



PAPER

'It gave me something stable to stand on': demystifying the academic publication process for doctoral candidates through inclusive pedagogies

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ABSTRACT

Doctoral candidates often face significant challenges when engaging with the academic publication process, navigating complex disciplinary expectations with limited institutional support. This article evaluates a pedagogical initiative designed to demystify academic publishing through a structured, collaborative, and inclusive approach. Drawing on Belcher (2019), we implemented a 12-session workshop series, *Publish Your Article!*, integrating guided discussions, facilitated writing retreats, and peer interaction. Using a mixed-methods design, we analysed participant reflections from questionnaires and focus groups to assess the provision's impact. Findings suggest that candidates initially perceived academic writing as an obscure and performative practice. Through sustained scaffolding and a Community of Practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991), participants began to reconceptualise writing as a developmental process, strengthening their confidence and sense of scholarly legitimacy. The study challenges 'sink or swim' models of publication support and advocates for embedded, sustainable learning development initiatives that meaningfully empower doctoral researchers.

KEYWORDS: doctoral writing, academic publishing, communities of practice, pedagogies of care, feminist pedagogies.

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Introduction

Doctoral candidates experience the demands and pressures of effectively engaging with the publication process. However, specific provisions explicitly addressing how to navigate writing for publication are scarce. To address this, in the academic year 2023/2024, a collaborative provision between the Academic English Service, University of St Andrews's in-sessional service, and the postgraduate research (PGR) learning development provision was developed to address this gap in the doctoral candidates' journey at our institution. Our collaborative provision entailed 12 online workshops based on Belcher's (2019) widely used book, which unpacks the academic journal writing process in 12 Weeks. Our provision, *Publish your Article!*, could be used as a full 12-workshop programme or as individual sessions, allowing candidates to take ownership of their learning. This provision took place between October 2023 and May 2024 through semesters one and two, with sessions spaced to allow candidates to dedicate the time they felt they needed to each step. Each session was divided into two hours. In the first hour, we would collaboratively explore one of the key areas in the writing for publication process, such as making sure there is a coherent argument in the article (Belcher, 2019). The second hour would take the form of a writing retreat, following the Pomodoro Technique while allowing participants to share their experiences (Hall & Villegas, 2025). This article critically evaluates this provision's impact addressing the following research questions:

1. How did attending the provision impact participants' writing for publication journey?
2. Which elements of the provision were perceived as successful?
3. Which elements of the provision were perceived as unsuitable?

The article starts by introducing the broader context in which this provision is situated, followed by a presentation and analysis of the qualitative data generated via questionnaires and focus groups. This article concludes with a critical reflection which may inform the implementation of a similar provision in other HE contexts.

Situating our provision

In this section, we explore the broader challenges doctoral candidates experience when navigating writing for publication. We then explore our local response to these challenges. We conclude this overview with a brief statement on our own positionality and professional identities that inform our local response.



The broader challenges

Doctoral candidates face significant obstacles when accessing academic publishing, where structural pressures heighten an already challenging process. The ‘publish or perish’ culture, ubiquitous in academia, determines career progression and access to opportunities (Cotterall, 2011; McGrail et al., 2006; Watermeyer et al., 2024). Doctoral candidates are expected to produce high-quality research while simultaneously navigating the complexities of academic writing, peer review, and journal selection, often with minimal institutional support (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). These expectations to engage with the process result in doctoral candidates struggling with confidence, imposter syndrome, and gatekeeping of publishing in academic journals. Doctoral candidates tend to be expected to navigate opaque disciplinary norms and reviewer feedback alone. The system perpetuates inequity, privileging those with access to informal networks of support while leaving others to flounder (Lillis & Curry, 2010).

