

Evaluating Academic Support and Development at Trinity College

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Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Dimensions of Academic Experience: Self-Efficacy, Learning Strategies, and College Belonging	7
Student Voices: Analysing Transformative Academic Support Experiences	13
Bridging Methods: Integrating Survey and Narrative Insights	17
Conclusion	22
Appendices	25

Executive Summary

This impact study presents findings from a mixed-methods evaluation of academic skills development at Trinity College, Oxford, conducted in Hilary Term 2024. The research combined survey responses from 61 students with insights gathered through <u>Most</u> <u>Significant Change (MSC)</u> methodology involving eight in-depth interviews. This study forms part of the Centre for Teaching and Learning's broader investigation into effective <u>academic skills development</u> across Oxford's collegiate university.

Key findings reveal:

1. Academic Skills and Confidence Interrelationship

- Survey data revealed a notable gap between general academic confidence (88.5% positive) and task-specific confidence (67.2% for exams)
- Student narratives, particularly Student 3's journey to mastering essay structure, illustrated how targeted support bridges this gap through transforming both technical skills and academic identity
- As one peer reviewer noted: "Most students mentioned both tangible advice they received and general confidence improvements—a valuable by-product of seeking specific skills support"

2. College-University Dynamic

- Stronger connection to college (75.4% feeling part of community) than university (62.3%), with the lowest ratings for university support (37.7%)
- MSC narratives revealed how college-based support creates safe spaces for development while also serving as potential bridges to university-wide resources



• Student 6's experience with inconsistent support plan implementation highlighted challenges in coordination between college and university systems

3. Complementary Support Networks

- Survey data showed 68.2% of students who accessed ASDL services also sought tutor advice, suggesting complementary rather than redundant support
- The ASDL identified a distinct role: "I benefit from there being distinct streams in college: subject tutors challenge students while I provide a more nurturing role"
- Student 8's narrative demonstrated how ASDL support complemented tutorial teaching by providing "the necessary structure to engage with ideas"

4. Critical Transition Points

- MSC narratives highlighted particular vulnerability during key academic transitions (entering university, returning from year abroad, approaching finals)
- Student 4's powerful account of return-from-abroad challenges ("daunting" and "terrifying") revealed how transition periods create both vulnerability and opportunities for intervention
- Peer reviewers suggested targeted "reintegration schemes for students that have been abroad" based on these experiences

5. Support Integration and Accessibility

- Both survey data and narratives highlighted the importance of flexible support systems that can adapt to diverse learning needs and circumstances
- Student experiences revealed varying levels of accessibility across different support services, with challenges for students with specific learning needs
- The survey finding of varied confidence in metacognitive strategies (95% for concept understanding but only 47.5% for self-motivation) was illuminated by student narratives describing how personalised support helped address individual learning approaches
- MSC stories emphasised the value of support that recognises and accommodates different learning styles while maintaining academic rigour

The study demonstrates the effectiveness of Trinity's academic support while highlighting opportunities for enhancement through better integration of different support services, more targeted support during academic transitions, enhanced support for diverse learning needs, and clearer communication about available support.

This study contributes to understanding effective academic skills development within Oxford's collegiate system while suggesting directions for future service development and research.



Introduction

This study examines academic skills development and support at Trinity College, Oxford through an integrated research approach that prioritises student voice and experience. Conducted in 2024 as part of the Centre for Teaching and Learning's broader investigation into effective <u>academic skills development</u> across Oxford's collegiate university, the study brings together multiple forms of evidence to create a rich understanding of how students engage with and benefit from academic support.

The research addresses a fundamental question in higher education:

How do students experience and engage with academic skills development within a collegiate university setting?

By examining Trinity College's approach to academic skills support, particularly through its Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL) provision, this study contributes to understanding how different forms of academic support can effectively complement tutorial teaching and enhance students' academic development.

Our mixed-methods approach recognises that academic skills development encompasses both measurable outcomes and deeply personal learning journeys. Rather than treating different forms of evidence as separate streams, we examine how they interact and inform each other, creating new insights through their intersection. This approach allows us to understand not just what works, but how and why certain support mechanisms prove effective for different students in varying contexts.

Key research questions include:

- 1. How do students engage with different forms of academic support within the college setting?
- 2. What characterises effective academic skills development from students' perspectives?
- 3. How do college-based academic support services complement broader university provision?
- 4. What factors enable or constrain students' engagement with academic skills development?

