

Evaluating the Skills Hub at Somerville College

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Executive Summary

This evaluation of Somerville College's Skills Hub demonstrates how student-centred academic support addresses critical development needs within Oxford's demanding academic environment. Conducted April-June 2025, the mixed-methods study gathered perspectives from 65 students (survey), one student adviser (co-analysis), and 17 academic staff through a participatory approach that positioned students as evaluation partners.

Key Findings

1. The Academic Confidence Paradox

Students report high general academic confidence (88%) but struggle translating this into specific task execution—only 48% feel confident in self-motivation, and 77% in managing study requirements. This reveals a critical support gap between intellectual capability and practical academic skills.

2. Academic Writing as Universal Priority

Academic writing emerged consistently across all data sources as the primary development need:

- 82% of staff identify it as their top priority for student support
- Student workshops revealed writing as central to confidence development
- 31% of students engage with academic workshops (second-highest usage)

One student articulated: **"Poor academic writing foundations from school... don't know how to plan... difficult to write concisely and with structure."**

3. Career Guidance and One-to-One Support Impact

Career support shows highest engagement (35% attend careers events) with transformative impacts from personalised guidance. Students particularly value the one-to-one sessions for their tailored approach to individual challenges.

4. Differential Support Experience

Students feel significantly more supported by Somerville (79%) than the University (63%), creating both opportunity and challenge for college-based provision.

This evaluation represents a **collaborative achievement**, demonstrating the commitment of Somerville's students, Skills Hub staff, and academic community to understanding and enhancing academic development support. The participatory approach—with students serving as co-evaluators rather than research subjects—has generated insights that traditional assessments might miss, while the remarkable convergence across multiple data streams validates both the Skills Hub's current impact and opportunities for growth. As part of the university-wide Academic Skills Development project, this evaluation contributes evidence-based understanding of how college-level support can address both immediate student needs and longer-term capability building. The dedication shown by all participants—from the 65 survey respondents to the Theory of Change workshop contributors, from engaged academic staff to the Skills Hub Coordinator—reflects Somerville's distinctive culture of collaborative excellence. This evaluation process itself models the kind of reflective, evidence-informed practice that characterises effective academic support in contemporary higher education.

Introduction

Academic skills development represents a critical challenge for higher education institutions committed to both excellence and inclusion. Within Oxford's collegiate system, Skills Hubs serve as vital bridges between students' intellectual capabilities and the specific competencies required for academic success.

This evaluation, commissioned as part of the university-wide Academic Skills Development (ASD) project, examines how Somerville's Skills Hub creates impact through its distinctive approach to student support. The research questions focus on:

- 1. How does academic skills support translate into student confidence and capability?**
- 2. What role does personalised support play in student academic development?**
- 3. How can skills provision address both immediate and long-term student needs?**

The Skills Hub at Somerville offers diverse services including academic workshops, one-to-one consultations, career guidance, and study skills support. Operating within the college's commitment to inclusive excellence, it aims to ensure all students can develop the capabilities needed to thrive academically and prepare for impactful careers.

Methodology

The evaluation employed an innovative mixed-methods approach designed to capture authentic student experience while generating actionable insights. Building on preliminary survey findings from April 2025, the study evolved through iterative stakeholder engagement and collaborative analysis.

Phase 1: Quantitative Foundation (April 2025) Survey of 65 students using the validated Academic Skills Questionnaire (ASQ), measuring academic self-efficacy, cognitive/metacognitive strategies, and belonging. Initial analysis revealed the "confidence paradox"—high general confidence (88%) but lower task-specific confidence, particularly in self-motivation (48%).

Phase 2: Student Voice Integration (May 2025) Theory of Change workshops where students collaboratively identified challenges, needs, and pathways for development. This participatory approach positioned students as experts in their own learning experience, with MSC-informed preparation ensuring grounded contributions.

Phase 3: Multi-Stakeholder Validation (June 2025) Staff survey (n=17) examining academic priorities and support integration opportunities. Results provided striking validation of student-identified needs while revealing institutional tensions.

Phase 4: Collaborative Sense-Making Student adviser served as co-analyst, providing what evaluation methodologists term "collaborative sense-making"—bridging quantitative patterns with lived experience insights. This validation process

functioned as analytical discovery tool, surfacing systemic explanations that single-method approaches would miss.

Methodological Strength Through Triangulation The convergence of evidence across multiple independent data streams provides robust validation. As the student adviser noted: **"The survey findings align closely with the challenges discussed in the workshop... almost every complaint I raised on behalf of a student during my time as JCR academic officer stemmed from unclear academic expectations."**

The Confidence Translation Challenge: Quantitative Patterns

The Academic Skills Questionnaire revealed a striking pattern in how students experience their own capabilities, illuminating both strengths and vulnerabilities that shape their engagement with academic support.

Academic Self-Efficacy: The Gradient of Confidence

Students demonstrated remarkably high confidence in their general academic abilities, with 88% agreeing they have the academic ability to do well at university. This strong foundation included 31% strongly agreeing—the highest proportion of strong agreement across all self-efficacy measures. However, confidence decreased markedly when moving to specific academic tasks.

Exam performance confidence stood at 82%, still robust but showing the beginning of what we term the "confidence gradient." When asked about managing the level of study required, only 77% expressed confidence, with the proportion of neutral responses jumping to 20%—suggesting uncertainty rather than outright doubt about their capabilities.

The pattern becomes clearer when examining response distributions. While virtually no students strongly disagreed with any self-efficacy statement, the proportion expressing uncertainty grew with task specificity. This suggests students recognise their intellectual capability but question their preparedness for Oxford's specific academic demands.

Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies: Skills in Practice

The ASQ's examination of specific academic skills revealed further nuances in student capabilities. Cognitive strategies—the direct skills used in academic work—showed relatively strong confidence levels. Written expression garnered 72% positive responses, while verbal communication reached 77%. However, identifying important information when studying dropped to 66%, the lowest cognitive skill confidence measured.

Metacognitive strategies—how students monitor and direct their own learning—revealed the evaluation's most concerning findings. While 87% of students felt confident they understand concepts being taught (the highest confidence measure in the entire survey), their ability to translate this understanding into self-directed learning showed dramatic drops. Time management confidence stood at only 62%,

while self-motivation—the ability to maintain momentum without external pressure—reached just 48%.

This metacognitive gap represents more than statistical variance; it illuminates a fundamental challenge in student development. Students understand what they're learning but struggle with how to learn independently. As one workshop participant articulated: **"Being self-taught in a lot of areas, lots of trial and error."**

Belonging and Support: The College-University Divide

The survey revealed consistent patterns in how students experience belonging and support within Oxford's dual structure. Across all measures, students reported stronger connection to Somerville College than to the wider university—a pattern with important implications for Skills Hub positioning.

Belonging measures showed relatively small but consistent gaps: 89% felt they belonged at college versus 85% at university, while 90% made the right decision in choosing Somerville compared to 87% for choosing university. These high absolute levels mask more significant differences in support perceptions.

The support gap proved more substantial: 79% felt supported by their college compared to only 63% by the university—a 16 percentage point difference. This differential creates both opportunity and challenge for the Skills Hub. Positioned within the college structure, it benefits from stronger student connection but may inadvertently reinforce the college-centric orientation that could limit student awareness of university-wide resources.

Skills Hub Engagement: Patterns and Barriers

The evaluation revealed a bimodal engagement pattern that reflects both success and untapped potential in current Skills Hub provision.

Usage Patterns: From Non-Users to Power Users

Overall, 51% of respondents had used at least one Skills Hub service—a moderate engagement level that leaves substantial room for growth. However, among those who do engage, usage patterns suggest high satisfaction and perceived value. Of engaged students, 34% had used three or more different types of services, indicating deep engagement with multiple aspects of academic development support.

Career-focused services dominated usage statistics, with 35% attending careers events and 25% seeking internship or funding advice. This career orientation might initially seem to diverge from academic skills focus, but student voices revealed deeper connections. As workshop participants explained, career planning helps contextualise academic skill development, answering the "why" behind the sometimes arduous work of capability building.

Academic workshops and seminars attracted 31% of students—the second-highest engagement category. This substantial participation validates the academic writing priority identified across all stakeholder groups. Study skills support (23%) and one-

to-one sessions (18%) showed lower absolute numbers but often represented more intensive engagement with transformative impact.

Barriers to Engagement: Time, Awareness, and Confidence

Understanding why 49% of students don't engage with any Skills Hub services proves crucial for future development. Academic time pressures emerged as the primary barrier, cited by 26% of respondents. This finding gains additional weight when contextualised with the metacognitive findings—students struggling with time management may paradoxically lack time to access time management support.

Schedule conflicts (14%) represented a related but distinct challenge, particularly given Oxford's intense term-time academic schedule. Students reported that Skills Hub sessions often clash with tutorials, lectures, or labs, forcing choices between immediate academic obligations and longer-term skill development.

Awareness barriers affected 8% of students, suggesting communication improvements could yield quick gains. However, the qualitative data revealed awareness involves more than simple knowledge of service existence. Students need to understand how specific offerings connect to their particular challenges—a nuanced communication challenge requiring targeted messaging.

Perhaps most concerning, 11% of students indicated they hadn't participated because they didn't think they needed support. Given the confidence paradox revealed in the ASQ data—high general confidence masking specific skill gaps—this suggests some students may not recognise their own development needs until academic crisis points.

Student Voice Through Theory of Change: Collaborative Pathways

The Theory of Change workshop represented a methodological innovation, transforming individual experiences into collective wisdom about academic development pathways. Eight students spent 90 minutes constructing logic models that connected current challenges through potential interventions to desired outcomes.

The Five Pathways: Student-Designed Solutions

Students organised their experiences into five interconnected pathways, each addressing a crucial aspect of academic development:

Pathway 1: Feedback and Expectations emerged from widespread frustration with inconsistent and unclear academic standards. Students articulated challenges including **"Difficult to know what is expected when expectations vary"** and **"Understanding feedback is hard."** Their proposed solutions centred on transparency: creating banks of example essays with tutor feedback, developing clear rubrics, and offering sessions on feedback interpretation.

Pathway 2: Academic Writing and Skills addressed what students identified as foundational gaps. **"Poor academic writing foundations from school"** connected

to **"Don't know how to plan"** and difficulty developing arguments. Students envisioned comprehensive support including drop-in writing clinics, peer mentoring systems, and structured workshops progressing from basic planning through advanced argumentation.

Pathway 3: Time Management reflected the quantitative finding of low self-motivation confidence. Students described **"overwhelming workload"** and struggling with prioritisation, proposing practical solutions including planning templates, peer discussion groups about workload strategies, and regular check-ins to maintain accountability without dependence.

Pathway 4: Confidence and Self-Efficacy addressed the psychological dimensions of academic development. Students identified being **"Not confident enough to ask questions"** and finding it **"Hard to admit you are struggling."** Their solutions emphasised peer support, normalising help-seeking, and creating "brave spaces" for academic vulnerability.

