According to HEFCE (2010), 59% of the 2007-8 full-time cohort enrolled onto an honours degree and, three and a half years later, of those employed, 53% were in graduate jobs.

Such a fundamental change to the study body in our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has not come without its critics and concerns. Universities were not only challenged with a rise in numbers but also with concerns of the calibre of student and fears of dumbing down (Cottrell, 2013). Assumptions were either that there would be widespread failure or an erosion of standards and as a result various approaches to widening participation emerged (R. Jones & Thomas, 2005). For many HEIs the 1990s saw the emergence of student support departments aimed at helping non-traditional students to succeed within a traditionally elite environment (Cottrell, 2013). The learning developer role emerged around this time, with the aim of empowering students “through enhancement of their academic practices” (Shahabudin, 2009). With most HEIs now providing additional support helping students to develop the skills required for successful university level study, the role of the learning developer has expanded and adapted since its conception over a decade ago.

### 1.3.2 An attainment gap

It is clear from the above that we have been successful in attracting more students from non-traditional backgrounds into our HEIs and offering more routes to degree attainment. However, these figures alone do not constitute evidence of an increasing meritocracy. Whilst a university degree is fundamental to economic success, offering the opportunity of access to better jobs and increased incomes (Fuller, 2009), in today’s competitive market the completion of a degree is insufficient. With many employers demanding a 2:1 as evidence of academic ability (J. Smith & Naylor, 2001), more focus needs to be placed on the degree outcomes of widening participation students. It is, therefore, concerning to note that in recent reports from the Institute of Fiscal Studies (Crawford, 2014), those from the lowest socio-economic group are 22.9% less likely to achieve these sought after grades than those from the 20% most privileged backgrounds.

Critics of the widening participation agenda may argue that such students are just not as capable and, therefore, lack the human capital to be successful, but this does not entirely explain the disparity. Even when controlling for tariff points on entry, students from poorer backgrounds are still 3.7% less likely to achieve a first or 2:1 than their more advantaged counterparts (Crawford, 2014). If true meritocracy is to be reached, we need to ensure that all those that make it to university via their demonstrated merits are able to reach their full potential, regardless of their background. Universities are arguably failing these students

and have a duty to ensure that they support and develop students in fair and equitable ways.

For too long the focus has been on access to HE, but there are signs that agendas are changing. The Office for Students' (OfS) recently published access and participation plans, recognise this required change in focus and calls for HE establishments, to not only improve access but also success rates and progression from HE for underrepresented groups (OfS, 2018). This will hopefully lead to more support for students not only in transitioning to HE study but also during the course of their degree. Understanding why there is a gap in degree attainment between those from differing socio-economic backgrounds is fundamental in creating effective strategies to support students to meet their full potential.

Bourdieu's (2011) theory on capital formation, particularly social and cultural capital, may offer some insights as to why those from widening participation backgrounds are less likely to reach the higher grades than their more privileged counterparts. By definition (OFFA, 2017), widening participation students are less likely to have a parent who has experience of university, and therefore prepare them for the challenges ahead and support them whilst there (Bradley & Bathmaker, 2013; Crozier & Reay, 2011; Reay, 1998). Parents with a university education, even if there are unfamiliar with the subject, are more likely to know how the system operates and can 'play the system' to their advantage (Ball, 2003). Perhaps most importantly, Bourdieu's (2011) notion of habitus, derived from social and cultural capital, may help to explain this attainment gap. This 'sense of belonging' has proved to be critical to student retention and success (Thomas, 2012). For those to whom university is the norm, they enter a world that they belong, which helps them to navigate the systems, decode the mysteries, make sense of what is required (Thomas, 2010) and possess the "proactive confidence" to seek support, if required (Ball, 2003, p. 88). Conversely, those students whose habitus is at "odds with that of their HE institution may feel that they don't fit in", which can have a detrimental impact on their attainment, sense of uncertainty and feelings of anxiety (Reay, 1998, p. 13). If we want to ensure all students are able to reach their potential at university we clearly need to have inclusive strategies, ensuring everyone understands the 'rules of the game' and thus have an equal chance of success.

### 1.3.3 Academic writing

The nature of the key assessment tool, the academic essay, used to determine the merit of the student and final grade, not only has “high stakes” (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 9) but also inherent issues for those from differing social backgrounds. Academic writing is a complex task requiring specific meta-cognitive skills (e.g. planning, evaluating and self-assessing) (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006) favouring middle class prior learning (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). To add to this, there appears to be no definition as to what makes a good essay, amongst institutions, lectures and students (Lea & Street, 1998). This is particularly problematic in institutions with weak framing, leaving students unsure of expectations, with a lack of direction, low confidence and rendering them dependent learners requiring constant support (Crozier & Reay, 2011). In addition, objectivity in marking essays is difficult to achieve and as Bernstein (1990) argues, lecturers favour those who mirror their own style, derived from their cultural and social backgrounds. The elaborate codes of the middle classes (Bernstein, 2011) are not only evident in the implicit marking criteria but also the text books and lectures, and if not shared can impair learning (Fuller, 2009), placing those from widening participation backgrounds, once again, at a distinct disadvantage.

In supporting students from widening participation backgrounds to attain these sought after high grades, it is clear that a focus needs to be placed on their ability to navigate the assessment criteria and multiple genres of the academic essay. Arguably, however, we also need to attend to the affective domains of writing. Writing is an individual task, requires creative effort over a sustained period, needs constant revision and requires self-discipline. All this combined means that academic writing presents particular challenges to self-regulation, suggesting self-efficacy has an important role to play in ensuring success (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

A meta-analysis into the antecedents of academic attainment has evidenced the importance of self-efficacy and effort regulation to tertiary grades (Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2012). Self-efficacy has also been shown to account for significant variance in writing performance across a range of studies and student groups (Pajares, 2003; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). According to Zimmerman and Bandura (1994) students with higher levels of self-efficacy for writing set themselves more challenging goals, which in turn drive them forwards. Such research would

suggest that effective support for student writing should also include a focus on fostering self-efficacy. Despite this, there appears to be sparse empirical evidence to support the need to change the writing support that is given to our university students, beyond developing their writing skills.

In conclusion, universities have been successful in attracting a wider range of students but if we are serious about creating a meritocratic society, we must do more to ensure students, from all backgrounds, are supported to achieve their potential. Students are still predominately assessed through their written work, which is used to determine their final grade but academic writing can be problematic for widening participation students. With implicit marking criteria, multiple genres to navigate and a language that is perhaps unfamiliar to those for whom university is not the norm, the demand for writing support is clear. Whilst the support for writing has progressed over the years, we have perhaps neglected a focus on the affective dimensions of writing. Previous research has suggested the importance of self-efficacy for writing and its impact on writing attainment. Whether writing workshops should include a focus on fostering self-efficacy is unclear and an area in much need of further research.

#### 1.4 Overall approach

As a researcher within education, I feel it important to state my positionality, as I can claim neither neutrality nor objectivity in my approach. My work within a university centres on supporting students, from all backgrounds, to develop their academic skills. My interests lie in understanding what impacts students' development whilst at university and, in particular, why students who arrive with the same tariff points have different chances of achieving the higher grades depending on their socio-economic background. I am motivated by closing this gap created by social inequality and take the view that we do not live in a meritocracy but, consciously or unconsciously, universities currently support social reproduction. In order to affect the desired emancipatory change within our universities, it was felt important to select the most powerful approach (M. Smith, 1998). Careful consideration was, therefore, given to the selection of research methods, in order to ensure as robust, valid and reliable approach as possible, within the current constraints.

Rather than being blindly loyal to any epistemological assumptions, this research argues from a pragmatist paradigm that the research approach should be appropriate for the research question. Such a pragmatist ontology and epistemology argues for a mixed methods approach, drawing on both numerical and narrative techniques as required to answer the research question (Ercikan & Roth, 2006). This focus on “methodological pluralism rather than an affinity to a single paradigm” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrision, 2011, p. 24) not only allows for more flexible methodological approaches but also opens up the opportunity for more assumptions to be explored (Ercikan & Roth, 2006). Such a mixed methods approach, according to Cohen et al. (2011), enables “data to be probed, corroboration and triangulation to be practised and rich(er) data to be gathered” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 23). It is, therefore, argued that this mixed methods approach helps to generate more robust research from which change can be proposed.

The overall aim of the study was clear from the start of this thesis: to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy and academic writing for widening participations students and recommend whether writing support sessions should focus on fostering self-efficacy. The specific research questions, hypotheses and methodology were determined after a review of the literature in this field, and a conceptual framework was compiled. This allowed for a coordinated and cohesive approach to research (Burton, Brundrett, & Jones, 2008) , the development of realistic and relevant research questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) and the most appropriate approach to be taken to answer the questions raised (Maxwell, 2012).

### 1.5 Thesis structure

This chapter has outlined the motivation for this study, from both a personal and research perspective. It has stated the overall aim of the study: to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy and academic writing for widening participation students and to recommend whether writing support sessions should focus on fostering self-efficacy. The following chapter will summarise the current research into the field of academic writing and self-efficacy for university level students. This aim of the research, coupled with synthesis of research highlighted in the Literature Review Chapter, was used to develop a conceptual framework, from which the research questions and hypotheses were formed. These will be detailed in the third chapter. It was felt that, as the research questions were derived after

analysis of the literature, an additional chapter between the Literature Review and the Methodology Chapter was required. The approach to answering these research questions will then be explained and justified in the Methodology Chapter.

The Results Chapter brings together the quantitative and qualitative research, structured by each research question. After analysis of the results, additional research was carried out and this forms an additional chapter entitled Locus of Control. The Discussion Chapter then reviews the findings in view of the previous research in the field. The final chapter, concludes the study and offers recommendations for future practice.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the literature around the two main concepts on which this thesis is based: academic writing and self-efficacy. These in themselves are concepts that have been difficult to define and have attracted research from a wide range of contexts and perspectives. It has, therefore, been necessary to narrow these down to the fields in which this thesis focuses: academic writing in university settings and academic self-efficacy. These two areas also overlap, with some research focusing on self-efficacy and academic writing. Research into this clearly defined field will, therefore, form a main part of this chapter. This thesis focuses on an academic writing and self-efficacy intervention, so the final part of this chapter concerns itself with any research specific to this field.

In summary, this literature review is structured broadly into three main areas. The first section reviews the research into academic writing at university. It explores the challenges of academic writing and the current approaches to supporting university students with this fundamental assessment tool. The second area focuses on academic self-efficacy and particularly its impact on academic attainment. Research into this field has been wide ranging, so particular attention will be placed on those closer to the context in question of UK university level education. The third and final section highlights research into the specific area of self-efficacy and academic writing. It analyses the evidence of correlation between self-efficacy for academic writing and writing attainment, and critically examines interventions that seek to improve academic outcomes.

### 2.2 Academic writing

Recent research from Itua, Coffey, Merryweather, Norton, and Foxcroft (2014), offers a clear distinction between two main issues that students face with academic writing: barriers inherent in academic writing; and barriers of epistemological beliefs. These distinct yet overlapping barriers, help to define the two areas in which research into academic writing has focused and for which varying solutions have been proposed, initiated and explored. The first focuses on the particular challenges of academic writing, such as the complexity of the task (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006), contrasting requirements (Lea & Street, 1998) and the high stakes involved (Hodgson & Harris, 2013; Lillis & Scott, 2007). The second are concerned

with the barriers brought about by epistemological beliefs regarding what constitutes good academic writing and students' prior experience of such assessment. Both of these, coupled with the beliefs academics hold about academic writing, have led to a range of interventions to help improve the writing attainment of undergraduates since the widening participation agendas of the 1990s.

### 2.2.1 Challenges of academic writing

There appears to be no debate surrounding the specific issues related to academic writing. Writing is a complex process which involves cognitive and meta-cognitive processes (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006). Students are faced with a blank page and have to decide what and how to write, which sources they should use, when they should begin each task and how to critique not only the work of others but their own writing too (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). It requires a complex range of skills including: information literacy; time management and critical thinking, in addition to knowledge specific to the academic writing context of referencing, knowledge of genre and appropriate style. To become an effective writer requires: "protracted cognitive development", developed over decades of writing practice; a strong working memory; and an appreciation of the writing from the imaginary reader's perspective (Kellogg, 2008, p. 2). It is often an individual task, requires creative effort over a sustained period, needs constant revision and requires self-discipline. All this combined means academic writing presents particular challenges to self-regulation (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) and a requirement to persist without immediate feedback which, according to Hidi and Boscolo (2006), has an impact on a student's motivation.

In addition to the complexities and difficulties students face with academic writing they also face the challenge of deciphering the 'mysteries' surrounding the notion of 'good' academic writing. Lea and Street's influential ethnographic research in the 1990s, highlighted the inconsistencies in academic writing requirements, not only across institutions but also between the disciplines (Lea & Street, 1998). A series of in-depth interviews with students and staff at two universities explored their understanding of academic writing, the challenge they faced and approaches taken. Their work challenged the initial preconceptions that students need to learn only one set of linguistic codes relevant to their discipline. Instead they found that students were working not only across disciplines, but within each discipline there were varying academic requirements by module, and even differing requirements

between tutors within a module (Lea & Street, 1998). They summarised that a number of challenges with regards academic writing “arose from the conflicting and contrasting requirements for writing on different courses and from the fact that these requirements were often left implicit” (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 11). Inconsistency in requirements, they argue, makes generic academic writing advice ineffective (Lea & Street, 1998) and their research led to an academic literacies approach to supporting writing at university, popular today. This argument, regarding the discipline specific nature of academic writing, was raised more recently in the research by Elton (2010), which highlighted the problematic nature in supporting students with generic writing advice and the ongoing nature of this problem.

Hodgson and Harris’ (2013) research further highlighted the discipline specific writing requirements that are evident in our universities, which remain largely implicit. Their in-depth study of 13 joint honour degree students evidenced the challenges faced with dealing with differing disciplinary requirements. They conclude that a student’s success is dependent upon them developing adequate “epistemological schemas” (Hodgson & Harris, 2013, p. 6). They call on subject tutors to take an “oblique approach to improving their students’ writing” and to help them to “develop a schematic understanding of the epistemology of the subject and of the specific assignment” (Hodgson & Harris, 2013, p. 6). Whilst this was a small scale study, it does help to support what others (Boscolo, Arfe, & Quarisa, 2007; Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Itua et al., 2014; Lea & Street, 1998), have argued are the challenges to academic writing. Their recommendations to help students to develop a clearer understanding of what is required of them, rather than merely focusing on generic writing skills, also helps learning developers and writing centres to further develop effective writing interventions.

Not only do students need to meet the differing requirements from a variety of disciplines tutors and assessment types, it has been argued that they are not offered a clear understanding of what ‘good’ writing looks like. This may be due to the level of agreement from staff and institutions regarding features of ‘good’ academic writing and the difficulties in expressing such notions in clear, explicit ways (Itua et al., 2014; Lea & Street, 1998). Lea and Street's (1998) interviews with staff suggested that, whilst academics claim to have a clear idea of what constitutes good writing within their discipline, when pressed further on

this, their focus tended to be on the generic; such as problems with syntax, grammar and surface level features. Not only is such a focus on surface level features ineffective (Fernsten & Reda, 2011), it also suggests that staff have difficulty themselves in defining what good academic writing looks like within their own discipline, adding to the confusion that students face. Furthermore, recent research evidenced that lecturers' own perceptions of academic writing and its development greatly influenced their approach to support their students to write academically (French, 2014). Such a multitude of beliefs as to the features of good writing, it is argued, has led to inconsistent support within universities.

The aforementioned issues further raise the question that Elton (2010) poses as to who best should support students with writing development. With generic advice provided by writing specialists arguably not appropriately contextualised and subject academics lacking the required writing pedagogical knowledge, offering effective support is not straight forward. The ideal approach is, arguably, a collaboration between academics and writing centres and the creation of contextualised writing resources (Elton, 2010; Wingate, 2015).

Others have researched the impact that prior educational background has on a student's ability to meet the writing requirements and obtain the higher degree classifications. In particular, a number of educational sociologists have theorised the impact of social class on academic writing attainment. Social capital theorists (Boudon, 1973; Bourdieu, 2011; Coleman, 1988) have purported that the skills of academic writing are more likely to be developed and fostered in private schools, favouring middle class prior learning. According to Thomas (2010, p. 433) "the language of instruction, the assumed knowledge and the prioritizing of style over content favours students from a dominant background rather than those for whom HE is not the norm". This mirrors the work of Bernstein who speaks of the elaborate codes of the middle classes which are more likely to match the implicit assessment criteria of their middle-class assessors (Bernstein, 1990, 2011). Such elaborate linguistic codes are, according to Fuller's (2009) research, also evidenced in the text books and lectures and, if not shared, impair learning, putting those from widening participation backgrounds at a distinct disadvantage.

Moreover, for many widening participation students whose previous more vocational studies called for different forms of assessment, the dominant academic writing practices prevalent in our universities often appear remote and unfamiliar. This, according to French

(2013) leads to feelings of being less capable, which impacts on confidence and adds to the illusiveness of 'good' academic writing for those less traditional students. The impact of such a lack of familiarity and awareness of the concept of 'good' writing on academic attainment for widening participation students has attracted researchers' attention in recent years (Ball, 2003; Bradley & Bathmaker, 2013; Lareau, 1997; Reay, 2006). Their findings suggest that more needs to be done to support all students once they arrive at university to decipher the mysteries of academic writing requirements, if we want all students to reach their full potential.

### 2.2.2 Institutional beliefs about students' writing

Not only does the lack of explicit requirements hinder a student's academic writing development but so too do the academics' beliefs about their students' abilities. A paper authored by Creme and Lea (1999) challenged the myths regarding student writing that, they argued, are "all-pervasive in today's UK higher education... [which have led] to unhelpful and inappropriate practices being adopted" (Creme & Lea, 1999, p. 1). Their findings are drawn from a combination of research and practice within the field, developed over a number of years.

Whilst their research is now over 18 years old, analysis of such myths helps us to evaluate why support for students' writing developed as it did through the 1990s and 2000s. The idea that students lack the basic skills to write, they argue is perhaps the most common myth of all. Such myths were reported in the press (French, 2013) and, once again, focused on the surface levels of writing including grammar, punctuation and spelling. Supporting the work of others (Fernsten & Reda, 2011; Lea & Street, 1998), Creme and Lea's (1999) research highlighted that, whilst it was these surface level features that markers focused on, analysis of the text highlighted the fact that "students' problems actually lie at a much deeper epistemological level of what to say and how to say it in a specific disciplinary context" (Creme & Lea, 1999, p. 3). Alongside other researchers (Elton, 2010; Hodgson & Harris, 2013; Lea & Street, 1998), they argue that the development of student writing needs to be done in the context, using genuine pieces of students' work, if it is to be effective (Creme & Lea, 1999).

A number of other unhelpful myths regarding academic writing have plagued universities in the last two decades and have led to ineffective writing support. The idea that some

students cannot write led to the deficit approach to learning development in the 1980s and calls for study skills to be embedded into every degree for all students (Dearing, 1997). Whilst Creme and Lea's (1999) research supports some of the ideas of Bernstein (2011) that students arrive at university with a variety of writing histories, they argue that these need to be mapped against the various writing requirements, in order to support all students effectively. The idea that there is only one way to write and that academic writing should be de-personalised are examples of other myths that were dispelled; but such misconceptions also evidence the complexity of academic writing and the danger in offering generic writing advice.

### 2.2.3 Support for student writing

The work of Lea and Street (1998) has arguably led to changes in how students are supported to develop their academic writing capabilities. The emergence of writing support centres in universities can be traced back to the period of widening participation agendas in the 1990s, which led to an increase in the student body and a concern for the calibre of student entering universities (Cottrell, 2013). Non-traditional entrants were viewed as lacking in the academic qualifications and skills required to be successful, so universities developed "bolt-on support units" (R. Jones & Thomas, 2005, p. 617). Academic and writing support was largely generic, delivered from bolt on writing centres and aimed at groups of students believed to be deficient in some way and targeted at their specific needs (for example: dyslexic, English as a second language, non-traditional student). Since then the seminal work of Lea and Street (1998) and others (Wingate, 2006, 2012, 2015; Wingate, Andon, & Cogo, 2011) has led to such support being viewed as a developmental service from which all students can benefit. The importance of working with academics to contextualise and embed study practices into programmes, supported by the meta-analysis of Hattie et al. (1996) is now widely accepted as good practice. This is evidenced in a move away from generic writing advice to more specialised, tailored developmental programmes. This holistic 'academic literacies' approach to supporting students whilst at university is now evident in many UK universities today, although according to Wingate (2018) there is also evidence that a remedial model of support persists in some HEIs.

More specifically to essay writing, 'essayist literacies' is a notion first used by Scollon and Scollon (1981) to explore students' writing in a Higher Education context. Essayist Literacies

explore academic writing as a socio-historic tradition bound within a particular institution to the exclusion of the non-traditional student (Lillis, 2001). Taking notions of social and cultural capital from Bourdieu (Bourdieu, Patterson, & Saint Martin, 1994), Lillis (2001) argues that essays are “a privilege literacy practice within Western societies, constituting considerable cultural/linguistic capital” for which students need to learn the conventions to be successful in HE (Lillis, 2001, p. 53). From this perspective, no longer is the blame for poor academic writing placed at the student’s door, who may be unfamiliar with the “privilege literacy practices in academia” (Lillis, 2001, p. 39) but focus is turned on the institution and what it should do to support students. Knowledgeable insiders can help to make the implicit, explicit and overcome the mismatch between students’ and tutors’ expectations and voices. At its heart, whilst such an approach helps us to appreciate the particular difficulties less traditional students may have with academic writing, it mirrors the academic literacies approach that: support should focus on beliefs regarding academic writing, helping to make the implicit, explicit and working with academics to contextualise advice to the discipline. This arguably would be of benefit to all students, not just those from widening participation backgrounds.

Despite the research and arguments for an academic literacies and essayist literacies approach, some argue that there is little evidence that much has changed in our universities over the last few decades. As recently as 2015, Wingate (2015) argued that the skills approach was still pervasive in UK universities, with writing support focusing on surface level features. Whether such a claim can be still held true at the time of writing is still debatable, and not the focus of this thesis. What is clear, however, is such centrally run skills sessions do little to address the issues and only serve to make writing support appear remedial (Wingate, 2015). Instead, support should be embedded into the discipline with academic staff and writing experts collaborating to ‘socialise’ students into the particular discourse of their subject (Wingate, 2018). All students should be included, removing any sense of exclusive targeting and in its place offering the notion that all students can develop their academic writing skills.

Whilst embedding skills within the disciplines and contextualising support to a given piece of coursework has been generally acknowledged as good practice there is an argument against too much focus on the end product. According to Masle (2011) students have difficulty in

transferring skills from one writing project to another and writing classes do little to prepare the writer for future challenges. Instead, she argues, we should focus such sessions on “decreasing writer apprehension and increasing agency” (Mascle, 2011, p. 8). It is not enough to give writers the power, they must be ready, willing and able to use it. Such research therefore calls for writing support to not solely focus on the task in hand but also on developing the writer, and in particular fostering agency and self-efficacy for writing.

#### 2.2.4 Students’ beliefs about writing

In addition to the general complexity of academic writing, others have researched the impact that our beliefs have on our ability to write academically. Such beliefs, it is argued, should also be explored within the support sessions students are offered at university to develop their academic writing skills. Itua et al. (2014) researched the barriers to, and solutions for, academic writing at both FE and HE level and too found that not only were the beliefs about what constituted good academic writing different between students and staff but so too were the perceived barriers and proposed solutions. They argued that their prior FE educational experiences had led to a didactic epistemological belief system, which was at odds with the university requirements of critical thinking (Itua et al., 2014). Focus therefore needs to be placed on not just developing writing skills but on challenging pre-conceived beliefs and ideas as to the purposes and requirements of university level writing.

Itua et al.’s (2014) findings were supported by other studies which suggested the current focus on league tables and a pass at all costs approach to teaching and learning has stifled students’ writing development (Hodgson & Harris, 2013). Arguably, this ‘spoon feeding’ approach has led to students arriving at university believing they should write what they are taught without critical reflection (Hodgson & Harris, 2013). This research suggests, therefore, that more needs to be done to alter students’ beliefs about what constitutes good academic writing, with a focus on developing critical thinking and reflection. Whilst students requested more taught sessions on academic writing, the solution, as Itua et al. (2014) argue, lies more in “improving confidence, and altering students’ beliefs, in order to assist in behavioural change strategies” (Itua et al., 2014, p. 306).

The field of academic writing beliefs has been further researched by exploring students’ beliefs as to the purpose of academic writing. White and Bruning (2005) researched the

transmissional and transactional beliefs that American students held with regards to academic writing, and the impact that this had on their attainment. They differentiated these two beliefs regarding the purpose of writing as either being: to transfer information from authoritative source to the reader (transmissional belief); or to engage with the text critically and integrate their own thinking (transactional belief). Using previously designed questionnaires to ascertain writing apprehension (Daly & Miller, 1975) and writing self-efficacy (Shell et al., 1989), they summarised that those that held transactional beliefs received higher grades. Whilst the causal link has to be questioned, this research further supports the importance of addressing beliefs when teaching academic writing. More recent work on 84 university art students from the University of Groningen supports this view (Baaijen, Galbraith, & de Gloppe, 2014). It suggested that these two sets of beliefs, whilst not mutually exclusive, impact on the quality of the writing product as they “interact in their effects on text quality, the amount and type of revision carried out, and the extent to which writers develop their understanding” (Baaijen et al., 2014, p. 81). These beliefs were linked to confidence and again they called for writing interventions that address the beliefs and confidence levels of the students they seek to help.

#### 2.2.5 Writing apprehension

Not only do students have varying beliefs about the purpose and requirements of academic writing at university, research suggests that their own self-belief can impact, and be impacted by, their academic writing achievements. In particular, an area of research has emerged focusing on the correlations between academic confidence, apprehension and academic outcomes. With the value placed on academic writing at universities, it is no surprise that this can be a cause of anxiety for students. Following previous research into the area of anxiety and general communication, Daly and Miller (1975) developed a tool to measure writing apprehension. Their research suggested the need for a reliable and valid instrument to measure writing apprehension, which they argue is the first step in addressing the issue: once we are able to measure a student’s apprehension for writing we will be able to more effectively target the support. Whilst over 40 years old, the value of Daly and Miller’s (1975) writing apprehension tool is evident in more recent research, particularly in the field of English as a second language and writing apprehension (Abdel Latif, 2015; Alnufaie & Grenfell, 2013; Mascle, 2011; Pimsarn, 2013). Such research has consistently

evidenced correlations between writing apprehension and academic writing attainment, across a range of ages, abilities and sexes. Above all they raise the need to address the issue of writing apprehension, if we are to improve academic writing attainment for all.

Research has also focused on the influences of, and importance of, self-confidence and writing. In particular Gardner's (2014) work used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore self-confidence in writing of 111 trainee teachers. His study emphasised the importance of this affective dimension to writing and how previous feedback from teachers can lead to damage to self-confidence and negative perceptions of one's self as a writer. The importance of a student engaging in self-reflection and exploring their identity as a writer was highlighted and Gardner (2014) calls for study support sessions to incorporate this element within writing sessions.

## 2.3 Determinants of academic success

### 2.3.1 An overview

Clearly determining how we can best support university students with their academic writing is a complex challenge. There are many factors at play, as previously discussed. Firstly, there is the nature of the task itself requiring a complex skill set, self-regulation and the ability to decipher implicit criteria. The beliefs students hold on the purpose of writing also have an impact; so too do the affective dimensions of confidence, apprehension and writing anxiety. Studies into academic success and factors that influence it are numerous and wide ranging. However, two key meta-analyses can offer us insight into the significance each of these factors play in determining academic attainment.

The influential work of Robbins, Lauver, Le, and Davis (2004) examined the relationships between psychosocial and study skills factors, and college grade outcomes. Their meta-analysis of 109 studies identified 9 broad constructs (achievement motivation, academic goals, institutional commitment, perceived social support, social involvement, academic self-efficacy, general self-concept, academic-related skills and contextual influences), which they sought to correlate with college students' performance (grade point average) and retention. As predicted, from their analysis of previous literature, the most influential determinants of performance were academic self-efficacy and attainment motivation. Their research suggests that "study skills are a precursor of positive class performance which

drives later achievement and persistent behaviour” (Robbins et al., 2004, p. 276). They argue that the key question is not whether study skills raise academic performance but how these can be combined with social and motivational factors to improve student outcomes. In particular they call for interventional research to determine the role of “performance and mastery goals within the college adjustment process” (Robbins et al., 2004, p. 276). Whilst standard writing workshops can improve writing performance there is an argument to include elements designed to foster academic self-efficacy and attainment motivation in order to improve academic outcomes.

Following on from the research of Robbins et al. (2004), Richardson et al. (2012) reviewed 13 years of research into antecedents of university students' grades. They aimed to build on the work of Robbins et al. (2004) and generate an up-to-date conceptual map of known correlates of tertiary grades. Their meta-analysis of 7167 English language articles yielded 247 data sets, categorised by 50 distinct correlates and 42 non-intellective constructs of grades. Of these, the strongest correlate observed was performance self-efficacy, followed by grade goal and effort regulation. Their results confirmed Robbins et al.'s (2004) conclusions that academic self-efficacy and effort regulation are the most important correlates of tertiary grades.

Both the work of Robbins et al. (2004), and later Richardson et al. (2012), emphasised the role of goal setting and self-efficacy in improving students' performance. In particular, Richardson et al. (2012) call for interventions that allow students to set their own proximal goals combined with self-efficacy enhancements. Setting graded tasks, providing feedback on successful performance and introducing activities that lower students' anxieties about coursework all promote mastery experience, which it is argued (Richardson et al., 2012) all promote self-efficacy. The strongest correlations were found at the start of a student's university journey and so the research calls for early interventions which test the impact of these constructs on students' grades.

### 2.3.2 Academic self- efficacy

This thesis is concerned with improving academic outcomes, in particular writing attainment, for university students. It is clear from the aforementioned meta-analyses that academic self-efficacy has a vital role to play in determining a student's academic success. Research in this field has called for further exploration into this social-learning theory. In

understanding its function and how it is developed, we can hope to improve the writing support we offer to students to more effectively address the complex issues that they face.

Self-efficacy is a motivational construct, first coined by Bandura as part of his wider Social Learning Theory. He (Bandura, 1977) argues that a person's beliefs in their efficacy influences their actions, how much effort they put in, how long they persevere when faced with obstacles and failures, their resilience, their thoughts, both positive and negative, and accomplishments. In short: "If people believe they have no power to produce results they will not attempt to make things happen" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).

Self-efficacy, and how a person perceives their capabilities, has been shown to be important in a variety of contexts including: health, sport science and mental health, evidencing the impact that this powerful construct has on a person's ability to reach their goals, overcome challenges and improve their outcomes (Bandura, 1997). In more recent years the role self-efficacy plays in determining academic outcomes has caught the interest of educationalists.

The notion of self-efficacy is particularly pertinent within today's educational system and employment settings which require students to educate themselves throughout their lifetimes to meet changing societal needs (Bandura, 1995). Collins (1982 as cited in Bandura, 1997) was one of the first to research the link between self-efficacy and academic performance. His research into maths ability with school aged children evidenced that a student's self-efficacy belief was a better predictor of positive behaviour than ability. The stronger their self-efficacy, the more likely they were to choose to rework questions they had failed, apply the skills that they had learnt and solve the problems they faced. He summarised that a child's "perceived self-efficacy is a better predictor of intellectual performance than skills alone" as it affects the quality of their thinking (Collins, 1982 as cited in Bandura, 1997, p.216).

Perhaps one of the most influential studies on the impact of self-efficacy on academic behaviour is the meta-analysis conducted by Multon, Brown, and Lent (1991). In total 68 studies on the subject were located and analysed, from 1977 (Bandura's first mention of self-efficacy) to 1988, across a range of subjects, experimental designs and assessment methods. Their findings support Bandura's theory that self-efficacy beliefs are related to academic behaviours and evidences a moderate correlation between self-efficacy beliefs

and performance outcomes in academic settings ( $r = .38, p = \leq .001$ ). This is a key finding as, they claim, low self-efficacy “may yield avoidance of potentially rewarding learning pursuits, thereby limiting skills development” (Multon et al., 1991, p. 36). Whilst focused predominately on primary aged children, their report supports the design of a self-efficacy based intervention “aimed at facilitating academic achievement and perseverance” but also calls for more research into how “self-efficacy beliefs interact with ability to influence academic outcomes” (Multon et al., 1991, p. 37).

As the link between self-efficacy beliefs and actual performance in academic settings has been demonstrated and is now widely accepted, research has begun to focus on practical, relevant and theoretical insights. Firstly, it is important to note that whilst studies, including the influential work of Multon et al. (1991), evidence a moderate correlation between academic self-efficacy and academic grades, this can perhaps be explained by past success determining feelings of self-efficacy (Herrmann, Bager-Elsborg, & McCune, 2017). Whilst it is accepted that a correlation has been evidenced between self-efficacy beliefs and academic attainment, there is arguably a lack of evidence to suggest this is causal. Such causations are challenging to research, with many variables impacting on self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance. Moreover, identifying how academic self-efficacy beliefs can help to influence future grades is, arguably, a more fruitful area of research.

One such area of research is the impact of self-efficacy on goal setting, which in turn, arguably, has an impact on actual achievement. Bandura (1997) argued for the importance of short-term goals in not only helping to motivate but helping to protect against self-demoralisation and build a student’s self-efficacy. Further research has evidenced that such goals should be personally determined (Masche, 2013), proximal and link to positive incentives (Schunk, 1984). Furthermore, effective goal setting coupled with self-efficacy leads to students setting themselves more challenging goals which drive them forwards and boost self-regulated learning (Schunk, 1990). Finally, feedback against these goals can help to boost self-efficacy and, with it, student attainment (Schunk & Swartz, 1993). If the aim, therefore, is to increase student attainment, this suggests that it is goal setting alongside self-efficacy beliefs that require closer examination.

It is without a doubt that self-efficacy is a powerful concept which impacts on how a student exercises control over their thoughts and feelings; in particular their ability to learn from

others, plan alternative strategies and influence their behaviour. However, as Pajares (1996) argued, there are other expectancy theories at play, with self-efficacy being more task and situation specific than other expectancy constructs. His research evidenced the need to test for self-efficacy in particular contexts and for it to be assessed at “the optimum level of specificity” (Pajares, 1996, p. 574). Whilst he agrees with the aforementioned arguments of the importance of self-efficacy as a motivational construct, he maintains that we need to understand and measure the domain under investigation and be specific on what we measure, if we are to seek real understanding of its impact (Pajares & Valiante, 2006). The following section therefore looks at specific research in the field of self-efficacy and academic writing.

## 2.4 Self-efficacy and academic writing

### 2.4.1 The importance of self-efficacy for writing

As previously argued, writing is a complex process which involves cognitive and meta-cognitive processes (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006). Students are faced with a blank page and have to decide what and how to write, which sources they should use, when they should begin each task and how to critique not only the work of others but their own writing too (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). It requires a complex range of skills including: information literacy; time management and critical thinking, in addition to knowledge specific to the academic writing context of referencing, knowledge of genre and appropriate style. It is often an individual task, requires creative effort over a sustained period, needs constant revision and requires self-discipline. All this combined means academic writing presents particular challenges to self-regulation, suggesting self-efficacy has an important role to play in ensuring success (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

The combined elements of the complex nature of academic writing, the unhelpful epistemological beliefs about the nature of good academic writing and the need for self-regulatory behaviours, all suggest the importance of self-efficacy in this domain. There has been a range of research which has sought to measure self-efficacy for academic writing and its impact on writing attainment. Many (Bruning, Dempsey, Kauffman, & McKim, 2013; Pajares, 1996; Pajares, Hartley, & Valiante, 2001; Pajares & Valiante, 2006) have stressed the importance of measuring self-efficacy in very specific contexts, as argue that our efficacy beliefs vary depending on the domain in question. This has led to the design of instruments

to measure self-efficacy for academic writing, most notably from Shell et al. (1989) and claims that using a scale from 0-100 allows for more differential information to be gathered (Bandura, 2006; Pajares et al., 2001). Such tools to measure self-efficacy for writing have been used and adapted in subsequent studies (for example Mascle, 2011).

As with previous studies evidencing the important role of self-efficacy in academic attainment, similar findings have been evidenced in the context of academic writing. Self-efficacy in writing has been shown to have a significant variance in writing performance across a range of studies with students (Pajares, 2003; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Shell et al., 1989; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Many studies have sought to understand why such a correlation exists. The goals students set themselves, driven by the levels of self-efficacy have been shown to have an impact on achievement. Students with higher levels of self-efficacy for writing set themselves more challenging goals, which in turn drive them to forwards (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). It could of course be argued that it is natural that a correlation would exist, as those with greater skill would naturally be more efficacious. In other words, a positive experience creates an increased self-belief in one's own capabilities. Research has however shown that self-efficacy is more than a mere reflection of skill (Schunk & Swartz, 1993).

