STUDENTS WILL BE PROVIDED WITH LEARNING EXPERIENCES THAT DEVELOP GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES *which will allow them to participate effectively and productively in their courses and subsequent employment* |

The JCU Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy adopts nine Core Principles, each of which informs our commitment to high quality student learning and teaching experiences at James Cook University. The fourth core principle states 'students will be provided with learning experiences that develop graduate attributes' and accomplish JCU's intent of building a brighter future for life in the tropics world-wide (CP4). The policy also notes that the design and teaching of subjects and courses will be responsive to the needs of students so they will be given the opportunity to develop and extend academic skills, and gain adequate levels of communicative competence from their first year. This core principle is reiterated within the JCU English Language and Numeracy Policy (2012) to ensure the quality of JCU's programs and graduates (p.1). The focus of this exemplar is on the development of English language and numeracy proficiency of students within first year courses with low-retention or highly diverse cohorts of non-traditional students. This position aligns with the University's Statement of Strategic Intent (2012) which recognises the guiding principle that 'Students are at the heart of our University' (CP.1), and the First Year Experience Transition Initiative which states 'effective first year transition pedagogy is about helping commencing students to stay and succeed.'

Dr Andrea Lynch and Trudy Quantrill coordinate the Systematic Integrated Learning Adviser (SILA) model in Townsville and Cairns, respectively, and their scope of expertise within the model has informed this exemplar. SILA Coordinators provide a point of contact for embedded Learning Advisers (SILAs) to clarify issues relating to the SILA program such as partnership agreements, curriculum development, engagement activities, reporting requirements and requests for professional development. The Systematic Integrated Learning Adviser (SILA) model is an evidence-based, systematic approach in the provision of support for the development of academic literacy(ies) and numeracy to first year students in targeted courses with low-retention and a diverse demographic. The model provides a mechanism for the strategic deployment of SILAs to designated courses, in the provision of highly targeted activities to address students learning needs. The model, which is offered in partnership with School and Faculty staff, is retention and achievement focused in the provision 'integrated learning support'. In 2012, the SILA model was piloted within seven first year courses providing SILAs the opportunity to have direct contact with over 3000 students over the course of the study period. This was in contrast to the old model of learning support where a limited number of students would self-refer to the Learning Advice Corner.

BEST PRACTICE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND NUMERACY PROFICIENCY DEVELOPMENT

JCU welcomes an increasing number of commencing students from non-traditional backgrounds as well as increasing international student participation within its academic programs, and many of our students have English is an additional or second language. Students are therefore offered opportunities to succeed through engagement, reflection and commitment to learning. This practice is seated firmly in policy as evidenced in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy which states 'in all subjects a variety of resources, teaching methods and approaches to learning will be considered and adopted in recognition of the diversity of the student body' (CP.2). Furthermore, JCU students are expected to graduate with appropriate levels of English language and numeracy proficiency, developed in the context of their specialty discipline. This aim has formed the basis for the English Language and Numeracy Policy, and it is this notion of discipline-specific support embedded within core first year subjects that informs the SILA program.

The SILA model exemplifies an innovative approach for the implementation of best practice procedures outlined within the English Language and Numeracy Policy. The policy has been developed in response to JCU's continuing commitment to ensure the quality of its programs and graduates, and effectively demonstrates the University's commitment to meeting relevant legislative requirements in accordance with TEQSA Threshold Standards (DEEWR, 2010, p.2). JCU recognises that while some students will enter the university with high levels of general English language and numeracy proficiency, 'all students will need to acquire specific academic language and numeracy skills during their studies', and that 'the acquisition of these skills is part of improving English language and numeracy proficiency' (p.2). Students are therefore 'actively encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and numeracy development' by taking full advantage of learning resources which are offered, and by developing their own strategies as well as 'acting on feedback so that they continue to strengthen and extend their language proficiency to ensure the attainment of graduate attributes' (p.2).

