Case Study

Implementing *English for Academic Studies*
Increase usage: Use of credits
KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Background

KTH is a highly prestigious Institute of Technology in Sweden. Its Swedish students generally follow a five-year Bachelor plus Master programme. Education at Bachelor's level is primarily conducted in Swedish, and the Master's level is delivered in English. Many international students join Swedish students at Master's level. International students were originally seen as the main target audience for the *English for Academic Studies* course, but now many Swedish students are taking it as well. Both groups need to develop their academic writing in English, even though generally the basic level of English is higher among Swedish students than international students. International students also need help adjusting to a new academic environment.

Challenges

Courses in language and communication at KTH are elective and study programmes are composed of required courses with very little room for electives. The university has recently imposed a credit ceiling preventing students from taking extra courses beyond the number of credits necessary for their degree.

An additional challenge is that departments are compensated according to how many credits they produce, and language courses receive half as much money per credit as those in science and technology. In this context, it has been important to provide cost-effective and efficient courses.

> *I feel that things I have learnt have been useful to me since my master's programme is in English and all the reports that I am writing in my courses are in English.*
> *I am also sure that the things I'm learning in this course can help me while writing reports in Swedish as well, since a lot of the material in this course is there to help to improve academic language in general, not just academic English. I also like the assignments and the fact that we upload many of them in discussion forums. It is interesting to see other students' thoughts and opinions since it can help me to develop my own thoughts and see things from different perspectives.*

Fanny Boström, Student, KTH Royal Institute of Technology

Objectives

- KTH's main reasons for taking part in the course development stage (2012-15) were to explore digital learning possibilities, as well as potentially providing a cost-effective alternative to the pre-sessional English courses already available.

- A mid-term objective (2016-17) was to create and offer a course worth fewer credits, so that it could be squeezed under the credit ceiling imposed by the university. In that way, the university was able to accommodate Swedish students who felt a need to focus on their English as they approached or began the final stages of their English-language programmes.

- A long-term goal is to create a course that is even more tailored to the needs of our Swedish engineering students.

Implementation

Blended version

A 7.5 ECTS, blended version of the course was made available in academic year 2015/16 and autumn 2016. The course was promoted along with other language courses. It attracted a modest number of applicants (no more than about 30 over three terms), equally divided between Swedish and international students. It also probably took students away from our other English courses, which were not reaching full enrolment. Because of low enrolment, this version of the course is no longer available, even though student evaluations were positive.

Six class meetings took place, one for each *English for Academic Studies* sub-course. Students prepared the course material before class and had to write responses to four selected questions delivered in the discussion forum on the VLE. The main objective of the class meetings was to provide the opportunity to work on oral skills that cannot be practised effectively online. In groups of three, students took turns answering questions inspired by the course material. The questions were presented with audio and visual signals, prompting the students when it was time to yield the turn to another group member, with the purpose of ensuring that even naturally quiet group members contributed to the discussion. Another idea behind the presentation was that it could, if necessary, be scaled up for use in a lecture hall with many students.

A longer writing assignment on a technical topic of their choice was also added to the course. At the end of each class session, students completed a paper version of the course quiz, which was then corrected in class. Like all KTH's language courses, the course was graded as a pass or fail.

Online-only version

In 2016/17 a 3 ECTS, online-only version of the course was launched, and promoted directly to KTH's programme directors. Since there were no class meetings, there were no scheduling clashes with the students' required courses, nor the burden of travelling to the central KTH campus from any of our peripheral campuses.

The online version of the course had assignments with deadlines for each sub-course. A tutor awarded points for and provided written feedback on assignments, and students had to complete all assignments and achieve a certain number of points to pass the course. As in the blended course, the assignments included posting in the discussion forums and taking the course quiz. Students also had to complete one activity of their own choosing for each sub-course.

Students evaluated the course both by a mid-term, non-anonymous required response in a discussion forum, and by the standard anonymous procedure at the end of the course.
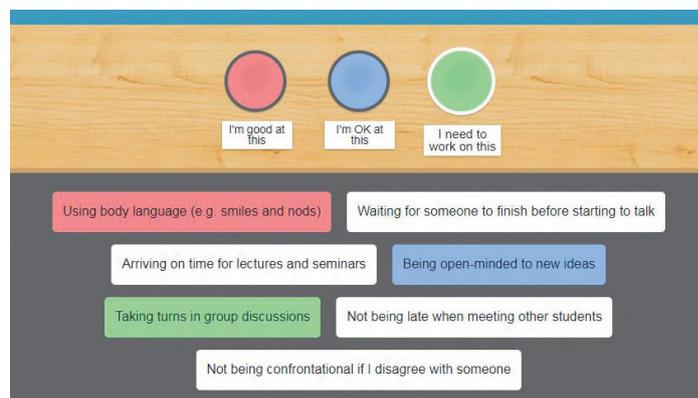
Results

The online-only course enrolment immediately exceeded expectations (175 registrants over two terms), probably due to the fact that with only 3 credits, there was space for it in the students' programmes, and study counsellors could promote it.

The mid-term evaluations were enormously positive. Students highly appreciated being able to work on the course material when and where they wanted and at their own pace, and found most of the course content relevant and useful. Some did comment that the quiz questions were too easy.

If enrolment increases in the upcoming academic year, it will be a sign that the word of mouth message about the course is positive and that the course is providing value to the students. It will also be interesting to see whether students log in again to the course after they have completed it.

In autumn 2017 there was a marked increase in the number of students signing up for classroom-based English courses, and it will be interesting to see if any of them were previous *English for Academic Studies* students whose eyes have been opened to the value of studying an English course alongside their mandatory courses.