More recent research has looked at the role self-efficacy plays within the complex myriad of writing beliefs. Sanders-Reio, Alexander, Reio Jr, and Newman (2014) questioned 738 students with regards their beliefs about writing, their writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension and its impact on their performance. Whilst their research support Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, they also found that beliefs about writing predicted the scores beyond that of self-efficacy, suggesting a "constellation of beliefs that may affect performance in tandem" (Sanders-Reio et al., 2014, p. 20). Of particular note is the role that self-regulation has on writing attainment. The confidence students have in their ability to face academic tasks and adapt their strategies accordingly, influences their ability to apply effective writing strategies and develop their writing skills (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

The role of self-beliefs, in particular locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and self-efficacy, in determining academic outcomes of university students has been the focus of some research (Alias, Akasah, & Kesot, 2012; Drago, Rheinheimer, & Detweiler, 2018; E. Jones, 2008). Both

locus of control and self-efficacy are social learning theories concerned with a person's beliefs and how they shape their lives. Whilst self-efficacy focuses on a person's belief in their capability, locus of control concerns itself with personal control and expectations of reinforcement (Rotter, 1975). Researching these two concepts concurrently, therefore, can offer us some further insight into the relationship between students' beliefs and performance. Of particular relevance to this study is Drago et al.'s (2018) work investigating the relationship between locus of control, academic self-efficacy and academic performance, and whether these variables were affected by tutoring in writing. Their study with 499 students at a mid-sized American university found locus of control had a significant impact on academic performance, as did academic self-efficacy (Drago et al., 2018). Jones' (2008) study investigated the impact of locus of control and self-efficacy on attainment of basic writers and found that locus of control is of fundamental importance to those least prepared academically, and more specifically in writing, where the ability to perform well is often viewed as outside the student's control.

Others have focused on the complex relationship between writing apprehension, confidence and self-efficacy. Pajares and Johnson's (1994) study with 30 undergraduate pre-service teachers found that whilst writing apprehension was negatively correlated with writing self-confidence, it was not predicative of writing performance. Importantly they found that self-efficacy mediated the influence of writing apprehension on writing performance (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Their study supports the idea of interventions that enhance self-efficacy as, they argue, this will decrease anxiety and enhance the quality of writing. This finding was mirrored by Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) and supports Bandura's initial claims that:

Anxiety is best allayed not by anxiety palliatives but by building a strong sense of efficacy..... The more their sense of efficacy is raised, the greater is the reduction in their anxiety and the more they improve their grades (Bandura, 1997, pp. 236-237).

All these studies show the complex relationship that exists between self-efficacy and academic writing performance. Not only is a causal relationship challenging to evidence, there also appears to be a constellation of beliefs including locus of control, performance self-efficacy beliefs and writing apprehension, which impact on a student's writing ability and their academic outcome.

#### 2.4.2 Sources of self-efficacy beliefs

Despite the aforementioned calls for interventions that help increase self-efficacy beliefs for academic writing, the research in this field appears relatively sparse. When looking to foster self-efficacy it seems prudent to begin with an examination of the sources of such beliefs.

Bandura states that self-efficacy is influenced by four sources: performance or mastery experience; vicarious experience; social persuasions; and physiological and emotional state (Bandura, 1997).

Mastery experiences offer, arguably, the most influential source of efficacy, as they present authentic evidence of a person's capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Success enhances, and builds on, a firm belief in one's personal efficacy, whereas experiencing failure undermines it. Yet, the nature and perceived level of the task is important. If we are able to experience overcoming obstacles through perseverance and effort, this helps to foster self-efficacy and manage future challenges (Bandura, 1997). It is the enactive experience and the sense of control that we feel that is vital. It is not enough to offer people "effective rules and strategies but [they need] to be persuaded that they can exercise better control by applying them persistently and consistently" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). So careful thought needs to be given to the nature of the experience, with a focus on developing strategies that they can consistently apply to achieve the required result.

Vicarious experience involves measuring one's capabilities in relation to others. Such measures are, arguably, especially important when there is "no absolute measure of adequacy" (Bandura, 1997, p. 86), leaving doubt as to a person's capability. This, therefore, suggests such vicarious experiences can be a powerful source of efficacy for academic writing. However, self-efficacy appraisals vary deeply depending upon with whom the individual compares themselves. Surpassing one's peers can raise self-efficacy beliefs, whereas being outperformed lowers them. Equally seeing others, who you perceive as similar to yourself, succeed can also raise self-efficacy. In academic settings, visits from former students, peer working and group assignments can all arguably help raise self-efficacy in this way (Bartsch, Case, & Meerman, 2012) and support the influence of mastery experiences. Within the context of writing, research highlighted that using exemplars of past students' work are not only valued by students (Carter, Salamonson, Ramjan, & Halcomb, 2018; Wingate, 2012) but when used interactively, can help to develop students'

understanding of assessment criteria and standards and, in this way, foster their self-efficacy beliefs (Hendry, Armstrong, & Bromberger, 2012; Hendry & Jukic, 2014; Hendry, White, & Herbert, 2016), particularly with first year undergraduate students.

Verbal persuasion offers a further means of strengthening a person's belief in their capabilities. With others expressing their faith in your capabilities, it is easy to see how this could have a more positive impact on self-efficacy belief than them expressing doubts. But evidence suggests that this only has an impact if the person already has some other evidence to support this view, usually the aforementioned mastery or vicarious experience (Bandura, 1997). To raise unrealistic beliefs in a person's capability can have the opposite effect, especially if they face failure in their pursuit. Within this area, the impact of feedback has been researched extensively, and out of scope of this project, suffice to say constructive criticism can help students to set higher goals and increase perceived self-efficacy (Baron, 1988). The source of the persuasion is also of vital importance. People are "inclined to trust evaluations of their capabilities by those who are themselves skilled in the activity, have access to some objective predictors of performance capability, or possess a rich fund of knowledge..." (Bandura, 1997, p. 105). Bandura also argues that when using "persuatory efficacy appraisals" these are most effective if they are only moderately beyond an individual's current capabilities (Bandura, 1997, p. 105). In short, skilled efficacy builders will use social persuasion as an adjunct to the previously discussed more powerful sources of self-efficacy; offering structured activities which stretch an individual's abilities without inviting failure, encouraging them to measure their success in terms of self-improvement alongside encouraging, constructive feedback.

How a person judges their capabilities depends, in part, on their physiological and emotional state (Bandura, 1997); therefore, the fourth way of fostering efficacy beliefs is to reduce stress levels and negative thought processes. This area has been of particular interest to researchers in the field of health and sports, with strong correlations evidenced between a person's emotional state and their performance (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrback, & Mack, 2000; Sheeran, Maki, Montanaro, & Avishai-Yitshak, 2016). The mood an individual is in when they fail has also shown to have an impact on how they respond to such experiences (Bandura, 1997). Such findings suggest that efficacy beliefs are, in part, mediated by an individual's selective recollection and interpretation of their previous success and failures.

Some have begun to research the relative importance of each of these four sources of self-efficacy. Consistently the importance of mastery experience is evidenced at all levels and stages of education (Mascle, 2011; Phan & Ngu, 2016; Schunk, 1989). However, beyond this, research proves to offer inconsistent evidence of the importance of the other three sources (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007). This is arguably because such sources do not operate in isolation: a student who has a piece of coursework returned with positive feedback attached will not only have obtained mastery experience but also positive vicarious experience to help foster his/her self-efficacy beliefs. However, it is also clear that different contexts will call for different skills and ways of learning. As previous discussed, self-efficacy is a task specific expectancy construct (Pajares, 1996), which in turn would suggest investigating the sources of self-efficacy and their relative importance, also needs to be researched within a particular context. This would allow us to obtain a deeper understanding as to how these sources interact and, ultimately, how to effectively foster self-efficacy in a given context.

#### 2.4.3 Interventions impacting on self-efficacy

Despite the evidenced link between self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment, and the suggestions on how we can best increase a student's self-efficacy beliefs for writing, there are few studies that have sought to increase a student's self-efficacy in this way. One of the few studies is that of Wernersbach, Crowley, Bates, and Rosenthal (2014) who split 237 students into two groups; a sample of 111 students, classed as 'academically underprepared', were put through an intervention, with the remaining having no such intervention programme. Over the seven-week study skills course, those that took part demonstrated greater increases in their reported skills ability, with some surpassing those who were not offered the intervention, and evidenced an increase in self-efficacy. The limitations of this study are clear, with non-comparable groups, they also did not investigate the impact the intervention had on achievement.

In a similar way a writing intervention with nursing students in the USA sought to research the impact a guided, scaffolded approach to supporting students' writing would have on their writing ability and self-efficacy (Miller, Russell, Cheng, & Skarbek, 2015) . Using a quasi-experimental, pre-post design their study did support previous findings that a more tailored and structured approach to writing with opportunity for students to practice their skills impacts positively on a students' self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment. Such

paralleled improvement in both writing self-efficacy and writing attainment offers further support that writing self-efficacy acts as a mediating variable for writing competence. Whilst the workshops were not directly intended to enhance self-efficacy, the findings here do support Bandura's (1997) sources of self-efficacy of mastery and vicarious experience, and the use of peer marking to support writing development.

Whilst the above studies are limited in their design, focusing on writing strategies rather than efforts to increase self-efficacy directly, they are amongst very few who have researched this area. All such studies call for the incorporation of interventions that support self-efficacy into programmes and further believe this will help with retention, claiming: “actively addressing academic self-efficacy in support services provided by universities may further enhance the effectiveness of the services and the overall retention in the academic context” (Wernersbach et al., 2014, p. 23).

#### 2.4.4 Interventions that sought to increase self-efficacy directly

Few studies can be found which seek directly to enhance a students' self-efficacy for writing. One such study into the improvement of writing through fostering self-efficacy has been carried out with children with learning difficulties. A Randomised Controlled Trial of 60 Spanish school aged children was developed to test whether self-efficacy beliefs for writing could be altered using an intensive writing programme (García & de Caso, 2006). The research evidenced that for those in the experimental group, the self-efficacy levels for writing were increased to more realistic levels and this in turn had an impact on the writing product. Meanwhile, those in the control group experienced no such uplift in their self-efficacy levels and writing attainment. This suggests that fostering self-efficacy within a writing workshop could have an impact on not only self-efficacy levels but also writing ability.

Whilst research into fostering academic self-efficacy in children is plentiful, attempts to transfer these practices to adult learners has not always proved successful. Attempts to foster a “joy of writing and collaboration” (Plakhotnik, Maria, & Tonette, 2016, p. 6) in adults appear much harder to achieve in adult learners who are perhaps more likely to take a more strategic approach to writing; with a focus on academic grades and desire to learn strategies that are designed specifically to increase grades on particular assignments. However, writing workshops which focus solely on the end product do little to foster agency

and present students with a challenge of how to transfer skills to future written assessments (Mascle, 2011). Careful thought must, therefore, be given to balance the dual aims of increasing a student's general self-efficacy for writing with particular focus on the needs of particular assignments students face.

Perhaps the study most relevant to this thesis is that of Mascle (2011) whose writing interventions focused on fostering agency. Her work sought to investigate the impact of immersion based workshops on writing apprehension and the role that self-efficacy and agency had to play in this process. Using a mixed method approach 17 graduate teachers were asked to complete writing apprehension (Daly & Miller, 1975) and writing self-efficacy (Shell et al., 1989) questionnaires, before and after a series of writing workshops. The weekly workshops, delivered over the summer holidays, were designed to foster students' general writing ability in a supportive community, building on the aforementioned sources of self-efficacy. Participants were also asked to complete a personal journal, reflecting on their experiences during the course of the intervention. Analysis of the journals evidenced the importance of mastery experience in fostering self-efficacy for this group, in particular the opportunity for the students to write and feel like writers. The results showed the majority of students experienced a decrease in writing apprehension which continued the year after and that, in turn, they became more self-regulated and self-efficacious writers. Her work contributes to the evidence that writing support is most effective when focused on the writer not the end product. In particular her recommendations for such support include:

- Mastery experience. Offer students purposeful, challenging writing practice to gain expertise in their subject, in a supportive community. Use the workshops as an opportunity for writers to write and feel like writers.
- Vicarious experience. Workshop leaders should share their writing and participants should read and hear their fellow participants' work.
- Feedback or social persuasions. Give students the opportunity for feedback. Self-efficacy builders do not just give praise but cultivate people's capabilities
- Reduce stress. Leaders of the course should make attempts to lessen writing apprehension. This is helped by allowing students the opportunity to reflect on themselves as writers. Providing them with writing experiences, models and

feedback all help with lessening apprehension and give students the opportunity to set their own goals (Mascle, 2011).

Perhaps most importantly, Mascle (2011) calls for an 'open system': interactive workshops which focus not on the writing process but on supporting and guiding. "We cannot foster writing self-efficacy with a more traditional classroom format...but an open system, such as a learning community or writing workshop in all its infinite variety of approaches can foster both writing self-efficacy and agency" (Mascle, 2011, p. 157). Such an open system fosters self-efficacy by building on Bandura's four sources with less emphasis on teaching and more on "fostering, supporting and guiding" (Mascle, 2011, p. 159).

Whilst the work of Mascle (2011) is clearly important in the development of effective writing workshops, such research has not yet shed any light on whether one form of writing workshop is more effective than others in developing writing self-efficacy and ultimately the writing attainment of its participants.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This section aimed to demonstrate the complexities that students face with academic writing. Not only do they need to develop a complex skills-set but in order to be successful they are required to navigate the implicit criteria and assess what constitutes 'good' academic writing. As discussed, such definitions of 'good' writing can vary not only across subjects but within the same disciplines. Both of these factors can be particularly challenging for students from widening participation backgrounds. Research suggests that support for academic writing should be embedded within the disciplines, contextualised to the subject and be a combined effort between subject academics and writing tutors. It has also argued that it is not sufficient for such sessions to focus on the end product but they must also make room to address the beliefs students have about the purpose and requirements of this pivotal assessment tool.

The second part of this literature review highlighted the important role that self-efficacy beliefs play in determining a student's success. With the aforementioned challenges of writing and the requirement for perseverance and difficulties measuring performance, self-efficacy clearly is an important requirement. Research has shown that not only does self-efficacy have a role to play in developing more challenging goals, perseverance and self -

regulation but also in reducing writing apprehension, which all impact on writing attainment. Despite the calls for interventions that help to increase self-efficacy in academic writing, research in this field for university students appears sparse. It would seem logical that the next step after confirming the correlation of Bandura's self-efficacy concept with academic writing would be to look at ways to foster it.

Bandura (1997) has defined the sources of self-efficacy, whilst Masle (2013) has sought to define how interventions should be used to increase self-efficacy beliefs for academic writing. Others have helped by defining how self-efficacy for academic writing should be measured, and emphasised the importance of linking this to goal setting and assignment requirements (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

Despite this, there are few studies that try and put this all into practice and test appropriately if such an intervention to increase self-efficacy beliefs in the context of academic writing offer distinct benefits. In particular, whilst Masle's (2011) study evidenced how immersion-based writing workshops helped to foster self-efficacy for writing and reduce writing apprehension, we are unable to compare its impact versus a standard writing workshop. This, despite the importance of academic writing as a key assessment tool for university students, makes this an important area worthy of investigation. If we are to argue the need for changing our current practices in support students' writing to include a focus on building self-efficacy, we firstly need to evidence the benefit in such a change.

This chapter has evidenced the importance of research, and in particular interventions, into the field of self-efficacy and academic writing for university students. The following chapter draws this research together to create a conceptual framework. The research questions, and hypotheses were derived from this framework and, as such, will also be detailed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3 Situating the study

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the research, discussed in the previous chapter, and the aims of the study, as outlined in the Introduction Chapter, into a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework will initially be introduced and explained. This framework is then used to determine the research questions on which this thesis is based. The research questions will be detailed in this chapter, along with their associated hypotheses.

### 3.2 The conceptual framework

To help focus the study, ensure cohesion and aid the development of relevant and realistic research questions (Burton et al., 2008; Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014), a conceptual framework was created. As advised by Burton et al. (2008), designing the framework was an iterative process. It began with the overall aim of the study: to increase the degree outcomes of widening participation students within university, whilst remaining focused on the particular scope of the study: academic writing and self-efficacy. The literature, as discussed in the previous chapter, was then synthesised and considered before creating a visual representation of the key concepts and how they interact. The conceptual framework, however, is not just a visual representation of the literature but, as advised, includes personal experience and current thinking of the issues in hand (Burton et al., 2008; Maxwell, 2012). As such, it represents the thinking at the outset of this study, with regards the scope, the relevant concepts and how they “interplay and interact with each other” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 24).

The concepts used to frame this study can be seen in Figure 3.1. The overall aim of this study, as discussed in the Introduction Chapter, was to raise the academic grades of university students from widening participation backgrounds, and in this particular context those following Foundation degree programmes. With this in mind, the conceptual framework begins at the end, the far right-hand side, with degree outcome. As has been argued, the main method of assessing the university student is through their academic writing, either essays, reports or case studies (Lillis & Scott, 2007). It is for this reason that this thesis concerns itself with academic writing attainment, which can be seen in the conceptual framework as feeding into the overall degree outcome.

Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework

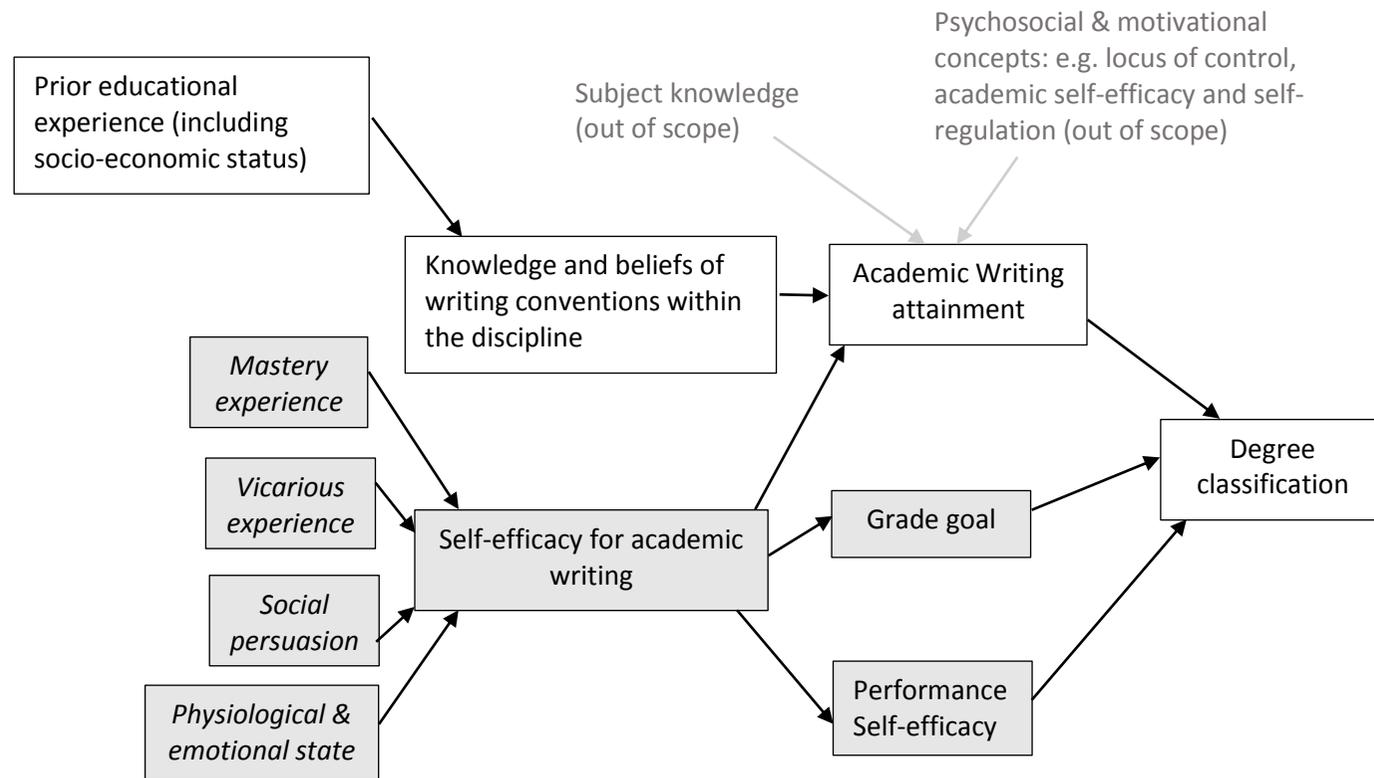
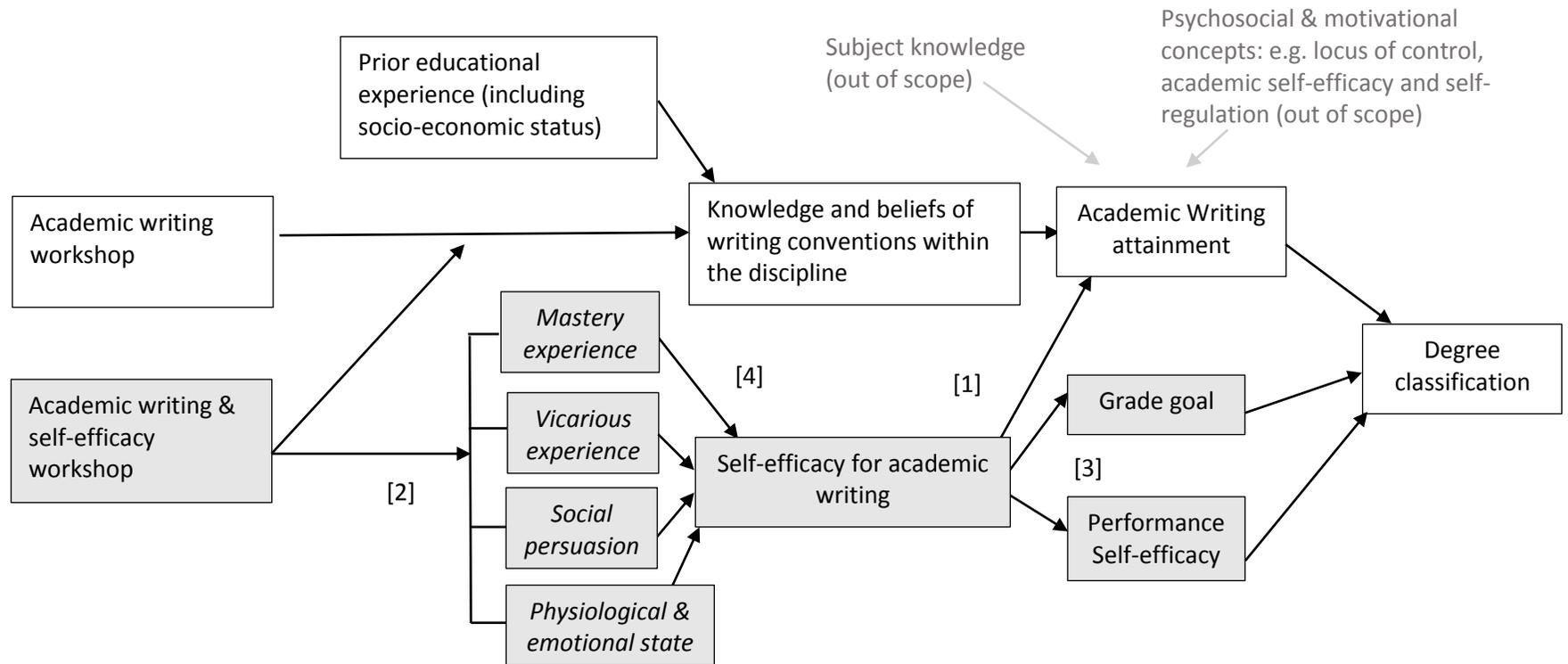


Figure 3.2: Conceptual framework including research questions



The numbers relate to their corresponding research question:

- [1] Are there correlations between self-efficacy for academic writing, the goals students set themselves, performance self-efficacy and academic attainment?
- [2] Can a writing intervention that aims to foster self-efficacy for writing, increase a student's perceived self-efficacy for academic writing?
- [3] Does the writing intervention have any corresponding impact on the goals the students set themselves and their performance self-efficacy?
- [4] What impact does each of the 4 sources of self-efficacy have on students' self-efficacy for writing?

It is accepted that there are a number of elements that impact on the student's ability to succeed in their written assignments. Not least, their knowledge and understanding of a subject, has a significant impact on how well they achieve. It is this knowledge, and a student's ability to apply it, that is being assessed. Whilst this subject knowledge is recognised as a key determinant in a student's ability to reach the high grades, it is out of scope of this study. Its importance, however, is acknowledged in the conceptual framework.

The role that psychosocial and motivational constructs play, such as locus of control (Rotter, 1966), academic self-efficacy (Multon et al., 1991), self-efficacy for self-regulation (Zimmerman et al., 1992), and those identified by Richardson et al. (2012) and Robbins et al. (2004) beyond self-efficacy, are also out of scope of this study. They are however acknowledged as important constructs which impact on a student's ability to write effectively and, as such, are shown in Figure 3.1.

Research suggests that students face two main barriers to academic writing. Their ability to write effectively is impacted by their ability to develop: their knowledge and skills with regards academic writing, for example referencing, researching and structure; and their understanding and beliefs as to what makes good academic writing (Itua et al., 2014). Both of these are discipline specific, and as such vary depending on the subject, and possibly even the module studied and individual assessment requirements (Hodgson & Harris, 2013; Lea & Street, 1998). Such knowledge and beliefs can be seen on the conceptual framework as impacting upon academic writing attainment.

A student's knowledge of academic writing conventions is influenced by prior educational experience, which, in turn, is influenced by socio-economic status (Bernstein, 2011; Bourdieu, 2011; Crozier & Reay, 2011). Academic writing skills required at university are more likely to have been developed and fostered in private schools, favouring middle class learning (Coleman, 1988; Thomas, 2010) placing those from lower socio-economic groups at a disadvantage (Ball, 2003; Bradley & Bathmaker, 2013; Lareau, 1997; Reay, 2006). This prior educational experience is, therefore, identified as impacting on the writing knowledge and beliefs, within the framework.

The second concept which this thesis has focused on is that of writing self-efficacy. This, and associated concepts are highlighted in grey in Figure 3.1. Research has evidenced a

correlation between writing self-efficacy and writing attainment (Pajares, 2003; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Shell et al., 1989; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Whilst there is still debate as to the extent to which such a relationship is causal, research suggests that this reflects more than a correlation, with self-efficacy being more than a reflection of skill (Schunk & Swartz, 1993). As a result, self-efficacy is depicted on the conceptual framework as having an impact upon academic writing attainment.

Associated with self-efficacy are the goals that students set themselves and their performance self-efficacy. The previous chapter argued that academic goals and performance self-efficacy are impacted by a student's level of self-efficacy. In addition, these goals help to drive them forwards to attain higher grades (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). The meta-analysis of Richardson et al. (2012) revealed the importance that performance self-efficacy has on tertiary grades. As a result both academic goals and performance self-efficacy can be seen to impact upon degree classification in Figure 3.1.

Self-efficacy is influenced by four sources: mastery experiences; vicarious experiences; social persuasion; and physiological and emotional state (Bandura, 1997). These four sources of self-efficacy have been included on the conceptual framework and depicted as impacting on self-efficacy for writing. In the absence of evidence of the relative impact of each of these sources on the specific context in question, they are depicted as playing an equal role in fostering self-efficacy within the conceptual framework.

### 3.3 The research questions and hypothesis

The conceptual framework not only synthesised the concepts within this thesis but also informed the design of the study. In particular, it supported the development of realistic and relevant research questions. There is, therefore, a direct link between the concepts depicted, their proposed relationships and the research questions, which can be seen in Figure 3.2.

On the far left-hand side of the conceptual framework are the two different conditions that this thesis aims to test. The top box depicts the writing workshops that are currently delivered at the University. Such writing workshops are contextualised to the subject and designed collaboratively between academics and learning developers, in accordance with considered best practice (Elton, 2010; Hodgson & Harris, 2013; Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate,

2006, 2012, 2015, 2018; Wingate et al., 2011). Currently these writing workshops focus on developing students' writing knowledge and beliefs about 'good' academic writing, making the implicit, explicit and supporting students to decipher academic assessment requirements. These workshops can be seen in the box to the far left hand-side and are shown as impacting on the two key factors, previously discussed.

The lower box, on the left-hand side of Figure 3.2, depicts the planned intervention. In this scenario not only does the workshop aim to develop students' knowledge and beliefs in academic writing conventions but also help to foster self-efficacy for writing by attending to the four sources of self-efficacy, as outlined by Bandura (1997) and researched by (Masclé, 2011).

The first research question is identified by [1] on Figure 3.2. It focuses on the relationship between self-efficacy for writing, writing attainment, the goals students set themselves and their performance self-efficacy. Previous research suggests there would be a positive correlation between all these factors (Pajares, 2003; Richardson et al., 2012; Robbins et al., 2004; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Shell et al., 1989; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). This thesis aimed to examine if the same relationships were to be observed within the context of widening participations students and university level study. The hypothesis is that a relationship does exist between all these factors. As there are four factors, six hypotheses were developed to represent the six potential relationships that exist.

The second and third research questions are concerned with the writing intervention. As previously discussed, the intervention looked at whether a writing workshop which included elements of self-efficacy building could have an impact on a student's self-efficacy for writing. This is the nature of the second research question, as indicated as [2] on Figure 3.2, with a hypothesis that an intervention of this kind does increase a student's self-efficacy for writing scores. It is also hypothesised that such a writing intervention will also have an impact on the goals a student sets themselves and their performance self-efficacy. This is indicated as [3] on the conceptual framework.

Finally research question four, [4], aims to investigate the relative influence of each of the four sources of self-efficacy on these students' overall self-efficacy for writing. It is anticipated that each of these sources has an impact and, as such, each are featured on this

conceptual framework, at this stage. As this question took more of an inductive approach, no hypotheses were generated. The four research questions, and associated hypotheses (where appropriate) are detailed in the Table 3.1 below.

*Table 3.1: Research questions and hypotheses*

| Research question   | Hypothesis  |
|---|---|
| 1. What is the relationship between students' self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and the academic goals they set themselves; and is there any correlation between these measures and students' attainment in writing? | 1) There is a positive correlation between self-efficacy for writing and academic goals.<br>2) There is a positive correlation between self-efficacy for writing and students' writing attainment.<br>3) There is positive correlation between academic goal and how confident they are overall with achieving various grades (performance self-efficacy).<br>4) There is a positive correlation between the academic goal students set themselves and their academic attainment.<br>5) There is a positive correlation between a student's performance self-efficacy and their academic attainment.<br>6) There is a positive correlation between a student's performance self-efficacy and their self-efficacy for writing. |
| 2. Can a writing intervention increase students' self-efficacy for writing?   | 7) Students who received the intervention experience an increase in average self-efficacy for writing greater than those who did not  |
| 3. Does the intervention have any corresponding effect on students' performance self-efficacy and the goals that they set themselves?   | 8) Students who received the intervention experience an increase in performance self-efficacy and will increase their academic goals greater than those who did not.  |
| 4. What influence does each of the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) have on students' self-efficacy for writing?   | No hypothesis required  |

### 3.4 Conclusion

The conceptual framework set out in this chapter was created prior to the research being carried out. It enabled focus on the relevant concepts, careful consideration of relevant and realistic research questions and the development of hypotheses. Conceptual frameworks are a visual representation of the thinking prior to the research and, therefore, evolve as the study progresses (Miles et al., 2014). As such, it was anticipated that this conceptual framework would be updated, depending on the results of this study. In that instance a new revised conceptual framework would be designed and discussed in subsequent chapters. The following chapter outlines and justifies the approach to answering these research questions.

## Chapter 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Approach

The following chapter discusses the methodological approach taken to meet the research aim of this project: evaluating the relationship between self-efficacy and writing attainment, and the impact of writing workshops on a student's self-efficacy for academic writing. It argues from a pragmatist paradigm that the approach should be driven by the research questions, and as such it is felt of fundamental importance to restate these. As discussed in the previous chapter the research questions were derived from the conceptual framework.

1. What is the relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs for writing, performance self-efficacy and the goals they set themselves; and is there any correlation between these measures and students' actual attainment in writing?
2. Can a writing intervention increase students' self-efficacy beliefs for writing?
3. Does the intervention have any corresponding effect on students' performance self-efficacy and the goals that they set themselves?
4. What influence does each of the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) have on students' self-efficacy for academic writing?

The context of this study is also of particular importance. The study focuses on students from widening participation backgrounds and, therefore, not traditional university students. As previously stated, it is argued that such students face additional challenges with academic writing, as they often lack the social and cultural capital of the traditional university student.

As outlined in the Introduction Chapter, the research was driven from personal motivation, seeking to redress inequality in education (Cohen et al., 2011), as highlighted in recent research (Crawford, 2014). Careful consideration has therefore been given to the selection of research methods, in order to ensure as robust, valid and reliable approach as possible, within the current constraints (M. Smith, 1998). In addition, this research argues from a pragmatist paradigm that the research approach should be appropriate for the research question. Such a pragmatist ontology and epistemology argues for a mixed methods approach, drawing on both numerical and narrative techniques, as required to answer the research question (Ercikan & Roth, 2006).

This pragmatist ontology and epistemology, has led to predominately quantitative research methods being used. As the research question focused on relationships between factors, a quantitative approach was appropriate. However, in order to explore some of the reasons behind the observed relationships (Newby, 2014) some sequential qualitative research methods were also employed. This mixed methods approach, according to Cohen et al. (2011), enables “data to be probed, corroboration and triangulation to be practised, rich(er) data to be gathered and new ways of thinking to be explored” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 23). It is, therefore, argued that such an approach will generate more robust research from which change can be proposed.

In order to answer the first three objectives, this project took a quasi-experimental design approach. Whilst it is accepted that this was not a randomised controlled trial (RCT) – this is challenging to achieve in an educational setting (Cohen et al., 2011)- the principles of a RCT were adhered to, where possible. The RCT approach is believed to be the most appropriate and robust technique to test potentially helpful educational initiatives as the one in question (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2001). With its roots in education, the RCT is now predominately used in clinical settings and is revered in some settings as “the only acceptable source of evidence for the efficacy of new treatments” (Matthews, 2006, p. 3). Despite this, its use in educational research is fairly limited and calls have been made for RCTs to be used more effectively in educational trials, especially in contexts where new initiatives are being implemented (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2001). Furthermore, this “gold standard” approach (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2001, p. 316) helps to answer the calls for educational policy to be more research based (Whitty, 2006), as it is perceived as a robust, powerful methodology and an “asset to educational research” (Newby, 2014, p. 121).

At its heart, the principles of a RCT are simple: two or more groups, identical in all respects are assembled. One is subjected to the intervention, the other, the control, is not (Newby, 2014). In this project three groups were proposed: an intervention group, a group who were subjected to standard practice and a control group. The intervention consisted of writing workshops which included elements designed to foster self-efficacy, as discussed by Bandura (1997) and practised by Mascle (2011). The control and standard groups were offered a variation of these workshops. A pre-test, post-test methodology followed, identified by Hutchinson and Styles (2010) as a powerful RCT design. Essay grades and self-

efficacy scores for writing (gained through questionnaire) were collated before and after the intervention. These were used to evaluate the impact of the workshops on students' self-efficacy, goals, performance self-efficacy and their relationship with academic writing attainment.

In order to answer the fourth and final objective, sequential qualitative research was carried out. In-depth interviews, with a selection of participants from the intervention study, sought to ascertain meaning behind the quantitative data. Not only did the data collated from the intervention study allow for a more robust approach to selection, but the initial findings also offered a basis from which appropriate questions could be developed and answers analysed.

## 4.2 Methods

As previous discussed, this thesis used a sequential mixed methods approach. A quasi-experimental design, using a pre-test, post-test methodology was followed by in-depth interviews.

*Figure 4.1: Overview of the research design*



#### 4.2.1 Participants

##### *Selection*

Selection was based on a series of criteria, all of which needed to be met. Firstly, participants needed to be studying a course at HE level, in the first part of their degree (Year 1) so that they can benefit from early intervention. In line with the initial driver of this project to 'level the playing field' within universities for all social classes, students also needed to be following a course that traditionally attracts an element of widening participation students. The principles of effective academic writing teaching advocates contextualising the skills within a subject discipline (Lea & Street, 1998) and, as such, selection needed also to focus on a cohort of students following a defined programme. Focusing on one course also helped to eliminate other possible variables such as variable course entry requirements and differing assessment criteria. Finally, as academic input is required in effective skills teaching (Itua et al., 2014), selection had to be drawn from academic courses where staff were already open to developing their students' academic skills in this way. Selecting courses with staff already predisposed to the positive influence of study support sessions, could, arguably, render the selection bias. There is, however, a clear rationale for this selection criteria. With the need to embed and contextualise academic writing skills within programmes, effective collaboration between the academic staff and learning developers is essential. As such, this selection reflects real world future take up of such support sessions.

From these selection criteria, a suitable sample was selected. A Foundation degree course, level 4, accredited by the University but run in four separate satellite sites, was considered an ideal sample. All 43 students followed the same course; had identical learning outcomes, assessments and assessment criteria; and identical entry criteria. As a professional Foundation degree, students were supported by their employers to attend the college one day a week for two years. They could leave at this point with a Foundation degree although the majority continue to study their third, and final, year at the University to which they are affiliated and leave with a degree. As a work-based course, it attracted a significant number of widening participation students, particularly first generation university students. The majority of students studied BTECs or NVQs as opposed to A-levels. The majority of students were female (42 out of 43) with ages ranging from 20 to 45, and many returned to study

after a break to raise family. The educational background, first in family to university, part time nature of the course and the age of the average student puts these students firmly within the category of widening participation, as defined by Office of Fair Access (OFFA, 2017). The programme managers at the four sites were supportive of the intervention and had worked previously with the learning developers to enhance their students' academic writing skills.