Pathway 5: Study Environment recognised physical space as crucial for academic success. Limited access to suitable study spaces affected concentration and productivity, with students proposing both immediate solutions (better communication about available spaces) and longer-term infrastructure development.

From Problems to Vision: The Transformation Logic

The students' Theory of Change revealed sophisticated understanding of how academic development occurs. They mapped short-term outcomes (improved planning skills, increased help-seeking), through medium-term changes (better self-reflection, reduced anxiety), to long-term transformation (academic independence, career readiness).

Particularly insightful was their recognition that academic skills development involves both technical capability and affective change. Improved writing skills reduce anxiety, which increases willingness to take academic risks, which improves learning outcomes—a virtuous cycle requiring support at multiple levels.

Staff Perspectives: External Validation and Institutional Context

The staff survey provided crucial external validation of student-identified needs while revealing important contextual factors shaping Skills Hub effectiveness.

Overwhelming Agreement on Priorities

The alignment between staff and student perspectives on academic writing proved remarkable. With 82% of staff identifying academic writing as students' most critical need, this represents the strongest consensus across any evaluation measure. Staff elaborated with concerning observations: **"General writing skills have deteriorated... students less capable of essays which sustain structured argument"** and noticing **"significant decline in how much text/scholarship students can read in a week."**

Time management and self-motivation, identified by 71% of staff as critical needs, provided direct validation of the metacognitive gaps revealed in student data. Staff recognised this as particularly challenging post-COVID, with one tutor noting students **"want and expect a lot more 'hand holding'"** while simultaneously needing to develop independence.

Critical thinking and analysis (47% of staff) ranked third, though staff observations suggested this connects more to confidence than capability. Students demonstrate intellectual ability but hesitate to engage authentically with challenging ideas—a pattern consistent with the confidence paradox identified in quantitative data.

The Skills Hub in Academic Ecosystem

Despite identifying clear student needs, staff engagement with Skills Hub remained limited. While 82% viewed it as complementary to tutorial teaching (47% "very well," 35% "somewhat"), actual collaboration remained rare. Only two staff members reported direct collaboration, though six had referred students.

The visibility gap proved particularly striking: 35% of staff felt unable to judge Skills Hub effectiveness due to limited feedback about student progress. This occurred despite 47% expressing interest in closer collaboration, suggesting systemic rather than attitudinal barriers. As one Fellow reflected: **"I'm extremely grateful that [Skills Hub] exists. Without the Skills Hub I expect the vast majority of the support provided would fall to tutors who already face a mammoth workload."**

Post-COVID Academic Skills Context

Staff observations provided crucial context for understanding current student needs, with 47% reporting declining academic skills since the pandemic. These changes manifest in specific ways that validate student-identified challenges:

"Students have become less independent and self-reliant... more likely to require prescriptive instruction" reflects the confidence translation challenge identified in student data. Another tutor observed students are **"less capable of essays which sustain structured argument,"** directly supporting the academic writing priority.

The pandemic's educational disruption created gaps that current students work to address. As one staff member noted: **"The intensity of Oxford academic work combined with other pressures may be overwhelming students' capacity for skill development."** This systemic understanding helps frame Skills Hub support not as remediation but as necessary scaffolding for capable students navigating unprecedented challenges.

Validation Through Collaborative Analysis

The student adviser's role as co-analyst provided crucial validation that strengthened the evaluation's methodological rigour. Drawing on her dual perspective as both student experience expert and former JCR Academic Officer, she identified systemic patterns underlying the quantitative findings.

Her central insight connected multiple data points to a root cause: **"This is a wider issue of unknown expectations, and hard-to-find boundaries with academic staff. I think the survey findings align closely with this challenge... I would interpret the relatively low confidence in identifying important information when studying (66%) as being the result of unclear academic expectations."**

This validation gained additional weight through institutional experience: **"Even though departmental guidelines are set, they are often disregarded by individual tutors... almost every complaint I raised on behalf of a student during my time as JCR academic officer stemmed from this in some way."**

The collaborative sense-making process revealed how the confidence gap, writing challenges, and support-seeking barriers all connect to this fundamental issue of academic expectations. This systemic understanding, impossible to derive from any single data source, demonstrates the methodological value of participatory evaluation approaches that position students as analytical partners rather than research subjects.

Triangulated Insights: Convergence and Creative Tensions

The convergence of evidence across three independent data streams creates a robust understanding of Skills Hub effectiveness and development opportunities.

Areas of Remarkable Alignment

Academic Writing as Universal Priority: The 82% staff identification, student Theory of Change emphasis, and 31% workshop participation rates represent unprecedented stakeholder alignment. This convergence suggests not just agreement but shared understanding of the challenge's nature and potential solutions.

The Confidence-Capability Gap: All data streams recognised that students possess intellectual ability but struggle with specific academic tasks. The quantitative gradient from 88% general confidence to 48% self-motivation confidence finds validation in staff observations about independence and student-designed pathways emphasising confidence building.

Support Integration Needs: Students, staff, and the adviser all identified disconnection between tutorial teaching and Skills Hub support as limiting effectiveness. This suggests opportunity for enhanced collaboration that respects both domains while creating more seamless student experience.

Productive Tensions

Several areas revealed differing perspectives that illuminate rather than undermine understanding:

Voluntary vs. Mandatory Support: Staff preferences for required workshops contrast with student emphasis on voluntary engagement and "psychological safety."

This tension reflects different theories about how independence develops—through structure or through choice.

Problem Severity Assessment: Staff perceive more serious skills deficits than students self-report, possibly reflecting different benchmarks or student optimism about their capabilities. This gap suggests need for calibrated communication that acknowledges capability while addressing development needs.