Throughout, we prioritise student perspectives and experiences, recognising that effective academic support must be responsive to students' diverse needs and learning journeys.

Context and Background at Trinity College

Academic skills development in higher education has gained increasing attention as institutions seek to support all students in achieving their academic potential. Rather than viewing academic skills as remedial support, contemporary approaches recognise them as fundamental to student success across all academic levels and disciplines.

The collegiate context of Oxford University presents both unique opportunities and challenges for academic skills development. Colleges provide learning communities where students can access personalised support, bridging subject-specific tutorial teaching and broader academic development. Trinity College's approach, particularly through the



provision of an Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL), demonstrates how colleges can create integrated support systems that complement tutorial teaching while addressing broader academic development needs.

This study forms part of a larger Centre for Teaching and Learning project examining effective academic skills provision across the collegiate university. The evaluation framework draws on theoretical approaches that understand academic skills development as both a technical and sociocultural process. This framework recognises that successful academic development involves not only acquiring specific skills but also developing academic confidence and disciplinary identity. A fuller theoretical framework for evaluating academic skills development is currently being developed through consultation with stakeholders across the university (as of February 2025).

Methodology

This study employs an integrated approach to understanding academic skills development at Trinity College, bringing together multiple forms of evidence to create a rich picture of student experience and support effectiveness.

Study Design

The research conducted during Hilary Term 2024 combined survey responses from 61 students (out of 370 total college population) with in-depth interviews using Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology (n=8). This design allowed us to examine both broader patterns of engagement and detailed personal narratives of academic development.

The complex nature of academic skills development demands multiple investigative approaches. While quantitative data can reveal patterns of engagement and self-reported confidence across the student population, qualitative insights are essential for understanding how students experience and integrate different forms of academic support. The combination allows us to not only identify what works but understand why and how it works in the collegiate context.

The survey provides systematic data about student engagement with academic support, self-efficacy, cognitive strategies, metacognitive approaches, and sense of belonging. Meanwhile, the Most Significant Change methodology captures rich narratives of individual learning journeys, allowing students to identify and analyse meaningful developments in their academic capabilities.

Integration Points

The study design incorporates several key integration points between methods:

- Survey findings informed the development of MSC interview prompts
- MSC narratives help explain patterns identified in survey data



- Quantitative measures of academic support participation and confidence levels provide important context for understanding individual student narratives, situating their experiences within broader institutional patterns
- Student reflections on peer stories complement survey responses about academic support preferences
- Both methods contribute to understanding barriers and enablers to engagement

Timeline and Sequence

The research followed a concurrent design with both quantitative and qualitative data collection occurring during Hilary Term 2024:

- 1. Survey distribution (Weeks 1-3)
- 2. Initial survey analysis (Week 4)
- 3. MSC interviews (Weeks 4-6)
- 4. Story collection and peer review (Weeks 6-7)
- 5. Integration of findings (Weeks 7-8)

This concurrent timing facilitated ongoing dialogue between different forms of evidence, with insights from each stream informing our understanding of the other. This approach aligns with emerging theoretical frameworks that examine how different forms of data interact to create new understandings, rather than treating them as separate streams of evidence.

Sample and Survey Approach

The survey was distributed to all Trinity College students in Hilary Term 2024, reaching 330 undergraduate students across all years and 40 postgraduate taught students. The survey received 61 completed responses, representing 16.5% of Trinity's student population. While we acknowledge the limitations of percentage reporting with our sample size (n=61, representing 16.5% of Trinity's student population), these proportional representations allow us to identify meaningful patterns and relative differences between different dimensions of academic experience. The consistent patterns across multiple measures strengthen our confidence in these comparative findings.

The survey's design and implementation benefited from active collaboration with college stakeholders. The JCR representative provided valuable input during question development and piloting, and both the JCR and Senior Tutor supported the survey's distribution.