There was an added benefit with the location of these students. With the students being taught in four separate locations around the county, there was less chance of contamination bias (Hutchinson & Styles, 2010). It was unlikely that the students from the intervention and control groups would come into contact with each other and be able to compare experiences. This has been argued to be a benefit in selecting groups for RCT from locations some distance apart (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2001).

#### *Respondents*

Out of the possible 43 students, 42 agreed to be part of the study. All participants were females aged between 20 and 45. With the exception of one student who studied A-levels, all other students had previously attained passes in BTECs or GNVQs relevant to their profession. Only seven out of the 42 students had a parent who had a Degree (level 6) or above qualification and, therefore, were likely to have previous experience of university study. The 42 students were split across four locations unevenly, with two larger cohorts (16 and 11) and two smaller cohorts (8 and 7). On analysis of the pre-questionnaire it was felt that all four groups were comparable in the age, gender and educational background of the students. More detail on this will be covered in the following chapter.

#### *Allocation*

A primary concern for any experimental design is to control for any allocation bias. The principle 'ceteris paribus' (all things being equal) is central to experimental design of this kind, so controlling for variables requires careful consideration (Newby, 2014). Whilst it would have been desirable to randomly assign students to either Group 1, 2 or 3, it was accepted that this was neither practical, or without its ethical concerns (Cohen et al., 2011). Instead, it was felt beneficial to make use of already pre-set groups and follow a cluster randomisation approach (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2001). It is for this reason, alongside the relatively small sample, that it is accepted that this was not a 'true' RCT but instead a quasi-

experimental design which makes use of pre-determined groups and avoids any unnecessary disruption (Newby, 2014).

Within this project, allocation to the intervention and control groups was decided by random selection. As two groups were larger than the other two, it was decided to combine the two smallest groups, for the purposes of allocating an intervention; meaning the two smallest groups would get the same intervention but delivered within their separate locations. This made three groups of a similar size (16, 11 and 15).

Each intervention was allocated a number from one to three. Then an electronic dice was rolled and whichever number one, two or three appeared first, this corresponding intervention was then allocated to each group in turn.

#### *Selection of participants for qualitative study*

The qualitative element of this study involved in-depth interviews with a selection of the participants. One of the aims of the interviews was to determine which elements of the workshops the students found helped, or hindered, their self-efficacy for writing and their interpretations as to why this might be. As a result, it was important to select students from all three intervention groups and, within each group, a student who had recorded an increase in self-efficacy for writing pre and post the intervention, and one that recorded no increase or decrease in scores. As age was felt to be a possible contributory factor to self-efficacy, selection criteria also included a mixture of students who had recently completed full time study (aged up to 25) and those that had taken some time away from education (aged over 30).

The data from the pre-questionnaire and the writing self-efficacy questionnaire were used to select appropriate participants for the in-depth interviews. The data were analysed and categorised into: change in self-efficacy pre and post intervention (an increase, decrease or no change); essay grade change pre and post intervention (an increase, decrease or no change); age (25 or under or over 26); the group they were allocated to. In total 10 students were selected as meeting the aforementioned criteria and emailed requesting for their participation in an interview. They were told that this was voluntary and eight agreed to participate.

## 4.2.2 Materials and measures

### *Pre-questionnaire*

Whilst it is believed that the three experimental groups were comparable, for reasons already discussed, it was felt beneficial to collect some background data on all the students within the sample. Such information could provide some baseline data to distinguish any variables when comparing the group means (Hutchinson & Styles, 2010). A questionnaire was designed to collect data about the students' prior educational experience and attainment and parents' highest academic qualification (see Appendix A for the pre-questionnaire). This allowed data to be gathered which could be used to determine the students' social and economic backgrounds and age, in line with widening participation definitions (OFFA, 2017), which it was felt could be useful for analysis purposes.

Data were categorised, where required. With regards the parental occupations, the Standard Occupations Classification, as defined by the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2016) was used to categorise these from 1-6, to offer an indication of socio-economic background. In addition, prior qualifications of both the participant and their parents were categorised into the levels as defined by the Department for Education (DfE, 2017b).

### *Questionnaire*

Students from all three groups were asked to complete a writing self-efficacy questionnaire (see Appendix B) at three times throughout the year: prior to the first workshop; at the end of the spring term when all workshops had been completed; and finally, at the start of their second year. Students were asked to include their student (identification) number on the form, in order that the questionnaires they completed at different times could be matched.

The writing self-efficacy questionnaire aimed to measure a student's performance self-efficacy, their self-efficacy for writing and the academic goals that they set themselves. It was an adaption of the perceived self-regulatory efficacy for writing questionnaire devised and tested by Zimmerman and Bandura (1994) and used a 0-100 scale, as advised by Pajares et al. (2001). A 100 point scale offers a more sensitive predictor of performance than the seven point scale originally used in the work of Zimmerman and Bandura (1994). In addition, "efficacy items should accurately reflect the construct" (Bandura, 2006, p. 308) and in this case, this presented a need to measure the specific elements of academic writing, in line with how they were measured and assessed. Therefore, some adaptations to the questions

were required to meet the specific requirements of the course. In order to ascertain the relationships between performance self-efficacy, self-efficacy for writing and grade goals students set themselves, the questionnaire also included additional questions on goal setting and, as such, mirrored some of the questions devised by Zimmerman and Bandura (1994) and their research into this field.

The academic goals and performance self-efficacy scores were allocated a grade from one to four and one to seven respectively, to aid statistical analysis. A mean self-efficacy for writing score was also calculated from the 25 items, to calculate average changes over the course of the project and for use in correlational analysis.

#### *Essay grades and marking sheet*

In addition, to determine the relationship between attainment, the students' performance and writing self-efficacy, and the goals they set themselves, data were also collated on the students' writing attainments. The research made use of the assessment regime within the institutions already in place for this measure. Not only was this an appropriate measure, as the aim on the research was to increase the degree classification of all students, but also using an existing test is a sound methodological approach. The assessment was not set with the intervention in mind, was not assessed by the researcher and, therefore, ensured a lack of assessment bias (Hutchinson & Styles, 2010).

Prior to the intervention, all students were required to submit an essay as part of their course requirements. This was the first piece of extended writing the students were asked to complete within the course and, therefore, a good reflection of their academic writing skills prior to any writing workshop. Students at all four colleges were set the same assignment, with the same assignment brief and marking criteria. It was, therefore, felt that the marks awarded for this assignment would prove a valid measure of a student's writing attainment prior to the intervention. After the workshops, all students were required, as part of their studies, to submit a case study report. Again, all students were asked to complete the same assessment at the same time, with the same assessment criteria and it was therefore felt this would be a valid indication of a student's writing attainment post the intervention. Results from both assignments were recorded alongside the students' scores for self-efficacy for writing. In addition, the students' final mark awarded for the year was

collated, and represented their Grade Point Average (GPA) which was also used for analytical purposes.

It is also accepted that whilst the final grade on the coursework needs to be the ultimate measure of the impact of such an intervention, there are many variables that contribute to this final award. Academic writing is only one of these variables and the intervention can only have a partial impact on the final grades awarded. As a result, in addition to collating the students' grades, tutors were also asked to complete a quick mark sheet immediately after marking each individual's work (see Appendix C). The mark-sheet was designed to be completed quickly, thus minimising tutors' extra marking time, and simply asked tutors to rate the work from 0 to 10 against key academic writing criteria. These criteria were based on the areas in which the workshops were designed to develop students' skills such as use of academic language, structure and referencing; a copy of which can be found in Appendix C. These were completed after marking the coursework pre-and-post the intervention, and could be used to evaluate any potential impact on specific criteria. In addition, these were used to establish the impact such academic writing skills had on the final grade awarded. This not only helped to establish if focusing on such skills was beneficial but also if their scores in these areas reflected the self-efficacy the students had for such skills.

#### *Interview schedule*

In addition to discovering the students' perceptions as to the effectiveness of the writing workshops, it was also felt of benefit to explore how students determined the scores they allocated to their writing capabilities, goals they set themselves and the confidence in achieving such goals that they recorded in their questionnaires. Underlying this, it was felt important to explore the overall perception each student had of their own writing capabilities and what had contributed to such perceptions. In exploring these elements of perceived academic writing capabilities and the contributory factors to this, it was felt that richer insight could be gained and more effective solutions to developing academic writing self-efficacy could be sought.

Whilst there were some clear areas this research sought to explore, it was felt that the interview required some flexibility. A potentially emotionally loaded topic like self-efficacy requires participants to speak "freely, emotionally and to have candour, richness, depth, authenticity and be honest about their experiences" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 413). A list of

pre-determined questions was not felt to offer the participants the freedom to explore the subject that it required. Instead a semi-structured interview was believed to be an appropriate tool, allowing broad themes to be covered whilst also allowing for the freedom to explore some ideas further (Thomas, 2013). An interview schedule, as defined by Thomas (2013), was designed focusing on the 'how' and 'why' questions allowing for more open responses. It offered the appropriate balance between exploring some pre-determined topics whilst allowing for a conversational approach to generate the level of richness and depth required (Cohen et al., 2011). A guide of questions was determined in advance with probing questions added, so areas of interest could be explored further. Careful consideration was given to the terminology within the questions to ensure they use words and phrases that the interviewee would be familiar with (Newby, 2014). The sequence of the questions and the wording was decided once in the interview allowing for the flexibility to be responsive to the given situation, taking Freebody's (2003, p. 137) view that together we are able to "make sense in generating meaningful accounts of the experiences they describe".

A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix D, indicating the types of questions that were posed to the participants.

#### 4.2.3 Procedure

##### *Prior to the intervention*

The pre-questionnaire (see Appendix A) was handed out alongside the information sheets and consent forms (see Ethical Considerations, Section 4.5) at an introduction session held for all of these students at the University, in November 2016. Students from all four institutions came together for an induction session at the University, and it was felt this would be a good opportunity to address all students and ensure they received a consistent message about the research. The students were verbally informed about the research, its purpose and what their involvement would be, if they accepted to participate. It was also explained that those who chose not to give consent would still attend the workshops but they would not need to complete the questionnaires, and if they did complete them their data would not be used within the study. Forty-two out of the 43 enrolled students completed the pre-questionnaire and the consent forms.

The essay marks for the first assignment were collected for each student. Tutors noted these on the mark sheet alongside their grade from 0 to 10 for each of the academic writing criteria, previously discussed (see Appendix C).

The three experimental groups were then allocated to either receive the intervention, standard workshop or the control, as previously described. Students and staff were blind to what group they were in, and also to what other groups were receiving, to minimise any Hawthorne effect (Hutchinson & Styles, 2010). Instead both students and staff were informed that the intention of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of academic writing support sessions. As such all students believed that they were part of the intervention group, thus any additional motivation from being part of an experimental group was experienced equally by all students (Newby, 2014).

The workshops were then designed, as described below

#### *Workshops*

As per research informed best practice, previously discussed, all writing workshops were designed in partnership with the academic and with careful consideration of the students' needs (Itua et al., 2014; Lea & Street, 1998). As writing workshops are more effective if contextualised to a given subject with a specific task in mind (Hattie et al., 1996) an assignment set in the spring term was chosen as the focus for the writing workshops. This particular assignment was chosen as not only was it one that I had experience of supporting students with but also it was an assignment which course leaders had highlighted as one which students found particularly challenging. It was the first time they were asked to write a report and link theory to practice, which was a cause for anxiety for students. In addition, this was the second piece of extended writing students were asked to submit. Results from their first assignment could, therefore, be used to determine their academic writing attainment prior to any intervention and offer a useful comparison. For the past three years, previous students on this course had received a one-and-a-half-hour workshop focusing on report structure, linking theory to practice, using evidence and academic style in Year 1 of their course. Feedback from these sessions, and subsequent discussions with course leaders, suggested that this content should remain unchanged. For this purpose, the content for the standard writing workshop remained as it was in previous years and offered the basis for all three groups.

### *The three experimental conditions*

Group 1 received the intervention. The aim of the intervention was to establish if a writing workshop incorporating elements which aim to foster self-efficacy had any additional benefits. As a result, this group had extra content added to the previously delivered standard writing workshop (see Group 2), and a change to the way in which the content was delivered. Students in Group 1 received three, one and a half hour workshops, which focused not only on strategies to develop students' academic writing, but also on developing their self-efficacy for academic writing. Content for these workshops was drawn from previously discussed literature on Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and how these can be fostered in a writing workshop (Mascle, 2013). The writing aims remained the same with content focusing on report structure, linking theory to practice, using evidence and academic style. However, the delivery was designed to be more facilitatory in approach, allowing more collaboration and time offered to 'experience' writing within the workshop and receive feedback.

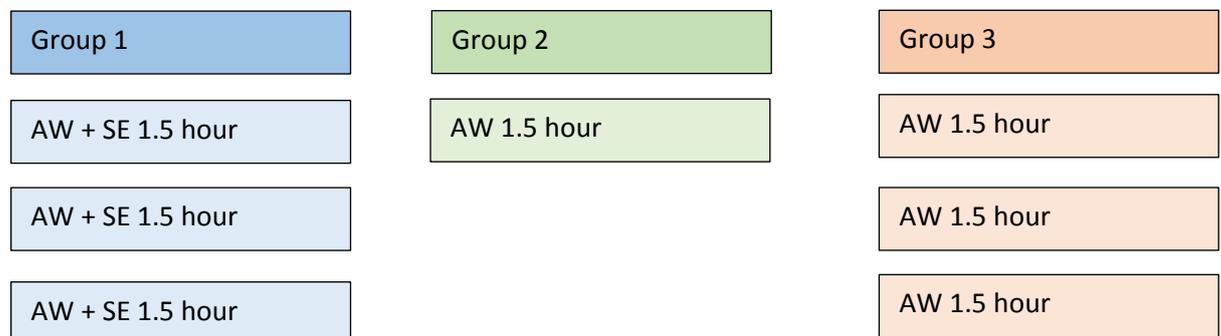
Consideration was given to the four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and physiological and emotional state (Bandura, 1997), in developing the workshops plans. Students were encouraged to discuss their concerns about writing and were supported to explore their emotions, and required to set goals for their writing. Examples of previous students' work was shared and discussed and students were encouraged to work collaboratively on the various stages of writing, offering feedback and support for each other throughout. As anticipated, this required more than the standard workshop time, so three workshops of one and a half hours each were planned. See Appendix E for lesson plans for each of these three workshops and how the 4 sources of self-efficacy were interpreted and incorporated.

Group 2 received the standard writing workshop on developing academic writing. This entailed a single, one-and-a-half-hour session on academic writing development, in line with what is currently offered, as discussed previously. A copy of the lesson plan for this workshop, including its pedagogic rationale, can be found in Appendix F.

Group 3, the final group, received three, one and a half hour workshops. As with Group 2, the workshops were developed with sound teaching and learning ideals in mind, utilising best practise in teaching academic writing, but matched the number of taught hours of the

‘intervention’ group. As with Group 2, these workshops focused on developing writing skills and had no elements of fostering self-efficacy added. The rationale for the inclusion of this third group was to isolate the variable of number of contact hours and to identify its possible impact on the intervention. It was believed that this would assist with identifying whether it is the extra time spent on supporting students with writing development or the inclusion of self-efficacy within the workshops which had an impact on students’ self-efficacy scores. The Group 3 workshops had the same focus as the standard and intervention group: report structure, linking theory to practice, using evidence and academic style but more time could be spend exploring these in more depth. In addition, critical thinking and writing skills were included as an additional area, on request of the course leader, to make use of this extra allocated time. The workshops plan for Group 3, and how it compares to the intervention group, can be found in Appendix G.

*Figure 4.2: Design of the workshop interventions*



Note: AW – academic writing. SE = self-efficacy

#### *Administration of writing self-efficacy questionnaire*

As stated above, in order to assess the impact of the intervention on students’ self-efficacy for academic writing, all students were asked to complete the writing self-efficacy questionnaire (see above) at various points within the research cycle: prior to the first workshop, at the end of the intervention and six months later.

Just before the first workshop began, (March 2017), students were asked to complete the writing self-efficacy questionnaire (see Appendix B), for the first time. The questionnaire was self-administered in the presence of the researcher to allow for any queries or uncertainties to be addressed immediately and increase the potential for a good completion rate (Cohen et al., 2011). Preliminary instructions were given to ensure students were measuring their perceived capability in the present moment and not focusing on their future beliefs. In addition, as suggested by Bandura (2006), in order to minimize response bias, students were instructed to complete their questionnaires privately, were informed that their responses would remain confidential and that codes would be used in the place of names when analysed. Finally, to encourage more honest answers, students were informed of the importance of their contribution to the research (Bandura, 2006). Emphasis was placed on how such findings will help our understanding and guide the development of support sessions designed to develop students' academic writing skills.

To accommodate the variable of time, all students completed the post-test questionnaire at the same time (when the last workshop had been completed – April 2017). In order to test for any longer-term impact of the intervention, all students completed the questionnaire again at the start of their second year (November 2017).

### *Interviews*

After the final workshop had been completed, data from the pre and post writing self-efficacy questionnaire were collated alongside the students' essay marks and marking sheets. As previously discussed, some preliminary analysis was carried out to identify a sample of participants for interview. Ten students were emailed and informed that they had been selected for interview, given information and consent forms and asked to participate. Eight students agreed and interviews were arranged at a mutually agreeable time.

All interviews were conducted over the phone during June 2017. This was mainly a pragmatic decision. As participants were in four different locations it would have proved challenging to arrange face to face interviews with them all before the end of their summer term. The participants were all in full-time work, only allocated one day to study each week and with already heavy timetables in the remaining few weeks of term, it was felt a phone interview would be more convenient for the participant. Whilst there is a tendency amongst some researchers to view telephone interviews as inferior to face to face interviews, there

remains little evidence to support this assertion (Novick, 2008). Moreover, Cachia (2011) argues that the telephone medium and semi-structured interviews are complementary and offer additional benefits to face to face interview, for instance in providing control to the interviewee of their privacy, as they choose their setting. In addition, comparisons carried out between the transcripts of face to face and telephone interviews revealed no significant differences (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), leading to the argument that telephone interviews can be an effective research tool. With regards the concerns about rapport, as I had already met all the participants at least twice in teaching contexts, they were already familiar with who I was and the research I was conducting. On balance of all this, it was felt that telephone interviews were an appropriate technique to adopt.

#### 4.2.4 Approach to analysis

As previously discussed, the data collected included:

- 42 pre-questionnaires (data included: parental occupation, prior educational experience, age and year left school)
- 41 writing self-efficacy questionnaires prior to the intervention (including 25 questions rated 0-100 on confidence in a variety of writing tasks; perceived likelihood of obtaining the range of degree classifications and the student's goal for academic attainment)
- 42 academic grades for assignment prior to the intervention, marked as a percentage
- 42 mark sheets (5 criteria with marks ranging from 0 to 10) relating to the above assignment
- 39 writing self-efficacy questionnaires post the intervention (as described above. Note 3 students were absent)
- 42 academic grades for assignments post the intervention, marked as a percentage
- 42 marks sheets (as described above) relating to the assignment post the intervention
- 40 writing self-efficacy questionnaires completed 6 months after the intervention had been completed
- 42 end of year grades (as a percentage)
- 8 in-depth interview transcripts

With the exception of the interview transcripts, the data were initially recorded in an excel spreadsheet, to allow for effective data management and analysis. All the unique items included the student number on them, so they could be matched. For confidentiality purposes, each student was then allocated a new number, to ensure the student could not be identified from their data. A record was also created identifying which group they were assigned to: intervention group (1), standard group (2) or control group (3), thus aiding the analysis of the workshops. The data were then exported into SPSS to allow for accurate statistical analysis to be carried out. In order to minimise the likelihood of Type 1 Errors (Field, 2013), careful consideration was given prior to any tests being run. Analysis focused solely on the research questions previously stated, and described below.

#### *Research Question 1*

Research Question 1 had a number of elements, all focusing on correlational analysis. Firstly, it sought to explore the relationship between students' self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and the academic goals that they set themselves. Research suggests that self-efficacy has a positive correlation with academic goals (Masclé, 2013; Schunk, 1984, 1990; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) but this thesis aimed to explore if this would also be found when investigating self-efficacy for writing and degree classification goals and expectations for students from widening participation background. For this purpose, the degree grade students were aiming for was correlated against their mean score for self-efficacy for writing. In addition, this mean self-efficacy score was then correlated against the confidence levels students reported in attaining this grade (performance self-efficacy). As the questionnaire was administered three times, these correlations were run at each iteration, therefore determining if the correlation strengthens as a student progress through their degree, as one might expect.

The second part of this question aimed to then establish if there was any correlation between these aforementioned measures: self-efficacy for writing, academic goal and performance self-efficacy, and the students' grade for their assignment. As grades for two assignments were collected (pre and post the interventions) and questionnaire data taken around the same time, this correlation could be run at two different times. Again, it was anticipated that the correlation would strengthen as students progressed through their degree and had more of an understanding as to their academic capability. In addition, mean

average scores from the final questionnaire (administered in November 2017) were correlated with the students' end of year grades.

#### *Research Question 2 and 3– experimental analysis*

Research Questions 2 and 3 sought to explore the impact of the differing writing workshops on a students' self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and goal setting. As unsystematic variance was controlled for, as much as possible, it is argued that the different workshop conditions would account for any difference in the change in scores evidenced across the three experimental designs (Field, 2013). In order to measure this, inferential statistical tests were carried out using SPSS alongside the comparisons of means across the three groups and the three time points (before the intervention, post intervention and six months later).

To determine whether the workshops had an impact on the students' self-efficacy scores, the mean score for self-efficacy for each student was calculate from the 25 questions within the questionnaire. Each student, therefore, had a mean self-efficacy score pre and post the workshops, and six months later. Statistical tests were then conducted to determine if there was any significant difference across the three experimental groups which regards to changes in self-efficacy at each time point.

In addition, performance self-efficacy and academic goal scores were treated in the same way. Each student had a score calculated for both performance self-efficacy (a score out of 27) and academic goal (a score from 1-4) at each time point (before the intervention, post intervention and six months later). Statistical tests were then conducted to determine if there was any significant difference across the three experimental groups which regards to changes in performance self-efficacy and goal setting at each time point.

#### *Research Question 4 – qualitative analysis.*

The fourth question sought to evaluate the impact of each of the four sources of self-efficacy on these students' self-efficacy for writing scores and assess the effectiveness of the writing workshops. Eight in-depth phone interviews were conducted. The first stage in analysing qualitative findings, such as this, is data processing and preparation (Miles et al., 2014). As a result, the interviews were listened to and transcribed. The eight interviews were transcribed using the exact words spoken and also adding in some non-verbal

communication, such as pauses, laughter and emphasis, as suggested by Cohen et al., (2011). The interviews were listened to and the transcripts read a number of times, to ensure familiarity with the data, prior to the next stage.

As Miles et al. (2014, p. 72) argue, “coding is analysis” requiring deep reflection and interpretation about the data’s meaning. Therefore, the transcripts were then coded using first cycle codes. To aid this process, and further analysis, the transcripts were downloaded into NVivo. This “heuristic process” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 73) allowed for careful reflection as to the meaning of the data and for possible conclusions to be drawn.

The transcripts were assigned a series of codes, using a combination of coding types. As the qualitative research sought to sequentially deepen the meaning of the quantitative research findings, some codes were determined deductively. Categorised by Miles et al. (2014) as ‘hypothesis coding’, codes were assigned to any mentions of the four sources of self-efficacy as defined by Bandura (1997): mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and physiological and emotional state. In addition, ‘causation’ coding was applied to responses which evaluated the effectiveness of the workshops. Arrows were used to denote possible cause and effect between two or more concepts, as described by the participant. According to Miles et al. (2014, p. 79) such causation coding is appropriate in evaluating the beliefs with regards the “complexity and influences and affects on human action and phenomena”, as in the case of self-efficacy, and also an appropriate technique in analysing the efficacy of a new programme or workshop. For these reasons, causation coding was arguably an effective first stage coding technique in this research project.

Other codes emerged during the data collection and analysis. Such inductive coding ensured the analysis was open to the participants’ reflections and responses, rather than just blindly attempting to fit the data into a set of pre-determined codes. To ensure the participants were prioritised and analysis captured the “magnitude of their beliefs”, some in vivo coding was used (Miles et al., 2014, p. 72). These phrases and words using the participant’s own language, allowed the capture of potential key leads to deeper understanding and insight. These words and phrases were denoted in speech marks within the margins of the transcripts.

After the first stage coding process, the transcripts were then subjected to second stage coding. This involved identifying patterns, themes, causes and explanations across all the coded transcripts (Miles et al., 2014). This iterative process, using inductive and deductive analysis involved a number of processes, reflection and a review of the literature within this field. Such qualitative analysis reflects a process described by Bryman (2016) as thematic analysis.

Firstly, to ensure the codes were being used consistently across the transcripts, each code was given a definition, for example 'motivation-self = an intrinsic motivation to study'. This had the result of removing some codes which overlapped or had a similar meaning, such as transition concerns and level of writing expected. The next step involved looking for linkages between codes and identifying where codes may be grouped into similar ideas. In order to determine this, all codes (alongside their definitions) were written on post-it notes and moved around to identify connections, possible groupings and potential hierarchies. From this a list of potential themes and sub themes were identified. As suggest by Bryman (2016) at this stage the literature was consulted to ensure the codes were underpinned by research into this field.

The following step aimed to determine the strength of the proposed themes. To do this NVivo was used. All transcripts were coded using the themes and sub themes identified. Reports were then generated to ensure codes were being used consistently across the transcripts and that more than one transcript had been coded with each sub theme. At this stage further consolidation of sub themes and themes occurred. With the transcripts coded, deeper insight was sought by examining possible connections between the themes, within and across the transcripts. Once again post-it notes filled with quotes were used to represent the different themes and participants, and moved around to identify possible linkages and differences. Some hypotheses were formed and tested out using the reporting software within NVivo. In addition, known variables, such as the intervention group, self-efficacy scores, assignment grades and changes in self-efficacy, were also added as 'attributes' into NVivo and reports were generated to identify the similarities and differences across these variables. At the end of this process a clear set of themes and sub themes were generated. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

### 4.3 Validity and reliability

Careful consideration has been given to the validity and reliability of this research project, as discussed in this chapter. With regards to the selection criteria of the participants, these were carefully described and fully justified. All possible practical measures were taken to ensure the similarity of the participants within each experimental group. The pre-questionnaire helped to establish any unsystematic variance and offered suitable criteria from which participants for the qualitative research could be selected. Random allocation was used to ensure a non-biased allocation to the control, intervention or standard group. To eliminate any possible Hawthorne effect, students and staff were blind as to what experimental group they were placed in and instead informed that they were all part of a study exploring the impact of writing workshops.

The writing self-efficacy questionnaire was a key data collection tool in this thesis. Not only was it the basis on which students' self-efficacy for writing, academic goals and performance self-efficacy was measured, it was also used at three separate intervals to measure the impact of the intervention. It was, therefore, imperative that the questionnaire was tested to increase its reliability, validity and practicality (Cohen et al., 2011). Despite the questionnaire being largely based on a pre-tested questionnaire designed by Zimmerman and Bandura (1994), there were some adaptations made to a number of questions (to make them more context specific) and the measurement scale (from 0-7 to 0-100, as advised by Bandura (2006)). It was, therefore, felt necessary to run a pilot of the questionnaire, to test for:

- The clarity of the questionnaire items
- The instructions in terms of the measurement scale of 0-100
- The clarity of the instructions and wording of the question relating to academic goals and attainment
- To check, for practicality reasons, the time the questionnaire took to complete
- To receive some general feedback on the validity and suitability of the questionnaire to the target audience.

As the final point identified, it was important to get feedback from the target audience of the study. The questionnaire was, therefore, piloted on 20 students who were studying the

same course but in the year above the identified sample. They were informed that the purpose of them completing the questionnaire was solely for piloting purposes. As such, they were informed not to include their student number, but asked to consider their answers carefully. Not only did this ensure an accurate recording of the time taken to complete the questionnaire, but it also allowed for a more accurate analysis of the validity of the research tool. Students were also asked to highlight any misleading questions and to add any comments about their overall feelings about the questionnaire at the bottom of the questionnaire.

The pilot highlighted two issues with the questionnaire. Instead of using the full range of ratings from 0-100, students recorded these in multiples of 10. It was felt this could be due to the way in which the scale was designed, so in its place a clearer grading scale was produced with additional markings to indicate that any number between 0 and 100 could be recorded. In addition, the scale of 1-7 used to indicate a student's confidence in achieving each specific degree classification, was the cause of some confusion; with some students appearing to be more confident in their ability to achieve a higher mark than a lower one. Despite this being the same layout as used in the questionnaire by Zimmerman and Bandura (1994), the layout of the question was changed to eliminate any ambiguity.

To measure academic attainment, current assessments were used. Not only has this been argued to be the most appropriate measure of academic attainment in this context but also, as these are not marked by myself, are completely unaffected by potential researcher bias. Despite all four institutions setting the same assessment and using the same assessment criteria, it was accepted that there needed to be further reassurances that all marks were comparable. Each institution had two markers grading all their work. A selection of these were double marked to ensure consistency within each college. In addition, a sample of each of these were randomly selected and marked across the colleges, thus ensuring cross-college marking consistency. This was not a new process set up for the purposes of this project but one that has been adopted by the colleges since their inception. The four colleges and markers come together once a month to discuss these, and other issues, at the University and the head of these programmes has the role to ensure a consistent, coherent approach.

In addition, a separate marking sheet was used to identify the specific writing skills which the workshops were designed to develop. The same markers marked these on both occasions, so even if there could arguably be a difference between these marks across the various markers, it could be argued that these were consistent for each individual college and, therefore, each individual student.

For the purpose of consistency, the researcher facilitated the workshops in all three groups. Whilst this created some timing challenges, it was felt that the input, personality and knowledge of facilitators can vary greatly, thus introducing further variables and potential influence for consideration (Newby, 2014). This does, however, mean that as the researcher and facilitator, I was not blind to the intervention, and am not free from bias. Whilst the possibility of the workshops for the intervention group being conducted, consciously or unconsciously, with greater fidelity is accepted as a limitation (Hutchinson & Styles, 2010), it is considered preferable to introducing the extra facilitator variable. To counter any such facilitator bias, all sessions were video recorded, with the students' permission (see section on ethical considerations) and viewed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to ensure consistency in teaching delivery. All eight workshop sessions were viewed and it was confirmed that the teaching was consistent in terms of energy and engagement across all four groups.

With regards the qualitative research, the selection criteria were fully described and justified. Careful consideration was given as to the format of the interview to ensure the question frame met the research aims in the most effective way. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative research has been fully disclosed, and justification for the approach taken has been given.

#### 4.4 The role of the researcher and reflexivity

The final question was answered using qualitative research in the form of eight semi structured interviews. Qualitative research is interpretive and the researcher is often involved in a "sustained and intensive experience with participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 187). This adds ethical, personal and strategic issues to the research design and calls for reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Such reflexivity involves considering the role of the researcher and the impact of their own experiences, background and values in shaping the research and interpreting the findings (Bryman, 2016), in an attempt to address any preconceptions

and allow for more effective analysis. As a learning developer within the institution under study, and a student who came to university through the widening participation agenda during the 1990s, there are a number of aspects which have been considered.

Firstly, as a former widening participation student with a passion to create a level playing field for all coming to university, I am only too aware of the possibility of my own experiences influencing the interview design and my interpretation of the responses given. Indeed, it was my background and values that led me to this study, as discussed in the Introduction Chapter. In an attempt to limit the influence of my preconceptions, open questions were used to allow students to discuss areas that they felt were important whilst allowing me to probe these further to develop my understanding of their experiences and beliefs. Also, as a learning developer who delivered the workshops for which I sought feedback on, I was only too aware that students may not have wanted to offer a truthful response; not only for concern of upsetting me but also due to the power dynamic. To counteract this, questions focused on the impact the workshops had on their writing self-efficacy beliefs rather than on how I delivered the session. I spent time early on in the interview building rapport and trust by sharing some of my own experiences, and reassured the interviewees that confidentiality was assured, in order to put them at ease. With regards the analysis, a robust and valid approach was taken to deriving the themes, as discussed in section 4.2.4.

While reflexivity ensured that I made a conscious effort to counter the influence my experiences, background and values had on the research design and analysis, it is accepted that these factors will still have had some impact on the questions I chose to ask, and how the responses were interpreted, analysed and discussed within this thesis.

#### 4.5 Ethical considerations

Due consideration must be given to ethical issues and the impact the research has on participants Cohen et al. (2011). A number of ethical issues that have been considered with this research, particularly in regards its experimental methodological approach. It was hypothesised that the intervention would have a positive impact on students' writing self-efficacy beliefs. It could, therefore, be argued, that those within the intervention group were unfairly offered an advantage. The control groups were being denied the potential

positive influence of the intervention, and could claim they were unfairly disadvantaged. Allowing students to self-select into the various experimental groups could have mediated such concerns, however, it was felt the benefits of taking a cluster randomised approach outweighed these concerns. At the research design stage, there was no evidence that the intervention would have the hypothesised benefits. It was, therefore, felt to be justifiable to focus the research on developing appropriate robust methods to gain reliable and valid data (Cohen et al., 2011). As such, for reasons previously discussed, it is argued that a random allocation selection method should be maintained. It was agreed that, if the intervention was evidenced to be beneficial, those in the control group would be offered additional sessions in the later stages of their course.

In accordance with ethical principles (Cohen et al., 2011), all students were informed of the research and asked to participate. They were informed that non-consent would not disadvantage them in anyway; they would still attend the workshops and benefit from the support. All students were given an information sheet and consent form prior to the completion of the pre-questionnaire (see Appendix H). They were emailed a week in advance with a description of the research project, along with the information sheet and consent form. This gave them time to consider their potential inclusion in the project prior to my meeting with them. At the first meeting all students were given a paper copy of the information sheet and consent form to read. It was explained to them that they were just agreeing to their questionnaire and academic grade data to be used for analytical purposes, that they could retract their consent at any time and if they did not choose to give consent they would not be disadvantaged in anyway. Students who consented (42 out of 43) were asked to complete the pre-questionnaire, which was returned directly to me. Consent forms and information sheets were also written for the course leaders, ensuring they were fully aware of the research project and agreed for their marks and separately designed marking sheet to be used within the project (see Appendix I).

Additional information sheets and consent forms were designed for the qualitative research (see Appendix J). Students were approached and asked to participate in an interview. Once they had agreed, the information sheet and consent form were emailed to them and they were asked to read this prior to arranging a time for interview. As the interviews were recorded, students were asked to give their formal agreement that they had read the

information sheet. A verbal summary was then given and they were asked to give their verbal consent for the interview to be recorded and the data captured to be used within this project and subsequent papers. This agreement was transcribed, and appears in the first section of all transcripts.

As previously mentioned, to match all separate items of data (three writing self-efficacy questionnaires, pre-questionnaire, interviews, assignment grades and marking sheets), the students' university numbers were used. Whilst no one outside of those working within the University with access to the online records system would be able to identify the student from this number, it was felt an extra safeguard was required. Once all the data was matched together, students were allocated a new unique number, which was then used in SPSS for analytical purposes. All the data were held in a password protected private drive and, therefore, not accessible to anyone but myself. For reasons of confidentiality no mention of the course or students' names have been used within this thesis. Instead numbers have been used to protect their anonymity and ensure, as much as possible, that the participants are not identifiable.

Ethical approval was sought and given by the University for all aspects of this thesis. The ethical approval forms can be found in Appendix K.

## Chapter 5 Results

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter is structured in accordance with the research questions previously discussed:

1. What is the relationship between students' self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and the academic goals they set themselves; and is there any correlation between these measures and students' attainment in writing?
2. Can a writing intervention increase students' self-efficacy for writing?
3. Does the intervention have any corresponding effect on students' performance self-efficacy and the goals that they set themselves?
4. What influence does each of the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) have on students' self-efficacy for writing?

As a sequential research design, the first three questions were addressed using quantitative research. Before these questions are explored, a description of the participants and an overview of the quantitative results will be offered, including tests for normality. Such descriptive statistics help to explain the characteristics of the specific student cohort in question. Each research question is then addressed in turn. SPSS was used to explore and analyse data and appropriate statistical tests were run.

The fourth, and final, question was addressed with qualitative research. This section begins with a description of the eight participants, selected after analysis of the quantitative data. It then offers an overview of the deductive codes, before highlighting the emergent themes. NVivo was used to code the transcripts and analyse the themes.

As previously discussed, a questionnaire was completed before ( $T_1$ ) and after the writing workshops ( $T_2$ ), and again six months later, ( $T_3$ ), to assess the longer-term impact on writing self-efficacy. In addition, assignment grades and marking sheets were gathered, and in-depth interviews were conducted, to gain deeper insight as to how self-efficacy for writing is fostered. Findings from the relevant instruments will be discussed in relation to each research question. Figure 5.1 depicts the research design.