Our local response to the challenges

Previously in our institution, candidates had access to one optional workshop on publishing their work, but the responsibility fell on the PGRs and their supervisors to develop the skills to meaningfully engage with the publication process. This workshop, titled ‘Publish or Perish’ replicated the pressure that we as practitioners wanted to eradicate. Similarly, we reject a hierarchical structure with ‘leadership’ but rather advocate for a genuine creation of a research community. As Smyth (2017, p. 77) notes, academic leadership is characterised by showing ‘no nexus between being able to supposedly inspire followers with a vision, and any experiential, existential, or demonstrable experience as a scholar/researcher’. For us, this meant acknowledging our previous experiences as scholars and using them as a springboard to facilitate the discussions, spark conversation, and further contextualise general guidance in the input sessions. This approach not only informed the dialogic approach of our provision and its activities, but also inspired us to take specific steps to build a community. We created a dedicated Microsoft Teams space and included a getting-to-know-you activity in the form of an introductory Padlet to foster meaningful connections. While Padlet was warmly received as an ice-breaker, we found little uptake on Teams, and this was mostly used to check the time of sessions and access links or for us to share interesting readings with doctoral candidates. Outside this, candidates barely engaged with the Teams platform. Doctoral candidates reported technological fatigue to explain their reticence to engage virtually.



We conceptualise the provision of these workshops as a Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as doctoral candidates were acquiring both skills and knowledge through participation. At their core, these workshops were designed to move the doctoral candidates from the periphery of writing for publication to fully contributing to knowledge building in their field through publications, thus conceptualising learning as a socio-cultural activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) identify domain, community, and practice as the key elements to form a CoP. In our case, the domain was our workshop space and our community was all of the participants—doctoral candidates and ourselves united by a key common practice to develop an understanding of publication practices and processes and to advance on our own writing. We brought topics to discuss in every session and opened up the space for genuine discussion and horizontal interaction. Similarly, we all took part in the writing part of the sessions.

Through these workshops, we enacted and advocated a pedagogy of kindness and belonging (Grant & Pittaway, 2024; MacDonald, 2024; Overgaard et al., 2024). By actively fostering a sense of community, we invited our candidates to interrogate reviewers' comments beyond the requests made and decide whether they were creating a sense of community. As they became part of the peer review system, we explicitly invited our candidates to consider how they could uphold strong standards through a community-informed approach and continued professional development or through an alienating and hostile approach to reviewing. Our goal was to invite our candidates to question, reimagine, and ultimately embrace a kinder approach to academia. This aligns with Smyth's (2017) call for 'dignity' in research. Specifically, in our case, we wanted to foster practices that 'would foreground and accord researchers' "storytelling rights" (Smyth, 2017, p. 141). Thus, in our workshops, we provided the essential linguistic structures and resources while explicitly unpacking the publication process. We conceptualise our provision as an opportunity to help our candidates succeed while inviting them to question the current socio-academic order (Fisher, 2000), also acknowledging the candidates' role as co-investigators (Freire, 2000). Table 1 shows the workshops alongside the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for each session.



Table 1. Workshops and intended ILOs.

| Session | Intended Learning Outcomes |
|---|--|
| Session 1. Your plan for writing | By the end of the workshop, we will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed barriers to writing and how to overcome them. • Designed a writing plan that works for you. • Identified suitable previous work to develop your article. • Started writing our article during our SUAW time! |
| Session 2. Is your argument there? | By the end of the workshop, we will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed the importance of having a clear argument in our articles. • Explored what an argument is. • Checked our articles for a clear argument. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| Session 3. Abstracts | By the end of the workshop, we will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explored different strategies to conceptualise the abstract for our articles. • Had the opportunity to write our abstracts and receive feedback on them. • Had the opportunity to give feedback on our colleagues' abstracts. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| Session 4. Finding the right journal | By the end of the workshop, we will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explored different strategies to select a journal for publication. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| Session 5. Citing the literature | By the end of the workshop, we will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explored sources available to us and decide how to use them. • Deepened our understanding of paraphrasing and citing sources. • Evaluated the sources we are using in our articles. |