The survey utilised validated question sets from the Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) <u>Academic Skills Questionnaire (ASQ)</u>, examining four key areas:

- 1. Academic self-efficacy measuring students' confidence in their academic abilities and skills
- 2. Cognitive strategies assessing approaches to academic tasks and learning
- 3. Metacognitive strategies examining how students monitor and direct their learning
- 4. Sense of belonging evaluating connection to college and university communities



Additionally, college-specific questions explored engagement with the Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL) and other forms of academic support.(Detailed analysis approach and statistical methods are provided in Appendix A)



Dimensions of Academic Experience: Self-Efficacy, Learning Strategies, and College Belonging

Analysis of student responses reveals complex relationships between academic confidence, learning strategies, and engagement with support services at Trinity College. Several significant patterns emerge across these dimensions, providing insight into how students develop and access academic support.



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

Academic confidence shows notable variation between general and specific capabilities. While students express high overall academic self-efficacy (88.5% feeling confident in their general academic ability), this confidence decreases markedly for specific tasks such as examinations (67.2%). This 21.3 percentage point gap suggests that students may need particular support in translating general academic capability into confidence with specific academic challenges.

Three key patterns emerged in students' academic self-efficacy:

- 1. Highest confidence in general academic ability (88.5% positive)
- 2. Moderate confidence in managing study requirements (70.5% positive)
- 3. Lower confidence in specific exam performance (67.2% positive)

This pattern suggests that while students generally feel academically capable, they experience more uncertainty when facing specific academic challenges like examinations.



The absence of strong disagreement across any measure indicates that even students who struggle maintain some level of academic self-belief.



Cognitive Strategies: Stronger Communication Than Information Processing Skills

Students feel most confident in their ability to communicate ideas (both written and verbal) but less confident in their information processing skills, particularly in discriminating important information during study. This pattern may reflect pedagogical approaches at both college and university levels that emphasise communication outputs over information evaluation processes. The finding suggests an opportunity to enhance teaching strategies that develop critical information literacy alongside communication skills—helping students navigate the challenge of determining what information matters most within their disciplines. This creates a clear hierarchy in perceived capabilities:

- 1. Written expression (75.4% positive)
- 2. Verbal expression (72.1% positive)
- 3. Information reliability assessment (67.2% positive)
- 4. Important information identification (60.6% positive)

The relatively high proportions of neutral responses in information processing areas suggest that many students might be receptive to developing these skills further. Nearly 40% of students expressed uncertainty or difficulty with identifying key information while studying, highlighting a potential area for targeted support.





Metacognitive Strategies: Strong Awareness but Weaker Self-Regulation

Analysis of students' metacognitive approaches reveals a stark contrast between their awareness of learning and their ability to regulate learning behaviours. Students demonstrate exceptionally high confidence in their ability to recognise when they've understood concepts (95%) and to apply study methods that have previously proved successful (93.4%)—indicating strong metacognitive knowledge. However, this confidence drops significantly when asked about their ability to manage their learning process—the self-regulation aspects of metacognition. This pattern suggests that while students possess strong awareness of what they know and what strategies work, they struggle with the executive function components of implementing these strategies consistently. However, this confidence decreases markedly for more complex aspects of learning management:

- 70.5% feel confident in assessing learning outcomes
- 59% report confidence in strategic problem-solving
- Only 47.5% express confidence in self-motivation, the lowest confidence level across all measured metacognitive strategies

The gap between recognising understanding and maintaining motivation is particularly noteworthy, indicating that metacognitive awareness alone doesn't necessarily translate into effective self-regulated learning. Students may know when they've understood something but still struggle with the executive aspects of learning - staying motivated, trying new approaches when faced with difficulties, and systematically working through



challenging material. These findings merit further exploration, particularly regarding how academic workload expectations, term structures, and competing demands may influence students' motivational resources. As several MSC narratives suggested, the intensive nature of the Oxford term combined with high performance expectations can create significant motivational challenges even for academically confident students. Student 11's description of struggling to maintain motivation until reaching "crisis point" illustrates how workload perceptions can impact self-regulation strategies.



Sense of Belonging: Strong College Connection, Weaker University Integration

Analysis of student responses reveals a consistent and significant differential between college and university experiences. Students report notably stronger connections to their college community (75.4% feeling part of the community) compared to their sense of belonging within the broader university (62.3%). This 13.1 percentage point gap suggests that the college environment provides a more immediately accessible and personally meaningful context for student engagement.