Figure 5.1: Gantt chart depicting the research design

| Task                                       | Nov -16 | Dec -16 | Jan -17 | Feb -17 | Mar -17 | Apr -17 | May -17 | Jun -17 | Jul- 17 | Aug -17 | Sep -17 | Oct -17 | Nov -17 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Pre-questionnaire                          |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| SE questionnaire T1                        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Assignment 1 submitted                     |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Workshops                                  |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| SE questionnaire T2                        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Assignment 1 graded & mark sheet completed |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Assignment 2 Submitted                     |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Assignment 2 graded & mark sheet completed |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| In-depth interviews                        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| End of year marks                          |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| SE questionnaire T3                        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |

Note. SE = Self-efficacy

## 5.2 Overall findings

### 5.2.1 Participants

All 42 students were female, with English as their first language. Their ages ranged from 20 to 45, with a mean age of 29, including nine students over the age of 40. All students had at least gained a level 3 qualification (predominately BTECs or NVQs in childcare related subjects), with nine students taking the more traditional academic route of A-levels. One student had attained a qualification at level 4 and two students had achieved a level 5. Thirty out of the 42 did not have a parent (either mother or father) study beyond level 3, and therefore they would be unlikely to have had experience of university study themselves. The breakdown of the socio-economic class, based on the parental occupation, revealed that the majority of mothers were working in Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) grade 2 related roles (for example administrative and sales roles) and fathers working in SOC grade 3 related roles (for example business professionals and skilled trades), as determined by the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2016). See Table 5.1 for more details.

*Table 5.1: Number of participants with a mother or father in each of the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC).*

|                 | SOC 1 | SOC 2 | SOC 3 | SOC 4 |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Mother (N = 42) | 10    | 18    | 10    | 4     |
| Father (N = 35) | 0     | 8     | 22    | 5     |

As previously discussed, three experimental groups formed the basis of this research. When looking at the aforementioned criteria by group, there remained a relatively even split, with the age and qualification of the participants. Group 1 had a higher proportion of students (50%) who had at least one parent who had studied up to degree level and, therefore, likely to have had experienced university level study (only 13% in Group 2 and 20% in Group 3). See Table 5.2 for a more detailed breakdown by group.

*Table 5.2: Mean age and range, number with a level 3, 4 and 5 qualification and number of participants with a parent who had a university education, by group*

|                      | Group 1 (n=11) | Group 2 (n=15) | Group 3 (n=16) |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Age range            | 20-43          | 21-45          | 20-43          |
| Mean age             | 27             | 31             | 28             |
| Level 3              | 10             | 14             | 15             |
| Level 4              | 0              | 1              | 0              |
| Level 5              | 1              | 0              | 1              |
| Parent to university | 6              | 2              | 4              |

### 5.2.2 Self-efficacy for writing scores

Self-efficacy for writing was measured at three times: before the intervention (T<sub>1</sub>), three weeks later with the last workshops (T<sub>2</sub>) and six months later (T<sub>3</sub>). All 25 statements were positively written and scored out of a 100, giving a total possible score of 2500. The mean score for each student was then calculated. A score of over 50 indicated a student was

'moderately certain' they could meet the criteria in the statement. The mean score at T<sub>1</sub> (prior to the intervention) was 55 (*SD* = 15.33; *N* = 41), with the lowest average score being five and highest 82. The student who scored five for self-efficacy for writing was later removed from statistical analysis, as was identified as a clear outlier and left the course prior to the final questionnaire being completed. With the outlier removed the new mean for self-efficacy at T<sub>1</sub> (prior to the intervention) was 56.6 (*SD* = 13.16; *N* = 40) with a range from 21 to 82. The outlier was removed from statistical evaluation, where questions include self-efficacy. As the student was in Group 3, this brought the number in this group down to 15 and matched that of Group 2.

The mean score by question across the three experimental groups revealed a range from 49 (q.11: I can meet the writing standards of a marker who is very demanding) to 66 (q.10: when I have a pressing deadline for an assignment, I can manage my time effectively). Questions relating to motivation (q.22: I can find ways to motivate myself to write an assignment even when the topic holds little interest for me), concentration (q.18: I can refocus my concentration on writing when I find myself thinking about other things), overcoming problems (q.21: When I get stuck, I can come up with memorable examples quickly to illustrate an important point), scored the lowest mean scores.

At T<sub>2</sub> (immediately after the intervention) the mean for self-efficacy for writing had increased slightly to 62.4 (*SD* = 15.06; *N* = 39). The mean score by question revealed a range from 56 (q.11 as previously: I can meet the writing standards of a marker who is very demanding) to 67.6 (q.24: I can find other people who will give me critical feedback on my early drafts). As at T<sub>1</sub>, questions relating to motivation, concentration, overcoming problems and quick thinking remained the lowest scores. The largest increases were seen in questions relating to writing mechanics, style and format such as q.5: I can construct a good opening sentence easily; q.6: I can write a brief but informative introduction that will prepare the reader well for the main focus of my assignment and capture the reader's interest; q.14: I can cite work accurately within the assignment, and in a reference list, conforming to the required referencing style; and q.25: I can write a conclusion that effectively summarises the main ideas in the assignment and clearly answers the question.

By T<sub>3</sub>, six months after the intervention, the mean self-efficacy scores for writing had dropped slightly from 62.4 at T<sub>2</sub> to 61.6 (*SD* = 12.62; *N* = 40). Despite this, the scores were

on average 3.5% higher than at the start of the intervention. Q.11: I can meet the writing standards of a marker who is very demanding, remained the lowest scoring question with a mean of 54.6 and, as at the start of the intervention q.10: when I have a pressing deadline for an assignment, I can manage my time effectively, received the highest mean score of 66.3. As with previous iterations, questions relating to motivation, concentration and quick thinking remained the lowest scorers. Questions relating to writing style and form (referencing, writing conclusions, introductions and opening sentences) continued to rise, despite the overall average drop.

### 5.2.3 Academic attainment and writing scores

The students were set an assignment which they had to submit just prior to the workshops. These were marked out of 100 and grades, together with feedback, were returned to the students after the workshops had concluded. The mean grade for Assignment 1 was 55% ( $SD = 7.35$ ;  $N = 42$ ), with the lowest score of 40% and highest of 68%. In addition, markers were requested to fill in a marking sheet, offering students a mark out of 10 for five writing criteria: referencing and use of sources, accurate grammar, spelling & punctuation, good academic style, coherent structure, and clear argument. Out of a total possible score of 50, the mean across all students was 21.3 ( $SD = 8.8$ ;  $N = 42$ ), fairly evenly split across the five criteria.

The second assessment was submitted after the intervention. The assignment brief, and past examples of previous students' work, were used as the focus for the sessions; the aim was to offer writing workshops using the assignment as the context. The mean grade for this assignment was similar at 56% ( $SD = 8.6$ ;  $N = 42$ ), with the lowest and highest score equalling that of Assignment 1 (40% and 68%). Again, markers completed a marking sheet with the same marking criteria. The average writing scores were slightly higher at 22.8 ( $SD = 8.3$ ;  $N = 42$ ), with increases noted in the coherent structure (+ 0.7) and clear argument (+ 0.4).

As described, there were two measures of academic attainment in this study. The first was the assignment grade and the second was the mark given for the writing elements (five criteria marked out of 10). The closer these two correlated, the higher the importance of writing elements to grade. This was tested at two stages: before the intervention ( $T_1$ ) and post the intervention ( $T_2$ ).

Table 5.3: Correlations, with significance levels, between assignment grade and writing score before the intervention ( $T_1$ ) and after the intervention ( $T_2$ )

| Time  | N  | $\tau$ | $p$   |
|-------|----|--------|-------|
| $T_1$ | 42 | .678   | <.001 |
| $T_2$ | 42 | .571   | <.001 |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient.  $T_1$  = assignment 1 grade and assignment 1 writing score.  $T_2$  = assignment 2 grade and assignment 2 writing score

As shown in Table 5.3, a strong, positive correlation was observed between the assignment mark and the scores given for the writing elements on the work at both times of testing i.e. a higher writing score correlated with a higher assignment grade. The assignment grade was, therefore, an accurate indicator of writing ability and has been used to represent the students' writing attainment in this thesis.

Finally, the end of year grades for all students were analysed. The mark included these two assignments alongside 11 other assignments, presentations and reflective accounts, across six modules. These showed a mean grade of 57% ( $SD = 5.8$ ;  $N = 42$ ) with a range from 44% to 67%.

#### 5.2.4 Academic goals and performance self-efficacy

At each iteration of the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate their confidence from 1 (highly uncertain) to 7 (highly certain), in achieving each of the four possible pass marks (pass at 40-49%; pass at 50-59%; merit at 60-69%; and distinction at 70%+). As expected, the confidence number declined as the grade increased; all students recorded being less confident attaining a higher grade than a lower grade. These four confidence levels were totalled for each student, in order to calculate an overall performance self-efficacy score out of a possible 28. The mean prior to the intervention ( $T_1$ ) was 16.05 ( $SD = 4.22$ ;  $N = 40$ ), straight after the intervention ( $T_2$ ) the mean rose to 17.36 ( $SD = 3.75$ ;  $N = 38$ ) and 6 months after the intervention ( $T_3$ ) this increased to 18.05 ( $SD = 3.89$ ;  $N = 40$ ), suggesting that performance self-efficacy increased over time.

Participants were also asked to select which of the four possible pass marks they were aiming for. Analysis of the initial questionnaire revealed 16 out of 41 were aiming for a pass at 50-59%, 20 selected a merit (60-69%) as their aim and only 5 had a distinction (70%+) as

their academic goal. An analysis of goals across all three questionnaires evidenced that most students (66%) did not change the grade they were aiming for from the March to the November in which the questionnaires were administered, despite them receiving the intervention and a variety of feedback and grades during this period. Of those that did, two increased their goal from a high pass (50-59%) to a merit and one decreased theirs in the other direction after the intervention. An additional five students increased their goal to a merit from a high pass in the November ( $T_3$ ), five students decreased theirs in the opposite direction, with one student decreasing their academic goal two bands, from a merit to a low pass.

### 5.2.5 Test for normality

In order to determine the appropriate statistical tests to be used, descriptive tests of normality were run on the main variables of assignment grades and average academic self-efficacy at three time stages: pre the intervention ( $T_1$ ), immediately after the intervention ( $T_2$ ) and 6 months post the intervention ( $T_3$ )

The results from the Shapiro-Wilk tests were considered to determine normality, as arguably it is the most accurate test when looking at smaller (less than 50) samples (Field, 2013). The test showed mixed findings, with some variables being normally distributed and some not. Therefore, non-parametric tests were used throughout the analysis of data presented in this chapter. The remainder of this chapter offers the results for each research question in turn.

### 5.3 Research Question 1: correlational analysis

What is the relationship between students' self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and the academic goals they set themselves; and is there any correlation between these measures and the students' actual attainment in writing?

Due to the complexity of this question and the number of factors correlated, six hypotheses were formulated and tested. As outlined in the Situating the Study Chapter, these were derived from previous research into this field and were:

1. Self-efficacy for writing has a positive correlation with academic goals.
2. Self-efficacy for writing has a positive correlation with students' writing attainment.

3. Academic goal has a positive correlation with how confident they are overall with achieving various grades (performance self-efficacy).
4. Academic goals students set themselves has a positive correlation with their academic attainment.
5. The confidence students have in achieving grades (performance self-efficacy) has a positive correlation with their academic attainment.
6. The confidence students have in achieving grades (performance self-efficacy) has a positive correlation with their self-efficacy for writing.

Results below used a Kendall Tau test ( $\tau$ ), as arguably this is the most accurate non-parametric test for small data sets (Field, 2013) .

### 5.3.1 Self-efficacy and goals

The following identifies the relationship evidenced between the students' self-efficacy for writing (mean score out of 100) and the grade they were aiming for at the end of the year (70%+, 60-69%, 50-59%, or 40-49%).

#### *Hypothesis 1: academic goal and self-efficacy for writing*

Self-efficacy for writing has a positive correlation with academic goal, i.e. the higher the average self-efficacy a student has for writing the higher academic goal they set themselves.

*Table 5.4: Correlations, with significance levels, between academic goal and self-efficacy for writing before the intervention ( $T_1$ ), after the intervention ( $T_2$ ) and 6 months later ( $T_3$ )*

| Time  | N  | $\tau$ | $p$  |
|-------|----|--------|------|
| $T_1$ | 40 | .337   | .008 |
| $T_2$ | 39 | .343   | .008 |
| $T_3$ | 40 | .303   | .016 |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient. SE = self-efficacy for writing

As shown in Table 5.4, there was a positive, moderate correlation between academic goal (grade a student is aiming for) and self-efficacy for writing, at each time of testing. Those who felt more confident with their ability to write set themselves a higher academic grade to aim for. This was the case at each time of testing.

### 5.3.2 Self-efficacy and attainment

#### *Hypothesis 2: self-efficacy and attainment*

Self-efficacy for writing has a positive correlation with students' writing attainment, i.e. there is a relationship between how capable a student feels they are with writing and the academic writing grade they receive.

*Table 5.5: Correlations, with significance levels, between writing attainment and writing self-efficacy before the intervention (T<sub>1</sub>), post the intervention (T<sub>2</sub>) and 6 months later (T<sub>3</sub>)*

| Time           | N  | $\tau$ | $p$  |
|----------------|----|--------|------|
| T <sub>1</sub> | 40 | .210   | .058 |
| T <sub>2</sub> | 39 | -.105  | .356 |
| T <sub>3</sub> | 40 | .158   | .156 |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient. T<sub>1</sub> = assignment 1 grade and self-efficacy prior to intervention. T<sub>2</sub> = assignment 2 grade and self-efficacy post the intervention. T<sub>3</sub> = final year grade and self-efficacy 6 months after intervention.

Table 5.5 shows that there was no statistically significant correlation observed between academic attainment and self-efficacy at any time of testing (T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub> or T<sub>3</sub>).

### 5.3.3 Academic Goals

#### *Hypothesis 3: academic goal and performance self-efficacy*

The academic goal (target grade) a student sets themselves has a positive correlation with how confident they are overall with achieving various grades (performance self-efficacy). Those that are more confident in attaining a distinction, merit, pass etc. set themselves a higher grade to aim for.

*Table 5.6: Correlations, with significance levels, between academic goal and performance self-efficacy before the intervention (T<sub>1</sub>), post the intervention (T<sub>2</sub>) and 6 months later (T<sub>3</sub>)*

| Time           | N  | $\tau$ | $p$  |
|----------------|----|--------|------|
| T <sub>1</sub> | 40 | .341   | .009 |
| T <sub>2</sub> | 39 | .329   | .015 |
| T <sub>3</sub> | 40 | .264   | .040 |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient.

As shown in Table 5.6, there was a significant, moderate correlation between performance self-efficacy and academic goal, at all times of testing.

*Hypothesis 4: academic goal and attainment*

The academic goal students set themselves has a positive correlation with their academic attainment. Those that are achieving higher grades will set higher academic goals for themselves.

*Table 5.7: Correlations, with significance levels, between academic goal and writing attainment before the intervention (T<sub>1</sub>), post the intervention (T<sub>2</sub>) and 6 months later (T<sub>3</sub>)*

| Time           | N  | $\tau$ | $p$  |
|----------------|----|--------|------|
| T <sub>1</sub> | 40 | .294   | .023 |
| T <sub>2</sub> | 39 | .198   | .133 |
| T <sub>3</sub> | 40 | .327   | .010 |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient. T<sub>1</sub> = assignment 1 grade and academic goal prior to intervention. T<sub>2</sub> = assignment 2 grade and academic goal post the intervention. T<sub>3</sub> = final year grade and academic goal 6 months after intervention.

As show in Table 5.7, there was a moderate correlation between the goals students set themselves and their assignment grades at T<sub>1</sub> (the start of the intervention) and T<sub>3</sub> (six months after the intervention) but this was not observed at T<sub>2</sub> (immediately after the intervention).

5.3.4 Performance self-efficacy

*Hypothesis 5: performance self-efficacy and attainment*

The confidence students have in achieving grades (performance self-efficacy) has a positive correlation with their academic attainment. Those that are achieving higher grades will have higher performance self-efficacy.

*Table 5.8: Correlations, with significance levels, between performance self-efficacy and writing attainment before the intervention (T<sub>1</sub>), post the intervention (T<sub>2</sub>) and 6 months later (T<sub>3</sub>)*

| Time           | N  | $\tau$ | $p$   |
|----------------|----|--------|-------|
| T <sub>1</sub> | 40 | .183   | .113  |
| T <sub>2</sub> | 39 | .056   | .639  |
| T <sub>3</sub> | 40 | .446   | <.001 |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient. T<sub>1</sub> = assignment 1 grade and performance self-efficacy prior to intervention. T<sub>2</sub> = assignment 2 grade and performance self-efficacy post the intervention. T<sub>3</sub> = final year grade and performance self-efficacy 6 months after intervention.

As shown in Table 5.8, no correlation was observed between performance self-efficacy and assignment grade either before the intervention (T<sub>1</sub>) or immediately after the intervention (T<sub>2</sub>). By T<sub>3</sub>, six months after the intervention, the end of year grade and performance self-efficacy were positively correlated.

*Hypothesis 6: performance self-efficacy and self-efficacy for writing*

The confidence students have in achieving grades (performance self-efficacy) has a positive correlation with their self-efficacy for writing. Those that perceive themselves to be more capable at writing also believe themselves more capable of achieving higher grades.

*Table 5.9: Correlations, with significance levels, between performance self-efficacy and self-efficacy for writing before the intervention (T<sub>1</sub>), post the intervention (T<sub>2</sub>) and 6 months later (T<sub>3</sub>)*

| Time           | N  | $\tau$ | $p$   |
|----------------|----|--------|-------|
| T <sub>1</sub> | 40 | .443   | <.001 |
| T <sub>2</sub> | 39 | .310   | .008  |
| T <sub>3</sub> | 40 | .317   | .005  |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient. T<sub>1</sub> = performance self-efficacy and writing self-efficacy prior to intervention. T<sub>2</sub> = performance self-efficacy and writing self-efficacy post the intervention. T<sub>3</sub> = performance self-efficacy and writing self-efficacy 6 months after intervention

As displayed in Table 5.9, there was a moderate positive correlation between performance self-efficacy and self-efficacy for writing at all times of testing.

The confidence that a student had for writing correlated with the confidence they had with achieving certain grades. Therefore, how capable they felt with writing was related to how confident they felt in achieving on their course.

#### 5.3.5 An overview of correlations

Table 5.10 shows the relationships between all four measures: academic goal, self-efficacy for writing, assignment grade and performance self-efficacy. As shown, academic goal (the grade a student is aiming for) was moderately correlated at all times of testing with self-efficacy for writing and performance self-efficacy. In addition, a moderate correlation was observed at all times of testing with self-efficacy for writing and performance self-efficacy. Academic attainment and academic goal were positively correlated before the intervention and again six months later, but not immediately after. A correlation between academic attainment and performance self-efficacy was only observed with the end of year grades and at the final time of testing. Self-efficacy for writing and attainment in writing showed no significant correlation, at any time of testing.

Table 5.10: Overview of correlations and significance of all factors at all times of testing

|                                 | Academic Goal<br>(target grade) | Self-efficacy for<br>writing   | Academic<br>attainment  | Performance self-<br>efficacy  |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Academic Goal<br>(target grade) |                                 | Moderate &<br>significant at all<br>times:<br>T <sub>1</sub> ( $\tau = .337, p = .008$ )<br>T <sub>2</sub> ( $\tau = .343, p = .008$ )<br>T <sub>3</sub> ( $\tau = .303, p = .016$ ) | Moderate &<br>significant at T <sub>1</sub> and<br>T <sub>3</sub><br>T <sub>1</sub> ( $\tau = .394, p = .023$ )<br>T <sub>2</sub> ( $\tau = .198, p = .133$ )<br>T <sub>3</sub> ( $\tau = .327, p = .010$ ) | Moderate &<br>significant at all times:<br>T <sub>1</sub> ( $\tau = .341, p = .009$ )<br>T <sub>2</sub> ( $\tau = .310, p = .008$ )<br>T <sub>3</sub> ( $\tau = .317, p = .005$ )          |
| Self-efficacy for<br>writing    |                                 |  | Not significant<br>T <sub>1</sub> ( $\tau = .210, p = .058$ )<br>T <sub>2</sub> ( $\tau = -.105, p = .356$ )<br>T <sub>3</sub> ( $\tau = .158, p = .156$ )  | Moderate &<br>significant at all times:<br>T <sub>1</sub> ( $\tau = .443, p < .001$ )<br>T <sub>2</sub> ( $\tau = .310, p = .008$ )<br>T <sub>3</sub> ( $\tau = .317, p = .005$ )          |
| Academic<br>attainment          |                                 |  |   | Moderate &<br>significant at T <sub>3</sub> only<br>T <sub>1</sub> ( $\tau = .183, p = .113$ )<br>T <sub>2</sub> ( $\tau = .056, p = .639$ )<br>T <sub>3</sub> ( $\tau = .446, p < .001$ ) |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient. T<sub>1</sub> = before the intervention. T<sub>2</sub> = immediately after the intervention. T<sub>3</sub> = six months after the intervention.

## 5.4 Research Question 2: Can a writing intervention increase students' self-efficacy for writing?

Research Question 2 aimed to explore whether a writing intervention could increase self-efficacy for writing. Responses to the self-efficacy questionnaires completed before the workshops (T<sub>1</sub>), after the workshops (T<sub>2</sub>) and six months later (T<sub>3</sub>), were analysed for each group, to determine any potential impact. As with the previous research question, a hypothesis guided the research.

### 5.4.1 Hypothesis 7: impact of writing intervention on self-efficacy for writing

Students who received the intervention (Group 1) will experience an increase in average self-efficacy for writing greater than those who received the three writing workshops (Group 3) who in turn will be greater than those who received the one standard workshop (Group 2).

*Table 5.11: Mean and standard deviation for self-efficacy for writing by each group at T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub> and T<sub>3</sub>.*

|         | T <sub>1</sub>   | T <sub>2</sub>   | T <sub>3</sub>   |
|---------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Group 1 | 63.3 (SD = 10.1) | 70.0 (SD = 10.0) | 66.0 (SD = 4.4)  |
| Group 2 | 56.0 (SD = 11)   | 61.0 (SD = 14.0) | 60.8 (SD = 16.0) |
| Group 3 | 52.3 (SD = 15.6) | 60.0 (SD = 18.0) | 59.2 (SD = 12.8) |

*Note:* Group 1: n = 11, Group 2: n = 14, Group 3: n = 15. SD = standard deviation

Table 5.11 shows the mean self-efficacy scores for writing for each group at T<sub>1</sub> (before the workshops), T<sub>2</sub> (immediately after the workshops) and T<sub>3</sub> six months after the workshops.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test carried out on the self-efficacy scores at each time of administration revealed that there was no significant difference between the three groups at T<sub>1</sub> (Chi-square(2) = 4.744,  $p = .093$ ), at T<sub>2</sub> (Chi-square (2) = 1.840,  $p = .399$ ), or at T<sub>3</sub> (Chi-square (2) = .627,  $p = .713$ ).

Additionally Friedman Tests were applied to investigate changes in self-efficacy scores for each group over the three time points. The results indicated that for Group 1 there was a statistically significant difference in the scores across the three time points (T<sub>1</sub> pre-intervention, T<sub>2</sub> post-intervention, and T<sub>3</sub> final testing): Chi square (2) = 9.800,  $p = .007$ . Post hoc analyses involving Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test (using a Bonferroni adjusted

alpha) revealed that there was a significant increase in self-efficacy scores between  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ ,  $z = -2.805$ ,  $p = .005$ , with a moderate effect size ( $r = .46$ ). There was no significant difference in self-efficacy score between  $T_2$  and  $T_3$  for this group:  $z = -1.274$ ,  $p = .203$ . There was also, however, no significant difference between the  $T_1$  and  $T_3$  scores for this group:  $z = -.711$ ,  $p = .477$ . These results are somewhat contradictory but a conservative interpretation is that the change in self-efficacy observed at  $T_2$  was not fully maintained when measured six months later.

For Groups 2 and 3 the Friedman Tests indicated that there was no significant change in self-efficacy scores across the three time points (Group 2: Chi-Square (2) = 5.286,  $p = .071$ ; Group 3: Chi-Square (2) = 3.745,  $p = .154$ ).

### 5.5 Research Question 3: Impact of intervention on performance self-efficacy and academic goals

Research Question 3 aimed to explore the impact of the intervention on a student's performance self-efficacy. In particular, whether the intervention had any corresponding effect on students' performance self-efficacy and the academic goals that they set themselves. One final hypothesis ( $H_8$ ) was developed to guide this question.

#### 5.5.1 Hypothesis 8: impact of intervention on performance self-efficacy and goals

Students who received the intervention (Group 1) will experience an increase in performance self-efficacy and will increase their academic goals greater than those who received the 3 workshops (Group 3), who in turn will be greater than those who received 1 workshop (Group 2).

*Table 5.12: Mean and standard deviation for performance self-efficacy by each group at  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$  and  $T_3$ .*

|         | $T_1$           | $T_2$           | $T_3$           |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Group 1 | 17.9 (SD = 3.2) | 19.3 (SD = 3.0) | 19.4 (SD = 2.0) |
| Group 2 | 16.0 (SD = 3.7) | 17.3 (SD = 4.3) | 18.7 (SD = 4.7) |
| Group 3 | 14.7 (SD = 5.0) | 16.3 (SD = 3.3) | 16.3 (SD = 3.5) |

*Note:* Group 1:  $n = 11$ , Group 2:  $n = 14$ , Group 3:  $n = 15$ . SD = standard deviation

Table 5.12 shows the means and standard deviations for performance self-efficacy by group at each time point. A Kruskal-Wallis Test carried out on the performance self-efficacy scores

at each time of administration revealed that there was no significant difference in scores between the three groups at T<sub>1</sub> (Chi-square(2) = 3.570,  $p = .145$ ) or T<sub>2</sub> (Chi-square (2) = 3.860,  $p = .145$ ). There was however a significant difference at T<sub>3</sub> (Chi-square (2) = 5.999,  $p = .050$ ). Following a Mann-Whitney U test, it can be concluded that Group 1's performance self-efficacy scores at T<sub>3</sub> were statically higher than Group 3's ( $U = 31.500$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

Additionally, Friedman Tests were applied to investigate changes in performance self-efficacy scores for each group over the three time points. For all three groups the Friedman Tests indicated that there was no significant change in performance self-efficacy scores across the three time points (Group 1: Chi-Square (2) = 5.027,  $p = .081$ ; Group 2: Chi-Square (2) = 5.647,  $p = .059$ ; Group 3: Chi-Square (2) = 5.193,  $p = .075$ ). It is, however, noted that these scores were not far from significant.

*Table 5.13: Mean and standard deviation for academic goal scores by each group at T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub> and T<sub>3</sub>.*

|         | T <sub>1</sub> | T <sub>2</sub> | T <sub>3</sub> |
|---------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Group 1 | 3.0 (SD = 0.8) | 2.9 (SD = 0.7) | 3.1 (SD = 0.7) |
| Group 2 | 2.6 (SD = 0.7) | 2.6 (SD = 0.6) | 2.6 (SD = 0.9) |
| Group 3 | 2.7 (SD = 0.6) | 2.7 (SD = 0.6) | 2.8 (SD = 0.6) |

*Note:* Includes only participants who attended all planned sessions. Group 1:  $n = 10$ , Group 2:  $n = 14$ , Group 3:  $n = 10$ . *SD* = standard deviation

Table 5.13 shows the mean and standard deviations for academic goal for each group at each time point. Very few students changed the academic grade they were aiming for during the course of the study, resulting in only small changes, if any change at all, to the mean scores. A Kruskal-Wallis Test carried out on the academic goal at each time of administration revealed that there was no significant difference in scores across the three groups at T<sub>1</sub> (Chi-square (2) = 2.315,  $p = .314$ ), at T<sub>2</sub> (Chi-square (2) = .838,  $p = .658$ ), or at T<sub>3</sub> (Chi-square (2) = 2.554,  $p = .279$ ). Additionally, Friedman Tests were applied to investigate changes in academic goal for each group over the three time points and indicated no significant change for any group at any time point. (Group 1: Chi-Square (2) = .500,  $p = .779$ ; Group 2: Chi-Square (2) = .750,  $p = .687$ ; Group 3: Chi-Square (2) = 1.143,  $p = .565$ ).

## 5.6 Research Question 4: influence of sources of self-efficacy

What influence does each of the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) have on students' self-efficacy for academic writing?

### 5.6.1 Participants

As discussed, eight in-depth interviews formed the basis of the answer to this question. Information gained through the questionnaire data was analysed to determine the selection of participants for the in-depth interviews. Participants were selected from all three groups. Within each group, a student that had experienced an increase in reported self-efficacy for writing higher than average (+8 or higher) and one that had experienced no or little increase (+7 or lower) was selected. In addition, a range of ages were selected; in particular, an equal number of those under 29 (the mean age) and those over 30 were identified. In total 10 students were contacted and eight agreed to the interviews. Below is a breakdown of the aforementioned characteristics of those that were interviewed.

*Table 5.14: Attributes (age, writing self-efficacy scores and assignment grades) of interviewees.*

| Participant | Group | Age | SE T <sub>1</sub> | SE T <sub>2</sub> | SE<br>(T <sub>2</sub> - T <sub>1</sub> ) | Essay 1 | Essay 2 | Essay<br>(2-1) |
|-------------|-------|-----|-------------------|-------------------|--|---------|---------|----------------|
| 1           | 1     | 21  | 49                | 60                | +11                                      | 62      | 65      | +3             |
| 2           | 1     | 22  | 58                | 62                | +4                                       | 68      | 68      | =              |
| 3           | 1     | 41  | 56                | 71                | +15                                      | 58      | 76      | +18            |
| 4           | 2     | 21  | 48                | 48                | =  | 48      | 54      | +6             |
| 5           | 2     | 30  | 32                | 30                | -2                                       | 63      | 48      | -15            |
| 6           | 2     | 40  | 50                | 58                | +8                                       | 58      | 64      | +6             |
| 7           | 3     | 21  | 51                | 76                | +25                                      | 50      | 59      | +9             |
| 8           | 3     | 43  | 57                | 69                | +12                                      | 58      | 53      | -6             |

Note. SE T<sub>1</sub> = self-efficacy for writing score pre the intervention. SE T<sub>2</sub> = self-efficacy for writing score post the intervention.

### 5.6.2 Pre-determined codes

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. As previously discussed, these were then listened to a number of times and then coded in a two-stage process. First stage coding involved coding anything of interest, using some predetermined codes and a series of

emergent themes. A number of codes were pre-determined from the literature and a deductive approach was taken, in this case. The following pre-determined codes were applied: mentions of a source of self-efficacy as determined by Bandura (1997): mastery experience; vicarious experience; social persuasions; and physiological and emotional state. In addition, any mention of the efficacy of the workshops were noted. In particular, a note was taken of what elements of the workshop they found most beneficial and why.

### 5.6.3 Inductive codes

Regarding the emergent first stage coding, any comment that was found to be interesting, potentially significant or helpful in understanding the relationship between self-efficacy for writing, writing attainment and previous experience was noted. Such notes, alongside the deductive codes, were recorded in a column on each of the transcribed scripts.

As discussed in the Methodology Chapter, the codes were then refined until a final set of themes were settled on. NVivo was used to code the transcripts with the following themes and sub themes, detailed below.

## 5.7 An overview of codes

### 5.7.1 Theme 1: Sources of self-efficacy

#### *Mastery experience*

Students discussed this in two main ways. Firstly, their experience at school had a lasting impression on how they perceived their ability with writing. There were some who put this down to the effort they put in, others who discuss their teachers' perceptions of them, either being shy or opinionated, and some who just believed writing has never been their strength. Secondly, the grades students were achieving on their course was a key factor they mentioned when determining their confidence in their abilities. However, they placed importance in the need for their grades to continue to improve, in order to sustain this confidence.

#### *Vicarious Experience*

Students discussed the influence of those around them in terms of their peers' grades and being able to view the writing of former students. When discussing their own attainments, they would often compare their grades to others, in order to reflect on how well they were doing. As time progressed on their course, however, they have found their peers less willing

to share their grades; they feel this may be due to changes in confidence. They all mentioned the benefits in being able to see previous students' writing, in order for them to gauge the level of what is expected as well as 'offer ideas' to get them started.

#### *Social persuasions*

Feedback from tutors (both written and verbal) was vital in offering reassurance and guidance. Focus was on the 'improvements needed' and many said they ignored positive comments. Verbal feedback was preferred as gave students a chance to ask questions and seek further clarification. Peers on the course, including those in higher years, were used for morale support but were not seen as experienced or knowledgeable enough to help support them academically.

#### *Physiological and emotional state*

Students often talked about their anxiety with writing and looked to their grades and tutors to offer them reassurance that they were writing at the right level. Fear of failure, or disappointing themselves if they set too high targets for themselves, was also a theme.

### 5.7.2 Theme 2: Motivation

#### *Goals*

When setting goals or aspirations for themselves there was a clear distinction between those who set what they viewed as 'realistic/low' goals for fear of disappointing themselves if they do not achieve the set goal, and others who liked to set themselves higher goals to reach for. Therefore, the extent to which goals were used to motivate students was variable.

#### *Personal motivation*

Some students mentioned the desire to prove others wrong by showing they were capable of university level study; however, on further questioning they believed it was their perception of themselves they were challenging. Many did not think they would go to university, as they had underachieved at school and had personal reasons for doing the course. All were motivated by their careers (see below).

#### *Professional motivation*

As a work-based course, all were being paid to attend college and had a day release to study. For all students questioned, to varying degrees, their motivation to achieve was to become qualified within their field and maintain, or develop, their position. This, for some, added extra pressure.

### 5.7.3 Theme 3: Academic requirements

#### *Level and transition*

A focus was placed on the level of study and expectations, which they felt were implicit. Students were not really clear on what was expected of them and were aware that each year these expectations would increase but were not sure how. This was a cause for anxiety.

#### *Assignment type (genre)*

There was a focus on the type of assignment and a strong sense from the students as to their capability with different genres (essays, reports, reflection or presentations). They felt more confident when questioned on their work experience than they did when asked to write in more theoretical and academic ways.

#### *Assignment brief*

Students felt much more confident with writing when they perceived a clear brief with advice on what to include and how to structure the writing. They were less confident with open ended questions, as this often caused anxiety as to whether they were 'going off topic' and not writing what was expected of them.

### 5.7.4 Theme 4: Locus of control

#### *Internal*

There were some students who appeared to believe they were in control of their own learning and academic success. They discussed the value of the feedback they received, recognised that they have support should they choose to use it and discussed strategies they have developed and put in place to improve their writing.

#### *External*

Some students focused on their desire for more feedback and how they would like to discuss this with their tutors face to face. They talked about being unsure about whether they had met their tutor's expectations, sought reassurance and also requested support for all assignments, not necessarily recognising the transferable skills that they had developed. They mentioned that their confidence in writing was something they had always struggled with and felt they were 'just not good' at writing essays.

## 5.8 Further analysis

Attributes were then added to NVivo so that the themes could be interrogated further by: Group (intervention group, control group or group with one workshop); self-efficacy for

writing scores (either above the average or below); change in writing self-efficacy scores (either increase or no change/decrease); and assignment grades.

Of notable interest regarding the qualitative analysis was the emergent theme of locus of control. It was felt that this was potentially an important factor influencing a student's ability to increase their self-efficacy for writing. As such it was decided, at this stage, to investigate the relationship between a student's locus of control and their change in self-efficacy for writing, over the course of the intervention. The following chapter discusses the additional post-hoc research that was carried out in this regard, and the findings of this research.

Analysis from all these findings and NVivo files, alongside previous research highlighted in the literature review, were then used to help to explore the research questions in more depth. The Discussion Chapter discusses the research questions, with an aim to analyse and interpret these results.

## Chapter 6 Locus of Control

### 6.1 Introduction

As discussed in the Results Chapter, the qualitative analysis highlighted a potentially interesting theme when exploring self-efficacy for writing: locus of control, which it was felt merited further investigation. When discussing the impact of the workshops, the eight students interviewed appeared to fall into two distinct groups: those who felt capable of taking the principles from the workshops and apply them to other writing contexts and those who requested further workshops for different genres of writing. This was also evident when discussing feedback on their written work. Some students felt they would benefit from additional verbal feedback, the chance to discuss the meaning of the comments with their marker and discuss ways to improve. Others had taken it upon themselves to use their feedback to create their own 'action list' for future assignments and were clear on what they needed to do themselves to progress. Their views were also quite distinct as to whether they believed writing, and particularly writing in an academic way, was just something they have never been good at or whether they felt capable of developing this skill. These traits appeared to resonate with the work of Rotter (1966) and his theory on locus of control, as discussed in the Literature Review Chapter.

The students' sense of who was in control of their learning (themselves or their tutors) appeared to have some bearing on their confidence in their capabilities to improve. As a social learning theory, like self-efficacy, locus of control is concerned with a person's beliefs and how they shape their lives, but it is a distinct concept focusing on expectancy of a particular type of reinforcement (Rotter, 1975). Where self-efficacy focuses on a person's belief in their capability, locus of control focuses on beliefs about personal control. As discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, the impact of locus of control has on academic achievement has been the focus of some studies in Higher Education (Alias et al., 2012; Drago et al., 2018; E. Jones, 2008). Locus of control has been found to be of particular importance amongst least academically prepared university students and in areas where control for success is often viewed as externally held (E. Jones, 2008). As has been previously argued, the implicit nature of the marking criteria (Lea & Street, 1998) and need for self-regulation associated with writing (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) would suggest locus of control could be a key concept in this study. No studies however have been found

which investigate the relationship between locus of control and a student's change in self-efficacy over a period of time.