Individual vs. Systemic Solutions: While students often frame challenges individually ("**I need to manage time better**"), the adviser's analysis revealed systemic issues around academic expectations. This suggests solutions must address both individual skill development and institutional clarity.

Potential Pathways Forward

The convergent evidence from students, staff, and collaborative analysis illuminates potential pathways for Skills Hub development that honour both immediate needs and long-term aspirations. These pathways emerge not as prescriptive mandates but as organic extensions of current strengths, designed to address the confidence translation challenge while building on successful foundations.

Immediate Priorities: Strengthening Core Academic Foundations

The overwhelming consensus on academic writing as primary development need suggests immediate focus on comprehensive writing support infrastructure. This involves creating the student-requested "bank of example essays with tutor feedback" that demystifies academic expectations while providing concrete models for success. Drop-in writing clinics should expand beyond current capacity, potentially incorporating peer mentors who can share recent success strategies. As staff noted, students need support not just with technical writing skills but with understanding "**what good looks like**" in their specific disciplines.

The confidence translation interventions require particular sensitivity, bridging the gap between students' recognised intellectual capability and their uncertainty about specific academic tasks. This means developing workshops that explicitly connect general academic confidence to specific skill application, using scaffolded approaches that build from existing strengths. Time management support must acknowledge the post-COVID context where, as staff observe, students "**want and expect more hand holding**" while still needing to develop independence.

Medium-term Development: Integration Without Intrusion

The staff survey reveals strong support for Skills Hub services (82% see it as complementary to tutorial teaching) alongside a critical visibility gap (35% unable to judge effectiveness). This suggests opportunity for enhanced integration that respects both tutorial autonomy and Skills Hub expertise. Rather than mandating collaboration, voluntary pilot programs could demonstrate value through concrete outcomes, building trust and understanding between support systems.

The student adviser's validation highlights how unclear academic expectations underlie many student challenges, suggesting need for collaborative work on expectation-setting across the college. This might involve Skills Hub and tutorial staff jointly developing discipline-specific guides that clarify standards while maintaining academic freedom. Regular "learning conversations" between Skills Hub and departments could surface emerging needs while sharing successful support strategies.

Personalised support expansion requires careful balance between increased capacity and maintained quality. The transformative impact of one-to-one sessions, validated across all data streams, suggests this format deserves protection even as demand grows. Online consultation options and peer mentoring can supplement but not replace the **"go-to person"** students seek for navigating uncertainty.

Long-term Vision: Holistic Development for Future Impact

The evaluation reveals Skills Hub's potential to contribute to a distinctive Somerville approach to student development—one that integrates academic excellence with personal growth and career preparation. This vision sees academic skills not as remedial support but as enhancement of existing capabilities, preparing students for the **"impactful careers"** identified in their Theory of Change.

Creating alumni mentorship networks could extend Skills Hub impact beyond graduation, with recent graduates sharing both academic strategies and career pathways. This addresses the high engagement with career services (35%) while maintaining focus on academic development as foundation for professional success.

The participatory evaluation approach itself suggests a model for ongoing development—regular student-led reviews ensuring services evolve with changing needs rather than crystallising around historical patterns. This positions Skills Hub as learning organisation, modelling the reflective practice it seeks to develop in students.

Conclusion

This evaluation demonstrates that effective academic support requires attention to both technical skill development and affective dimensions including confidence, belonging, and help-seeking behaviours. Somerville's Skills Hub successfully addresses many student needs while revealing opportunities for enhanced provision that could serve as model for collegiate academic support.

The methodological innovation of this evaluation—positioning students as co-designers and validators rather than passive subjects—yielded insights that traditional assessment approaches would miss. The remarkable convergence across three independent data streams (student survey, collaborative Theory of Change, staff survey) provides robust validation of key findings. When 82% of staff identify academic writing as priority, students design it as core pathway, and 31% actively engage with writing workshops, the alignment suggests genuine shared understanding rather than imposed interpretation.

The participatory approach revealed systemic issues, particularly around academic expectations, that explain surface-level symptoms. As the student adviser's validation demonstrated, many apparent skill deficits connect to unclear expectations rather than capability gaps. This understanding reframes Skills Hub work from remediation to translation—helping capable students decode academic conventions while building confidence to engage authentically with intellectual challenges.

Moving forward, the Skills Hub can build on its strong foundation by addressing the confidence translation challenge through targeted interventions that connect general capability to specific skills. The demand for expanded one-to-one support reflects its transformative impact, while the need for better communication about available services suggests untapped potential among the 49% of non-engaged students.

The evaluation also reveals productive tensions—between staff desire for mandatory support and student preference for voluntary engagement, between independence development and scaffolding needs, between college-centric identity and university-wide resources. These tensions, rather than problems to solve, represent creative spaces for innovation in academic support design.

Through continued partnership between students, staff, and institutional leadership, the Skills Hub can enhance its contribution to academic excellence that is both rigorous and inclusive. The evaluation process itself, demonstrating the value of student expertise in understanding their own development, offers a model for ongoing institutional learning. In positioning students as partners in both evaluation and enhancement, Somerville creates conditions for academic support that truly serves those it seeks to develop—capable students navigating complex academic challenges while preparing for impactful futures.