A clear hierarchical pattern emerges in students' institutional connections, revealing a graduated decline from highest satisfaction with college choice to lowest perception of university support:

- 1. College Choice Satisfaction (90.1%)
- 2. University Choice Satisfaction (83.6%)
- 3. College Community Integration (75.4%)
- 4. College Support (65.6%)
- 5. General University Belonging (62.3%)
- 6. University Support (37.7%)

This graduated pattern is particularly significant as it demonstrates how students' sense of connection systematically weakens as they move from immediate college environment to broader university structures. The steep drop between satisfaction with institutional choices and perceptions of support (24.5 percentage points for college, 45.9 percentage points for university) suggests a disconnect between students' initial expectations and their lived experience of institutional support. This hierarchical relationship helps explain why college-based academic support often serves as a critical foundation for students' academic development within the collegiate university system.

College-Specific Academic Support Engagement

Analysis of support engagement shows varying levels of uptake across different services:

- Advice from tutors: 49 students (80.3%)
- 1:1 sessions with ASDL: 17 students (27.9%)
- Workshops: 6 students (9.8%)
- Drop-in hours: 6 students (9.8%)

The dominance of tutor advice suggests this remains the primary form of academic support, while the ASDL services show significant but lower engagement levels. Among the 22 students who indicated using ASDL services, 15 attended two or more sessions, suggesting they found value in the service that warranted return visits.

Particularly noteworthy is the substantial overlap between ASDL engagement and tutorial support - 15 of the 22 students who accessed ASDL services (68.2%) also actively sought advice from their tutors. Rather than suggesting redundancy, this pattern indicates students are able to effectively combine different types of support to meet their academic needs.

Barriers to Support Engagement

Analysis of open-ended survey responses and MSC narratives reveals multiple layers of challenges in accessing academic support:

1. Practical concerns:

- Time management challenges, as illustrated by Student 8 who noted: "I simply couldn't find time between tutorials and lectures to book another appointment."
- Communication difficulties in articulating needs, with 23% of survey respondents mentioning uncertainty about how to express their academic challenges



 Initial scepticism about potential value, reflected in Student 11's experience of avoiding help-seeking until "reaching crisis point"

2. Structural issues:

- Variable awareness of available services, with 31% of survey respondents indicating they were unsure about what support was available
- Opportunities for enhanced support during key transition points, as reflected in Student 4's experience returning from year abroad—a period they described as "terrifying" and where additional targeted support could be particularly valuable
- Potential for streamlined access processes, with Student 3 suggesting that "a button, easier access" could encourage more students to benefit from the valuable services already available

These interrelated barriers suggest that enhancing access to academic support requires addressing both immediate practical concerns and offers opportunities to engage with broader structural issues in how services are organised and communicated.

Synthesis of Interconnected Patterns

The survey data reveals several key intersecting themes that shape how students experience and utilise academic support:

- 1. **The College-University Dynamic**: Students show a clear preference for college-based support, with college-based services often facilitating access to broader university resources. This complementarity appears particularly effective when support services maintain distinct but coordinated roles.
- 2. **Confidence and Support-Seeking**: Rather than finding an inverse relationship where lower confidence drives support-seeking, the data shows that students with higher academic confidence often engage more actively with multiple forms of support. This suggests support services function not merely as remedial resources but as enhancement opportunities.
- 3. **Engagement Patterns**: Students who establish early engagement patterns are more likely to maintain consistent support utilisation throughout their academic journey, highlighting the importance of early intervention and clear pathways to support.

These intersecting themes point to a complex support ecosystem where college-based services, academic confidence, and engagement patterns interact to shape students' academic development. Understanding these interactions proves crucial for developing more effective and integrated support systems.

(For detailed statistical breakdowns of individual questions, see Appendix B)



Student Voices: Analysing Transformative Academic Support Experiences

The qualitative component of this study employed the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology to capture transformative academic support experiences at Trinity College. This participatory approach involved collecting and systematically selecting stories of significant change from student participants, analysing these stories through multiple organisational levels to understand impact.

At its core, MSC asks participants to respond to a simple but profound question: "Looking back over your experiences with the Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL), what do you think was the **most significant change** that occurred in your academic development?" The process then involves systematic selection of these stories by different stakeholder groups, who discuss and reach consensus on which changes they consider most significant.