At JCU, academic and professional staff share the responsibility for supporting students' development of English language skills. This is reflected within a set of good practice guidelines developed by Teaching and Learning Development (TLD) for Schools wishing to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of their students (Litnum Project). These guidelines have ensured an institution-wide commitment to improve academic language, literacy and numeracy at JCU, which includes giving students early feedback on their literacy and numeracy skills so that they can take action to improve their skills. The SILA model essentially brings together key stakeholders who share the responsibility for implementing best practice procedures in English language and numeracy development as outlined within the English Language and Numeracy Policy.

ENGAGEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS IN SUPPORT OF STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Acknowledged within the English Language and Numeracy Policy are the challenges surrounding English language proficiency in relation to the increasing internationalization of JCU's tri-city campuses, the widening participation agenda, and building capacity through higher education. The policy applies to all staff and all students undertaking preparatory, undergraduate and postgraduate courses (p.1), outlining the University's responsibility to ensure that all students develop key attributes including a level of English language proficiency that will allow them to participate effectively and productively in their courses and subsequent employment (p.2). The policy also sets out JCU's requirements for and expectations of students' English language and numeracy proficiency at enrolment, during their course of study and at graduation (p.1).

Faculties share the responsibility for making explicit to students and staff the importance of developing English language proficiency levels, specific to their discipline(s) in their courses, and with the support of the Head of School and Course Coordinators, Subject Coordinators are responsible for: ensuring the subject is delivered in compliance with relevant academic policies; that graduate attributes are appropriately embedded in the subject. And that students' success in courses and the identification of students who require support, is facilitated through engagement with Learning Advisers and other professionals.

Learning Advisers in Townsville and Cairns have a special interest in the first year experience of students. They work alongside Academic Developers (AD) within TLD in the development of key support materials to empower staff and

students to improve the overall student experience at JCU. In targeted courses within which SILAs are deployed, the support programs offered vary according to the discipline and are developed in collaboration with the Subject Coordinator. SILAs are embedded within these first-year subjects to address the academic language and numeracy support needs of individual students as well as whole cohorts, within the context of the discipline. An important aspect of the SILA model is the development of a collaborative partnership between Schools and TLD which is visible to students, fostering the idea that the support made available is a legitimate extension of the subject.

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS SUPPORT NEEDS

The English Language and Numeracy Policy describes a range of procedures for supporting students to develop English language proficiency (p.3–7). One such procedure involves a Post-Enrolment Language Assessment (PELA) to identify students' support needs (p.4). The PELA is a key component of the SILA model in the provision of discipline-specific academic support. It is designed to provide an initial measure of students' general written English proficiency, making it possible to determine the level of support needed within the cohort, as well as identify those students who may benefit from focused English language support. The PELA has been adapted into an online version in LearnJCU in order to assess students across campuses and modes within targeted courses, as well as external students and late enrolments. This means that students are not disadvantaged and are given an opportunity to be assessed and supported.

The PELA has no impact on students' grade in the course or subject, rather, it provides useful baseline data that can be used to track the progression of educational and quality assurance standards from first year to graduation in line with national threshold standards in higher education. The data can also be used as the basis for discussions between academics and TLD staff about embedding academic literacy into curricula, as well as providing a more comprehensive understanding of the specific language needs of the JCU students so services can be modified or developed to improve success and retention rates. For example, the PELA results in SP1, 2013 for the School of Business showed that most of the Band 3 students who were ranked as 'critically underprepared' had English as an Additional Language, and this evidence would then form the basis for an appropriate intervention strategy to support those students.
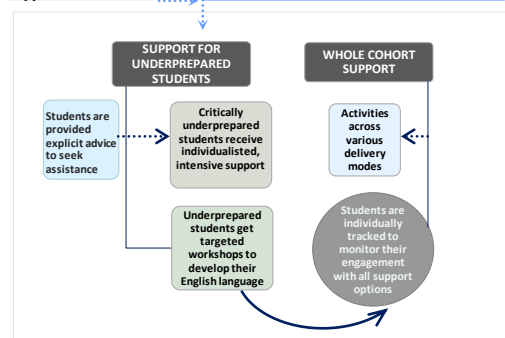