| | |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified 'source gaps' in our article. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| <p>Session 6.</p> <p>So what?</p> | <p>By the end of the workshop, we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed our understanding of claims for significance. • Explored strategies to identify our claims for significance. • Received feedback on our writing (so far!). • Given feedback on what our peers have written (so far!). • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| <p>Session 7.</p> <p>Is your evidence strong?</p> | <p>By the end of the workshop, we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified the evidence provided in our articles (so far!). • Analysed the quality and relevance of the evidence in our articles. • Analysed the interpretation of the evidence in our articles. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| <p>Session 8.</p> <p>Is your evidence clear?</p> | <p>By the end of the workshop, we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified effective ways to present our evidence. • Analysed the clarity of the evidence presented in our articles. • Analysed the clarity of the interpretation of the evidence presented in our articles. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| <p>Session 9.</p> <p>Strong structures</p> | <p>By the end of the workshop, we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified effective ways to present our evidence. • Explore strategies to evaluate the structure of published articles. • Explore strategies to evaluate the structure of our own articles. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| <p>Session 10.</p> <p>Introductions and conclusions</p> | <p>By the end of the workshop, we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified effective ways to strengthen our structure. • Explored strategies to evaluate the structure of published articles. |



| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explored strategies to evaluate the structure of our own articles. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| Session 11. Editing your work | <p>By the end of the workshop, we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified effective ways to revise our articles (microstructure). • Identified effective ways to revise our articles (macrostructure). • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |
| Session 12. Life after submission | <p>By the end of the workshop, we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explored how to prepare our articles for submission. • Explored strategies to address reviewer comments. • Reflected on the nature of peer review comments. • Done some writing during our SUAW time! |

At their core, these workshops are firmly rooted in feminist pedagogies (Cerdá, 2022; Fisher, 2000; hooks, 1984), explicitly enacting a pedagogy of care. As Walker-Gleaves (2019) explains, this is not to say that we are fore-fronting a nurturing environment at the expense of academic rigour, but rather using our CoP as a springboard to effectively and sustainably scaffold autonomy, while fostering our candidates' social and cultural capital. Ultimately, we aim to empower our candidates to be active participants in the academic writing, publication and peer review process. Our understanding of a pedagogy of care echoes Walker-Gleaves (2019) by actively engaging in 'proper academic inquiry' (p. 109), while exploring the role and bounds of care in HE teaching-and-learning spaces.

These workshops also gave us the opportunity to openly discuss all aspects of publishing in Western contexts. For instance, we explicitly discussed the implications of the name under which we published. We explored the implications that this may have for women who, in the Anglo-Saxon context, may traditionally adopt their partner's surname after getting married, or the challenges for scholars whose name does not conform to the Latin alphabet (Larivière et al., 2021; Öz, 2024; Pellack & Kappmeyer, 2011).



Figure 1. Materials from workshop 10 discussing adopting a publication name.

Choosing YOUR name

- Extrinsic considerations
 - Consistency
 - Legality
 - Author disambiguation
 - Bias
 - Alphabetizing errors
- Intrinsic
 - Life change



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Belcher (2019, p. 291-295)



Ultimately, we challenged the 'publish or perish' culture combined with a lack of support by designing and delivering these workshops (Figure 2) centred around community building and creativity (Heron et al., 2021).

Figure 2. Materials from workshop four to spark discussion on the role of publishing and academic rejection.

Before we start... Contributing to the conversation



Process vs Product

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Our own positionality and professional identity

Regarding our professional identities, it is also worth stressing how our professional roles, and therefore our sessions, sit in the third space (MacDonald, 2016; Whitchurch & Healy, 2024). Although this concept was originally used in the context of leadership and administration-oriented HE roles (Whitchurch, 2008), it has been embraced by learning developers (Syska & McDonald, 2025) and practitioners situated in liminal spaces such as in-session academic language and skills provisions. As Tuck (2018) further explains, working with students as writers positioned in quasi-disciplinary spaces fails to reevaluate caring as integral to academia both in terms of identity and labour.