For this study, eight students from diverse academic backgrounds participated in in-depth interviews about their experiences with academic skills development. Their stories were then analysed by peer reviewers (the same eight students read each other's stories) and supplemented with insights from the ASDL. Through this peer review process, students selected **Student 3's narrative about "Mastering Logical Essay Structure"** as illustrating particularly impactful academic development. As one peer reviewer noted: 'The student seemed to have greatly improved by using the models given by ASDL and, in comparison to many of the other stories, has described fewer personal difficulties which the ASDL could not help with. The nature of their benefits - essay writing - is very important academically and also in regard to confidence.'

Student 3's Narrative: Mastering Logical Essay Structure

Student's Approved Summary:

The most significant change the student reports from their one-on-one session with the Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL) was learning how to structure essays logically, which "genuinely changed the essays after." The ASDL "explained the questions I should ask myself; this changed the whole logic; she made me understand."

The student brought tutor feedback to the session indicating "ideas [are] great, but not the way you express yourself." Reviewing this with the ASDL gave the student a "general understanding" of "how [an] idea works; how it works for [...] literature." The key insight was that "every sentence has a role to play in the development of the argument," whether in essays or exams. The student learned to use "linear progression" where the "First line [presents] what I claim; then line, have to be careful; use to link evidence directly." The student now chooses the "best evidence" to "match the questions" and discusses "features," "the effect of both," then "linking to [the] conclusion." The ASDL emphasised "every sentence has to have a purpose, not just [to] make my argument," a lesson driven home by "Feedback from tutors about more descriptive paragraphs where I don't do this."



Mastering this "model" has been a game changer for the student's academic confidence. Whereas before "I wasn't sure I could explain myself in a clear way," the student reports "I understand the model now; it is now fine, [though it] takes a long time to incorporate this model." The student's "ability to express myself better" has measurably improved thanks to the ASDL's support.

The student characterises one-on-one sessions with the ASDL as "genuinely the most beneficial help you get," far surpassing general classes that "[were] not targeted, [rather a] general outline [which] does not address your specific problems. Jennie targets this specifically." Access to such personalised support makes the student "feel like part of a larger institution" beyond just Trinity College.

The main barrier was that it "took so long" to figure out how to book a session with the ASDL. The student suggests "there should be a button, easier access to make sure students do use" the service fully, as currently "We don't go to see her due to this organisation."

To further integrate, the student proposes incorporating a "five or ten minutes" check-in with the ASDL into termly meetings with subject tutors "to check up on [your] subject, this could be done with Jennie, could take five or ten minutes; small questions could be addressed."

Overall, the student has found the ASDL's "model worked very well" even though it "Took a long time to embed." In essays where the student applies the techniques learned, "I see change." The student feels confident that "if I have any problem I could return" to the ASDL for further support building on this foundation.

Key Themes from Student Narratives

Analysis of all MSC narratives, anchored by Student 3's exemplary story, revealed five key themes in how students experience and benefit from academic skills development:

1. Technical Skill Development with Increased Academic Confidence

Student 3's narrative demonstrates how targeted technical support can transform academic capabilities while simultaneously building confidence. Their progression from struggling with essay structure to developing what they described as "a clear framework where every sentence has a role to play" exemplifies effective skills development. As one peer reviewer noted: "Most if not all students mentioned both tangible advice/tips they got but also general confidence. This was interesting as confidence was probably a by-product rather than what students initially sought from the ASDL, yet almost all reported this same benefit."

This intertwining of skill development with growing academic confidence appeared consistently across narratives. Student 3's experience of moving from "feeling lost in my own arguments" to "knowing exactly why each paragraph needs to be where it is" illustrates this connection vividly. Their journey from uncertainty to mastery demonstrated what one peer reviewer called "the transformative potential of really understanding the 'why' behind academic conventions."



2. Critical Academic Transitions and Support Timing

Several narratives highlighted particular vulnerability during academic transitions, with Student 4's experience returning from year abroad providing a powerful example: feeling a sense of "displacement" and finding the prospect of re-entering Oxford academics "daunting" and "terrifying." This led to peer suggestions for "reintegration schemes for students that have been abroad as being launched back into my final year is quite a daunting prospect."

Other critical transition points emerged across narratives - Student 2 described the challenging shift from school to university expectations, while Student 7 highlighted particular pressures approaching finals. These stories collectively emphasised how transition periods create both vulnerability and opportunities for effective intervention.