As the questionnaire administered focused solely on self-efficacy for writing, it was felt an additional questionnaire to establish all participants' locus of control score could offer some further and valuable insight into the potential influence this may have on a student's self-efficacy for writing scores and their potential to change. This was not part of the original research design, as emerged through an inductive approach to qualitative analysis. As such, it forms this separate chapter, findings from which will be used to support the analysis of findings within the Discussion Chapter.

## 6.2 Methods

### 6.2.1 Participants

The participants were the same group of students as described in the Methodology Chapter and analysed in the Results Chapter. The questionnaire was handed out and completed in March 2018, on a voluntary basis, by those present in a particular seminar. In total 38 out of the original 42 students completed the questionnaire. One student had left the course, as previously discussed, and three were absent on the day.

### 6.2.2 Materials and measures

Students from all three groups were asked to complete a locus of control questionnaire. The original questionnaire developed by Rotter (1966) has since been adapted for specific contexts. As argued by Rotter himself (1975), more specific and contextualised measurements of locus of control would yield more precise predictions of behaviour. As a result, a number of contextualised locus of control questionnaires were developed. Most notably within the academic context is the work by Trice (1985) in creating a 'Locus of Control for College Students' questionnaire (known as academic locus of control). His 28 item questionnaire has more recently been updated, simplified and tested (Curtis & Trice, 2013) and it is this version of the questionnaire that was used in this case. Not only was the questionnaire shortened but it evidenced some questions could be eliminated, as were shown to have no impact, many of which were unsuitable for the particular cohort in question. Curtis and Trice's (2013) updated questionnaire was adapted slightly for this context. The use of the word 'professor' was changed to 'lecturer' and 'social activity'

changed to 'social life', to ensure the questionnaire had relevance to the participants, without changing the underlying meaning. The final questionnaire used consisted of 25 questions written in a True-False format, inviting participants to agree or disagree with the statement. A copy of this academic locus of control questionnaire used can be found in Appendix L.

### 6.2.3 Procedure

The academic locus of control questionnaire was handed out to students in March 2018. Students were scheduled to come into the University for a workshop and 15 minutes was planned into the start of the session to allow students to complete the short questionnaire. They were at this stage familiar with the research and it was explained to them that the results from the academic locus of control questionnaire would be used to offer further insight into the study. They were asked to put their student number on the sheet, so that their scores could be matched with the previous data gathered. They were instructed to mark each question with either a T (true) or F (false), depending if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, for example 'I am easily distracted'. Students were informed that there were no correct or incorrect answers and that, as a researcher, I was just interested in their thoughts and beliefs.

### 6.2.4 Approach to analysis

Each of the questionnaires were given a mark out of 25, using the mark scheme devised by Curtis and Trice (2013) (see Appendix M for the marking criteria). An answer which related to an external academic locus of control, for example 'I came to college because it was expected of me', was awarded a point, whereas ones which suggested an internal academic locus of control were not. Therefore, scores greater than 13 were associated with having an external academic locus of control, whilst lower scores suggested a more internal academic locus of control. Each student's score was then recorded alongside their other scores of self-efficacy for writing, assignment grades and background data and entered into SPSS for further analysis.

### 6.2.5 Ethical considerations

As with all data, and in accordance with ethical principles previously discussed (Cohen et al., 2011), all students were informed that completing the questionnaire was entirely voluntary. They were reminded of the information outlined in the information sheet, that the

information was to be used within my doctorate and they would remain anonymous. They were also informed that they could talk to me at any point and I would be happy to explain the analysis for their individual questionnaires. As with previous data, their student number was only used to match their record up with a unique number I had allocated them, in order that the students could not be traced. All data was stored in a password protected private drive and not accessible to anyone but myself.

## 6.3 Results

### 6.3.1 An overview

The mean score for academic locus of control for the 38 students who completed the questionnaire was 10.2 ( $SD = 3.6$ ). Their scores ranged from 4 to 19. This would indicate that as a cohort they were marginally more internal in terms of their locus of control, though their scores did cover a wide range.

Some initial correlational analysis was carried out, in line with the analysis of other variables outlined in the previous chapter. Non parametric tests were used for this analysis, and as discussed in the Results Chapter, a Kendall Tau ( $\tau$ ) test was used, as it is arguably the most accurate measure for small sample sizes (Field, 2013). There was no significant correlation ( $p < .05$ ) found with academic locus of control and attainment at any time of testing (essay grade 1:  $\tau = .039$ ,  $p = .741$ ; essay grade 2:  $\tau = -.071$ ,  $p = .551$ ; end of year grade  $\tau = -.070$ ,  $p = .559$ ). Equally, no significant correlation was found with academic locus of control and self-efficacy for writing at any time of testing ( $T_1$ :  $\tau = -.109$ ,  $p = .357$ ;  $T_2$ :  $\tau = .0$ ,  $p = .99$ ;  $T_3$ :  $\tau = -.208$ ,  $p = .076$ ). In addition, no correlation was observed with academic locus of control and performance self-efficacy ( $T_1$ :  $\tau = .026$ ,  $p = .832$ ;  $T_2$ :  $\tau = -.132$ ,  $p = .294$ ;  $T_3$ :  $\tau = -.080$ ,  $p = .508$ ) or with the academic goals students were aiming for ( $T_1$ :  $\tau = .116$ ,  $p = .399$ ;  $T_2$ :  $\tau = -.080$ ,  $p = .571$ ;  $T_3$ :  $\tau = .125$ ,  $p = .344$ ).

As discussed, the qualitative analysis raised a potential interesting question, which this additional research sought to answer: does a student's academic locus of control have any correlation with their change in self-efficacy for writing. As with the previous research questions, a hypothesis was developed to guide the analysis to this.

### 6.3.2 Hypothesis 9: academic locus of control and change in self-efficacy for writing

There is a negative correlation between academic locus of control and changes in self-efficacy for writing at each time of testing. Those with an internal academic locus of control will experience an increase in self-efficacy scores straight after the intervention and when tested six months, when compared to their self-efficacy for writing scores at the start.

*Table 6.1: Correlations, with significance levels, between academic locus of control and change in self-efficacy for writing straight after the intervention (T<sub>2</sub>) and 6 months later (T<sub>3</sub>)*

| Time           | N  | $\tau$ | $p$  |
|----------------|----|--------|------|
| T <sub>2</sub> | 39 | .226   | .027 |
| T <sub>3</sub> | 38 | -.233  | .05  |

Note.  $\tau$  = Kendall Tau correlation co-efficient. T<sub>2</sub>= academic locus of control and change in writing self-efficacy post the intervention. T<sub>3</sub>= academic locus of control of control and change in writing self-efficacy 6 months after intervention (when compared to scores after the intervention)

Table 6.1 shows that immediately after the intervention, there was a positive, small correlation between academic locus of control and a change in self-efficacy for writing. Therefore, an external academic locus of control was correlated with an increase in self-efficacy for writing when tested immediately after the workshops. However, when self-efficacy for writing was tested six months after the workshops, there was a small negative correlation between academic locus of control and changes in self-efficacy for writing. Therefore, an internal academic locus of control was correlated with an increase in self-efficacy for writing, six months after the intervention.

The findings from this chapter will now be used to contribute to the discussion in the following chapter.

## Chapter 7 Discussion

### 7.1 Introduction

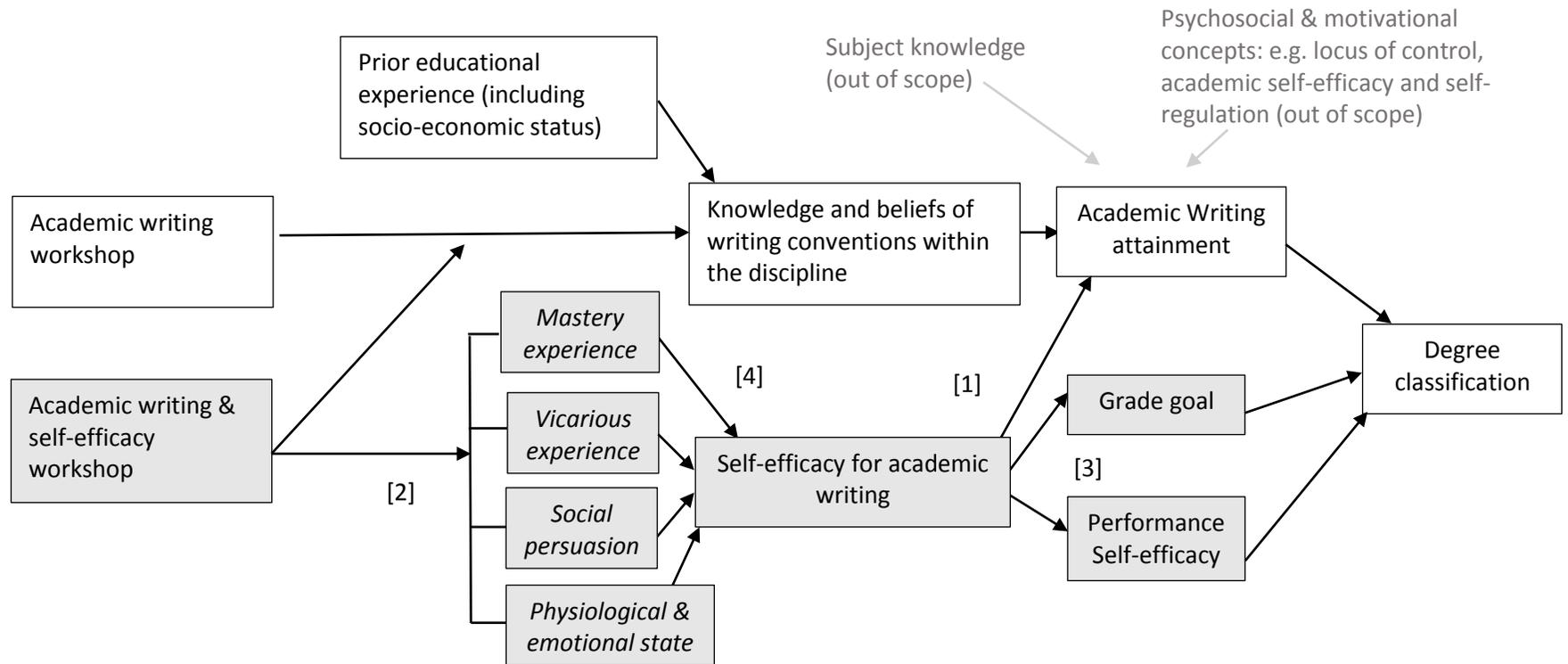
This chapter aims to explore the aforementioned results within the context of research in this field and the conceptual framework, as outlined in the Situating the Study Chapter. As with the previous chapter, it is structured in accordance with the research questions and will be drawing on results from both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as research highlighted in the Literature Review Chapter, to offer insight into this field.

It is felt appropriate at this stage to reintroduce the conceptual framework, from which this thesis is based. Figure 7.1, as discussed in the Situating the Study Chapter, depicts not only the scope of this project but also the thinking at the start as to how the concepts may be interlinked, and the rationale for the research questions. As previously discussed, the overall driver of this research was to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment for a particular cohort of widening participation students at university. Whilst the study focused on a particular cohort of Foundation degree students, it is believed the findings from this study will have implications for a range of widening participation students within our universities today.

As depicted in the conceptual framework, the focus of the study was writing attainment, as arguably this is still the main assessment method within UK HE establishments (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Whilst it accepts there are other self-belief constructs that may impact on academic outcomes, it focused on students' self-efficacy for writing, as there is evidence that this can have a considerable impact on writing attainment (Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Pajares & Valiante, 2006; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Shell et al., 1989; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). As Figure 7.1 shows there were two main areas of focus: the relationship between self-efficacy for writing, academic attainment and academic goals (Research Question 1); and the impact a writing intervention had on these measures (Research Questions 2 and 3). The relative importance of each of the four sources of self-efficacy for writing for these students was also examined, as indicated in Research Question 4.

This chapter begins by exploring the pattern of correlations that emerged between writing attainment, writing self-efficacy, performance self-efficacy and academic goals for this particular set of students. In order to explore these findings further, insights from the

Figure 7.1: Conceptual framework including research questions



The numbers relate to their corresponding research question:

- [1] Is there a correlation between self-efficacy for academic writing, the goals students set themselves, performance self-efficacy and academic attainment?
- [2] Can a writing intervention that aims to foster self-efficacy for writing, increase a student's perceived self-efficacy for academic writing?
- [3] Does the writing intervention have any corresponding impact on the goals the students set themselves and their performance self-efficacy?
- [4] What impact does each of the 4 sources of self-efficacy have on students' self-efficacy for writing?

qualitative analysis will be used to offer context, and findings from previous research will be drawn upon.

To offer further insight into self-efficacy beliefs, this discussion will examine some of the descriptive statistics highlighted in the Results Chapter. In particular, it analyses the self-efficacy for writing scores and examines areas that may be of particular challenge for these students. The discussion then moves on to the second part of this thesis, namely the impact of the intervention. In this section, data drawn from the interviews with the students will be used, alongside the research of others, to help offer further insight into these results. Finally, the discussion focuses on the fourth research question, namely what impact does each of Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy have on this particular group's perceptions of their capability with writing.

## 7.2 Research Question 1: correlational analysis

This section focuses on Research Question 1: What is the relationship between students' self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and the academic goals they set themselves and are there any correlations between these measures and students' attainment in writing? It looks at each relationship in turn before concluding by discussing the interplay between these measures.

### 7.2.1 Academic goals

#### Self-efficacy and academic goals

Students were asked to indicate the academic grade they were aiming for on their course and offered the options of a distinction (70+%), merit (60 –69%), pass (50-59%) or low pass (40-49%). This was then correlated with their mean score for writing self-efficacy. As the questionnaire was administered at three times, three separate correlations were reported. As indicated, there was a positive moderate correlation observed between the students' academic goals and their self-efficacy for writing at all times of testing. Therefore, this indicates that those who felt more capable regarding their academic writing set themselves higher academic goals to aim for.

This potentially has two implications. Firstly, it highlights the perceived relative importance of writing to academic achievement. As previously discussed, essays are still the main assessment tool used within universities (Lillis & Scott, 2007) so perhaps it should not be a

surprise that confidence in writing skill is related to confidence in achieving high grades. It does, however, still support the importance of developing writing skills, and writing confidence, in our university students, as previously argued. Secondly, on a more general note, the correlation between self-efficacy for writing and goal setting has a number of implications. Such a correlation supports Bandura's (1977) assertion that self-efficacy is a powerful concept as it determines the goals we set ourselves and how we overcome challenges and improve outcomes. If students' perceptions of themselves is that they are not capable of good academic writing, they will set themselves lower academic goals and it is these goals which, in turn, impact on academic achievement (Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). The findings from this research, therefore, offer support for the importance of self-efficacy beliefs to goal setting, which in turn is related to academic outcomes.

#### *Academic goal and attainment*

As discussed, academic goals play an important role in academic success, so further analysis of the relationship of academic goals with attainment is fundamental. As mentioned above, students were asked to record the academic grade they were aiming for at the three different times of testing. This was then correlated with the assignment grades the students attained for work they had submitted around the same time as completing the questionnaire. A moderate, positive correlation was found between the grades students were aiming for at the start of the intervention and their first assignment grade.

At the second time of testing (straight after the intervention) no correlation was observed. This could, arguably, be explained by a limitation in the methodology. The marks from the second assignment which were used in the correlation were not returned to the students at the time of them setting their goals. They had submitted the work the week the questionnaire was administered but would not have had an indication of how well they had performed. So, whilst this score indicated a measure of their actual attainment at that point in time, with the absence of feedback, it was not arguably a measure of their actual known ability. Additionally, this was only one assignment out of six that they had completed by this stage.

At the third and final time of testing, the attainment measure used was arguably a more accurate measure of a student's overall academic ability, as it was their final accumulated

grade for the year. As the students would have been aware of this mark at the time of indicating the grade they are aiming for, this was arguably a more accurate measure of the relationship between goals and known attainment. It is, therefore, not surprising that the correlation was stronger at this point than at any other time of testing. This measure of attainment mirrors that known as Grade Point Average (GPA) commonly used in other similar studies (Richardson et al., 2012). The moderate, positive correlation observed was in line with the magnitude of the correlation found in the analysis of 13 years of research into the relationship between university students' GPA scores and grade goals (Richardson et al., 2012). This suggests, therefore, that with regards the relationship between goal setting and GPA, these students' scores were comparable to other university students previously researched.

As the majority of students (66%) did not change their goals from the March to the November in which the questionnaires were administered, this could also be evidence that goals are a determinant of academic outcomes. With the correlation becoming stronger and goals on the whole not changing, this could perhaps offer support for Bandura and Zimmerman's (1994) assertion, and Richardson et al. (2012) meta-analysis, that goal setting mediates academic success. Whether it was the goal that was driving the academic achievement or the academic achievement that was driving the goal is, however, unclear. This complex interplay between goals and achievement is further supported by the qualitative data, and perfectly summed up by Interviewee 3's comment: *"The grade is what lets you know you're doing alright and it is this then that drives you forward and set goals for yourself, else you will be held back"* (Interviewee 3, line 141). Whilst a relationship between goal setting and GPA was evident, with such a small sample and only moderate changes in correlations, no claims of causation can be made. Instead, this can only be a possible suggestion for further research.

Whilst a moderate correlation was observed between grade goal and GPA, this only accounts for 10% of variance. This is particularly interesting when considering that at the last time of testing students had received their grade for the year just before they set their academic goal for the remainder of their course. This, therefore, implies that there were other factors at play, beyond current attainment, in determining the grade goals that students set for themselves. It further suggests that some students were setting higher or

lower grade goals than their marks to date would suggest they were capable of achieving. The interviews did offer some interesting insights as to why that might be.

When asked how they decided on the academic grade they were aiming for, there was some evidence of a link to their actual attainment, for instance:

Interviewee 8 (line 95):

*Um well I was kind of wanting a merit. Because a couple of my assessments have had a merit and a high pass which I felt disappointed in but actually when you look at the difference between the actual number of a low merit and a high pass it's only really a couple of points isn't it?*

However, two students did indicate that they had set themselves lower goals to aim for than the grades that they were receiving, for fear of disappointing themselves. When Interviewee 4 for was asked why she had set her goal as a high pass (50-59%), when her grades were merits (60-69%) her response was:

*I am quite surprised I didn't put a low pass to that question.....a high pass mark, so I wanted to aim for that and nothing really higher at the moment but I know that I can achieve that securely and until I feel that, I don't want to aim for anything more..... I just don't like to set high expectations of myself, like I'm really confident and I think that's probably why I just put the same. Then if I wasn't to achieve that expectation it would be quite disappointing (Interviewee 4, line 151).*

This was also mirrored by interviewee 2 who, when asked why she recorded that she was aiming for a pass when her grades were all merits, said "*Ideally I'd like a merit but obviously I'd be happy with a pass.... I don't want to set my sights too high because I don't want to get disappointed*" (Interviewee 2, line 112).

This reluctance to set high goals for academic attainment is, perhaps, an indication of low confidence. This could be due in part to the disappointment some had indicated with the grades that they had received when compared to previous studies, for example "*When I was at college I always came out with distinctions, so I think it was a shock to come into higher education because what they are expecting is a lot higher than what I've been used to*" (Interviewee 7, line 78). This highlights a possible transition issue, with expectations

regarding both assignment 'quality' and grades in need of addressing. With these students still being taught in Further Education (FE) institutions, whilst studying a university level qualification, this compounds the issue (Itua et al., 2014). Arguably for these students it is even more important that the writing expectations and assessment criteria, including expectations of grades, is highlighted to students when commencing their university level studies, so disappointment in grades does not have a detrimental impact on goals and confidence. This is particularly important when we consider the potential impact goal setting may have on actual attainment.

#### *Academic goal and performance self-efficacy*

The final question associated with academic goals is their relationships with performance self-efficacy. Students were asked at each iteration of the questionnaire to rate their confidence from 1 (highly uncertain) to 7 (highly certain) in achieving each of the possible four pass mark outcomes (pass at 40-49%; pass at 50%; merit at 60-69%; and distinction at 70+% ). As expected, the confidence number declined as the grade increased, for all students at all times of testing. The confidence levels for each of these four possible outcomes was then totalled to give a total mark out of 28, which was then correlated with the academic goal that the student had stated they were aiming for.

As shown in the results, there was a moderate, positive correlation with academic goal and performance self-efficacy at each time of testing. This suggests that those who were more confident in their ability to attain the various grades, set themselves a higher academic goal, supporting previous research (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Whilst a significant correlation was found, once again this was moderate, suggesting that there were other factors at play in determining the academic goals, beyond how confident students feel about achieving their grade goal. This could relate to the above discussion regarding goals and how students were not necessarily setting themselves realistic goals based on their acquired grades; indicating that, whilst they may have felt confident in achieving higher grades, they were not committed to state these as goals, for a fear that they may underperform.

In summary, academic goals appear to play an important role in writing attainment and self-efficacy for writing. The research has indicated that there was a relationship between the academic goals students were aiming for and both their performance self-efficacy and their overall self-efficacy for writing. A relationship has also been found with a student's

academic goal and their attainment in writing, which was strongest at the final time of testing. Qualitative research has helped to add some possible reasons for this, which then leads us to some possible recommendations going forwards. The following section investigates the important relationship between attainment and belief in one's capability further.

### 7.2.2 Self efficacy for writing

#### *Self-efficacy and academic attainment*

Perhaps the most important relationship within this thesis is that of a student's perceived capability in writing (self-efficacy for writing scores) and their actual writing attainment. A plethora of research, including the influential meta-analysis conducted by Multon et al. (1991), supports Bandura's theory that self-efficacy beliefs are related to academic behaviours and evidences a correlation between self-efficacy beliefs and academic outcomes. It has further been argued that self-efficacy has a particularly important role to play in academic writing, as it presents challenges to self-regulation, motivation and requires sustained effort (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). It was, therefore, hypothesised that such a correlation between writing attainment and self-efficacy for writing would exist in this study.

As shown in the Results Chapter, there was no significant correlation observed between attainment in writing and writing self-efficacy at any time of testing. Arguably, this is an interesting, yet unexpected, result suggesting that there was no significant relationship observed between a student's perceived capability with academic writing and their actual attainment in writing.

Once again this lack of correlation could possibly be explained by the limitations in the research design. With a small sample of only 42 students, this might explain the lack of observed correlation between these factors. In addition, whilst the research design followed the advice of Bandura (1997) by recording self-efficacy close to the measures of actual capability, this may have contributed to this interesting result. At both the first time and second time of measuring this relationship, the students had not yet had the marks returned for their assignment used to measure their actual writing attainment. Whilst this relationship is measuring the student's perceived capability with their actual attainment, it

could be argued that this perceived capability was not derived from their 'known' capability at this time.

However, this argument does not hold true when interpreting the results of the third iteration of the questionnaire. At this point students had been given their end of year grade, used in the correlation analysis, prior to completing their self-efficacy for writing questionnaire. If previous, recent, known attainment were to provide an accurate measure of a student's self-efficacy for writing, a relationship would be observed at this time. However, no such relationship was observed. In addition, as previously mentioned, this measure of attainment matched that of GPA used in previous studies. With a moderate correlation between GPA and academic self-efficacy evidenced in Richardson et al.'s (2012) systematic analysis, this is an interesting finding. This result indicates that other factors, beyond writing attainment, were at play when determining writing self-efficacy beliefs, for these widening participation students.

It is argued that it is the particular type of student, or group, from which the participants were sampled, that could help to explain the lack of observed relationship between self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment. Participants were purposefully selected as they all fell firmly into the category of 'widening participation' students, as defined by the Office of Fair Access (OFFA, 2017). Time away from studying, coupled with less than positive school experiences, revealed in the interviews, appeared to have an impact on the students' overall perceptions on their academic capabilities, indicating the importance of Bandura's (1997) fourth source of self-efficacy: physiological and emotional state. Some thought back to when the questionnaire was handed out, recalling that they had just handed in an assignment and were anxious about their mark, or just returned from a presentation and were doubting their academic capabilities, which reflected on their general self-belief and scores entered in the questionnaires. This suggests some potential limitations in using self-efficacy questionnaires as a sole measure of perceived capability and, as Sanders-Reio et al. (2014) argue, it perhaps a constellation of beliefs that should be considered.

It could also be argued that an accurate measure of one's capability in writing is hard to ascertain. With writing, and in particular written assignments, students are rarely offered an early indication of how well they are performing, and often only have what is deemed as 'unclear' or 'confusing' marking criteria to use to appraise their work before submission (Lea

& Street, 1998). This is not suggesting that self-efficacy is not an important concept within the context of academic writing, as Zimmerman and Bandura (1994) argue; on the contrary, it is perhaps more important in writing, as the lack of immediate feedback requires perseverance, self-regulation and determination, thus rendering self-efficacy more crucial to success. However, this might help to explain the lack of an accurate measure in how well students believe they are doing and, therefore, this reflects in weak relationships between ability and perceived capability. It might also highlight the need for the consideration of other beliefs, such as locus of control, which determine not only how capable you feel but also how much control you feel that you have in your own learning and destiny.

Added to this is the challenge that academic writing covers a number of genres and students need to adapt to the differing requirements regarding writing style, content and structure (Lea & Street, 1998; Hodgson & Harris, 2018). This may have had an impact on how students were determining their capability with academic writing and how this might not correlate with their recent attainment in writing. Receiving a high grade for one genre of writing e.g. a reflective report may not result in higher perceived capability in general academic writing. Reports, for instance, were viewed as more practically based, where essays, it was perceived, focus on theory, which many found challenging. Interviewee 6 (line 185) for instance stated, *“I’ve not done theoretical based learning for a long time and I need to get my head back into it. Not like the practical learning I do every day”*. These students were required to write blog posts, essays, reports, reflective accounts and observations within their first year, so arguably receiving a good grade in one may not transfer to overall confidence in writing ability. This possible lack of transference in writing skills, will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In addition, it is worth considering that the measure used for self-efficacy for writing was calculated using a mean score across the 25 questions. More detailed analysis of the range and scores of these questions, could offer some additional insight. The results from the writing self-efficacy questionnaire revealed some interesting findings regarding levels of perceived capability for a) executing strategic aspects of writing process b) realising the creative aspects and c) executing behavioural self-management (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). As mentioned in the Results Chapter, questions relating to concentration and starting writing received the lowest mean average scores, replicating previous findings in this field

(Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Such low scores in students' beliefs in their capability to 'get started' with writing are not surprising. As others have highlighted (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994), writing is a complex process involving cognitive and meta-cognitive processes. When students are faced with the blank page, it requires self-regulation, motivation and confidence to persist without immediate feedback. This is compounded when they feel the marker may be demanding, as many fear is the case with this transition to university-level writing.

Such concerns with getting started with writing were also raised in the interviews, especially when the essay question was broad:

Interviewee 1 (line 215):

*I get 'I don't know how to start this', and I try and write out some random sentences, points or thoughts in my head, get them on the paper, just for something to be there and then I might go well that's a bit rubbish I'll change that or remove it completely and I go from there. Yes, the initial starting and then starting to write [is what I find the biggest challenge].*

Interviewee 6 (line 223):

*Getting started [is my biggest challenge]. I think sometimes some of the criteria is quite vague. So, if we take the child in society one it says something like: take an aspect of childhood and how the society's perception of childhood has changed in relation to poverty, media and there was something else, I can't remember what it was. But it was quite big to narrow down.*

The issue raised with 'vague' and 'open' questions was a particular concern to 6 out of the 8 students interviewed. This appeared to challenge their confidence further and delay, or protract, the writing process: "*I'll find something, think it's really important then look at it again and think it might not be 100% relevant. I kinda doubt myself, I get a bit panicky*" (Interviewee 2, line 152) and "*I think that was quite challenging because it was very broad....I think where I was used to college and my level 3 I had a direct question and that was the question that I needed to answer*" (interviewee 7, line 187).

Questions deemed as 'open' or 'vague', often intended to allow the student to explore a particular area of interest, only appeared to add to the perceptions of implicit marking criteria, highlighted by previous studies (Hodgson & Harris, 2013; Lea & Street, 1998). As interviewee 6 (line 232) says "*It's not knowing what they are looking for*" and interviewee 2 (line 158) "*But sometimes the criteria doesn't quite match 100% with the question*". Whilst it is important that students are able to explore areas of interest, perhaps for these students, some initial feedback on their choice of topic and how they intend to approach a more 'open' brief would support students to get started with the already challenging task of writing quicker and more confidently. As such, this supports the call from Hodgson and Harris (2013) for tutors to help their students to develop a schematic understanding of the specific assignment.

Conversely, there were areas of writing where students felt more capable, highlighted in the writing self-efficacy questionnaires. At all times of testing, the two questions with the mean highest scores were question 10: when I have pressing deadline I can manage my time effectively, and question 24: I can find other people who can give me critical feedback on my early drafts. This could perhaps relate to the particular cohort in question. As highlighted in the Result Chapter, all 42 students were working within their chosen industry and given day release to attend college. With a mean age of 29, the participants were older than the traditional student; all but one would have been classed as a 'mature' student, as were over the age of 21 on entry. Their age and work experience arguably afforded them more confidence in their ability to manage their time. Despite only 12 out of the 42 having had a parent study at university, their scores suggested they had access to others who they trusted to offer effective and critical feedback on their writing. Through the interviews it was clear that many had been encouraged to apply for the course by colleagues and work mentors who had previously completed it. Students often discussed sharing their written work with their colleagues, which might help to explain the relative confidence with seeking feedback.

In summary, the lack of an observed relationship between self-efficacy for writing and academic attainment found here was not as hypothesised. As discussed, this could be in part due to the methodological approach (the timings and the instruments used to measure attainment), though this was not the case when GPA was used at the final time of testing.

Arguably, the particular context of this study may help to explain this lack of observed correlation between attainment and perceived capability. Both the nature of writing with its complex requirements, multiple genres to master and lack of immediate feedback, and the characteristics of these students, being from widening participation backgrounds, has been put forward as possible reasons for this result. This has implications for tutors' approaches with students. The findings suggest that more explicit support from course tutors is required with interpreting assessment criteria, particularly with open questions. Such support, coupled with class discussions regarding grades students can expect to attain at university, would help to support students to raise their self-efficacy for writing beliefs.

### 7.2.3 Performance self-efficacy

The final factor to be discussed, is performance self-efficacy. As previously mentioned, in order to calculate this, students were asked to rate their confidence (from 1 to 7) in achieving the four possible pass mark outcomes (low pass, pass, merit and distinction).

#### *Performance self-efficacy and attainment*

The correlation between performance self-efficacy and attainment (calculated as previously discussed) was calculated to determine if any relationship between these factors existed. No significant correlation was observed before or immediately after the intervention but a moderate and significant correlation was observed at the final time of testing. Moreover, of all the correlations carried out, this one (between the GPA at the end of year one, and the performance self-efficacy scores six months after the intervention) was the strongest. This supports the meta-analysis into antecedents of university grades, previously discussed, with the strongest correlate observed being performance self-efficacy (Richardson et al., 2012). Whilst it is arguably expected that those attaining higher academic grades would be more confident in achieving higher grades in the future, this was still an important finding.

There was, however, no such relationship observed at the other two times of testing, suggesting that confidence in attaining grades was not linked to grade attainment. As argued previously, this could possibly be explained by the limitations in methodological approach. The scores used as the measure for the assignment grades, were only one grade amongst a range of assignments students were expected to submit. This might suggest a possible issue with using a particular assignment for a measurement of academic ability, in such studies. In addition, it could also be argued that as time progresses, a student's

confidence in their academic ability becomes more aligned to their known academic capability. More research would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

However, the interviews suggest that there was evidence of students' lack of confidence in the degree outcome, despite them having received positive results. There was a belief that the marking would get harder and they would be required to meet higher and higher expectations. This could be what was undermining their confidence early on in the process. For example, Interviewee 2 (line 119), *"In Year 2 the difference in academic writing and the level and stuff, just goes up so I don't want to aim for a distinction and be disappointed when I don't achieve it"*.

Interviewee 4 (line 212):

*I'm a bit worried about how the 2<sup>nd</sup> year is going to go because everyone keeps saying it's going to be harder...harsher marking and then that makes me think if I was to do this piece of work that I got marked on yesterday and I handed it in in Year 2 would it get the same mark or would they mark it lower.*

This could help to explain why, for some, receiving high grades at the end of Year 1 did not necessarily lead to confidence in attaining high grades at the end of Year 2. It further supports the argument that a range of factors influence students' performance self-efficacy beyond their current level of attainment.

#### [Performance self-efficacy and self-efficacy for writing](#)

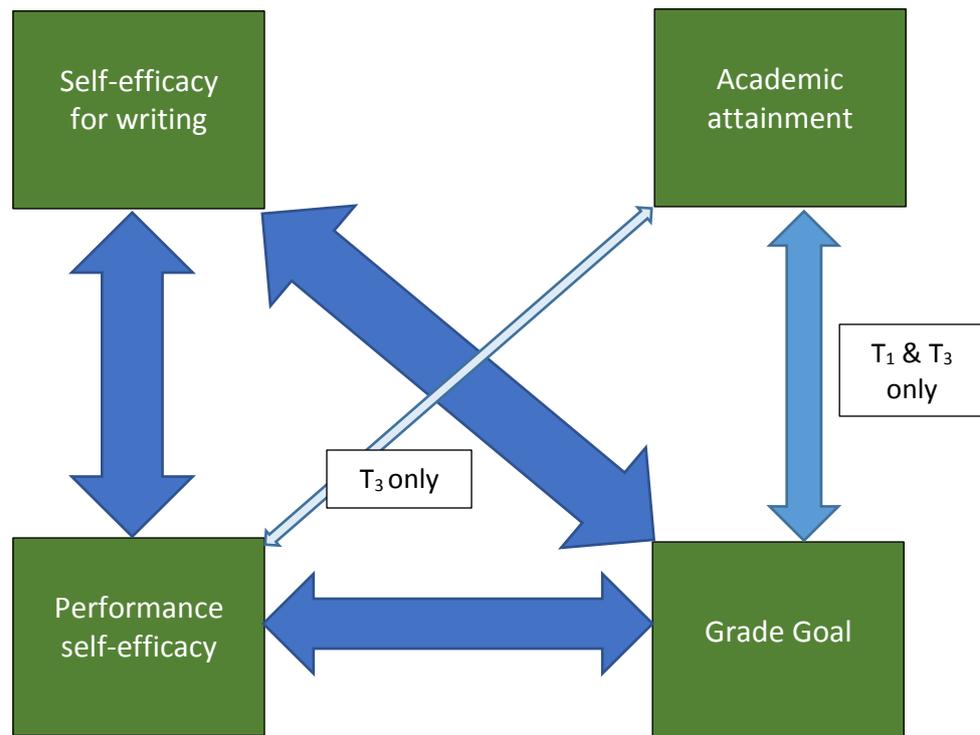
The final relationship tested was that of performance self-efficacy and self-efficacy for writing. This measured whether there was a correlation between how capable a student felt with academic writing and how confident they felt with their overall academic achievement. As hypothesised, there was a correlation observed between these two factors at all times of testing. Both of these factors are measuring a student's perceived capability, either with writing or degree outcome, so perhaps it is not surprising that such a correlation was observed. However, it is important to note that the existence of such a relationship suggests the perceived importance of writing skills to academic outcomes. If a student does not feel capable of academic writing they are also likely to not feel confident in attaining high degree outcomes.

The relationship that performance self-efficacy has with academic goals, offers further insight. As mentioned, a correlation was observed at each time of testing between academic goals and performance self-efficacy, suggesting that those that were more confident in attaining the range of academic outcomes also set themselves higher goals. When considering this in line with the other associated relationships with performance self-efficacy, once again the important role that academic goals play is highlighted. This supports the previous meta-analysis (Richardson et al., 2012) and Zimmerman and Bandura's (1994) claim that goals have a mediating role to play between self-efficacy and academic attainment.

#### 7.2.4 Overall relationships between the factors

Figure 7.2 depicts the overall correlations between the four factors: self-efficacy for writing, academic attainment, performance self-efficacy and grade goal. The figure indicates if a significant correlation was observed at all times of testing, or not. In summary, significant correlations were observed at all times of testing between self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and grade goal. Regarding academic attainment, there was an observed significant correlation with grade goal at two out of three times of testing, and with performance self-efficacy and self-efficacy for writing at only one time of testing. Arguments have been put forward as to why significant correlations with academic attainment and self-efficacy for writing were not observed: limitations in methodology, the challenges of measuring one's capability in academic writing and the characteristics of widening participation students. It has also been argued that academic goals may act as a mediating factor between academic attainment and writing self-efficacy.

Figure 7.2: Correlations between factors



Note: all correlations shown are moderate and significant. The large arrow signifies an observed correlation at all times of testing.