Diagram 1: *The SILA program anticipates that students will differ in the level of assistance they need to develop specific aspects of their English language proficiency, and therefore offer a two-pronged approach in the provision of support of discipline specific literacies and numeracies.*

FIVE STAGES OF SILA: AN ACTION RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The SILA model is a systematic approach to academic support that is based on an action research framework and involves five stages: broad inquiry, specific inquiry, intervention plan, English language/numeracy development and program evaluation. The program is formalised with SILA Agreements for each subject that outline the joint responsibilities of the academic and learning support staff in the provision of service. The Subject Coordinators agree to provide the SILAs with course and subject profile data, access to LearnJCU and Subject Outlines, provide time in lectures and tutorials for SILAs to administer diagnostic assessments and deliver targeted support, and also actively promote these activities to the cohort. In turn, the SILAs assist in the development of Subject Outlines and assessment tasks, assess students' English language and numeracy proficiency on entry, design and deliver discipline-specific activities to help develop these proficiency levels through assessment support, and provide a comprehensive evaluation of SILA activities for the evidence-based model. The SILA scope is post-enrolment beginning in week one of the study period, although the work undertaken by SILAs in the process of integrating and embedding support commences well before.

BROAD INQUIRY | Stage One begins twelve weeks prior to commencement of study period when Course and Subject Coordinators submit an expression of interest for SILA assistance to their Faculty Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning (ADTL). This process ensures that there is an actively collaborative approach to developing and implementing discipline-specific academic literacies and numeracy support. During this broad inquiry stage, the ADTLs review past course/subject performance reports and student profiles for the nominated subjects to check that they meet the threshold requirements for SILA support: challenges with retention rates and/or success rates or have a significant proportion of non-traditional students. The ADTL, Course Coordinator and/or Head of School then make recommendations on subjects proposed for SILA support based on the evidence, which ensures a strategic approach to SILA subject selection to maximise results from interventions.

The SILA Coordinators then allocate relevant subjects to the SILA staff based on expertise and strengths, then undertake a review of past course performance and subject feedback reports in addition to compiling student profile data to identify benchmarks for retention and achievement. Pre-semester SILA activities also include a collaborative review of subject outlines between Subject Coordinators, lecturers and SILA staff to ensure a shared understanding of subject outcomes, academic literacy/numeracy demands and assessment regime. During this expertise sharing about curriculum development, issues of constructive alignment, assessment articulation, rubric development and the consistency of assessment tasks across modes are discussed as well as compliance with JCU policies.

SPECIFIC INQUIRY | In stage two of the model, SILA staff undertake more focused inquiries in order to determine specific student needs to formulate support strategies. This stage involves a post-enrolment English language and/or numeracy assessment or an early, weighted assessment task to gauge proficiency levels. These measures allow the SILAs to construct student profiles with regards to literacy/numeracy proficiency levels and

identify underprepared and critically underprepared students in order to case manage and provide individualised support to this sub-group. Students in SILA subjects are required to complete a PELA/PENA by the second week of the study period, under exam type conditions of 20 minutes in duration. Most commonly, on-campus students complete a paper and pencil version during class, and external students or late enrolments complete an online version.

SILAs adopt a generic template to administer the PELA across the SILA subjects, and the written task is assessed according to a marking criteria developed by Barthel (2012), which is based on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) rankings. A universal question is used, rather than a discipline-specific question. The decision to use a generic question was based on the fact that some new students have performed poorly in the past when discipline-specific questions were posed because they had no discipline knowledge at that early stage and wasted time attempting to formulate a perceived right answer. The universal question also allows PELA results to be compared across the various course cohorts to construct profiles of performance across the institution to highlight where additional support resources are required.

In line with JCU assessment monitoring policies, the written task is double-marked for validity and reliability purposes by a Peer Adviser and the subject SILA; students are provided with a Band rating of 1, 2, or 3, an associated explanation and a suite of support recommendations. The higher the band, the greater the level of support needed to develop the proficiency required to succeed as an undergraduate student. Based on their PELA results, all students are emailed advising them of appropriate resources, and are invited to review their assessment. The PELA helps the student, the Subject Coordinator and SILAs understand the diverse learning needs of students'. The results make it possible to identify students who may benefit from focused support; to inform the development of targeted, whole cohort language support strategies, and to enable students to take control of their own learning (p.2) .