3. Support Mechanisms and Accessibility Challenges

Students consistently emphasised the value of individualised support, with Student 3's experience exemplifying the benefits of one-on-one guidance. As observed in peer feedback: "The one-on-one sessions allow for the most tailored feedback opportunity. Also, as students speak of confidence improvements, one-on-one spaces provide judgment-free zones for asking fundamental questions about academic work."

However, students also identified barriers to accessing support. Time management emerged as a significant challenge, with students struggling to balance academic commitments with support engagement. Communication presented another crucial barrier - some students reported difficulty in articulating their needs or understanding how services could help them. Initial scepticism about potential value also appeared to deter some students from seeking help, particularly before they had direct experience with the services.

4. Neurodiversity and Institutional Support Integration

The MSC narratives revealed complex experiences of neurodivergent students navigating multiple support systems. Student 6's story provided particularly crucial insights, highlighting both the potential and limitations of current academic support structures for neurodivergent students.

Student 6's experience illuminated fundamental challenges in institutional understanding of neurodiversity: "colleges don't understand me and my brain," elaborating how wellintentioned interventions were "often more to my detriment." Their story revealed a critical gap between support availability and support effectiveness, particularly highlighting how inconsistent application of Student Support Plans created additional challenges: "tutors 'need to be a lot more consistent' in following Student Support Plans, rather than the current approach 'where each tutor does their own thing.'"

However, they also described the ASDL as "one of few staff who understand my disability," explaining that the ASDL approach "worked because it started from understanding how my brain works, not from trying to make me work like everyone else."



5. Complementary Relationship with Tutorial Teaching

Students described complex relationships between different forms of academic support, with several narratives highlighting how ASDL support complemented tutorial teaching. Student 8's story particularly illuminated this dynamic, demonstrating what one peer reviewer called "the ASDL's ability to complement the tutor's engaging with 'ideas' with the necessary structure to engage with these ideas."

This complementarity appeared differently across subject areas. While Student 3's experience focused on essay structure in humanities, Student 9 described how ASDL support helped them "translate mathematical understanding into clear written explanations" for their science tutorials. These experiences highlighted the value of support that bridges subject-specific knowledge and general academic skills.

ASDL's Pedagogical Approach

The ASDL's detailed response to these narratives provided valuable context about the pedagogical approach employed at Trinity College. Central to the ASDL's methodology is connecting skills development to deeper understanding: "I endeavour to ensure any advice I provide is always connected to the 'why', providing the students the reason for doing these things." This approach aims to develop independent learners rather than creating dependency on support.

The ASDL identified a distinct supportive role complementing tutorial teaching: "I benefit from there being distinct streams in college: subject tutors will talk to them in one way and must by necessity challenge them... and I can slot into that as a more nurturing role."

While increased confidence wasn't an explicit goal, the ASDL noted it emerged as a positive unintended outcome of the individualised support approach. The emphasis on helping students become "genre analysts" in their fields proved particularly effective in building both skills and confidence.

Broader Implications from Student-Identified Significant Changes

These MSC narratives directly address the project's core questions about effective academic skills interventions by revealing:

- 1. **Support Discovery and Access**: Students identified significant changes in how they discovered and accessed support, with informal networks often facilitating access. As one peer reviewer noted: "sharing these stories more widely... might be a great way to show other students that are struggling in silence where they can get help."
- 2. **Evolving Value Perceptions**: Initially seeking help with specific challenges, students discovered broader benefits beyond their initial expectations.
- 3. **Development of Self-Directed Learning**: Stories revealed transformation from passive to active learning approaches. Student 12's shift from seeing reading lists as "a checklist" to "a thinking activity" exemplifies this metacognitive development.



- 4. **Complex Pathways to Specialised Support**: While some found effective support, others identified systemic gaps, suggesting need for clearer signposting of specialist resources, particularly for neurodivergent students.
- 5. **Integration with Academic Journey**: Stories highlighted critical transition points (year abroad returns, exam periods) where support proved particularly valuable.

Student voices particularly emphasised the transformative potential of well-designed academic support while identifying areas for development in institutional provision. Their stories suggest effective interventions must balance structured support with flexibility to meet diverse student needs.

Bridging Methods: Integrating Survey and Narrative Insights

The combination of survey data with in-depth MSC narratives provides a rich, multidimensional understanding of academic skills development at Trinity College. This integration reveals both key convergences and illuminating differences that help us understand how academic support functions within the collegiate environment. By examining where these methods reinforce, complement, or challenge each other, we gain deeper insight into effective academic skills development.