This links with our own identity as practitioners and researchers and our own position in relation to the wider university. Although Paula holds a lecturer position, her role as in-session director means that her work focuses on guiding candidates to develop the necessary academic literacies to succeed in their respective educational journeys.

Nevertheless, her research focuses mainly on flipped learning and online pedagogies (Villegas 2022; Villegas, 2024). Similarly, Lucy led GradSkills, the skills program designed to allow doctoral candidates to develop their researcher's toolkit. However, most of her scholarship focused on twentieth-century literary and cultural studies (Hall & Plain, 2016; Hall, 2020). Thus, these team-taught workshops are not only a bridge between in-session provision and student development, but also a bridge between our scholarly and professional identities.

These conversations around researchers, practitioners, and practitioner-researchers are prominent in the literature around our professional identity (Harland, 2010; Harvey & Spee, 2023; Jarl et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2023). In this context, we would position ourselves as teacher-scholar-activists (Suh & Jensen, 2020). In our role as session facilitators, we adopted a collaborative approach to teaching and learning while actively encouraging our candidates to critically engage with the framework and suggestions provided. By doing so, candidates were encouraged to investigate disciplinary differences and further understand the sometimes opaque process involved in the dissemination of academic knowledge.

As scholars, we thoroughly investigated pedagogical approaches to meet our proposed ILOs in the most effective manner in our delivery mode while engaging in a critical appraisal of the provision. Through a systematic collection of feedback via questionnaires and a focus group, we are actively contributing to the body of knowledge by exploring practical approaches to



empowering PGR candidates to engage in the academic publishing process. Crucially, as activists, we provide a safe space to unpick, interrogate, and challenge normative conventions in academia, as demonstrated in the previous section. This is in line with the feminist approach (Fisher, 2000; Tuck, 2018) that underpins our pedagogical and research endeavours.

Methodology

To assess the programme's impact, we employed a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach, combining quantitative questionnaires with qualitative focus groups. MMR enables data triangulation, complementarity, and expanded insights (Ivankova & Greer, 2015; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007), making it an effective method for investigating complex processes such as doctoral candidates' relationships towards academic writing and publication.

After attending each session, participants were emailed a standard questionnaire designed by the university to evaluate all provision situated in the third space, including our provision. Towards the end of the 12 workshops, we conducted a focus group attended by four participants. It was designed to provide a welcoming space for reflecting on their publication journey. Although we had no input in the design of the former, we carefully designed the questions and prompts for the latter. Thus, the data presented in this article are drawn from both these questionnaire responses and the focus group discussion. We echo concerns raised in the scholarship of teaching and learning about the use of student evaluation data (Ali et al., 2021). In line with ethical research practices, we secured ethical approval from our home university and obtained informed consent from participants to collect and share their experiences.

Most of our participants were enrolled in an innovative doctorate-by-impact programme, which requires them to produce tangible research outputs before submitting a reflective portfolio. Some were pursuing a professional doctorate in TESOL (Carver, 2024), and others were doctoral candidates from Divinity, Geography, and International Relations. Although the majority of candidates could be placed within Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities, candidates from Chemistry and Marine Biology attended a number of workshops (see Appendix C). This added a multidisciplinary element to our sessions.



Despite an average of 19 candidates per session, not all candidates engaged with the feedback questionnaire (Table 2). This constitutes a limitation on the findings presented due to low feedback engagement. Similarly, although all candidates were invited to participate in the focus group, only four candidates engaged with the process. Their pseudonyms, to protect their identities, are Marianna, Patricia (DProf candidates), Aretha (International Relations), and Lola (Psychology). It is worth noting a further limitation with this data set, given the number of participants and the multidisciplinary difference we have mentioned. Half of our participants were DProf candidates, which suggests that learners completing a doctorate by impact may consider this type of provision to be clearly linked to their objectives.