### 7.3 Research Question 2: Impact of the writing intervention on self-efficacy for writing beliefs

The second research question investigated the impact of the writing intervention on a student's self-efficacy for writing beliefs. In order to calculate this, a student's self-efficacy score for writing was calculated before the intervention (T<sub>1</sub>), after the intervention (T<sub>2</sub>) and again six months later (T<sub>3</sub>). This resulted in two different points for measuring change: changes in self-efficacy immediately following the intervention, and changes in self-efficacy six months later. In order to determine the impact of the intervention, this was analysed by group.

#### 7.3.1 Impact on self-efficacy straight after the intervention

The results straight after the workshop were as hypothesised: those that were in the intervention group saw their average self-efficacy scores increase greater than the control group, with those receiving the one workshop experiencing the smallest average increase in self-efficacy. Furthermore, statistical tests indicated that there was a statically significant

positive impact on self-efficacy immediately after the workshops for those in the intervention group (Group 1). Meanwhile, no significant difference in self-efficacy scores was observed for those in the control group (Group 3) or those that received the standard one workshop (Group 2). This is an important finding, as it indicates that it was the inclusion of self-efficacy elements that had a significant impact on fostering self-efficacy, rather than the number of workshops delivered. As the control group had the same workshops hours, with more writing skills content, this is an interesting finding for those seeking to increase the writing self-efficacy beliefs of their students.

There was, however, no significant difference between groups in the changes in self-efficacy scores immediately after the workshop. This could suggest that whilst the intervention group did experience a significant change in their self-efficacy scores, the magnitude of this change, when compared to the other groups was small. There are a couple of points worthy of further discussion which may help add further insight into this finding: the limitations of the approach, the reported benefits of the workshops from the student interviews and the aforementioned challenges with measuring perceived self-efficacy in the domain of academic writing.

Firstly, whilst the intention was to run the intervention workshop differently to the control group workshop, a couple of the activities did not work out completely as planned. As Appendix E shows, the intervention workshops were built around Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy and how this might apply in the context of academic writing development, as argued by Mascle (2011). Firstly, as previously stated in the methodology section, the control group and the students who received the standard single workshop, also had elements of self-efficacy building designed into their workshops. Writing support workshops were already set up and delivered to these students, and some of the elements such as using past students' work to support student writing were already used. As these worked well in the past it was felt unethical to remove them. Therefore, the control group and intervention group workshop contents were not completely different.

In addition, some of the activities intended to foster self-efficacy for writing added to the intervention group did not work as hoped. In particular, as advised by Mascle (2011), an activity was designed to encourage students to write within the workshop and share their writing with others to gain immediate feedback (see Appendix E). Whilst some students in

the intervention group did this, others did not wish to share their work. From what we know about the challenges of academic writing, as previously discussed, and the anxiety and apprehension students feel about academic writing (Martinez et al., 2011), this is probably not a surprise, but may limit the approach. This will be discussed further in the section on vicarious experience as a source of self-efficacy.

However, there were still some notable differences between the structure and content of the control and the intervention workshops, which may help to explain the statistically significant changes in Group 1's self-efficacy scores. The intervention workshops, as previously discussed, were more facilitated than taught, with students working in groups practising writing and structuring the assignments. Analysis of the changes in the individual questions can offer us further insight into the impact this change in approach may have had. Higher than average increases in the intervention group were observed in questions related to concentration and focus rather than skills like referencing and academic style, which the workshops were designed to address. This may suggest that the workshops may have had an immediate impact on their overall view of their writing capability rather than with regards to specific writing skills. This might help to explain why the control group (Group 3), whose three workshops focused on skills development, did not experience the statistically significant change in self-efficacy scores that the intervention group did.

When asked about the workshops, all students interviewed were very positive about their usefulness and commented on how they increased their confidence. The following are some examples of quotes from students within each of the differing experimental groups.

Intervention group: Group 1

*I felt more confident; I had a bit more knowledge about what was expected. Seeing examples of others work helped to see what kind of things we needed to put in*  
(Interviewee 2, line 107).

*Yes, I definitely felt more confident after the workshops. I felt I knew what I had to do and had a sense of what I was aiming for because we saw other people's work*  
(Interviewee 3, line 98).

Standard one workshop group: Group 2

*That was really, really helpful. Really helpful to see like the examples of work that other people had done. That was extremely helpful as we hadn't done that before and you went through it with us and you gave us the time and that definitely made me feel a lot more confident (Interviewee 4, line 161).*

Control group: Group 3

*I did find them helpful. I found it particularly helpful to look at work as well and how it was structured and thought it was useful to try and pick out what I knew tutors were looking for in the work that was there. Yeah it gave me a bit more confidence doing those workshops (Interviewee 8, line 119).*

It is clear that all the students interviewed believed that the workshops, particularly the use of past students' writing examples, helped to increase their confidence in writing. However, when asked whether they felt their questionnaire scores had increased after the workshops, whilst all claimed they felt more confident, they did not feel that this would have resulted in higher self-efficacy scores. For all, it was their returned marks that determined how confident they truly felt in their abilities. For example: *"I guess the only thing I can say that makes me confident is getting the results back and going oh well I can actually do it"* (Interviewee 5, line 152). The workshops arguably did have a role to play in increasing a student's understanding of expectations, rather than directly increasing confidence in their capability. As one student commented: *"I think for me the feedback is what gives me the confidence but I think once you have the workshops you get a clear understanding of things and you can apply that to the feedback"* (Interviewee 8, line 164). These claims do support Bandura's (1997) theory on sources of self-efficacy, however, highlighting the importance of mastery experience and social persuasion in building self-efficacy. Whilst it was the intention to build these elements into the writing workshops, with students being offered the opportunity to master writing and receive feedback, this was arguably not as powerful as the grades from assignments and feedback from tutors that they mention. This will be discussed further in the following section.

There does, however, appear to be a contradiction in findings. Whilst students in the interviews claimed it was their returned grade that determined their scores for self-efficacy,

as discussed in the previous section, there was no observed correlation between these two factors. It was arguably not the grade itself but whether their grades were increasing or decreasing that determined if a student changed their perceived self-efficacy. The interviews highlighted the importance in seeing an improvement in grades, in order for the students to feel capable of writing: *“I feel a bit more confident when getting my grades because they are gradually getting higher”* (Interviewee 2, line 179). This may be due to the belief that grades should continue to increase throughout the academic year. This was further compounded by the concern some had for the increased expectations placed on them next year. As previously discussed, students mentioned the transition they *“all talk about”, “the harsher marking”* and *“less support”*. This might help to explain why only continual increase in grades received will increase their belief in their writing capability. With the wide genre of assessment on this course, not all students may experience this increase, even if they acted on the feedback offered. This could suggest that being clear to students as to what they can expect in terms of assignment grades over the course of the year may help to mitigate this potential drop in confidence.

In the short term, it can be concluded that those in the intervention group did experience an increase in writing self-efficacy scores greater than those in the control group, whose scores increased greater than those who received the standard single workshop. Analysis of the individual questions and the interviews however, showed a more mixed picture. All discussed feeling more confident after the workshop but claimed that they did not expect this to change their questionnaire scores, as only having grades returned would do this and, even then, for some the grades would need to be increasing. So, whilst a statistically significant change in self-efficacy scores for those in the intervention group was observed, it is important to see if these increases in scores were maintained over a period of time.

### 7.3.2 Result 2: six months later

A further questionnaire was administered six months after the intervention, once again asking students to rate their self-efficacy for writing. These scores were then analysed for the three separate groups, to determine the longer term impact on self-efficacy for each group. As shown in the results section, whilst all three groups' self-efficacy scores were higher than they were at the start of the intervention, they had fallen from their post-intervention levels. Those in the intervention group experienced the greatest drop in self-

efficacy, followed by those in the control group, with those who received only the one workshop experiencing the smallest drop. In addition, statistical tests indicated that, whilst those in the intervention group experienced a statically significant increase in self-efficacy scores immediately after the workshop, there was no significant difference between the scores from before the intervention and six months later. So, whilst the intervention may have helped increase self-efficacy beliefs immediately after the workshops, it appeared that this increase was not maintained over the long-term. As the aim of this study was to increase writing self-efficacy beliefs, this is clearly an important finding.

No previous studies have been found which look at the long-term impact of workshops on students' self-efficacy for writing scores, which could add insight to this result. In an attempt to measure the efficacy of study skills interventions, previous studies have tended to measure impact immediately after an intervention. This study suggests that such findings may indicate positive results which may not be sustained long-term. It is, therefore, recommended that studies that aim to investigate the impact that study skills workshops have on students' perceived capabilities do not focus solely on responses immediately after an intervention. Instead, research into the long-term impact of study skills sessions is required, in order to add insight into the effectiveness of the support on offer.

This result, indicating that rises in self-efficacy beliefs were not fully maintained, may offer insight into the impact of writing workshops on a student's belief in their capability to work independently. It is interesting to note that, whilst those that received the three workshops (both Group 1 and Group 3) observed the greatest immediate gains in self-efficacy, they also observed a bigger decline in their scores six months later, when compared to those that received only one workshop (Group 2). This may evidence that the immediate confidence felt after attending a writing workshop only has a short term effect.

It could also be argued that offering students more support could have the unintended consequence of fostering dependency rather than empowering the student. The workshops were designed using known good practice to develop students' writing capabilities: embedded into the curriculum and contextualised to a given assignment. Whilst general skills were drawn out, there is an argument that too much focus on the end product, can do little to help students transfer skills from one writing project to another (Mascle, 2011). Evidence of this lack of ability to transfer the knowledge gained in the workshops was

evident in some of the interview responses, for instance: *“If we could have workshops on writing essays, as well as reports, that would give me more confidence”* (Interviewee 1, line 115). Whilst the workshops were intending to not just focus on the end product but also develop the writer, as Mascle (2011) advised, there was perhaps a need to make more explicit that the skills and knowledge gained during the workshops can be used and developed in other forms of academic writing. Starting with the principles before discussing the assignment task, would arguably be a more effective workshop structure.

Finally, it is also worth noting the complex relationship that this thesis has argued exists between attainment, self-efficacy and the other constellation of beliefs that students hold regarding their capabilities, supporting the work of Sanders-Reio et al. (2014). As Mascle (2011) argues, not only do student have to be provided with the skills, they must feel they have the power to act, and be ready to use such power; highlighting the importance of agency as well as self-efficacy. This leads on to the additional area of research conducted in this study of locus of control, and how this interacts with self-efficacy.

### 7.3.3 The importance of Locus of Control

As discussed in the Results Chapter, when analysing the interviews inductively, a theme regarding the level of control students felt they had of their learning and attainment emerged. Further reading highlighted that this theme related to the notion of locus of control, as defined by Rotter (1966). Students who were interviewed appeared to fall into two groups: those that felt in control of their learning and felt they had the power to increase their grades and were taking active steps to do so; and those students who felt their fate was, to some extent, in the hands of their more knowledgeable markers. To these students, grades were, in part, based on whether they had met the standards and implicit marking criteria of their assessors. This appeared to have an influence on how the students were determining their self-efficacy scores as their time on their course progressed.

As discussed in the previous chapter, to test this hypothesis, all students were handed out an academic locus of control questionnaire, in March 2018. A high score here indicated that they had an external academic locus of control, with a lower score indicating a more internal academic locus of control. When this was correlated against the changes in self-efficacy for writing straight after the intervention, a positive moderate relationship was observed; meaning there was a correlation between those with an external academic locus

of control and an increase in self-efficacy for writing. When we consider that these writing self-efficacy questionnaires were taken immediately after the workshops, this is perhaps not surprising. Some students discussed the benefits in the workshops in *“having the experts there to support us”* and, arguably, the workshops offered some immediate reassurance to those students who needed such support.

When looking at the impact of academic locus of control on changes in self-efficacy scores six months after the intervention, the opposite relationship was evidenced. A negative correlation was observed between the change in self-efficacy and academic locus of control. In this case, a relationship between an internal academic locus of control and increases in self-efficacy for writing was observed. This, therefore, suggests that it is those who believe they have the power to influence their academic grade that, longer term, develop their self-efficacy for writing.

Evidence of an internal academic locus of control was most clearly revealed in how the students acted upon the feedback in order to develop their skill, for instance: *“well I take action after my essays. I have like an action plan of things I am going to work on from the feedback they give us and I try hard and work on those. So, I guess this is helping me to improve”* (Interviewee 3, line 119). How some students were interpreting and acting on feedback was perfectly summed up by Interviewee 8, line 150:

*I’ve done myself a grid...you can look at it and what I need to do, you get a bit of a clearer idea and that does then give you confidence when you know what your weak points are so you can build on them and take advantage of the fact that you're good at one thing and you need to put some work in on other things really and it also then helps you to pick out what study skills modules to re-do because a couple I have gone back to read through.*

Whilst academic locus of control was not the intended focus of this thesis, the combined inductive and deductive approach taken to the qualitative data did enable this relevant theme to emerge. The importance of academic locus of control on academic performance has been researched in related studies (Alias et al., 2012; Drago et al., 2018; E. Jones, 2008). Whilst E. Jones (2008) argued that it is of fundamental importance to those least academically prepared, such as students within this study, no research has been found

which looks at the relationship between academic locus of control and a change in self-efficacy beliefs. This finding suggests that further research into the relationship between academic locus of control and self-efficacy, particular in the domain of writing and the context of widening participation students, would offer valuable insight into this field.

It is accepted that there are limitations to this result, not least that the questionnaire was only administered once and at a different time to the other instruments, yet this is still arguably an important finding. The relevance of academic locus of control relates to Masle's (2011) previously referenced comment that students need to feel they have the power and the ability and willingness to use it, if they to make real progress. Writing workshops should, arguably, not just focus on building self-efficacy but also challenge students' beliefs regarding who has control of their learning and the power that they need to harness, if they are to improve their academic outcomes.

#### 7.4 Research Question 3: Impact of the writing intervention on students' performance self-efficacy and goals

The third question focused on the impact of the writing intervention on students' performance self-efficacy and goals. It was hypothesised that those that received the intervention would have increased confidence in the ability to attain the higher degree outcomes. The results showed that those in the control group, not the intervention group, experienced the greatest uplift in their performance self-efficacy, although their scores were the lowest to start with. However, this did not prove to be statistically significant. In addition, when looking at the increases in performance self-efficacy by group from before the intervention to six months later, it was Group 2 (standard group) who experienced the highest increase. Whilst this change was also not statistically significant, it is an interesting finding considering this group only had one workshop.

When looking at the academic goals students set themselves, as previously mentioned, the majority of students did not change their academic goal during the time of testing. For those that did change their academic goal, either up or down, no discernible pattern could be identified between this factor and which experimental group the students were in. It must, therefore, be concluded that the intervention had no impact on a student's grade goal. With both performance self-efficacy and grade goal considered as key determinants in university

academic outcomes (Richardson et al., 2012), the lack of impact the workshops had on these factors cannot be ignored.

These findings support the aforementioned argument that there are other factors at play when these students determine their self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and grade goals beyond their actual attainment and the workshops and advice they are offered. Academic locus of control has already been highlighted as a possible factor, with students holding an internal academic locus of control more likely to experience an increase in self-efficacy over time. An examination of Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy within the context of these students may help to offer further insight into the complex relationships that exists between self-efficacy beliefs and attainment.

#### 7.5 Research Question 4: Sources of self-efficacy for writing

The final research question sought to examine the role each of Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy had on these students' self-efficacy for writing scores. This will be explored using analysis from the qualitative findings, with each source discussed in turn.

##### 7.5.1 Mastery experience

In line with previous research (Pajares et al., 2007), by far the most influential source used by these students to determine their self-efficacy for writing was their interpretation of their previous results. When asked how they had decided their scores for self-efficacy for writing, all eight mentioned their previous grades as the key factor. This may of course be expected, in that how capable we feel about any given task is based, in part, on how well we have performed in a related task in the past. However, what is fundamental here is that it was based on a student's own interpretations of that result. Whilst other studies (Pajares, 2003; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Shell et al., 1989; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) have evidenced a relationship between actual attainment in writing and self-efficacy for writing, this study did not. It can, therefore, be argued that the importance source of self-efficacy in this case was the perception of mastery experienced based on the student's interpretation of the result they achieved.

In interpreting their result, students talked about the grade that they received in light of either how they have performed in the past or by comparing themselves to others on the course. As previously mentioned, experiencing high grades in FE, and adjusting to the

perceived higher requirements at HE, can have a negative impact on self-efficacy, for instance:

*I think I hoped for the highest grades possible. When I was at college I always came out with distinctions, so I think it was a shock to come into Higher Education because they are expecting a lot higher than I've been used to. (Interviewee 7, line 78)*

As mentioned previously, students would benefit from more explicit instruction on what is expected of them in terms of their writing and, in turn, what they can expect in terms of grades, if they are to interpret their results in a more meaningful way.

This need to interpret the meaning of their results appeared particularly important at the start of the course. In order to determine their own writing capability, the students needed to have a sense of where they fitted into their peer group, in terms of their grade. For instance, when Interviewee 3 was asked how well she thought she was doing on the course she responded with *"It is difficult to say without knowing how I fit in and how I compare to others. I might be doing really badly but I think I'm doing really well"* (Interviewee 3, line 106)

There was evidence to suggest that students were discussing marks with each other at the beginning of the course but, for some, this was no longer happening. When asked why this practice of sharing marks had stopped, it appeared that this was probably because the students no longer needed to establish 'where they fitted in'. There was also evidence that they were more aware of the impact sharing grades might have had on their own, or other people's, confidence levels. As Interviewee 5 (line 168) commented: *"It might be that certain people weren't feeling very confident. I think the first one everyone was just yeah I got through it I passed and then when people started getting higher grades it made some people not very confident, so maybe that's why we all stopped doing it"*

This comparing of grades with other students on the course appeared to do little to increase the self-efficacy of these students. Even students that achieved well, talked about how sharing grades undermined their confidence, as they compared the perceived effort they put in to get the results with others. The impact of sharing grades with others appeared even more damaging to self-efficacy, when a student's grade was lower than that of their peers, for instance:

*Um I think we all think about our grades when they come out. Everybody discusses what they've got, I think I felt good about my grade until I heard that other people had got higher than me...and um and then I think I kind of thought well what didn't I do? What should I be doing to get there? and I think I felt like I tried so hard, and I put so much into it and it took me ages that I was then disappointed that I didn't get that higher mark (Interviewee 7, line 142).*

The comparison of grades links to Bandura (1997) second source of self-efficacy, vicarious experiences, and his argument that being out performed can lower self-efficacy, appears particularly relevant in this context.

Self-efficacy for writing was not only determined by a student's interpretation of their results but also the direction in which their grades were going. Six out of the eight students interviewed mentioned the need to observe their grades increase throughout the year before they felt confident in their writing capabilities. This need for continual improvement is not always easy to achieve in writing, with a range of genres, formats and styles to master (Lea & Street, 1998) and implicit marking criteria to navigate (Hodgson & Harris, 2013). It, therefore, supports Pajares et al. (2007) assertion that tutors should support students to not only be able to interpret their results more objectively, but also, in respect of widening participation students, question their expectations of their writing grades, as they progress through the academic year.

The intervention workshop aimed to foster self-efficacy through mastery experience for writing. Those in the intervention group were given the opportunity to write an introduction, conclusion and a paragraph which embedded theory and practice, all of which were requirements of their assignment. Whilst some did undertake the task at hand, others appeared to not engage as well with this workshop activity. When we consider what we know about writing at this level, it is perhaps not surprising that this was a challenging task for some students to engage with. Writing is a creative process, requiring a complex set of skills and self-regulation (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) and, therefore expecting all students to write in a set period within a short workshop, was probably not a viable proposition. It is also questionable whether students viewed this as 'authentic' mastery experience (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Students were asked to share their work with others

to receive feedback, yet this, despite encouragement, did not happen in all cases (this will be discussed later). The lack of feedback offered to students on their writing, alongside the challenge of creating an authentic writing activity that all students are willing to engage in, highlights the limitations of fostering self-efficacy through developing mastery experience in writing workshops within this context.

Despite this, the importance of mastery experience in developing self-efficacy for writing, for these widening participation university students is clear. The key here appears to be to challenge some of the assumptions students come into HE with regarding the grades they should be achieving and the expectation that these grades, regardless of the change in assignment types, or writing genre, should increase. There appears to be a need for college lecturers working within HE, to be explicit in defining their expectations and, in turn, what students should expect in terms of their grades, and to offer more support in helping students to interpret their results in a more objective way. Support for students to transition from FE to HE with not just the skills but with managing their grade expectations, is required.

#### 7.5.2 Vicarious experience

Vicarious experience involves measuring one's capabilities in relation to others, and arguably can be an important source of self-efficacy when there is no clear framework to determine one's ability (Bandura, 1997). As previously argued, this would suggest that vicarious experience could be a powerful source of self-efficacy within the context of academic writing. The comparing of grades, as discussed above, can support the influence of mastery experiences, but can also undermine it depending on the outcome of such comparisons. As discussed above, for these students experiencing others surpassing their grade appeared to have a significant and negative impact on their self-efficacy for writing.

There are, however, other ways of comparing our abilities, beyond the sharing of grades. As argued by Bartsch et al. (2012), peer working, visits from former students and group assignments can all help raise self-efficacy in this way and support the influence of mastery experience. In the case of academic writing, sharing writing with other participants and seeing other examples of writing should, according to Masclé (2013), all support the development of writing self-efficacy.

The workshops were designed with a number of the aforementioned principles in mind. In all workshops, students were given examples of two former students' reports. They were asked to compare them and, using the assessment criteria, decide what marks each of the reports achieved. They were then tasked with highlighting the strengths of the writing and specific sections were used as exemplars of good writing structure. Of the range of activities in the workshops, all students commented that it was the use of these examples that they found most helpful, supporting previous research in this field (Wingate, 2012). For some, just seeing the examples helped them to know where to start and how to interpret the brief, both key challenges to writing expressed by these students:

*I found it particularly helpful to look at work as well and how it was structured and thought it was useful to try and pick out what I think tutors were looking for in the work that was there. Yeah it gave me a bit more confidence (Interviewee 8, line 119).*

*It was good to see other people's work, so I could see what standard I was aiming for. What standard they wanted...it helps to get you started too, to see where other people started (Interviewee 3, line 88).*

For others, it was perhaps more seeing an example of a student, who they could identify with, succeed in writing, which helped to increase their confidence.

*I remember going through the report, the examples. I think it was helpful to see something, to actually read through and see what was actually written. They've done it, you're not the only one who's done this and just to look at the different styles of writing. I think it's quite difficult to share work with other people, so you don't know how other people are writing or how they write their essays or reports (Interviewee 7, line 101).*

The above quote highlights a number of areas worthy of further exploration: witnessing others who you can identify with succeed, the challenge in sharing writing with peers and the role of exemplars.

As the above quote demonstrated, for some students seeing others succeed helped to increase confidence, if they were perceived to be comparable to them in some way.

Another student spoke of her confidence increasing as she was introduced to students in

the year above. Witnessing more advanced peers develop, succeed and continue to study can be a powerful source of self-efficacy, as she described:

*..we met up with the ones at the end of the first year before we started, and that was good because you can see then that they were just like you, you know they all came from different backgrounds, some had children, some didn't and they were quite honest about how things were, so that gives you a bit of confidence. We saw them again at the end of this term and it was really good to see how many of them are going on to do their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. That gives you confidence because you think it's really done something for them and that could be me in a year's time...I had my spirits lifted because of that (Interviewee 8, line 209).*

The important role that peers can have in developing self-efficacy through vicarious experience, supports the research of Bartsch et al. (2012). Witnessing a student succeed, with whom you can relate to, is arguably more influential for students from widening participation backgrounds, who may sense of lack of belonging (Bourdieu, 2011; Reay, 1998; Thomas, 2010). Such vicarious experience helps to dispel the belief that university-level study is not for 'people like them' and can help to challenge perceptions about their own capability. Further opportunities should be explored which enable dialogue between year groups and allow current students to witness 'people like them' develop and succeed.

The second point worthy of note is the comment that Interviewee 2 made, regarding students not sharing their written work with each other. This may help to explain one of the failings of the intervention workshop, expressed earlier. The lesson plan included elements where students were asked to write and share their writing with a peer (see Appendix E). This was developed based on the suggestions of Mascle (2011), that writing workshops should give the opportunity for participants to write and read their fellow participants' work. However, whilst the majority of students appeared happy to write, as instructed, only half the class were happy to share their writing with their peers. As previously argued, the affective dimension of writing needs to be considered (Gardner, 2014). Both writing anxiety and lack of confidence in writing can hinder the success of such a classroom activity. Interviewee 7, (line 107), commented on the difficulty of sharing work: *"It's that fear of 'what if I've got this wrong' or they think I've got it wrong or they've written it in a different way to me"*. Concerning students from widening participation backgrounds, perhaps more

time, consideration and scaffolding needs to be given to such activities, to enable students to feel more confident in sharing their writing with others.

Finally, there appears to be value in using exemplars to support students to understand assessment criteria and expectation, supporting previous research into this field (Carter et al., 2018; Hendry et al., 2012; Hendry & Jukic, 2014; Hendry et al., 2016). Exemplars were a successful resource in this study, arguably as their use in the workshops were carefully considered. Firstly, the aim of using the exemplars was explained, as advised (Hendry et al., 2016). Students were instructed to focus on the features of 'good' writing rather than on the generic; such as problems with surface level features, grammar and syntax (Fernsten & Reda, 2011). In addition, their learning through exemplars was facilitated with the tutor (myself) offering their own insight into features of good writing, aligned with the assessment criteria, as advised by Hendry (2016). These findings support the argument that guided learning through the use of exemplars, can foster a student's self-efficacy for writing, if facilitated appropriately. They arguably have a particularly important role to play in supporting non-traditional students, transitioning to university, to decipher the assessment criteria and expectations of their markers.

In summary, strategies used in this study designed to foster self-efficacy through vicarious experiences evidenced a mixed response. As argued in the previous section, the sharing of grades only supports mastery experience if the outcome of these comparisons is positive. Some students were unwilling to share their own written examples with others within the workshop, which may relate to their perceptions of their own writing capabilities. However, careful use of past students' exemplars can help foster students' confidence in interpreting the assessment criteria and their tutor's expectations of them, and can increase self-efficacy as they witness others, like them, succeed.

### 7.5.3 Social persuasions

Having others express their confidence in your abilities can, according to Bandura (1997) have an impact on a person's self-efficacy beliefs but only if they have other supporting evidence from either mastery or vicarious experience. Within the interviews, the role of feedback was raised. In particular for these students, it appeared that it was important that the feedback was clear. In addition, whether it was effective in fostering self-efficacy was

dependent of who was offering the feedback and if students felt capable of acting on the feedback they were offered.

Whilst Bandura (1997) discusses the role of verbal persuasions, students often recognise these forms of encouragement as written feedback on their assignments. Whilst out of the scope of this project, it is understood that despite the range of feedback students receive, it is predominately the written feedback on assignments, which is the focus of their attention. Within this study all students made reference to their feedback when discussing how well they felt they were doing on the course and whether they felt capable of improving. In this way, the feedback was being used alongside the evidence of mastery experience to determine self-efficacy beliefs for writing.

Concerning the written feedback they had received, all students focused on what they needed to improve rather than the positive forms of encouragement they had received, for example: *“I mean obviously they need to write positives and negatives but I don’t take any notice of the positives. I just try and work on the negatives as that’s what’s going to improve my assignments”* (Interviewee 4, line 279). They discussed the ‘three points for development’ they were offered, and this did seem to help guide them. However, feedback only appeared effective if the students knew how to act upon it and were given a concrete example. There was a marked difference between two students who wanted the opportunity for verbal feedback and further discussion with their tutor, and the other students who appeared confident in their approaches to using the feedback they were offered to improve their writing. This has clear links to academic locus of control, discussed previously and self-efficacy for self-regulation, which have shown to correlate with writing attainment (Pajares, 2003; Zimmerman et al., 1992). These interrelated concepts of academic locus of control and self-efficacy for self-regulated learning appear to be influential to the development of writing confidence to these non-traditional students.

The question as to whether peers could offer useful feedback was also raised and links to the previous section regarding sharing writing in workshops. Students did not feel confident in either giving or receiving feedback from peers on their course. Interviewee 6, did not even entertain the idea claiming *“we are all in the same bamboozled thing together”* (line 275) and believed feedback of this kind could only come from tutors. Others, like Interviewee 1, felt that peers could offer support, if there was reassurance that the student

was achieving well in that area. They too felt they could only offer feedback if it was an area that they felt really confident in. This suggests that workshops designed to use peer support and advice in this way need to give careful consideration as to how to support students to feel confident to give and receive feedback on their work.

In summary, this study supports Bandura's (1997) theory that social persuasions only have an impact on self-efficacy for writing if students have supporting evidence from either mastery or vicarious experience. In this case written feedback on work was perceived as the most influential form of persuasion offered to students and this was used in conjunction with grades to determine capability. Feedback by peers was not considered of value to these students, who felt neither confident in offering nor receiving feedback on their writing. Crucially, students needed to understand their tutor's feedback and feel capable to act upon it, if it was to have a positive impact on confidence. Concepts of self-efficacy for self-regulated learning and academic locus of control had a key role to play in their writing development.

#### 7.5.4 Physiological and emotional state

How a person's judges their capabilities is dependant, in part, by the physiological and emotional state (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy beliefs, therefore, are mediated by a person's interpretation of their past successes and failures. Whilst no medical data was gathered from students regarding the physiological and emotional responses to writing, the interviews did offer some insight into this fourth source of self-efficacy. As argued earlier, the influence of physiological and emotional state was evident in the apprehension and anxiety these students had towards writing, the low goals they were setting themselves and the lack of correlation between attainment and self-efficacy for writing, observed in this study.

When discussing with students their feeling about writing, many used terms like "*nervous*" (Interviewees 8 and 7), "*apprehensive*" (Interviewee 6) "*worried*" (Interviewee 4) and even "*scared*" (Interviewee 3). Such feelings appeared to stem from experiences they had at school and whether they were felt to be 'a good writer'. All stated they had always struggled with writing or confidence, recalling their school experiences. Including Interviewee 6's (line 81) recollection of being made to feel not capable of reaching her goal: "[*my apprehension*]

*probably came from school. I remember at school we had to fill out a careers option thing, and I put that I wanted to teach, and they suggested that I was a shop assistant".*

Such deep-seated beliefs about writing ability might, arguably, take some time to change. This might help to explain why for some of these students, who have not taken a traditionally route to university, their assignment grades early on in their course might not correlate with their sense of writing self-efficacy. For a number of these students, however, such negative emotions towards writing were, arguably, limiting the influence of mastery and vicarious experience on developing their self-efficacy for writing. This has potentially wide implications for the range of students that enter our universities from widening participation backgrounds.

As discussed earlier, goals have an important role to play in mediating between self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). As shown in the correlational analysis, however, students were not setting goals in line with their capability, with student claims of setting lower goals to avoid disappointing themselves. Such emotional responses to feelings of 'failure' require addressing, if students are to make the most of their mastery and vicarious experiences.

Whilst the importance of this source of self-efficacy cannot be denied, (its influence can be seen throughout this study), it is perhaps the most challenging one to address. Attempts were made in the intervention to foster self-efficacy through attending to emotional and physiological responses to writing. All of the workshops were designed to lessen writer apprehension, and the intervention added elements where students were encouraged to discuss their feeling about writing in a supportive and open way, as advised (Mascle, 2011). Whilst such discussions enabled students to share their feelings about writing, there was not sufficient time to address such concerns in any meaningful way. It is perhaps through the objective interpretation of the grades and feedback that the students receive, combined with their development of agency, which will improve their emotional and physiological responses to academic writing.

## 7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed each of the four research questions in turn by reviewing the results in light of previous research. These discussions have resulted in a revised conceptual

framework, as seen in Figure 7.3. New relationships identified between concepts are highlighted with a red arrow, and additional concepts are highlighted in green boxes.

In respect of Research Question 1, Figure 7.2 was offered, depicting the interplay between academic attainment, self-efficacy for writing, performance self-efficacy and grade goal. From this the importance of grade goal was highlighted, as a possible moderating factor between self-efficacy and writing attainment for these non-traditional students. The absence of an observed correlation between self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment has also been highlighted as a key finding. The conceptual framework has been revised to reflect these findings (see Figure 7.3). The relationship between self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment has been removed, whilst the relationship between self-efficacy for writing, academic goals and performance self-efficacy is maintained, as is their relationship with writing attainment. The relationship between academic goals, performance self-efficacy and academic writing are shown as a double headed arrows, representing the correlational relationship between these factors. The importance of prior-educational experience to mastery and vicarious experiences has also been highlighted. This has resulted in an additional link between prior educational experiences and self-efficacy to be added to the revised framework.

Research Questions 2 and 3 revealed that the intervention had an insignificant additional impact on a student's self-efficacy for writing, grade goal and performance self-efficacy in the long-term, when compared to the current writing workshops. Instead, through analysis of the qualitative findings, it has been acknowledged that embedded writing workshops generally can have an impact on writing self-efficacy beliefs. This has resulted in a change to the framework to represent the impact writing workshops in general have to fostering self-efficacy beliefs. The inclusion of a relationship between academic locus of control and self-efficacy for writing, is a reflection of the finding that an internal academic locus of control can impact on self-efficacy for writing in the long-term; whereas a relationship was observed between an external academic locus of control and self-efficacy improvement in the short term.

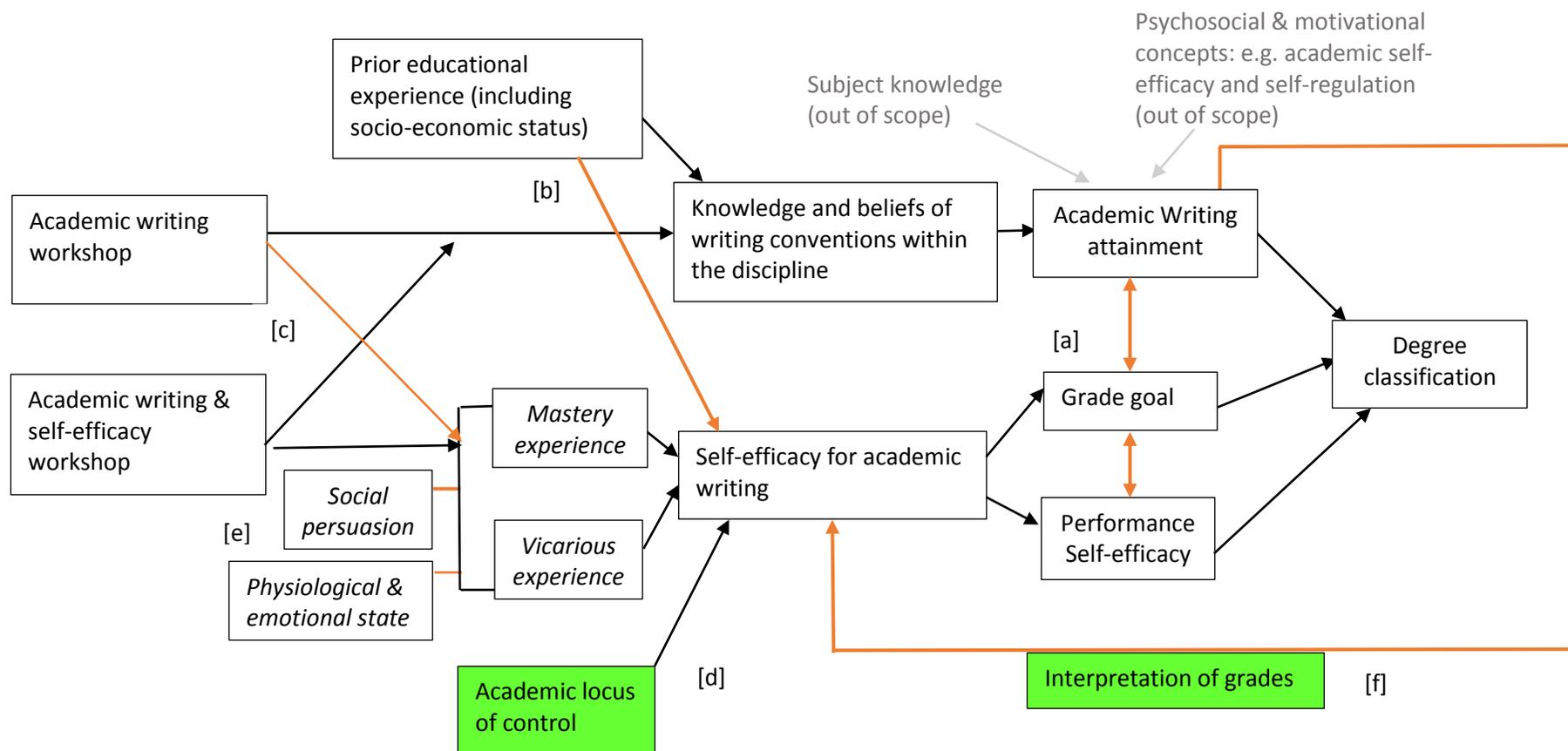
Finally, discussions regarding the impact of Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy revealed that all sources were relevant in this study. Prior educational experience impacted on the power of both mastery and vicarious experiences and resulted in students

interpreting these in different ways. It is argued that verbal persuasions, and emotional and physiological state only impact on self-efficacy by supporting evidence interpreted from mastery and vicarious experiences. This has resulted in a change to the emphasis of each of these four sources, as depicted in the revised conceptual framework.