Key Convergences: Where Survey Data and Narratives Align

1. Confidence-Capability Gap and Its Bridging

Survey data revealed a notable gap between general academic confidence (88.5%) and taskspecific confidence (67.2% for exams). This 21.3 percentage point difference might have remained an abstract statistical finding without the MSC narratives that illuminated how this gap manifests in students' lived experience.

Student 3's journey from general academic capability to mastery of specific essay writing skills provides a powerful illustration of how this gap can be bridged through targeted support. Their narrative described moving from "ideas [are] great, but not the way you express yourself" to developing a clear framework where "every sentence has a role to play in the development of the argument." This progression demonstrates precisely how targeted academic support can help translate general academic ability into specific technical competencies.

Other narratives reinforced this pattern from different disciplinary perspectives. Student 9's experience in sciences and Student 8's development of strategic reading approaches demonstrated that the confidence-capability gap crosses disciplinary boundaries, though it manifests differently in different academic contexts.



2. College-University Support Divide

The quantitative data showed stronger connection to college (75.4% feeling part of the community) compared to university-wide belonging (62.3%). This college-centric pattern could be interpreted in multiple ways, but MSC narratives provided crucial context for understanding its implications for academic support.

Student 6's experience with inconsistent support plan implementation across college and university contexts highlighted structural challenges in current integration. Their observation that "tutors 'need to be a lot more consistent' in following Student Support Plans, rather than the current approach 'where each tutor does their own thing'" reveals how the college-university divide can create practical challenges for students navigating support systems.

However, other narratives demonstrated how college-based support can create pathways to broader university resources. Student 3's reflection that personalised ASDL support makes them "feel like part of a larger institution" beyond just Trinity College suggests that well-implemented college support can actually enhance university-wide integration.

3. Support Integration and Complementarity

Survey data showed interesting patterns of multiple support engagement, with 68.2% of students who accessed ASDL services also actively seeking tutor advice. The MSC narratives explained this pattern, revealing that students view different support types as complementary rather than redundant.

Student 8's story particularly illuminated this dynamic, demonstrating what one peer reviewer called "the ASDL's ability to complement the tutor's engaging with 'ideas' with the necessary structure to engage with these ideas." This complementarity appeared across subject areas, with narratives revealing how ASDL support helps bridge subject-specific knowledge (typically from tutorials) and general academic skills development.

The ASDL's own reflection reinforced this finding: "I benefit from there being distinct streams in college: subject tutors will talk to them in one way and must by necessity challenge them... and I can slot into that as a more nurturing role."

Complementary Insights: How Methods Enhance Each Other

1. Critical Transition Points and Support Timing

The survey data showed varying levels of support engagement across different services and identified time constraints as a barrier to access. However, the MSC narratives revealed why timing matters so critically, highlighting particular vulnerability during key academic transitions.

Student 4's powerful description of return-from-abroad challenges, Student 2's account of school-to-university transition, and Student 7's experience approaching finals collectively demonstrated how major academic transitions create both vulnerability and opportunities



for intervention. These stories suggest that support timing may be as crucial as its content, particularly during these critical junctures.

Without these narratives, the importance of targeting support at specific transition points might have been underappreciated in the survey findings. This insight has significant implications for service planning and resource allocation.

2. Support for Neurodivergent Students

While survey data showed high overall academic confidence, with 88.5% feeling confident in their general academic ability, the MSC narratives revealed important nuances in how different student groups experience academic support. Student 6's account of navigating support as a neurodivergent student particularly highlighted how standard approaches may need adaptation to serve diverse learning needs effectively.

Their experience that colleges "don't understand me and my brain" and that wellintentioned interventions were "often more to my detriment" reveals challenges that might remain invisible in aggregate survey data. The contrast between their frustrations with general support structures and positive experience with the ASDL ("one of few staff who understand my disability") suggests the importance of flexible support systems that can adapt to individual circumstances.

These narrative insights help explain why survey findings on metacognitive strategies showed such variance, with 95% of students confident in recognising concept understanding but only 59% reporting confidence in strategic problem-solving and 47.5% in self-motivation. Different student populations may experience these metacognitive challenges very differently based on how well support systems accommodate their specific learning needs and approaches.