Appendices

A. Methodological Details

Survey Design and Sample

- **Total respondents:** 65 students (approximately 17% of student population)
- **Instrument:** Validated TASO Academic Skills Questionnaire (ASQ) plus college-specific items
- **Distribution:** Undergraduate Years 1-4 and Postgraduate Taught students
- **Academic divisions:** MPLS (20%), Humanities (17%), Social Sciences (6%), Medical Sciences (5%)
- **Demographic diversity:** 37% state school, 25% international, 12% socio-economically disadvantaged, 11% additional support needs

Theory of Change Workshops

- **Duration:** 90-minute collaborative sessions via MS Teams
- **Participants:** 8 students with diverse Skills Hub engagement experience

- **Method:** MSC-informed preparatory reflection followed by collaborative logic model development
- **Documentation:** Digital whiteboard capture and screen recording for transparency

Staff Survey

- **Respondents:** 17 academic staff across disciplines
- **Response rate:** 85% of those invited
- **Focus areas:** Student academic needs, Skills Hub awareness, collaboration opportunities

B. Academic Self-Efficacy and Skills Data (ASQ Results)

Figure 1: Academic Self-Efficacy - Confidence Gap Between General and Specific Abilities

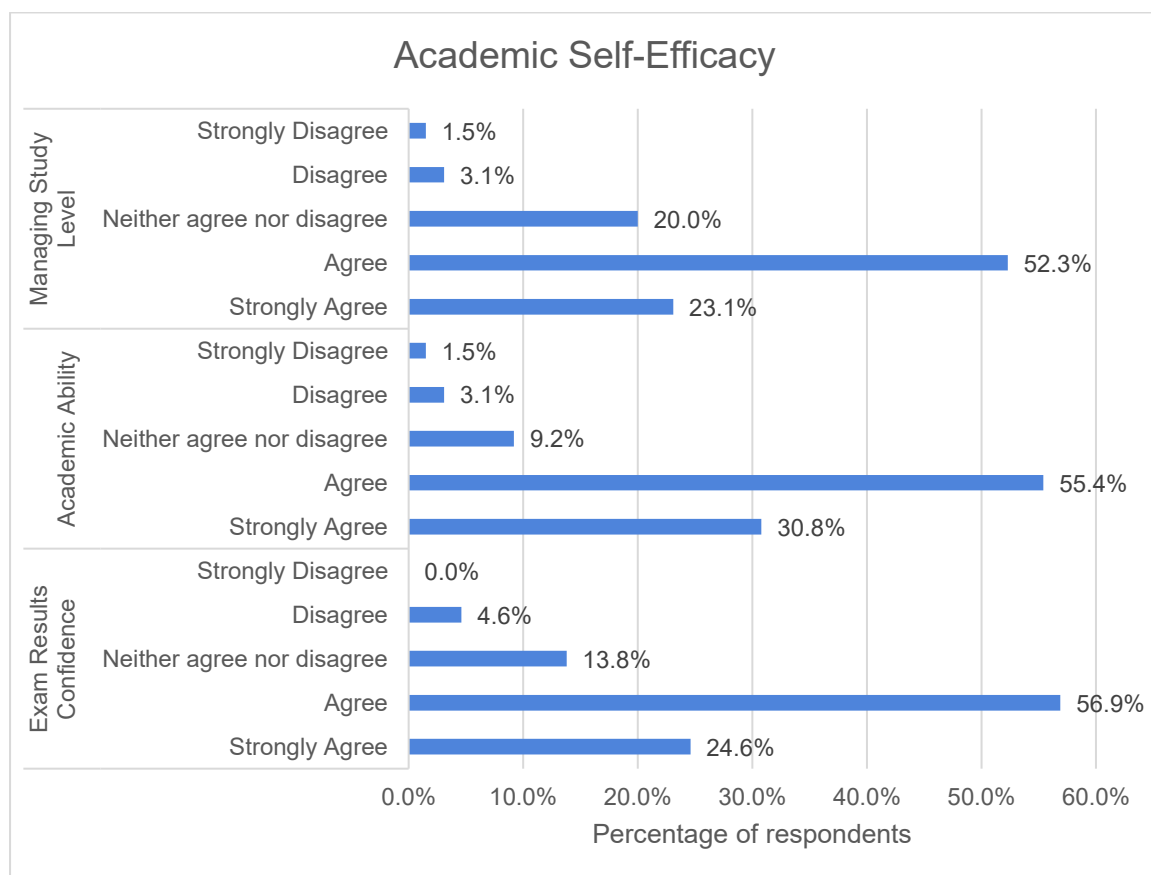
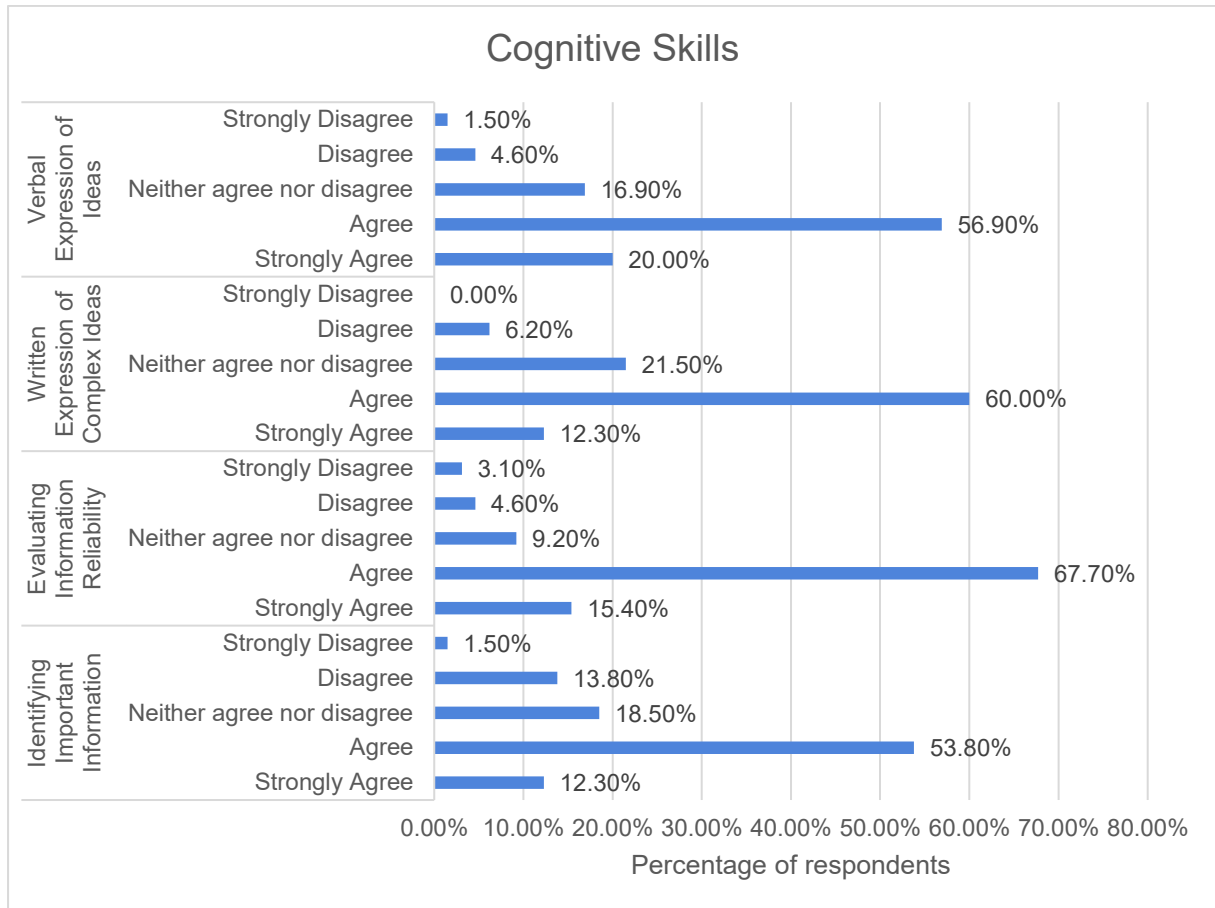