INTERVENTION PLAN | At this stage, an intervention plan is constructed in the form of a SILA Agreement. This formal agreement is developed collaboratively with the relevant Subject Coordinator, and outlines the roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders in the partnership, namely Learning Adviser, Subject Coordinators, Lecturers, Sessional Tutors and Peer Advisors. The contract is formalised by census date and details a schedule of agreed activities and resources to be developed from the pre-semester period through to post-semester. The agreement is based on the findings from the broad and specific inquiry stage of the model. This agreement also details issues relating to the promotion of SILA activities and communication permissions for targeted support, and also provides permission for Learning Advisers to have leader access and space within the LearnJCU environment for SILA subjects.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE/NUMERACY DEVELOPMENT | During the development stage, the SILA shareholders deliver the co-developed activities to develop academic literacies and/or numeracy for the whole cohort as well as target sub-groups. These activities include face-to-face as well as online targeted workshops, lecture and tutorial presentations, and also resource development for learning technologies as well as Peer Advisers. These Peer Advisers are recruited via Subject Coordinators and facilitate workshops designed by SILA staff, and help students unpack assessment tasks, produce work at the expected higher-education levels, improve submission rates, and develop discipline-specific learning communities.

SILAs anticipate that students will differ in the level of assistance they need to develop specific aspects of their English language proficiency (p.2). Band 2 students are deemed to be underprepared and Band 3 students are deemed to be critically underprepared. These latter students are provided with explicit advice about their need to seek assistance in order to develop the English language skills they will need to be successful in their undergraduate studies. The SILA program offers a two pronged approach in the provision of support with specific support directed to underprepared students as well as whole cohort support for the development of discipline specific literacies and numeracies.

Provision of specific support directed to underprepared students includes activities such as targeted workshops, individual consultations for students who falter in the PELA, fail an early assessment item, or are repeating a subject. In the SILA School of Business subject (BU1105), the Band 3 students are invited to have a one-on-one consultation with the SILA as a starting point, so that they can obtain detailed, diagnostic feedback about their PELA. These students are then tracked as they complete a series of discipline-focused online workshops and quizzes in LearnJCU, which are designed to improve their foundation understanding of English language. This is then followed by another series of individual consultations to review drafts for their first piece of written assessment to help consolidate their language skills. These consultations are also offered to external students, which are provided via phone, email or Collaborate, depending on the preference of the student. Whole cohort support for the development of discipline-specific literacies and numeracies includes: unpacking assessment criteria, modelling annotated exemplars, deconstructing relevant genres – coming to grips with academic language, recognising learning styles and preparing for exams. These activities are provided across the various delivery modes. Students are individually tracked to monitor their engagement with SILA support options, such as workshops, online resources and individual consultations, and these interactions are compared against PELA and assessment results to garner the success of the support program.

EVALUATION | At the end of semester, a review and evaluation of the SILA activities is undertaken in a process of continual improvement. This evaluation maps the PELA/PENA results of individual students against interim and overall results as well as engagement with SILA support activities and resources throughout the semester.

In 2013, there was an increase to nine degree courses participating in SILA across all four faculties at JCU. The SILA evaluation at the end of SP2, 2012 highlighted that the online learning environment was the preferred space for the delivery of SILA support, which informed the design of support activities in 2013. The evaluation process also highlighted the need for Learning Advisers to undertake additional travel at strategic times to present key lectures as well as more individualised support for underprepared students on the other campuses. The process also highlighted the need to review the training and use of Peer Advisers in certain courses, as the level of student engagement with these SILA activities was limited.

Future challenges to the model; the funding arrangements for the majority of Learning Advisers currently employed within SILA. This reliance on 'soft funding' could have serious consequences for the ongoing program and for the capacity of SILAs to provide data informed support strategies such as currently provided through a PELA/PENA.

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