Table 2. Feedback generated from questionnaires.

| Session | What did you find most useful about this event? (No. of entries) | What did you find least useful about this event? (No. of entries) | What actions will you take as a result of this event? (No. of entries) | Any additional feedback or suggestions that you may have about the event. (No. of entries) |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Session 1. Your plan for writing | 8 | 3 | 7 | 3 |
| Session 2. Is your argument there? | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Session 3. Abstracts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Session 4. Finding the right journal | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Session 5. Citing the literature | 4 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Session 6. | 5 | 1 | 2 | 1 |



| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| So what? | | | | |
| Session 7. Is your evidence strong? | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Session 8. Is your evidence clear? | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Session 9. Strong structures | 5 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Session 10. Introductions and conclusions | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Session 11. Editing your work | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Session 12. Life after submission | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 |

A feminist gaze (Fisher, 2000) further informed our analysis, recognising the liminal nature of our work. From an analytical perspective, the intersection of third space work and feminist pedagogies is key to our ethos, shaping both our collaborative pedagogical efforts and the analysis of our data. To recognise the role of our theoretical underpinnings alongside the unique nature of our sample, we adopted a hybrid process of inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Specifically, we draw from Fisher's (2000) key elements in articulating feminist pedagogies for our deductive themes, while acknowledging the inductive themes generated in the analysis process. Table 3 presents both inductive and deductive themes alongside the integrated broader themes in relation to the proposed RQs they address.



Table 3. Visual representation of the hybrid TA process following Fereday & Muir-Cochrane's (2006) approach as implemented in this paper.

| Deductive themes (Fisher, 2000) | Inductive themes | Broader Integrated themes | RQ addressed |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--------------|
| Access to the discourse itself | Identity, goal of the course | Navigating academic discourse: identity and access. | RQ1 |
| Caring | Collaboration, self-study, teacher interventions | From transmission to collaboration: the role of care and community in learning | RQ2/RQ3 |
| Community | Collaboration, Identity, online delivery mode | | |
| Transmission | Teacher interventions, self-study, online delivery mode | Performing academic writing: breaking down the Process for Learning | RQ2/RQ3 |
| Performance | Itemising the process, collaboration, self-study, online delivery mode | | |
| Critical Thinking | Goal of the course, online delivery mode | | |

Results and discussion

Following the broader integrated themes as the guiding structure, we present the data generated in relation to the proposed RQs.

Navigating academic discourse: identity and access (RQ1)

This theme explores how candidates gained access to academic discourse and how their identities as researchers evolved with it. The deductive foundation lies on Fisher's (2000) conceptualisation of academic discourse as a structure that requires initiation. It is combined with the inductive insights generated from the data, with participants highlighting their personal identity and perceived barriers to meaningfully engage in the writing for publication process. Responses from the questionnaire show how candidates appreciated an explicit



approach to unpacking the publication process as a way to overcome those barriers. Comments such as, 'The step-by-step chunks that the approach to writing a journal article has been broken down into makes it doable and not feel overwhelming' demonstrate that this approach allows researchers to better understand conventions. This was echoed in the focus group when Lola explained how after the session on finding the right journal (workshop four) she finally felt ready to start writing:

That session was very helpful because it was realistic, like, choose this journal ... Don't do this. Do this. This is OK, so that's that. That session was very helpful to us, like, OK, so this is how [it works].... So, it helped give me that confidence.

Patricia offered a different perspective on the workshops by speaking candidly about her prior publishing experience. The workshops gave her the opportunity to reflect on what she did at the time, and what she identifies as useful knowledge she lacked while navigating her first publication.

Oh, why didn't I know this like 10 years ago? The first time that I was forced, you know, to face this idea that I have to do some publishing. I have published articles in the small journals.... I'm making sense of what I did with every session, you know, like oh now I know. Right now, I'm like oh, that article would have been much better if I had known this before.