In addition to these research questions, the in-depth interviews also highlighted the importance of grades in influencing self-efficacy beliefs. Whilst it would be expected that high grades would result in higher levels of writing self-efficacy beliefs, as discussed, a correlational analysis of these two factors revealed no such correlation was observed. Analysis of the in-depth interviews, however, indicated that it was the students' interpretation of their grades that was helping to determine their self-efficacy for writing beliefs. These interpretations were based upon their grades compared to peers, their expectations based on previous FE grades and beliefs that grades should increase over the course of the year. The importance that these grade interpretations have on self-efficacy for writing beliefs has resulted in an additional link being added between academic writing attainment and self-efficacy beliefs, as seen in Figure 7.3.

In discussing all research questions in depth, this chapter has raised a number of questions regarding the writing support for non-traditional students and has recommended a range of strategies for the future. The following chapter will discuss these in more depth.

Figure 7.3: Revised conceptual framework



- [a] The link between self-efficacy for writing and academic writing attainment has been removed but the importance of grade goal to writing attainment is recognised, as is the relationship between performance self-efficacy and grade goal
- [b] The impact that prior educational experiences has on self-efficacy for writing is recognised
- [c] Standard writing workshops also have an impact on mastery and vicarious experiences, in addition to writing knowledge and beliefs
- [d] Academic locus of control has an impact on self-efficacy for writing
- [e] Social/verbal persuasions only have an impact on self efficacy if they have supporting evidence from mastery or vicarious experiences
- [f] How students interpret the grades and feedback has an impact on their self-efficacy beliefs

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to answer four research questions, which have been discussed in depth in the previous chapter. In doing so, a range of correlations related to academic writing and self-efficacy have been analysed, the impact of a writing intervention has been evaluated, and recommendations for further studies and changes in practice have been offered. This chapter aims to pull together the conclusions from this study. It also evaluates the methodology adopted, highlighting both the successes and the limitations to the approach. As with other research studies of this kind, there are a number of additional questions which the study now poses, so recommendations for future research are also covered in this chapter. As a Doctorate in Education, the importance of the study for those in practice is not overlooked; thus, the final section covers recommendations and implications for future practice.

### 8.2 Conclusion of this study

There are a number of conclusions which can be drawn from this study. This section aims to bring some of these together to offer an overview as to the relationship between self-efficacy and writing attainment. Firstly, the relationship observed between self-efficacy for writing and performance self-efficacy evidences the perceived importance that writing skills have to degree outcomes. As with previous studies, this study has also evidenced the importance of academic goals in driving students forward, and the observed relationship they have with performance self-efficacy, self-efficacy for writing and GPA. The challenges of navigating the implicit marking criteria and multiple genres associated with academic writing are clear. These challenges to writing, coupled with the prior educational experiences of the cohort in question, can have a negative impact on confidence and, in turn, the academic goals some non-traditional students set for themselves. This suggests that, as expected, researching self-efficacy for writing and its relationship with academic performance, is fundamental if our aim is to support all students to succeed at university.

Arguably one of the key findings of this study is the lack of correlation that was observed between self-efficacy for writing and writing attainment. This was not as hypothesised and not in line with previous research into this field. Students claimed to be using their past

grades to determine their capability in writing and yet no relationship was found between the students' writing attainment (grade point average) and their self-efficacy for writing scores. The study concludes that, as with other studies, mastery experiences are still the main determinant of self-efficacy scores, yet it is the interpretation of these experiences that is fundamental, not the absolute grades. In attempting to make accurate interpretations of their grades, students compare these with their peers and with their previous grades on their FE courses. Unfavourable comparisons have a detrimental impact on students' confidence in their capability to write. There is also a commonly held assumption that grades will continue to increase and, as they believe expectations of them will be higher in subsequent years, static or decreasing grades also have a negative impact on confidence. It, therefore, argues that more work needs to be done to ensure Foundation degree students are aware of what they can expect in terms of grades and their expected development over the course of their degree.

The impact writing workshops have on self-efficacy scores is the third key finding. Whilst the students in the intervention experienced a statistically significant increase in their writing self-efficacy scores immediately after the workshops, this increase was not maintained. In addition, those in the intervention and control group experienced greater drops, six months later, in their writing self-efficacy scores than students who received a single workshop. There is, therefore, an argument that offering more workshops could inadvertently render some students dependent. This conclusion is supported by the correlations evidenced between academic locus of control and changes in self-efficacy for writing scores. A relationship was observed between those with an external academic locus of control and an increase in self-efficacy immediately after the workshop; with students with an internal academic locus of control more likely to experience an uplift in self-efficacy scores six months later. A complex relationship is evident between self-efficacy, attainment and academic locus of control, which influences students' interpretations of their grades and their beliefs as to whether they can improve them. This study, therefore, concludes that students must not only feel capable of writing but also feel that they have control over their learning and development, in order for self-efficacy to increase in the long-term.

The final key finding concerns the relative impact of the four sources of self-efficacy regarding these students' perceived writing capability. As with related studies, mastery

experiences are fundamental in influencing a student's belief in their capability to write academically; as discussed, though, it is not the absolute grade that is determining capability but the interpretation a student places on this grade that is key. Vicarious experiences are the second most influential source. Comparing marks with others can have a significant and negative impact on self-efficacy for writing, especially when others perform better or are perceived to have put in less effort. Using past student work as examples in a facilitated way in workshops does, however, help to raise self-efficacy for writing. Such use of exemplars fosters self-efficacy beliefs by making the writing task more explicit. In addition, witnessing the success of others you can identify with helps to foster self-efficacy beliefs. This may be particularly important to non-traditional students, who may be first in their family to university and potentially lack the social and cultural capital of the more traditional student. Social persuasions act only to support evidence from mastery or vicarious experiences. Emphasis is placed on tutor feedback, helping students to interpret their mastery experience (grade), with students finding peer feedback on their writing difficult to give and receive. Finally, regarding physiological and emotional state, the study revealed deep seated notions regarding the students' perceived abilities with writing, derived from their school experiences. Anxiety and lack of confidence in writing can have a detrimental impact on goal setting and interpretation of mastery experiences. Whilst such beliefs are difficult to change, it is perhaps through supporting students to develop a more objective interpretation of grades and fostering agency that we can begin to challenge these negative self-perceptions.

This thesis began with a conceptual framework, which outlined the key concepts from which this study was based, and how it was believed that these impacted on academic attainment of university level students. Throughout the analysis and discussion of the findings, an amended conceptual framework was developed. This updated conceptual framework features an accumulation of the aforementioned conclusions. It is believed that this framework furthers our understanding of the relationship between self-efficacy for writing, academic attainment and other factors, especially for widening participation students.

### 8.3 Reconsidering methodology

As discussed in the Introduction Chapter, a pragmatic paradigm led to a mixed methods approach being adopted. The powerful combination of a quasi-experimental design (using a

pre-test, post-test methodology), and semi-structured interviews, is arguably one of the key strengths of this study. There are, however, limitations to the approach taken and some of the instruments used, which future studies into this field may wish to consider.

### 8.3.1 Successes

It is believed that the main strength of this study is its mixed methods approach. The sequential design offered a number of benefits. Firstly, the analysis of the quantitative results enabled the identification of suitable interviewees, according to key selection criteria, and, therefore, ensured a reflective sample. Secondly, this sequential design meant questions could be derived after the analysis of the quantitative findings. This enabled the exploration of the meaning behind some of the observed relationships and offered deeper insight into the field of self-efficacy and academic writing. Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to answer the four research questions, often with the latter aiding the interpretation of the findings from the quantitative data. It is felt that taking either approach without the other would not have resulted in such rich insight.

The mix of deductive and inductive approaches also allowed for a focused, yet open approach. As evidence in the Literature Review Chapter, there is a wealth of research into the fields of academic self-efficacy and academic writing. It is accepted that this study continues this work and is based on a number of core concepts, theories and insights previously explored. Such findings formed the basis of this research and, in designing, conducting and analysing the quantitative research, a deductive approach was, therefore, taken. The approach taken to the qualitative data was, however, more interpretive. The aim here was to explore meaning behind the data and, thus, it was felt a semi-structured interview was called for. This allowed the discussion to focus on the areas of interest, whilst allowing for the interview to be open and the students to elaborate on answers, where appropriate.

A mix of deductive and inductive approaches was also taken to the analysis of the qualitative data. Whilst some coding was pre-determined from the previous research, an interpretive approach was also taken to the transcripts. Such an approach led to an entirely new theme emerging of academic locus of control, which then led on to an additional instrument being used and more data being collected. Analysis of these data allowed for an

additional correlation to be discovered and, thus, deepened understanding of the relationships between academic writing, self-efficacy and academic locus of control. Had a purely deductive approach been taken, it is argued, no such new insight would have been found.

### 8.3.2 Limitations

With the benefit of reflection, however, it is accepted that the approaches taken and instruments used were not without their limitations. Firstly, applying a quasi-experimental design to a writing workshop raised a number of challenges. Writing workshops were already provided to students prior to the introduction of this intervention. Such workshops were developed over time and used known, sound pedagogical principles and years of reflective practice. As a result, a number of the activities already built into the workshop focused on self-efficacy building, such as the use of exemplars and peer working. It was felt unethical to remove such tried and tested good practice from the standard and control groups. Therefore, it was challenging to ensure that the intervention group experienced an enhanced self-efficacy building workshop without negatively impacting on the other two groups. In addition, some of the unique activities built into the intervention workshops were not as effective as I had hoped. Asking students to write within a workshop setting, and then share this writing with peers, was perhaps too ambitious to achieve with a group of unconfident writers. A lack of confidence in their writing abilities and that of their peers, also made the task of giving constructive feedback challenging for some. Greater consideration should be given to scaffolding such a writing activity in future studies of this kind.

In addition, regarding the workshops, there was a challenge in creating an authentic writing activity which offered valued feedback. The interviews revealed the importance placed on the written feedback the students received from their tutors; verbal feedback from peers did not hold the same value and, therefore, had limited impact on self-efficacy beliefs. Students have to first feel that they have valuable feedback to offer to their peers, and that their peers have experience, expertise and advice to offer them on their written work. They must also feel comfortable to offer and receive such advice, within a safe environment. Again, if researchers were designing similar writing interventions, careful consideration

should be given to supporting students to feel comfortable and competent to give, and receive, advice on writing from peers.

Analysis of the results highlighted another possible limitation with regards to the instruments used in this study. Using the received grade of a specific assignment as a measure of writing attainment at a given period of time, proved potentially problematic. As argued, students complete a range of assignments over the course of the year, covering different genres of writing, as well as differing modules with varying criteria. Taking one assignment grade in isolation may not accurately represent a student's writing ability at that given time, as so many variables contribute to that grade beyond their ability to write academically. Arguably a more effective measure would be the grade point average, used as a measure of attainment at the final time of testing within this study. This, however, does create an issue as to how to accurately measure a student's writing ability in an intervention of this kind. Whilst it was the intention to use a 'real' assignment grade, for reasons previously acknowledged, perhaps there is an argument to design a written task for this particular purpose. As the overarching aim of this thesis, though, was to increase the academic outcomes of Foundations degree students, the argument to use authentic writing activities and measures, remains strong.

Finally, it is recognised that the study focuses on a small sample. With only 42 students, split into three groups, it is challenging to report any statistically significant findings because of low statistical power. Experimental research is challenging within education. Groups not only need to be directly equivalent, there is also the challenge to recruit the number of participants required to ensure its statistical significance. Sample size has a direct effect on statistical power, and small sample sizes make it challenging to correctly reject the null hypothesis. Despite these challenges and the limitations experienced, experimental research is, arguably, a powerful approach and critical in affecting change within education. Whilst the students in this study were selected as a representative sample of those following Foundation degrees in the UK, the limitations of widening these findings out is understood. In particular, the analysis of the interviews is not only interpretive and based on my own understandings and interpretations but explores the interpretations and experiences of only eight students. As argued in the previous section, despite the

recognised limitations to such qualitative research, the insights that can be gained have clearly been demonstrated in this thesis.

#### 8.4 Suggestions for future research

As indicated in the Discussion Chapter, whilst this study answered a number of set questions, it also raised a number of new questions which further research may seek to answer. Firstly, this research highlighted a relationship between self-efficacy for writing and academic locus of control. Initial findings suggested that those with an internal academic locus of control were more likely to experience an increase in self-efficacy for writing beliefs long-term. This important interplay between how capable a student feels with regards their ability to write academically and their beliefs as to whether they are in control of their learning and development is worthy of further research. Findings from this study would suggest that attention needs to be paid to students' beliefs regarding academic locus of control, if the intention is to increase self-efficacy beliefs over time. More research into the relationship between these two sets of beliefs is called for, especially in the domain of the least prepared university students. If such a relationship does exist, it would also be of value to determine the origins of such beliefs regarding academic locus of control and whether such beliefs can be challenged in adults entering HE.

Measuring the impact of writing workshops is an ongoing concern for learning developers in HE. This study has attempted to do this by measuring students' perceived self-efficacy for writing before and after such interventions. There does, however, appear to be a lack of research which investigates the long-term impact of such workshops. The impact such support has on overall grades will always be challenging to measure, with so many other variables at play, but confidence in participants' capability needs to be measured at a number of points. There is a danger that an increase in confidence straight after a workshop may not be sustained in the long-term. Therefore, more research into the long-term impacts of writing workshops on the self-efficacy beliefs of students is also called for, in order that we can begin to understand the impact of such support sessions and ensure they are as effective as possible.

It is also recognised that this research has focused on a limited number of factors, namely self-efficacy and locus of control, and their relationship with academic writing attainment. It

is acknowledged that such beliefs about oneself and capabilities also form part of the wider remit of learner identity. Exploring this complex, but wider area, and its impact on university attainment is an area in need of further research. The development of an HE learner identity is central to successful transitions to university level study, particularly for those from widening participation backgrounds, who may not have sufficient cultural capital (MacFarlane, 2018). Exploring how we can best foster positive learner identities will also aid positive transitions to university, help to develop a sense of belonging, and ultimately support students to improve their academic outcomes.

In addition, while it was not the intention of this study to focus solely on female students, the all-female sample meant the variable of gender could not be considered. Previous studies on self-efficacy suggest that gender has a role to play in influencing self-efficacy beliefs and it is important to determine if this would be the case with widening participation students and academic writing. The interplay between academic locus of control and increases in self-efficacy by gender would also be a fruitful area of research and help to further our understanding of these influential concepts, which in turn would support the creation of effective interventions to develop students' self-efficacy beliefs.

Finally, more research is called for on the sociological perspectives of widening participation. This thesis has touched on some of the societal factors that have influenced these students' perceptions of themselves as writers, and the conceptual framework has been updated to show the influence of prior educational experiences in developing academic self-efficacy beliefs. However, placing these findings into a broader social context will help to deepen our understanding of the impact the social, economic and political environments have on students' self-efficacy beliefs. This in turn could offer new perspectives and further our knowledge in how best we can support widening participation students to foster self-efficacy beliefs within our educational institutions.

### 8.5 Recommendations and implications for practice

Despite the limitations highlighted and the calls for further research, this study does provide a number of key recommendations for both learning developers, tutors and other staff supporting students to develop their writing skills within our UK HEIs. Whilst the focus here is on students from widening participation backgrounds, and in particular those following a

Foundation degree programme, many of these recommendations are relevant to professionals supporting any student to develop their self-efficacy for writing when entering the UK HE system.

1. *Explain the grading system.* On entering HE, especially if coming from a FE background where grading may be different, ensure students are clear as to what to expect with regards their grades. Tutors should explain that the students' grades may not always increase, as there are multiple genres, styles and modules to navigate. Students should be given an indication of the average grades attained in previous years, to help manage their grade expectations. This should help to lessen the negative impact that a perceived low grade or decreasing grades have on the goals and confidence of students who may be used to attaining higher grades on previous courses.
2. *Lessen the need for students to compare their grades with others.* As highlighted, when students fare unfavourably compared to their peers, this can have a negative impact on their self-efficacy for writing. The need to compare grades is linked to the above point that students, predominately at the start of their course, are looking to interpret their grade and understand how they are performing. Offering them a clearer indication of what to expect and feedback that supports this, would lessen the need for such comparisons that, if unfavourable, could be damaging to their beliefs in their capability.
3. *Offer more support with open or broad questions.* Students with low self-efficacy in writing find the process of starting to write the most challenging stage and this is compounded when the question is perceived as broad or open. Such open questions, often designed to motivate the students to research an area of interest, challenges students' self-efficacy, as they start to doubt if their focus is correct. Offering students clearer criteria, or perhaps an option to put in a formative paper highlighting what they intend to cover in their open assignment, would help to minimise this anxiety and have a positive impact on their writing self-efficacy.
4. *Highlight the transferability of skills, rather than focus on the end product.* Writing workshops need to ensure a fine balance between contextualisation and generalisation. In order for students to see the value, the workshop needs to be

contextualised to the work the student needs to complete. Too much focus on the end product, however, can make it challenging for students to transfer the learnings to other writing tasks. To avoid fostering dependency, it is recommended that writing workshops start with the writing principles (e.g. principles of a good writing structure), then discuss and practise how these principles apply within a given task, before returning back to how the principles could be applied to other written assignments. Such a workshop structure of: principles, contextualised to task, confirming key principles, should help to foster students' beliefs in their abilities to write and study independently.

5. *Address academic locus of control beliefs.* In addition to the importance of self-efficacy beliefs, students must also feel that they are in control of their development and attainment. To address this, clear feedback should be offered, which students feel able to act upon. In addition, workshops should challenge students' beliefs about who has control of their learning and the power they need to harness to improve academic outcomes. Involving students in curriculum design and development, evidencing how their feedback on the course is being acted upon and enabling feed forward, can all help students to feel empowered.
6. *Use exemplars as an effective strategy for fostering self-efficacy.* Students overwhelmingly valued the use of exemplars to develop their self-efficacy for writing. Careful considerations should be given to the purpose of the exemplars within the session and facilitators should also offer some guided feedback on the writing themselves. Focus should not be on the surface level features of the writing but instead students should be asked to identify where the writing has met the marking criteria. Such a guided activity will help to make marking criteria more explicit in a given assignment and increase confidence in interpreting future assignment briefs. Offering exemplars that are relevant to the student's area of study and at the appropriate level will also support the development of vicarious experiences. Witnessing students they perceive as similar to themselves succeed in writing, is a powerful source of self-efficacy, particularly to university level students from non-traditional backgrounds.

7. *Scaffold writing activities.* Students may find it challenging to produce written work within a workshop setting. This is made even more challenging if they are asked to give and receive feedback on this written work. Workshop facilitators should spend time clearly explaining the purpose of the written task, ensuring it is perceived to offer an authentic writing experience. For feedback to be valued, student should be supported to offer constructive feedback based on given criteria and avoid focus on surface level features. Such a writing activity may take more than one workshop to develop, if it is to be truly effective.

## 8.6 Concluding thoughts

This thesis journey began with a personal motivation to help, in some small way, to address the inequalities that still exist between social-economic groups and university attainment. At its heart is the belief that fostering self-efficacy with regards academic writing is fundamental if we are to support students effectively. The importance of academic locus of control and mastery and vicarious experiences found in this study, have led to an amended conceptual framework to be developed. This framework should provide a useful starting point to others considering research into this important field.

In addition, as a practitioner in education, supporting students to succeed at university, concluding this study with seven key recommendations is particularly rewarding. My intention with this study was always to offer some insight and recommendations to others in the field of learning development. All of us whose role it is to support students to succeed at university should be aware that too much support may render our students dependent. Empowering students may require us to be more honest and explicit regarding what we expect of them, what they can expect of themselves and to hand students more control over their learning and assessments. The facilitated use of exemplars, scaffolded opportunities to write and discussions regarding the focus of open question should all help to foster self-efficacy and thus support academic attainment for all students who enter our universities.

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## Appendix A: Pre questionnaire

1. Student number: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What language do you use at home? \_\_\_\_\_
3. If your answer to (2) is not English, what language do you usually read and write in?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Gender  
Male   
Female   
Prefer not to say
5. What are your highest qualifications (e.g A-levels, BTEC etc) and grades  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Please state your mother's occupation \_\_\_\_\_
7. Your mother's highest qualification:  
Post Graduate (e.g. masters, PhD)   
Degree (e.g. BA, BSc, PGCE etc)   
A-level/ BTEC/ Level 3   
GCSE/ O-Level/CSE/Level 2
8. Please state your father's occupation \_\_\_\_\_
9. Your father's highest qualification:  
Post Graduate (e.g. masters, PhD)   
Degree (e.g. BA, BSc, etc)   
A-level/ BTEC/ Level 3   
GCSE/ O-Level/CSE/Level 2
10. What year did you leave full time education? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What age were you when you left full time education? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Writing Self-efficacy Questionnaire

The below questionnaire has been adapted from a questionnaire measuring perceived self-regulatory efficacy for writing from Zimmerman and Bandura (1994).

0.....10..... 20..... 30..... 40..... 50..... 60..... 70..... 80..... 90..... 100

### Self-efficacy for writing

| <i>Directions: On a scale from 0 (no chance) to 100 (completely certain) how confident are you of being able to successfully communicate, in writing, the below. You can write any number between 0 and 100.</i> |   |                 |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Item   | Question  | Measure (0-100) |
| 1  | When given a writing assignment, I can come up with a suitable topic in a short time.                             |                 |
| 2  | I can start writing with no difficulty.   |                 |
| 3  | I can construct a good opening sentence easily.   |                 |
| 4  | I can come up with a well-structured opening paragraph to capture readers' interest.                              |                 |
| 5  | I can write a brief but informative overview that will prepare readers well for the main thesis of my assignment. |                 |
| 6  | I can use my first attempts at writing to refine my ideas.  |                 |
| 7  | I can adjust my style of writing to suit the needs of the assignment.   |                 |
| 8  | I can find a way to concentrate on my writing even when there are many distractions around me.                    |                 |
| 9  | When I have a pressing deadline for an assignment, I can manage my time efficiently.                              |                 |
| 10   | I can meet the writing standards of an assessor who is very demanding.  |                 |
| 11   | I can come up with memorable examples quickly to illustrate an important point.                                   |                 |
| 12   | I can rewrite my wordy or confusing sentences clearly.  |                 |
| 13   | When I need to make a subtle or abstract idea more imaginable, I can use words to create a vivid picture.         |                 |
| 14   | I can locate and use appropriate reference sources when I need to argue an important point.                       |                 |
| 15   | I can write very effective transitional sentences from one idea to another.                                       |                 |
| 16   | I can refocus my concentration on writing when I find myself thinking about other things.                         |                 |
| 17   | When I write on a lengthy topic, I can create a variety of good outlines on the main sections of my assignment.   |                 |
| 18   | When I want to persuade a sceptical reader about a point, I can use a convincing quote from an authority.         |                 |
| 19   | When I get stuck on writing an assignment, I can find ways to overcome the problem.                               |                 |
| 20   | I can find ways to motivate myself to write an assignment even when the topic holds little interest for me.       |                 |

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 21 | When I have written a long or complex paper I can find and correct all my grammatical errors.       |  |
| 22 | I can revise a first draft so that it is clearer and better organised.                              |  |
| 23 | When I edit a complex assignment, I can find and correct all my grammatical errors.                 |  |
| 24 | I can find other people who will give me critical feedback on my early drafts.                      |  |
| 25 | When my assignment is written on a complicated topic, I can come up with a short informative title. |  |

### Academic Achievement

| On a scale of 1 to 7, how confident are you in achieving the following grades in your next written assignment (1 = highly uncertain, 7 = very certain). You can write any number from 1 to 7 |               |
|--|---------------|
| Grade  | Measure (1-7) |
| 1 <sup>st</sup>  |               |
| 2:1  |               |
| 2:2  |               |
| 3  |               |

### Academic Goals

| What academic grade are you striving for on this course (please tick just one) |             |
|--|-------------|
| Grade  | Please tick |
| 1 <sup>st</sup>  |             |
| 2:1  |             |
| 2:2  |             |
| 3  |             |

## Appendix C: Marking Sheet

Assignment: **Essay 1 (2500 words)**

Student number: \_\_\_\_\_

Marker: \_\_\_\_\_

Mark given: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the following using the scale indicated. A high number (9, 10) represents strong evidence of this skill, whilst a low number (1, 2) indicates an area for development. The middle scores (4, 5 and 6) are what is to be expected at this level

### **Good academic style**

*Appropriate use of academic language and tone for the assignment*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### **Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation**

*No mistakes in spelling and effective use of grammar and punctuation. Work has been accurately proof read.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### **Coherent structure**

*A detailed introduction and clear conclusion is present. The argument demonstrates a clear sequence of ideas. Paragraphs are correctly formed and careful planning is evident.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### **Clear argument is present and supported**

*Excellent use of examples and evidence to support main statements.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### **Referencing and use of sources**

*Well researched, using appropriate resources that are correctly cited within the work. A full and accurate reference list is provided at the end of the work.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

## Appendix D: Interview Schedule

| Research question  |
|--|
| What are the relative importance of the sources of SE for academic writing and how can we help to foster this in future? |

| Issue/theme   | Possible questions  | Possible follow ups  | Probes/comments  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <b>About you</b> ( <i>aim: to explore mainly self-perception belief in academic ability and thoughts on academic writing</i> )                          | <b>How would your parents/English teacher/ college leaders/ peers on course describe you?</b>               |  |  |
|   | <i>Why did you decide to take this course?</i>  | <i>How prepared did you feel?</i>  |  |
|   | <b>What thoughts/words come to mind when you hear the words academic writing?</b>                           | <i>Where does that come from? Do you enjoy writing?</i>  |  |
| <b>SE and goals prior to intervention</b> ( <i>aim: to explore initial beliefs about own capability for academic writing – drivers for the scores</i> ) | <b>When you first completed the questionnaire, how did you decide what to score? What's this based off?</b> | <i>How did you know whether you are capable or not? What feedback had you received? <b>How do you think your score compared to the average of the group (more/less confident)?</b></i> | Might need here to show the questionnaire as a memory aid<br><br><i>Explore whether this is an example of mastery, vicarious, social persuasion or physiological responses</i> |
|   | <i>What about the grade you were aiming for – on what basis was this decided.</i>                           | <i>Why this grade?</i>   |  |
| <b>SE post intervention</b> ( <i>aim: to explore reasons for any change in SE scores and whether these reflect how they feel now</i> )                  | <i>How did you find the workshops?</i>  | <i>Do you think they made any difference? (we want to learn about what works and what doesn't)</i>   |  |
|   | <b>Do you think your score increased, decreased or stayed the same after the workshops?</b>                 | <i>Why do you think that would be?</i>   |  |
|   | <i>So, your average score did increase/decrease –</i>   |  |  |

|   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
|   | <i>why do you think that was?</i>   |   |  |
| <b>About grades</b> ( <i>aim: to explore how reflective they think their recent grade. Also explore link with grade and SE scores</i> ) | <b>How well do you think you're doing?</b>  | How do you feel about your mark?  |  |
|   | <i>Has your recent grade had any impact on how confident you feel?</i>                                  | <i>Do you feel capable of improving?</i>                                      |  |
|   | <i>Has this altered the grade you are now aiming for?</i>   |   |  |
| <b>Challenges about AW</b> ( <i>aim: to explore any link between SE and AW</i> )  | <b>What do you find most challenging about writing essays?</b>  | <i>What do you do to overcome these challenges?</i>                           |  |
|   |   | <i>Has your view of academic writing changed over the course of the year?</i> |  |
| <b>The future</b> ( <i>Explain link between SE and AW and explore what they think would help increase their SE for AW</i> )             | <b>What will help you (or people on your course) to feel more confident about writing academically?</b> |   |  |

## Appendix E: Lesson plans for Group 1 Self efficacy writing workshops

### Week 1 Writing feelings. Overview, assignment briefs and planning

\*coding for link to self-efficacy at end of this document

| Time | Topic                                 | Activity  | Link to SE theory *     | Detailed explanation and how compares to standard   |
|------|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|
| 5    | Introduction and rules                | Discussion on the rules that will be set. Hand-out writing books for reflection/ own drafts etc.                                      | P and E (a)             | Not in standard   |
| 10   | Writing and feelings                  | Write down some words that come to mind when asked to do some academic writing. Share with small group – collate all                  | P & E (b)               | Not in standard. Addressing the 4 <sup>th</sup> source of self-efficacy. Physiological and emotional state. Discussing feelings about writing and apprehension in an open environment |
| 5    | Writing and apprehension              | Explain apprehension is normal and why –theory and research – and how sessions are intended to help                                   | P & E (c)               | Not in standard   |
| 5    | Setting goals                         | Students set their own writing goals in their books   | Extra                   | Not in standard – setting of goals linked to self-efficacy  |
| 5    | Introduction to how sessions will run | Show that they will be linked to the assignment and require working together and we'll go through the assignment in stages            | M (b and f)             |   |
| 5    | Stages of academic writing            | What stages do you go through when writing an essay share these ideas with each other   | M (c)                   | Not in standard. Allows for collaboration   |
| 5    | My stages                             | As a writer share the 7 stages that I go through and offer them as a model for others to comment on and use to scaffold their writing | M (f)                   |   |
| 10   | Look at the assignment brief          | What are you being asked to do – write in your own words and what ideas do you have? Write these down                                 | M (f)                   | Understanding assignment in own words   |
| 10   | Sharing the ideas                     | Working in pairs – share your understanding and ideas. Students give feedback to each other   | S (a and c)             | Sharing understanding with each other. Feedback   |
| 10   | Planning                              | A look at how different people plan – and importance of planning  | V                       | Not in standard. Sharing how others plan  |
| 15   | Creation of a plan                    | As a group – on a flipchart put up and share  | M (e) and V(a)<br>S (a) | Doing an actual plan and sharing this with others – not the detail but ideas  |
| 5    | Review and plan for next week         | Ask students to bring with them some theory or an observation they might use in this assignment                                       |                         |   |

## Week 2 Introductions, paragraphs and integrating theory and practise

| Time | Topic   | Activity   | Link to SE theory           | Detailed explanation and how compares to standard   |
|------|---|--|-----------------------------|---|
| 5    | Introduction                                    | What the session will include.<br>Restate rules  |                             |   |
| 10   | A look at introductions                         | Show some past introductions – how are they constructed? Use a mixture perhaps journal articles/ my own writing/ past student writing  | V (c)                       | Using different examples  |
| 15   | Creating your own introduction                  | Writing own individual introduction. Offer a guide – a structure to follow. Mainly focusing on the HOW of the plan. Students must not focus on form – free writing   | M (f)                       | Scaffolded writing tasks – write an introduction  |
| 10   | Feedback/exp and on your introduction           | Working in pairs help each other out. Some rules will be given on feedback – not focus on ‘correctness’ but the ideas. Is there anything you can learn from each other   | M(e)feedback<br>S a, band c | Having immediate feedback from peers. Offered a template for feedback and not commenting on correctness but the ideas |
| 15   | Integrating theory and practice                 | A look at some past peer examples of this essay. A couple of different examples – which one does this better? How are they doing this. Can you devise a structure (individually and then as a group)                                 | V (b and c)<br>M (f)        | This is done in the standard session but a good example of where we do use past examples to aid understanding         |
| 5    | Share the models                                | Share some of the models students have devised including my own  | V (a)                       | Opportunity to work together but also giving structure.   |
| 20   | Use the model to write a paragraph using theory | Could be done as a group. Offer students some useful phrases to introduce theory. Fill in a template and then work in pairs to see if you can find a theory/ example off the practice that fits the theory to make one complete idea | M (f) S (a, b and c)        | A plan is given and students can put in an interesting observation  |
| 5    | How this will link to plan                      | How many of these can you do justice in one assignment? Discussion. How this links to general critical thinking  | M (b)                       | Looking wider than the assignment making the point that you need to go for depth in assignments.                      |
| 5    | Review and plan for next week                   | Ask students to build on their plans   |                             |   |

### Week 3 – Accuracy, Style and using evidence (90 mins)

| Time | Topic                          | Activity   | Link to SE theory | Detailed explanation and how compares to standard   |
|------|--------------------------------|--|-------------------|---|
| 5    | Introduction                   | Topic style, tone and 'academic style'   |                   |   |
| 10   | A look at a journal article    | How do they put ideas across? What do you notice about formality, style etc.? Importance of clarity and discussion about different genres including reflection | V (c)             | Just a discussion in standard session. Here we use actual written texts to see it in action             |
| 15   | Principles of academic writing | Go through what these are and how they can be seen in the article  | M (e)             | In standard but here in last session. Leaving this idea of correctness to the last session.             |
| 10   | The importance of evidence     | Show by using 2 examples how this is used  | V (b)             | In standard   |
| 10   | Referencing quiz               | In pairs. Must agree   | M (c)             | In standard   |
| 5    | Principles of referencing      | Cover the basic principles   |                   |   |
| 15   | Experience referencing         | Using the guides, students try referencing 3 different sources. Find their pair and compare their answers  | M (c)             | Hands on experience of using evidence and opportunity to compare with others and get immediate feedback |
| 10   | Bringing it all together       | What do you remember, what will you take with you? Importance of planning, ideas, theory and practise working together and accuracy                            | M (b)             |   |
| 5    | Reviewing goals                | From week 1  | E                 | This is new. Returning to goals.  |
| 5    | Close                          |  |                   |   |

## **Key to codes of self-efficacy used in lesson plan (theory taken from Mascle, 2013):**

**Overall:** Students should be given varied opportunities to write meaningful and purposeful texts within a specific context. They should also be exposed to the writing of others (comparable peers) from their conception to a polished draft. They should receive 'real and meaningful feedback from multiple sources' (Mascle, 2013, p.220) at various stages of their work and offered appraisal and guidance.