Figure 2: Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies



Meta-Cognitive Skills

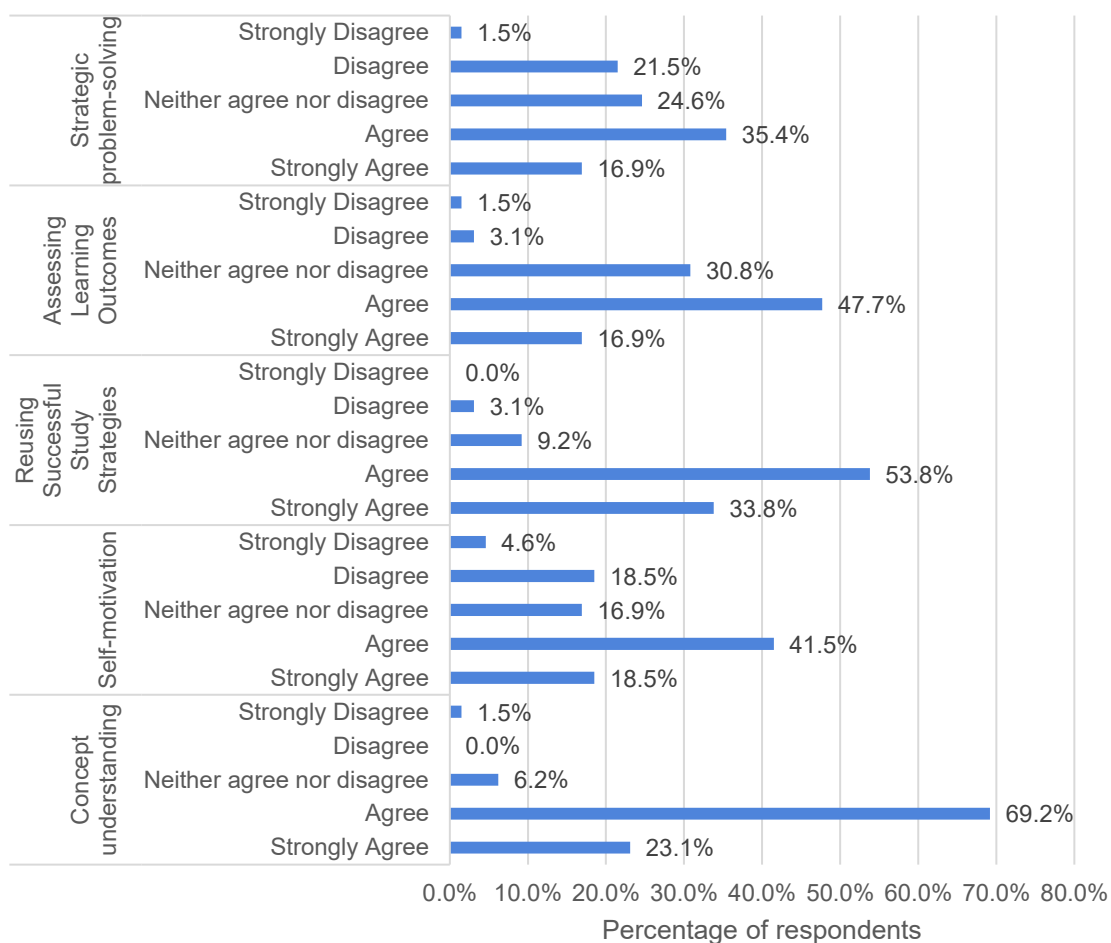
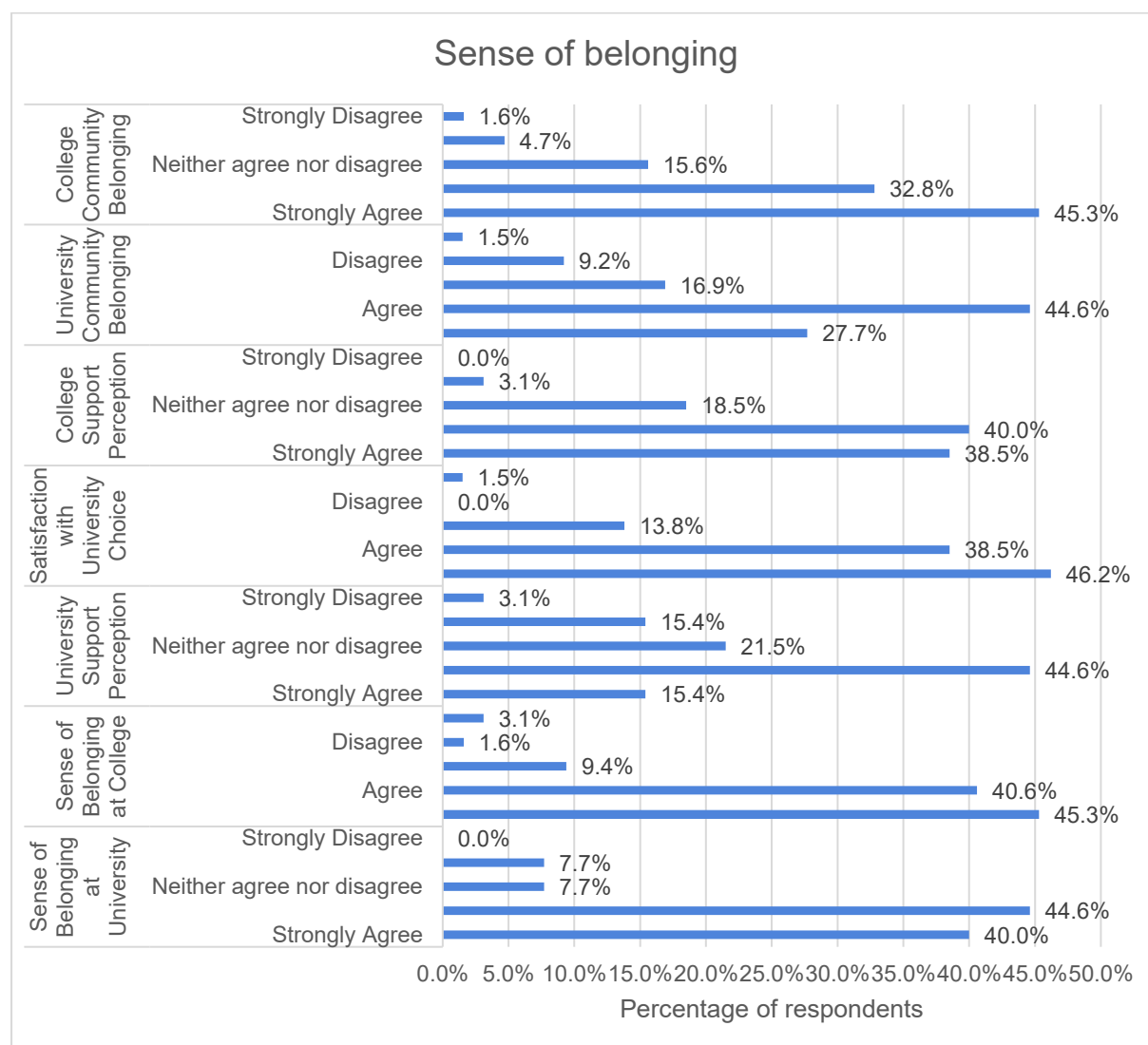


Figure 3: Belonging and Support - College vs University Gap



C. Skills Hub Engagement Patterns

Service Utilisation Breakdown:

- Career events: 35%
- Academic workshops/seminars: 31%
- Internship/funding advice: 25%
- Study skills support: 23%
- One-to-one sessions: 18%
- Non-engagement: 49%

Engagement Depth Among Users:

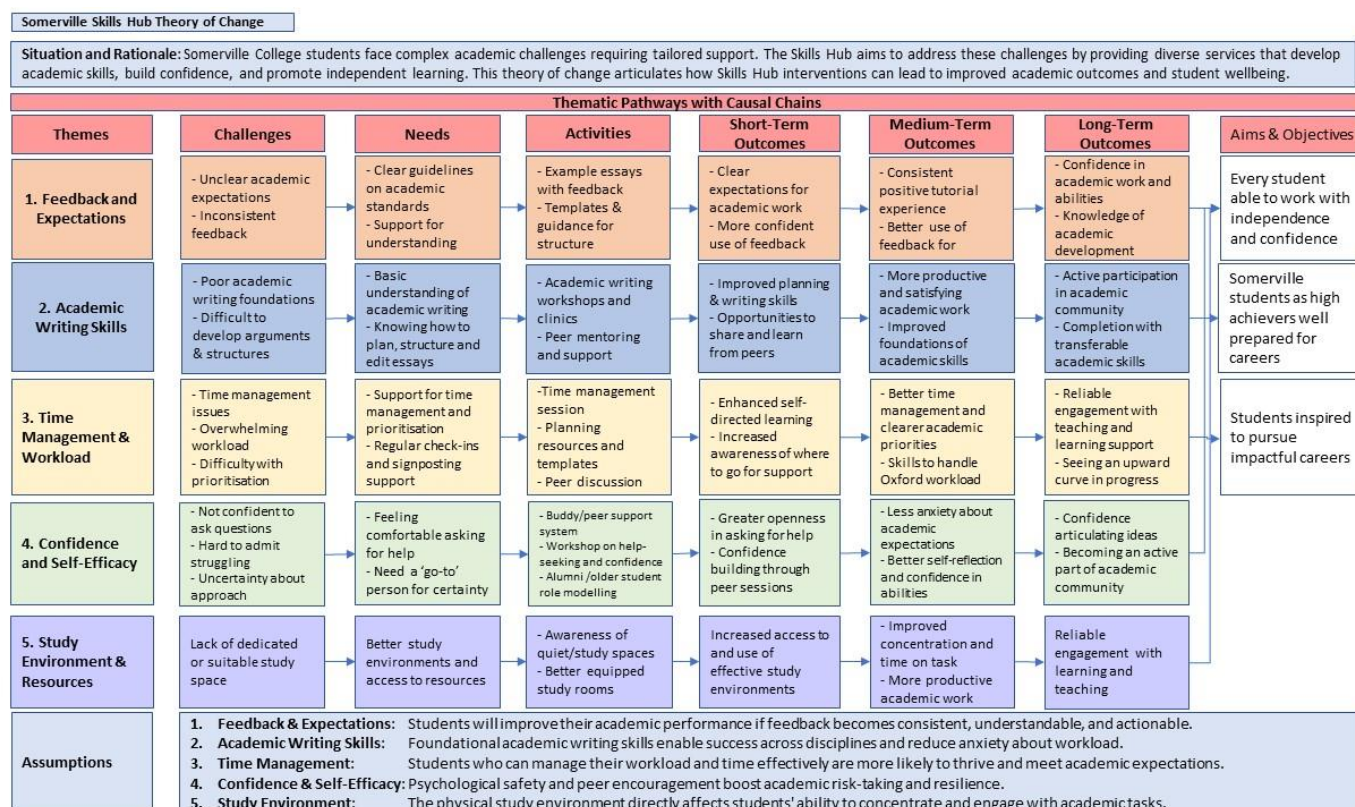
- Single service use: 35%
- Two services: 31%
- Three or more services: 34%

Barriers to Engagement:

- Academic time pressures: 26%
- Schedule conflicts: 14%
- Unaware of services: 8%
- Prefer self-directed learning: 6%

D. Theory of Change Visual Framework

Figure 4: Student-Designed Theory of Change for Skills Hub Development



The Theory of Change demonstrates how student-identified challenges connect through Skills Hub activities to short, medium, and long-term outcomes, ultimately supporting the aims of developing independent, confident learners prepared for impactful careers.

E. Convergent Evidence Summary

Academic Writing Priority Alignment:

- Staff identifying as top priority: 82%
- Student Theory of Change emphasis: Primary pathway
- Workshop participation rate: 31%

Confidence Translation Challenge Evidence:

- Quantitative gap: 11 percentage points (88% general vs 77% specific)

- Student articulation: "Need to feel confident approaching work the right way"
- Staff observation: 71% identify time management/self-motivation as critical need

Support Integration Opportunities:

- Staff interest in collaboration: 47%
- Staff unable to judge effectiveness: 35%
- Direct Skills Hub-staff collaboration: 2 instances only

F. Key Student Voices from Theory of Change Workshop

On Feedback Challenges:

- "Understanding feedback is hard"
- "You don't get much feedback during term time"
- "Feedback is too generic"
- "Difficult to know what is expected when expectations vary"

On Academic Writing Needs:

- "Poor academic writing foundations from school"
- "Don't know how to plan"
- "Difficult to write concisely and with structure"
- "Not sure how to develop your own argument"

On Support Seeking:

- "Hard to ask for help or admit you are struggling"
- "Need a 'go-to' person who helps with questions/uncertainty"
- "Not confident enough to ask questions"

On Self-Direction:

- "Being self-taught in a lot of areas, lots of trial and error"
- "Being your own academic coach"
- "Time management issues with overwhelming workload"

G. Validation Process and Methodological Strength

Triangulation Across Data Sources:

1. **Student Survey (n=65):** Quantitative patterns revealing confidence gaps and engagement patterns
2. **Theory of Change Workshop (n=8):** Student-generated pathways from challenges to outcomes
3. **Staff Survey (n=17):** External validation of student-identified priorities

4. **Student Adviser Analysis:** Systemic interpretation connecting surface patterns to root causes

Validation Checkpoints:

- Student workshop participants verified Theory of Change accuracy
- Staff priorities independently confirmed student-identified needs (82% writing, 71% time management)
- Student adviser connected disparate findings to academic expectations issue
- Convergent evidence across methods strengthens confidence in findings

Participatory Evaluation Innovation: This evaluation demonstrates how positioning students as co-evaluators rather than subjects:

- Surfaces systemic explanations invisible to external observation
- Validates findings through multiple perspective integration
- Creates actionable insights grounded in lived experience
- Models the collaborative learning Skills Hub seeks to foster

Limitations and Reflexivity:

- Sample sizes, while robust for qualitative insight, limit statistical generalisation
- Self-selection bias may over-represent engaged students
- Single college focus provides depth but limits wider applicability
- Temporal snapshot captures current moment but not longitudinal change

Despite limitations, the methodological rigour through triangulation, member checking, and collaborative analysis provides confidence in core findings and recommendations.