Similarly, Aretha explains how having a paper accepted in a reputable journal in her field helped ease her anxiety around the publication process and improved her ability to engage with the process itself:

When you start publishing and sometimes you just doubt your abilities ... So when my paper was accepted in a very good journal, in my disciplinary area. So that was really what gave me a good push to go on and write because I never expected that they would look at [my article], but it was really a good motive for me to go on.

As highlighted, Aretha's experience is a clear contrast with Lola, who found herself unable to engage with the process and felt overwhelmed prior to attending the sessions. Lola mentioned that session four was the turning point for her to be able to start writing:

I had read too many [papers]. I had so many questions but still I just couldn't start. But as soon as I joined the session, I remember, I think it was maybe by the fourth, or the third session. I think I had [this thought]. Oh let's start now—I can,



there's no excuse.... So it sort of gave me direction, and [the feeling of] let's start writing, and it gave me the motivation to start. For me, that was it.

Marianna, on the other hand, perceived her journey to becoming a researcher as a cumulative process, sharing that:

Every module, every lesson, every class that we are taking is kind of helping us to build our identity as researchers Personally, I still feel a bit and even though I've published even before starting the doctoral program, I still feel that I'm in the process of becoming, you know, a proper researcher.

It is interesting how both Marianna and Patricia see their identity as researchers in the early stages. This identity is shaped by their doctoral programme and also their choice to attend these workshops. Aretha reports a sense of accomplishment and, to a certain extent, shows more comfort with this label as she is fairly happy to provide advice based on her experience navigating the publication process alongside attending the workshops. She noted that 'it takes too much of your time to write an article. So always choose a good, competitive journal because you are putting a lot of effort in anyway, so it is worth trying'. This contrasts with Patricia's reflection on the impact of the workshops, as she noted that 'these sessions are helping me to finally land. I'm not there yet and I think it's going to still take a while. I finally identify myself: I'm a teacher-researcher. I hope... one day'.

It is possible to hypothesise that Marianna and Patricia may have a more complex and nuanced relationship due to the nature of their doctorates. Both Lola and Aretha are doing a traditional PhD with a strong emphasis on research, whereas Marianna and Patricia are part of a professional doctorate which, at its core, scaffolds the transition from practitioner to researcher. Crucially, Lola conceptualises the workshops as a springboard to articulate her ideas without explicitly bringing her researcher identity into the conversation, thus using the workshops to overcome perceived barriers. Patricia, Marianna, and Aretha conceptualise the workshops as a catalyst to engage in reflective practice while undergoing their transformative journey to becoming researchers. This theme captures the tensions between accessibility and exclusivity in academic writing, as well as candidates' evolving sense of belonging in academic spaces. It is clear how the conceptualisation of academic identity and the role of publication are perceived as intertwined yet elusive. These workshops provide a springboard that goes beyond unpacking the mechanics, or 'behind the scenes', of the publication process, while offering a playful space to explore the development of participants' identities as researchers.



From transmission to collaboration: the role of care and community in learning (RQ2/RQ3)

The second theme generated examines the shift from knowledge transmission to a more collaborative and caring pedagogical model. Once again, the deductive foundation draws on Fisher's (2000) discussions around care in learning environments and the role of community in shaping student success. The inductive codes generated show how participants emphasise the importance of teacher provisions, self-study, and collaboration in fostering a sense of belonging and shared learning. The online delivery mode influences how these interactions occur, with a range of preferences reported.

Data generated from questionnaires show what elements candidates identified as most useful in terms of the events, the facilitators' provisions, and the caring approach we enacted. One participant noted that 'the positivity around writing blocks and the confirmation that writing and choosing the articles to read is hard' were the most helpful elements. Similarly, the opportunities to discuss their work as part of a CoP was a recurrent highlight. Feedback highlighted the value of being able to 'talk about your research with people from different fields; a sense of community'. This was also reflected in the focus groups. Marianna reflected that for her 'the discussion sessions were really helpful'.