### **4 main sources of self-efficacy**

1. ***Mastery experience (M)***: Learners should be offered a supportive environment which offers value beyond the assignment and support beyond that of the instructor. They should be presented with opportunities to overcome barriers, practise their skills and experience both success and failures. They should study within a writing 'community', have an 'audience beyond the instructor' and offered scaffolded writing tasks e.g. start with introduction/summary
  - a. *Ensure there is a supportive environment*. Create some rules: no wrong/right questions
  - b. *Beyond the assignment* – make links to the skills within the workshops but also show what this means for academic skills generally. Possibly start specific then look wider
  - c. *Support beyond the instructor* – introduce some peer learning. Perhaps TBL strategies. Teach each other, work in groups be support for each other
  - d. *Opportunities to overcome barriers* – need to identify what those barriers are and then we should have time in class to work on those skills – perhaps some learnings from TBL group based assignment. Get them to either work on a plan for their assignment or some writing each.
  - e. *Experience success and failures* – suggests that they would need some immediate feedback from some work they have undertaken
  - f. *Scaffolded writing tasks* – get them to build up from the idea creating, to writing an introduction and summary
2. ***Vicarious experience (V)***: Learners should be given the opportunity to compare their written work, at various stages, with model answers, and each other. They should be offered model answers as well as journals. This is particularly important in academic writing as there is no absolute measure to judge your work for yourself.
  - a. *Opportunities to share work with each other - could work in groups to share writing that that do in class*

- b. *Also offer feedback on past writing examples from previous students - perhaps give them some criteria to assess them*
  - c. *Also to look at analysing a journal article and how it is written; how ideas are put across and structuring*
- 3. **Social persuasion (S):** Workshops should be used to offer feedback and cultivate learner's beliefs in their capabilities. This should be more 'genuine' feedback than usual. Peer feedback should be given in a guided way e.g. 'this is interesting because', 'I wonder about...' The focus should initially be on their ideas and then the correctness of their writing, towards the end of the programme.
  - a. *Offer students opportunity to get feedback on their drafts/ ideas/ various stages of their writing from their peers*
  - b. *Give the students some template for feedback to guide them e.g this was an interesting idea; I wonder whether this might be clearer if; perhaps consider*
  - c. *Make it clear to students that they should not be commenting at the early stages on correctness, just ideas*
- 4. **Physiological and emotional state (P & E):** Workshops should reduce the stress of writers and discussing issues of writing apprehension can help. The use of reflection and sharing experiences also helps with this. Initially it might be helpful to raise the issue of writing apprehension so students know how 'common' it is. Use ideas like 'when I know I have to write I feel...'.
  - a. *Open up the workshops with some clear rules about supporting each other*
  - b. *Discuss openly how people feel about writing – genuine discussion as to why this is, links back to past experience*
  - c. *Advise students that writing apprehension is common then explain how session will help*
- 5. **Extras.** Writers should set their own goals – on their progress not the end product, Should not have heavy teacher involvement but active student engagement – must relinquish control.
  - a. Start the session with allowing students to identify their own writing goals
  - b. Ensure the session has lots of active student engagement and not teacher led instruction

## Appendix F: Lesson Plan for Group 2 Standard workshop

### Week 1 – writing child reports (AW = academic writing)

| Time | Topic   | Activity  | Link to AW theory  |
|------|---|---|--|
| 5    | Introduction – overview of the session                        | What we will be covering in the session- showing how this is linked to their particular assignment  | Contextualised to the writing the student needs to do                                |
| 10   | What are the differences between a report and an essay?       | Discussion in pairs – to identify the particular genre and what is expected   |  |
| 5    | Reports – highlighting the importance of audience and purpose | Teacher –led explaining how audience and purpose will change the report style, content etc  | Show how this could be used for future assignments – so encouraging self-development |
| 10   | Identifying the audience and purpose of your report           | Looking at the assessment criteria identify the primary and secondary audience – how might this impact on your structure? What else do you note on the requirements | Making the implicit explicit. Deciphering the requirements.                          |
| 20   | Marking past child study reports                              | Students to read the backgrounds and first few paragraphs of report A and B and in small groups mark them – what are the strengths and weaknesses. Feedback         | Using authentic examples   |
| 10   | Summarise – what have you learnt about what are good reports? | Plenary discussion  |  |
| 15   | Linking theory to practice.                                   | Students read the section in both reports on 'language development' discuss how both successful both reports are in integrating theory and practice                 |  |
| 10   | Tips on linking theory and practice                           | Offer students a framework to use in linking theory and practice together   | Offer students a framework that they can use   |
| 5    | Review  | Recap key point and offer links to further advice and support   |  |

## Appendix G: Lesson plans for Group 3 Enhanced Standard

### Week 1 – writing child reports – analysing the requirements, intros and conclusions

| Time | Topic   | Activity  | Link to AW theory   | How is this different to SE workshop   |
|------|---|---|---|--|
| 5    | Introduction – overview of the session                        | What we will be covering in the session- showing how this is linked to their particular assignment  | Contextualised to the writing the student needs to do       |  |
| 10   | What are the differences between a report and an essay?       | Discussion in pairs – to identify the particular genre and what is expected   |   | Isn't in the SE workshop   |
| 5    | Reports – highlighting the importance of audience and purpose | Teacher –led explaining how audience and purpose will change the report style, content etc  | Show how this could be used for future assignments          | Isn't in the SE workshop   |
| 10   | Identifying the audience and purpose of your report           | Looking at the assessment criteria identify the primary and secondary audience – how might this impact on your structure? What else do you note on the requirements   | Making the implicit explicit. Deciphering the requirements. | Not in SE workshop   |
| 20   | Marking past child study reports                              | Students to read the backgrounds and first few paragraphs of report A and B and in small groups mark them – what are the strengths and weaknesses. Feedback   | Using authentic examples                                    | Using same reports in SE workshop but less emphasis  |
| 10   | Summarise –learnt about what are good reports?                | Plenary discussion  |   |  |
| 20   | A closer look at introductions                                | Students to read the introduction of the essay gave highest mark to. Write how their introduction is constructed. Followed by a group discussion of the WHAT, WHY and HOW. Now writes some answers to these 3 questions to begin your essay | Chance to do their own writing                              | The amount of time taken to write is the same. Difference in SE workshop is this followed up by feedback and sharing |
| 5    | A closer look at conclusion                                   | Students read the conclusion of the essay gave highest mark to. Write how their conclusion is constructed. Followed by a group discussion. Write what your conclusion must include  | Deconstructing the purpose of conclusion                    | Same as SE only touched on briefly   |
| 5    | Review  | Recap key point and offer links to further advice and support   |   |  |

## Week 2 – what is scholarly? Writing style and using evidence

| Time | Topic                                  | Activity  | Link to AW theory  | How is this different to SE w/shop?       |
|------|--|---|--|---|
| 5    | Introduction – overview of the session | What we will be covering in the session- showing how this is linked to their particular assignment  | Contextualised to the writing the student needs to do      | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |
| 10   | What is scholarly?                     | Write down words that spring to mind. What is scholarly? What does it mean to have 'good academic writing?' 'How would you recognize it when you saw it?' | Will then allow challenges to misconceptions of good style | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |
| 10   | Plenary.                               | Put them into categories and discuss what we mean by these things   |  | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |
| 10   | Identifying academic Style             | Students to pull out some phrases in good essay regarding what they believe is an example of good academic style. Can we learn anything from these?       | Using authentic examples                                   | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |
| 15   | Style                                  | Covering 3 elements: cautious language; formal/ subject phrases; clarity  | Making the implicit explicit                               | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |
| 10   | How evidence is used                   | Example given showing how evidence is used to support a point of view not replace it. 2 examples to show what is meant                                    | Using authentic examples                                   | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |
| 15   | How to reference                       | Quick quiz in groups  | Peer learning  | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |
| 10   | APA referencing                        | Summary of how to use APA and what you can do to help yourself  |  | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |
| 5    | Review                                 | Recap key point and offer links to further advice and support   |  | New content not in self-efficacy workshop |

### Week 3– What is critical analysis? Embedding theory and practice

| Time | Topic  | Activity  | Link to AW theory                                     | How is this different to SE workshop?   |
|------|--|---|---|---|
| 5    | Introduction – overview of the session       | What we will be covering in the session- showing how this is linked to their particular assignment  | Contextualised to the writing the student needs to do |   |
| 10   | What does critical mean?                     | Question to students. Write down your thoughts. Capture some ideas and put on board   | Writing initial thoughts down. A look at beliefs      | Not in SE one – this is extra as we have more time in these sessions. This was designed as staff wanted this covered  |
| 15   | Everyday critical thinking                   | Think of last time you bought something significant – house, car, mobile phone. What evidence did you collect, how did you weigh up alternatives. Working in pairs challenge each other | Demystifying meaning                                  | As above – additional   |
| 10   | Critical thinking is what?                   | A relook at defining what it is – based on evidence – how can we challenge academic evidence?   | Demystifying meaning                                  | As above new to this workshop   |
| 15   | What is evidence and how can we critique it? | How does it relate to other theories? Does it work in this context? Are there other explanations? What the implications   | Giving a strategy to question                         | As above new to this workshop   |
| 15   | 2 forms of evidence – theory and practice    | Students to read the sections in both reports on ‘language development’ discuss how successful each report is in integrating theory and practice. Can students think of a framework     | Writing down a framework they might be able to use    | Same as SE one – it’s what was done with this afterwards that is different. No building on their own writing and understanding or getting feedback on this. |
| 10   | Tips on linking theory and practice          | Offer students a framework to use in linking theory and practice together   | Offer students a framework they could adapt and use   | Similar to SE in the writing opportunity. In SE case they will then get feedback on this  |
| 5    | Review                                       | Review what it means to be critical along with other sessions, scholarly and using evidence. Remind students about support  | Recap and reminder of resources                       |   |
| 5    | Close  | Review of session and remind students of support  |   |   |

## Appendix H: Information sheet and consent form for students



**Researcher:**

Name *Sonia Hood*

Phone: 0118 378 4614

Email: *s.hood@reading.ac.uk*

**Supervisor:**

Name: *Professor Rhona Stainthorp*

Phone: 0118 378 2689

Email: *r.w.stainthorp@reading.ac.uk*

### INFORMATION SHEET (QUESTIONNAIRE)

*What is the study?*

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Study Advice workshops that you attend and measure the impact that it has had on you and your course. It aims to establish the best ways of supporting students with developing academic writing skills and in particular it focuses on students who may not have traditionally attended university.

*Why have you been asked to take part?*

You have been asked to participate in a research study and selected to be a participant due to you being a first year student on x course. Your course traditionally attracts students from a wide variety of backgrounds and already has Study Advice sessions within the programme, which can be evaluated.

*Do you have to take part?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and non-participation will not impact your studies in any way.

*What will happen if you take part?*

If you agree to take part you will be asked to complete a questionnaire at 3 intervals in the academic year. The questionnaire will ask you to rate your confidence levels in writing, the goals that you set yourself and record your latest coursework grade. These questionnaires will then be analysed using an appropriate software tool. You will also be asked to complete a pre-questionnaire which asks some questions regarding both your own and your parents' educational background, your ethnicity and age.

In addition you are asked to consent to the Study Advice sessions being video recorded. The purpose of this is to monitor my role as a facilitator, for comparison across the study groups. The camera will be directed at myself and any identifiable comments will be electronically removed before being given to an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party to analyse.

*What are the risks and benefits of taking part?*

Careful consideration has been given to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Your student number will be used to match your questionnaires but will be removed prior to the data being analysed and, in its place, a random number will be assigned. Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names, or student numbers, will be used within the project. In addition the name of your institution will not be used, ensuring maximum anonymity. The video recording and any writing or analysis will be stored on a personal drive. This means that only I will be able to access these files and confidentiality is maintained.

The questionnaire itself will offer you the chance to reflect on your thoughts about academic writing and the goals you set yourself, which may help with your future development. It is hoped that findings from this study will help us to develop effective academic writing workshops in the future.

*What will happen to the data?*

The results of this study will be used within an Education Doctorate and may be published in subsequent journals, and/or presented at conferences. Should you wish to see the project findings before submission, an electronic copy can be emailed to you.

*What happens if I change my mind?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any stage, without any repercussions, by contacting myself on 0118 378 4614 or emailing [s.hood@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.hood@reading.ac.uk)

*Where can I get more information?*

If you have any queries regarding this study please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, as detailed above.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Signed: (Researcher)

Date: 27.05.2016

## Consent Form (Questionnaires)

**Project title:**

*I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing*

I have read and had explained to me by Sonia Hood the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that the questionnaires that I complete will be analysed and results used within a Doctorate of Education. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to my involvement in this project as outlined in the Information Sheet

I consent to the Study Advice sessions being video recorded

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I: Information sheet and consent form tutors

**Researcher:**

Name *Sonia Hood*

Phone: 0118 378 4614

Email: *s.hood@reading.ac.uk*

**Supervisor:**

Name: *Professor Rhona Stainthorp*

Phone: 0118 378 2689

Email: *r.w.stainthorp@reading.ac.uk*

### INFORMATION SHEET (Programme leaders and markers)

#### *What is the study?*

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Study Advice workshops within your course and measure the impact that it has had on your students. It aims to establish the best ways of supporting students with developing academic writing skills and in particular focuses on students who may not have traditionally attended university.

#### *Why have your students been asked to take part?*

Your course traditionally attracts students from a wide variety of backgrounds and already has Study Advice sessions within the programme, which can be evaluated.

#### *Do you have to take part?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and non-participation will not impact on the current Study Advice support that we offer.

#### *What will happen if you take part?*

If you agree to your students taking part, they will be randomly allocated to receive one of three different workshop programmes, all of which are at least equal to what they currently receive. The workshops are designed to support the students' academic writing development. In order to assess the impact of these workshops, students will be asked to complete a questionnaire at 3 intervals in the academic year. The questionnaire will ask them to rate their confidence levels in writing and the goals that they set themselves. Consent from students will be sought to use this data.

In order to assess the impact that the workshops have had on their academic writing, you are asked to complete a simple question sheet after marking the students' assessed work. The sheet will ask you to rate the students' work against criteria key to academic writing.

#### *What are the risks and benefits of taking part?*

Careful consideration has been given to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Student numbers will be used to match questionnaires and mark sheets, but will be removed prior to the data being analysed and, in its place, a random number will be assigned. Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names, or student numbers, will be used within the project. In addition the name of your institution will not be used, ensuring maximum anonymity. Any writing or analysis will be stored on a personal drive. This means that only I will be able to access these files and confidentiality is maintained.

The questionnaire itself will offer your students the chance to reflect on their thoughts about academic writing and the goals they set themselves, which may help with their future development. It is hoped that findings from this study will help us to develop effective academic writing workshops in the future.

*What will happen to the data?*

The results of this study will be used within an Education Doctorate and may be published in subsequent journals, and/or presented at conferences. Should you wish to see the project findings before submission, an electronic copy can be emailed to you.

*What happens if I change my mind?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any stage, without any repercussions, by contacting myself on 0118 378 4614 or emailing [s.hood@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.hood@reading.ac.uk)

*Where can I get more information?*

If you have any queries regarding this study please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, as detailed above.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Signed: (Researcher)

Date: 27.05.2016

Consent Form (programme leaders and markers)



**Project title:**

*I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing*

I have read and had explained to me by Sonia Hood the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that the mark sheets that I complete will be analysed and results used within a Doctorate of Education. I understand that my participation, and the participation of my students, is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to my involvement in this project as outlined in the Information Sheet

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J: Information sheets and consent form interviews



**Researcher:**

Name *Sonia Hood*

Phone: 0118 378 4614

Email: *s.hood@reading.ac.uk*

**Supervisor:**

Name: *Professor Rhona Stainthorp*

Phone: 0118 378 2689

Email: *r.w.stainthorp@reading.ac.uk*

### INFORMATION SHEET (IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW)

*What is the study?*

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Study Advice workshops that you attend and measure the impact that it has had on you and your course. It aims to establish the best ways of supporting students with developing academic writing skills and in particular it focuses on students who may not have traditionally attended university.

*Why have you been asked to take part?*

You have already given permission for your questionnaire data to be used within this project. The data has now been analysed and I would like to explore some of the findings with you. In particular I wish to capture, from your perspective, the effectiveness of the workshop(s) and the impact that it has had on your course. You have been selected as a representative sample from your course.

*Do you have to take part?*

Participation in this in this study is entirely voluntary and non-participation will not impact your studies in any way.

*What will happen if you take part?*

If you agree to take part you will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview lasting approximately 1 hour. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, with your permission. This will then be thematically analysed and some of your comments may be used directly within the project. These comments will be anonymised and you will not be identifiable.

*What are the risks and benefits of taking part?*

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used within the project. In addition the name of your institution will not be used, ensuring maximum anonymity. Recordings and transcript files will be stored on a personal drive. This means that only I will be able to access these files and confidentiality is maintained.

The interview itself will offer you the chance to reflect on your thoughts about academic writing and the goals you set yourself, which may help with your future development. It is hoped that findings from this study will help us to develop effective academic writing workshops in the future.

*What will happen to the data?*

The results of this study will be used within an Education Doctorate and may be published in subsequent journals, and/or presented at conferences. You can ask at any time to see the transcript and confirm that you are still happy for its contents to be used. Should you wish to see the project findings before submission, an electronic copy can be emailed to you.

*What happens if I change my mind?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any stage, without any repercussions, by contacting myself on 0118 378 4614 or emailing [s.hood@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.hood@reading.ac.uk)

*Where can I get more information?*

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

If you have any queries regarding this study please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, as detailed above.

Signed: (Researcher)

Date: 27.05.2016

Consent Form (In-depth interview)

**Project title:**

*I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing*

I have read and had explained to me by Sonia Hood the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interview will be recorded and transcribed. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to my involvement in this project as outlined in the Information Sheet

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix K: Ethics Forms

Institute of Education

### Ethical Approval Form A (version May 2015)

Tick one:

Staff project: \_\_\_\_\_ PhD \_\_\_\_\_ EdD   x  

Name of applicant (s): *Sonia Hood*

Title of project:

*I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing*

Name of supervisor (for student projects): *Professor Rhona Stainthorp*

**Please complete the form below including relevant sections overleaf.**

|  | YES | NO |
|--|-----|----|
| <b>Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:</b>   |     |    |
| a) explains the purpose(s) of the project  | X   |    |
| b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants  | X   |    |
| c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used   | X   |    |
| d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary  | X   |    |
| e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish   | X   |    |
| f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal | X   |    |
| g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this                             | X   |    |
| h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them  | X   |    |
| i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email . If any of the project            | X   |    |

|  |     |    |      |
|--|-----|----|------|
| investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included and their name provided  |     |    |      |
| k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants   | X   |    |      |
| j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows:<br><br>‘This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct’.                              | X   |    |      |
| k)includes a standard statement regarding insurance:<br><br>“The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request”.   | X   |    |      |
| <b>Please answer the following questions</b>   |     |    |      |
| 1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).            | X   |    |      |
| 2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?  | X   |    |      |
| 3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?  |     |    | X    |
| 4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: <a href="http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx">http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx</a> )?   | X   |    |      |
| 5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?   | X   |    |      |
| 6) Does your research comply with the University’s Code of Good Practice in Research?  | X   |    |      |
|  | YES | NO | N.A. |
| 7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?   |     |    | X    |
| 8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?   |     |    | X    |
| 9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent? |     |    | X    |
| 10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data <sup>1</sup> , or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?  |     |    | X    |

<sup>1</sup> Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| 11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data? |  |   | X |
| 12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?   |  | X |   |
| 12b) If the answer to question 12a is “yes”, does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?  |  |   | X |
| 13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?   |  | X |   |
| 13b) If the answer to question 13a is “yes”, please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.   |  |   | X |
| 14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?  |  | X |   |
| 14b. If the answer to question 14a is “yes”:<br>My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University’s insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.  |  |   | X |
| <b>If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below</b>  |  |   |   |

Please complete **either** Section A **or** Section B and provide the details required in support of your application. Sign the form (Section C) then submit it with all relevant attachments (e.g. information sheets, consent forms, tests, questionnaires, interview schedules) to the Institute’s Ethics Committee for consideration. Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>A:</b> My research goes beyond the ‘accepted custom and practice of teaching’ but I consider that this project has <b>no</b> significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)  | x |
| <p>Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.</p> <p>There will be approximately 45 students involved in this project. All students are over the age of 18. Their 3 tutors will also be involved in supporting the project, though not directly in the research.</p> <p>Within the pilot, approximately an additional 45 students will be involved along with the same 3 tutors previously identified.</p>  |   |
| <p>Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words noting:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. title of project</li> <li>2. purpose of project and its academic rationale</li> <li>3. brief description of methods and measurements</li> <li>4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria</li> <li>5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)</li> <li>6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.</li> </ol> |   |



STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE  
INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed: ..... Print Name..... Date.....

(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative)\*

\* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

University of Reading

Institute of Education

**Risk Assessment Form for Research Activities February 2014**

Select one:

Staff project:  PGR project:  MA/UG project:

Name of applicant (s): ...*Sonia Hood*.....

Title of project:

I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing

Name of supervisor (for student projects): Professor Rhona Stainthorp

**A: Please complete the form below**

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Brief outline of Work/activity: | <b>Workshops and in-depth interviews will take place in a University private room. There will be no equipment except a hand held audio recorder and a video recorder</b> |
|---------------------------------|--|

|                               |                                  |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Where will data be collected? | <b>A university private room</b> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Significant hazards: | <b>None identified. The universities themselves have a duty to maintain a safe area of work within the university.</b><br><b>The video and audio equipment will be loaned from the University and will therefore have the necessary safety checks.</b> |
|----------------------|--|

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Who might be exposed to hazards? | N/A |
|----------------------------------|-----|

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Existing control measures: | <b>The rooms fall within the university's Health &amp; Safety responsibilities.</b> |
|----------------------------|---|



**Researcher:**

Name: *Sonia Hood*  
Phone: 0118 378 4614  
Email: *s.hood@reading.ac.uk*

**Supervisor:**

Name: *Professor Rhona Stainthorp*  
Phone: 0118 378 2689  
Email: *r.w.stainthorp@reading.ac.uk*

**INFORMATION SHEET (QUESTIONNAIRE)***What is the study?*

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Study Advice workshops that you attend and measure the impact that it has had on you and your course. It aims to establish the best ways of supporting students with developing academic writing skills and in particular it focuses on students who may not have traditionally attended university.

*Why have you been asked to take part?*

You have been asked to participate in a research study and selected to be a participant due to you being a first year student on x course. Your course traditionally attracts students from a wide variety of backgrounds and already has Study Advice sessions within the programme, which can be evaluated.

*Do you have to take part?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and non-participation will not impact your studies in any way.

*What will happen if you take part?*

If you agree to take part you will be asked to complete a questionnaire at 3 intervals in the academic year. The questionnaire will ask you to rate your confidence levels in writing, the goals that you set yourself and record your latest coursework grade. These questionnaires will then be analysed using an appropriate software tool. You will also be asked to complete a pre-questionnaire which asks some questions regarding both your own and your parents' educational background, your ethnicity and age.

In addition you are asked to consent to the Study Advice sessions being video recorded. The purpose of this is to monitor my role as a facilitator, for comparison across the study groups. The camera will be directed at myself and any identifiable comments will be electronically removed before being given to an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party to analyse.

*What are the risks and benefits of taking part?*

Careful consideration has been given to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Your student number will be used to match your questionnaires but will be removed prior to the data being analysed and, in its place, a random number will be assigned. Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names, or student numbers, will be used within the project. In addition the name of your institution will not be used, ensuring maximum anonymity. The video recording and any writing or analysis will be stored on a personal drive. This means that only I will be able to access these files and confidentiality is maintained.

The questionnaire itself will offer you the chance to reflect on your thoughts about academic writing and the goals you set yourself, which may help with your future development. It is hoped that findings from this study will help us to develop effective academic writing workshops in the future.

*What will happen to the data?*

The results of this study will be used within an Education Doctorate and may be published in subsequent journals, and/or presented at conferences. Should you wish to see the project findings before submission, an electronic copy can be emailed to you.

*What happens if I change my mind?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any stage, without any repercussions, by contacting myself on 0118 378 4614 or emailing [s.hood@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.hood@reading.ac.uk)

*Where can I get more information?*

If you have any queries regarding this study please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, as detailed above.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Signed: (Researcher)

Date: 27.05.2016



Consent Form (Questionnaires)

**Project title:**

*I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing*

I have read and had explained to me by Sonia Hood the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that the questionnaires that I complete will be analysed and results used within a Doctorate of Education. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to my involvement in this project as outlined in the Information Sheet

I consent to the Study Advice sessions being video recorded

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Pre Questionnaire (example)

1. Student number:
  
2. What language do you use at home?
  
3. If your answer to (2) is not English, what language do you usually read and write in?
  
4. How would you describe your ethnicity (please tick):
  - Black
  - White
  - Asian
  - Mixed
  - Other
  - Prefer not to say
  
5. What's your highest qualifications (e.g A-levels, BTEC etc) and grades
  
6. Please state your mother's occupation
  
7. Your mother's highest qualification:
  - Post Graduate (e.g. masters, PhD)
  - Degree (e.g. BA, BSc, PGCE etc)
  - A-level/ BTEC/ Level 3
  - GCSE/ O-Level/CSE/Level 2
  
8. Please state your father's occupation
  
9. Your father's highest qualification:
  - Post Graduate (e.g. masters, PhD)
  - Degree (e.g. BA, BSc, PGCE etc)
  - A-level/ BTEC/ Level 3
  - GCSE/ O-Level/CSE/Level 2

## Questionnaire

The below questionnaire has been adapted from a questionnaire measuring perceived self-regulatory efficacy for writing from Zimmerman and Bandura (1994).

**Student number**.....

### Self-efficacy for writing

| <i>Directions: On a scale from 0 (no chance) to 100 (completely certain) how confident are you of being able to successfully communicate, in writing, the below. You can write any number between 0 and 100.</i> |   |                 |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Item   | Question  | Measure (0-100) |
| 1  | When given a writing assignment, I can come up with a suitable topic in a short time.                             |                 |
| 2  | I can start writing with no difficulty.   |                 |
| 3  | I can construct a good opening sentence easily.   |                 |
| 4  | I can come up with a well-structured opening paragraph to capture readers' interest.                              |                 |
| 5  | I can write a brief but informative overview that will prepare readers well for the main thesis of my assignment. |                 |
| 6  | I can use my first attempts at writing to refine my ideas.  |                 |
| 7  | I can adjust my style of writing to suit the needs of the assignment.   |                 |
| 8  | I can find a way to concentrate on my writing even when there are many distractions around me.                    |                 |
| 9  | When I have a pressing deadline for an assignment, I can manage my time efficiently.                              |                 |
| 10   | I can meet the writing standards of an assessor who is very demanding.  |                 |
| 11   | I can come up with memorable examples quickly to illustrate an important point.                                   |                 |
| 12   | I can rewrite my wordy or confusing sentences clearly.  |                 |
| 13   | When I need to make a subtle or abstract idea more imaginable, I can use words to create a vivid picture.         |                 |
| 14   | I can locate and use appropriate reference sources when I need to argue an important point.                       |                 |
| 15   | I can write very effective transitional sentences from one idea to another.                                       |                 |
| 16   | I can refocus my concentration on writing when I find myself thinking about other things.                         |                 |
| 17   | When I write on a lengthy topic, I can create a variety of good outlines on the main sections of my assignment.   |                 |
| 18   | When I want to persuade a sceptical reader about a point, I can use a convincing quote from an authority.         |                 |
| 19   | When I get stuck on writing an assignment, I can find ways to overcome the problem.                               |                 |
| 20   | I can find ways to motivate myself to write an assignment even when the topic holds little interest for me.       |                 |
| 21   | When I write a long or complex paper I can find and correct all my grammatical errors.                            |                 |

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 22 | I can revise a first draft so that it is clearer and better organised.                              |  |
| 23 | When I edit a complex assignment, I can find and correct all my grammatical errors.                 |  |
| 24 | I can find other people who will give me critical feedback on my early drafts.                      |  |
| 25 | When my assignment is written on a complicated topic, I can come up with a short informative title. |  |

### Academic Achievement

| On a scale of 1 to 7, how confident are you in achieving the following grades in your next written assignment (1 = highly uncertain, 7 = very certain). You can write any number from 1 to 7 |               |
|--|---------------|
| Grade  | Measure (1-7) |
| 70% or more (distinction)  |               |
| 60-69% (merit)   |               |
| 50-59% (pass)  |               |
| 40-49% (pass)  |               |
| Fail   |               |

### Academic Goals

| What academic grade are you striving for on this course (please tick just one) |             |
|--|-------------|
| Grade  | Please tick |
| 70% or more (distinction)  |             |
| 60-69% (merit)   |             |
| 50-59% (pass)  |             |
| 40-49% (pass)  |             |
| Fail   |             |

**Researcher:**Name *Sonia Hood*

Phone: 0118 378 4614

Email: [s.hood@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.hood@reading.ac.uk)**Supervisor:**Name: *Professor Rhona Stainthorp*

Phone: 0118 378 2689

Email: [r.w.stainthorp@reading.ac.uk](mailto:r.w.stainthorp@reading.ac.uk)**INFORMATION SHEET (IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW)***What is the study?*

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Study Advice workshops that you attend and measure the impact that it has had on you and your course. It aims to establish the best ways of supporting students with developing academic writing skills and in particular it focuses on students who may not have traditionally attended university.

*Why have you been asked to take part?*

You have already given permission for your questionnaire data to be used within this project. The data has now been analysed and I would like to explore some of the findings with you. In particular I wish to capture, from your perspective, the effectiveness of the workshop(s) and the impact that it has had on your course. You have been selected as a representative sample from your course.

*Do you have to take part?*

Participation in this in this study is entirely voluntary and non-participation will not impact your studies in any way.

*What will happen if you take part?*

If you agree to take part you will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview lasting approximately 1 hour. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, with your permission. This will then be thematically analysed and some of your comments may be used directly within the project. These comments will be anonymised and you will not be identifiable.

*What are the risks and benefits of taking part?*

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used within the project. In addition the name of your institution will not be used, ensuring maximum anonymity. Recordings and transcript files will be stored on a personal drive. This means that only I will be able to access these files and confidentiality is maintained.

The interview itself will offer you the chance to reflect on your thoughts about academic writing and the goals you set yourself, which may help with your future development. It is hoped that findings from this study will help us to develop effective academic writing workshops in the future.

*What will happen to the data?*

The results of this study will be used within an Education Doctorate and may be published in subsequent journals, and/or presented at conferences. You can ask at any time to see the transcript and confirm that you are still happy for its contents to be used. Should you wish to see the project findings before submission, an electronic copy can be emailed to you.

*What happens if I change my mind?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any stage, without any repercussions, by contacting myself on 0118 378 4614 or emailing [s.hood@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.hood@reading.ac.uk)

*Where can I get more information?*

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

If you have any queries regarding this study please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, as detailed above.

Signed: (Researcher)

Date: 27.05.2016

Consent Form (In-depth interview)

**Project title:**

*I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing*

I have read and had explained to me by Sonia Hood the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interview will be recorded and transcribed. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to my involvement in this project as outlined in the Information Sheet

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Draft questions for semi-structured interview

### **Title of project:**

*I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing*

The below provides an example of the types of questions that will be asked within the in-depth interview. It focuses on a number of themes: the participant's confidence levels with regards academic writing prior to the intervention and after; the reasons for any increase in confidence; the perceived impact on writing attainment; and evaluation of the workshop(s) generally. The questions within each section will be led by past responses and, as such, the below only offers an indication of the possible questions that may be asked.

### **Background (aim: to find out educational background, past experience of studying etc.).**

Examples of questions:

*What brought you to this course? What was your motive to continue studying?*

*What's your previous experience of studying? What did you study? What level? How did you get on?*

*Did you have a gap from studying? How long ago was that?*

*How long have you been in your current job? How do you find juggling work and study?*

*Who do you turn to for support on your course?*

### **Self-efficacy prior to the intervention (aim: to explore some of the 'meaning' behind the initial questionnaire identifying: their performance self-efficacy; writing self-efficacy and goals that they set themselves)**

Examples of questions:

*Thinking back to when you started the course, can you tell me how confident you felt about studying? What about your confidence in academic writing? Why was that?*

*I see here you have scored your confidence level to achieve x as y (taken from questionnaire data). Why was that?*

*At the start of your course you set yourself the following aim (state what this was), and thought you were most likely to achieve x. What were your thoughts at the time?*

### **Reflections of value of academic writing workshops (aim: to establish the effectiveness of the workshops; what was perceived as useful and not so helpful)**

Examples of questions:

*Thinking back to the series of workshops that I ran on academic writing, what were your thoughts on these? Is there anything in particular that you remember as being helpful/unhelpful?*

*Can you think of ways in which these could be improved?*

*Did you use any of the resources/strategies in your own writing? Which ones?*

**Changes in any scores (aim to establish what might have driven any changes to self-efficacy scores/ goals set/ writing attainment levels)**

Examples of questions:

*Later in the year, when you completed the questionnaire for the second time, I note that your score for x has moved from y to z (taken from questionnaire). Can you think why that might be? What changed?*

*How do you feel now about your ability to write academically?*

*I also note that your goals have changed and now you are looking to achieve x (from questionnaire). Did you realise that? Is there any reason for this change?*

*What sorts of grades are you now achieving? How do you feel about that?*

**Overall evaluation (aim: establish how they felt about the effectiveness of the workshops and/or what had the largest impact on their academic writing grades)**

Examples of questions:

*What do you think explains your improvement in your grades?*

*What is the best way we can support next year's cohort to improve their academic writing skills?*

*Do you have any further comments/ suggestions for improvement?*

**Researcher:**Name *Sonia Hood*

Phone: 0118 378 4614

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Email: *r.w.stainthorp@reading.ac.uk***INFORMATION SHEET (Course directors and markers)***What is the study?*

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Study Advice workshops within your course and measure the impact that it has had on your students. It aims to establish the best ways of supporting students with developing academic writing skills and in particular focuses on students who may not have traditionally attended university.

*Why have your students been asked to take part?*

Your course traditionally attracts students from a wide variety of backgrounds and already has Study Advice sessions within the programme, which can be evaluated.

*Do you have to take part?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and non-participation will not impact on the current Study Advice support that we offer.

*What will happen if you take part?*

If you agree to your students taking part, they will be randomly allocated to receive one of three different workshop programmes, all of which are at least equal to what they currently receive. The workshops are designed to support the students' academic writing development. In order to assess the impact of these workshops, students will be asked to complete a questionnaire at 3 intervals in the academic year. The questionnaire will ask them to rate their confidence levels in writing and the goals that they set themselves. Consent from students will be sought to use this data.

In order to assess the impact that the workshops have had on their academic writing, you are asked to complete a simple question sheet after marking the students' assessed work. The sheet will ask you to rate the students' work against criteria key to academic writing.

*What are the risks and benefits of taking part?*

Careful consideration has been given to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Student numbers will be used to match questionnaires and mark sheets, but will be removed prior to the data being analysed and, in its place, a random number will be assigned. Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names, or student numbers, will be used within the project. In addition the name of your institution will not be used, ensuring maximum anonymity. Any writing or analysis will be stored on a personal drive. This means that only I will be able to access these files and confidentiality is maintained.

The questionnaire itself will offer your students the chance to reflect on their thoughts about academic writing and the goals they set themselves, which may help with their future development. It is hoped that findings from this study will help us to develop effective academic writing workshops in the future.

*What will happen to the data?*

The results of this study will be used within an Education Doctorate and may be published in subsequent journals, and/or presented at conferences. Should you wish to see the project findings before submission, an electronic copy can be emailed to you.

*What happens if I change my mind?*

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any stage, without any repercussions, by contacting myself on 0118 378 4614 or emailing [s.hood@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.hood@reading.ac.uk)

*Where can I get more information?*

If you have any queries regarding this study please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, as detailed above.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Signed: (Researcher)

Date: 27.05.2016

Consent Form (programme leaders and markers)

**Project title:**

*I believe I can write: Improving academic writing achievement through increasing self-efficacy belief for writing*

I have read and had explained to me by Sonia Hood the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that the mark sheets that I complete will be analysed and results used within a Doctorate of Education. I understand that my participation, and the participation of my students, is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without repercussions.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to my involvement in this project as outlined in the Information Sheet

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Example of marking sheet for tutors

Please complete the following using the scale indicated. A high number (9, 10) represents strong evidence of this skill, whilst a low number (1, 2) indicates an area for development. The middle scores (4, 5 and 6) are what is to be expected at this level

### Good academic style

*Appropriate use of academic language and tone for the assignment*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation

*No mistakes in spelling and effective use of grammar and punctuation. Work has been accurately proof read.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### Coherent structure

*A detailed introduction and clear conclusion is present. The argument demonstrates a clear sequence of ideas. Paragraphs are correctly formed and careful planning is evident.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### Clear argument is present and supported

*Excellent use of examples and evidence to support main statements.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### Referencing and use of sources

*Well researched, using appropriate resources that are correctly cited within the work. A full and accurate reference list is provided at the end of the work.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

## Appendix L: Academic locus of control survey

Adapted from College Success Survey (Trice, 1985; Curtis & Trice, 2013)

Please answer each question below “true” (T) or “false” (F)

**Student number:**

1. \_\_\_ College grades most often reflect the effort you put into classes.
2. \_\_\_ I came to college because it was expected of me.
3. \_\_\_ I have largely determined my own career goals.
4. \_\_\_ Some people have a knack for writing, while others will never write well no matter how hard they try.
5. \_\_\_ Lecturers sometimes make an early impression of you and then no matter what you do, you cannot change that impression.
6. \_\_\_ There are some subjects in which I could never do well.
7. \_\_\_ I sometimes feel that there is nothing I can do to improve my situation.
8. \_\_\_ I never feel really hopeless; there is always something I can do to improve my situation.
9. \_\_\_ I would never allow social activities to affect my studies.
10. \_\_\_ There are many more important things for me than getting good grades.
11. \_\_\_ Studying regularly is important.
12. \_\_\_ For some courses it is not important to go to class.
13. \_\_\_ I consider myself highly motivated to achieve success in life.
14. \_\_\_ I am a good writer.
15. \_\_\_ Doing work on time is always important to me.
16. \_\_\_ What I learn is more determined by college and course requirements than by what I want to learn.
17. \_\_\_ I am easily distracted.
18. \_\_\_ I can be easily talked out of studying.
19. \_\_\_ I get depressed sometimes and then there is no way I can accomplish what I know I should be doing.
20. \_\_\_ Things will probably go wrong for me some time in the near future.
21. \_\_\_ I keep changing my mind about my career goals.
22. \_\_\_ I feel I will someday make a real contribution to the world if I work hard at it.
23. \_\_\_ There has been at least one instance in school where my social life impaired my academic performance.
24. \_\_\_ I would like to graduate from college, but there are more important things in my life.
25. \_\_\_ I plan well and I stick to my plans.

## Appendix M: Grading for academic locus of control survey

Adapted from college Success Survey (Trice, 1985; Curtis & Trice, 2013)

Please answer each question below “true” (T) or “false” (F)

### Coding

1. F\_\_ College grades most often reflect the effort you put into classes.
2. T\_\_ I came to college because it was expected of me.
3. F\_\_ I have largely determined my own career goals.
4. \_T\_ Some people have a knack for writing, while others will never write well no matter how hard they try.
5. \_T\_ Lecturers sometimes make an early impression of you and then no matter what you do, you cannot change that impression.
6. T\_\_ There are some subjects in which I could never do well.
7. T\_\_ I sometimes feel that there is nothing I can do to improve my situation.
8. \_F\_ I never feel really hopeless; there is always something I can do to improve my situation.
9. \_F\_ I would never allow social activities to affect my studies.
10. \_T\_ There are many more important things for me than getting good grades.
11. \_F\_ Studying regularly is important.
12. \_T\_ For some courses it is not important to go to class.
13. \_F\_ I consider myself highly motivated to achieve success in life.
14. \_F\_ I am a good writer.
15. \_F\_ Doing work on time is always important to me.
16. \_T\_ What I learn is more determined by college and course requirements than by what I want to learn.
17. \_\_T\_ I am easily distracted.
18. \_\_T\_ I can be easily talked out of studying.
19. \_\_T\_ I get depressed sometimes and then there is no way I can accomplish what I know I should be doing.
20. \_\_T\_ Things will probably go wrong for me some time in the near future.
21. \_T\_ I keep changing my mind about my career goals.
22. \_\_F\_ I feel I will someday make a real contribution to the world if I work hard at it.
23. \_\_T\_ There has been at least one instance in school where my social life impaired my academic performance.
24. \_\_T\_ I would like to graduate from college, but there are more important things in my life.
25. \_\_F\_ I plan well and I stick to my plan

Students should total their number of MATCHED items. Scores will range between 0 –25.

|              |    |              |
|--------------|----|--------------|
| 0-12         | 13 | 14-25        |
| Internal LOC |    | External LOC |