As highlighted, we provided a virtual space (a Teams group) for candidates to interact with each other, yet we noticed little uptake from participants. When asked about the virtual space, Patricia candidly admitted a lack of interest in the group: 'I'm not afraid of saying it, so I don't have these compelling necessity of being on the phone and exchanging messages, and I do not have the time'. However, the opportunities for discussion were warmly received as the evidence above shows. Crucially, this sense of CoP was built in the session, as Lola describes: 'you feel this sense of community and it happens through the sessions because I see them [classmates] all the time and I begin to write in the chat ... A lot of people put funny comments in there'.

Patricia further explains how the community 'was built through interaction and with the people. You know, you interacted with us, we talked so yeah it does not matter if you've got like a new Teams channel'. This helped us realise how enacting a community was based on the balance of input discussion and collaborative writing sessions rather than contrived channels of communication outside the session. It is important to contextualise that



candidates' engagement with a type of provision that is optional and added on to their doctoral journey may call for strategic and meaningful use of contact time to foster a sense of community.

Interestingly, discussion activities were shortened from ten to five minutes in one session to allow a bit more room for input. Candidates strongly reacted against this decision, which we quickly changed in subsequent sessions. Marianna noted:

When the discussions were shortened, but then you brought it back to ten minutes That part was important because I saw the difference from when it was five minutes and when it was ten minutes, like we couldn't really talk, one person was saying something, then it would be [over]. But ten minutes gave everyone the opportunity to talk.

This highlighted the importance of providing a space for community interaction. It also reminded us that candidates were comfortable co-constructing the sessions with us and felt confident enough to explain what they needed from us, helping us develop a provision truly centred around them.

A key feature that we identified in relation to our own role is our approach to balancing input, collaborative discussions, and output. Patricia explains how she could have benefitted from a stronger teacher presence:

It would be great if from time to time you'd act like teachers. So, I know we are doctoral students, right? But it would be a great idea if you ask us in turns, what you have really worked on, so it would force me to be a little bit more disciplined, not responsible. I'm being responsible. That's why I'm here. Right. Disciplined, and writing requires lots of discipline.

Patricia's points resonate with criticism of active learning (Kirschener et al., 2006; Sweller, 1994) and the dangers of edging into the 'guide on the side' (King, 1993) approach to teaching and learning. However, this perception was not unanimously shared by our participants. Lola notes her preference for a light-touch approach: 'for me that that is what drew me. I like the flexible [approach]'. This interaction speaks to a much broader conundrum that our candidates present us with: wanting 'the right answer' and 'the right way' to publish. Multiple approaches, perspectives, and intersectional factors create an uncertainty from which we cannot shelter our candidates. We can only create the space for them to navigate those uncertainties as part of a CoP. This speaks to the transformative element of a doctoral



journey (Carver, 2024) and highlights the valuable, if at times uncomfortable, contribution this provision makes. Thus, this theme underscores the relational aspects of learning, highlighting how care is enacted through teacher presence, peer support, and self-directed learning in different learning modes.

Performing academic writing: breaking down the process for learning (RQ2/RQ3)

This theme explores how candidates experience academic writing as both a performative act and a structured, iterative process, particularly within guided learning environments. Drawing on Fisher (2000), we consider the performative nature of academic writing, specifically writing for publication within a strict set of conventions. Inductive insights from participant responses suggest a gradual shift from this view towards a more process-oriented understanding of academic writing. Candidates describe strategies such as being able to break down the process of writing into manageable components: ‘the step-by-step chunks that the approach to writing a journal article has been broken down into makes it doable and not feel overwhelming’. Candidates also describe collaborating with peers to develop their academic voice: ‘I feel like I am really learning how to write academically’ as explored in the previous section. Lola skilfully articulates how breaking down the process made it easier for her to engage in knowledge construction within her field, explaining how taking these workshops gave her the confidence to write about the data she had gathered:

How I struggle? Look, I couldn't say much ... I went to buy more books on qualitative [research] ... But you know this one, sort of, I think it just took my confidence to just like start ... So for me, that's saying that maybe [it should be] a required course. I don't think anyone would take this program and sort of like regret it or anything. I'm just saying it will save us from a lot of heartache and complaints ... I'm always complaining.

This lengthy yet powerful quote demonstrates how, by itemising the process, Lola was able to begin to explain her research to her community, using an academic article as the vehicle to actively participate and co-construct knowledge in her field. In her eyes, our guided learning environment made it possible for her to engage with discourses within her discipline.

Thus, this theme underscores how candidates move from seeing academic writing as a performative and obscure exercise to embracing it as an accessible process. Structured support, collaboration, and reflection helped shift focus, fostering greater confidence and



critical ownership of researchers' writing and allowing them to contribute to their disciplines (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Lea & Street, 1998).

Conclusion

Taken together, our themes emphasise key factors in our balanced approach that led to successful provision. We combined scaffolded input on writing for publication as a process, both from a language and skills perspective, with discussions allowing participants to share their thoughts and protected writing time. Our deliberate approach to community creation was more successful at creating welcoming spaces in the sessions than in fostering ad-hoc interactions outside the sessions. Nevertheless, the sessions also provided a reflective space to allow candidates to explore their identities as researchers (Gee, 2000; Wellington & Sykes, 2006) and interrogate the core ideas of 'doctorateness' (Carver, 2024). Our conceptualisation and delivery, rooted in feminism, was positively received. Thus, these elements provide a blueprint for other developers to engage in providing a similar provision while emphasising the benefits for our candidates.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire feedback

1. I am currently a:

- Undergraduate
- Taught postgraduate
- Research postgraduate
- Other
- Staff member

2. What did you find most useful about this event? (*)

3. What did you find least useful about this event? (*)

4. How well did the event meet its stated objectives?

- Very good
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Poor

5. How relevant was the event for your professional/personal development?

- Very relevant
- A lot
- Little
- Not at all

6. What actions will you take as a result of this event? (*)

7. Please tell us any additional feedback or suggestions that you may have about the event. (*)

() Questions used to inform our paper*



Appendix B: Guiding questions for the focus groups

Workshop

- What has been useful about the workshops so far?
- What has been least useful about the workshops so far?
- If you could change one thing about the 12-step workshops, what would it be and why?
- Did you find the breakout room activities/discussions engaging? What other types of activity would you like to see in these sections?

Series structure

- Did you find the structure of the programme helpful (12 workshops over 12 weeks) and why?
- Is there anything you would change about the structure of the individual workshops?
- Is there anything you would change about the structure of the programme as a whole?

Developing your researcher identity

- What aspects (if any) of writing and publishing an academic article do you feel confident about and why?
- What aspects (if any) of writing and publishing an academic article do you not feel confident about and why?
- Have you been working on your article alongside the workshops (i.e. has the progress of your article aligned with the workshop schedule) and did this impact how you engaged with workshop material?
- How do you see yourself in relation to your field (e.g. an outsider, part of it, EC, leading it) and why?

Peer work and peer feedback

- How are you finding the peer work?
- What was valuable about peer feedback?
- What was not valuable about peer feedback?
- How useful did you find the independent writing sessions at the end of each workshop and why?



Learners' thoughts!

- What can the university do to help you develop as a researcher? (Blue skies thinking!)



Appendix C: Participant fields

| Participants' field organised by frequency (descending from highest to lowest) |
|--|
| DProf TESOL |
| Divinity |
| Geography |
| International Relations |
| Sustainable Development |
| Psychology and Neuroscience |
| Computer Science |
| Geoscience |
| Chemistry |
| Theology |
| Astrophysics |
| Geology |
| Art History |
| Linguistics |
| Classical Studies |
| Medicine |
| Earth Sciences |
| School of Modern Languages |
| Marine Science |