3. Nuanced Understanding of Engagement Barriers

Survey data identified several practical barriers to support engagement, including time constraints, communication difficulties, and variable awareness of services. The MSC narratives added crucial depth to this understanding, revealing how institutional culture and individual circumstances shape help-seeking behaviours.

Student 11's description of a "toxic" perception that "you constantly feel you are up against everyone in college" illuminates how competitive academic culture can discourage open discussion of challenges and support needs. Meanwhile, Student 3's practical observation that it "took so long" to figure out how to book a session highlights specific operational barriers that could be addressed through simple system improvements.

These complementary insights suggest that enhancing support access requires addressing both cultural and practical barriers—something neither method alone could fully reveal.



Illuminating Contrasts: Where Methods Reveal Different Perspectives

1. Support Engagement Complexity

Survey data suggested moderate engagement with academic support services (27.9% accessing 1:1 sessions with the ASDL), potentially indicating limited reach. However, MSC narratives revealed more complex engagement patterns than the survey could capture. Some students benefited significantly from informal guidance or periodic check-ins that might not register as formal support engagement in survey responses.

Student 12's experience of transforming their approach to reading lists after a brief ASDL interaction demonstrates how impactful even limited formal engagement can be. Meanwhile, student peer reviewers noted the importance of informal support networks, suggesting a "student to student mentor system" that could complement formal services.

This contrast highlights how quantitative measures of support engagement may underestimate the actual influence and reach of academic support, particularly when informal and peer-based elements are considered.

2. Value Beyond Metrics

While survey data measured specific dimensions like academic self-efficacy and metacognitive strategies, the MSC narratives revealed value dimensions that standardised metrics might miss. The recurring theme of increased confidence as an "unintended outcome" of skills-focused support illustrates how academic development often transcends narrowly defined competencies.

Student 3's reflection that mastering essay structure was "a game changer for my academic confidence" highlights how technical skill development can catalyse broader academic growth. The ASDL's observation that increased confidence emerged as "a positive unintended outcome of the individualised support approach" further emphasises this point.

This contrast suggests that effective evaluation of academic support must look beyond easily measurable outcomes to capture these transformative but less tangible dimensions of student development.

Synthesised Insights: Implications for Academic Skills Development

The integration of survey data and MSC narratives suggests several key principles for enhancing academic skills support:

1. Targeted Support at Critical Transitions

Both methods highlight the importance of well-timed support interventions, particularly during major academic transitions. Student 4's powerful narrative about returning from year abroad, combined with survey data showing varied support needs across academic stages, suggests that orientation and reintegration programs could significantly enhance student success at these critical junctures.



2. Bridging Technical Skills and Confidence Development

The combined evidence demonstrates how effective academic support must address both specific skills development and broader confidence building. Student 3's journey from struggling with structure to developing confident academic writing illustrates how technical competence and self-belief develop in tandem. Support interventions should explicitly recognise and nurture this relationship.

3. Flexible Systems for Diverse Learning Needs

Survey data revealing variance in metacognitive strategy confidence, along with Student 6's powerful narrative about neurodiversity support challenges, emphasises the need for flexible support systems that can adapt to individual learning needs. One-size-fits-all approaches risk leaving significant student populations underserved.

4. Enhanced Communication and Accessibility

The survey identified awareness gaps and access barriers, while MSC narratives provided specific suggestions for improvement—from Student 3's recommendation for "a button, easier access" to appointment booking to Student 11's emphasis on normalising help-seeking behaviour. Addressing both practical and cultural barriers to support access should be a priority.

5. Complementary Support Integration

Both methods highlighted the value of maintaining distinct but coordinated support systems. The survey showed students combining multiple support types, while narratives like Student 8's demonstrated how different support forms serve complementary functions. This suggests the importance of clarifying and strengthening rather than simplifying the support ecosystem.

Methodological Reflections

This integrated approach has several important implications for how we understand and evaluate academic skills development:

- 1. **Capturing Complexity**: The combination of methods revealed complexities in student experience that neither approach alone could fully capture.
- 2. **Student Voice Centrality**: The MSC methodology's emphasis on student-identified significance ensured evaluation priorities reflected student experience rather than solely institutional metrics.
- 3. **Understanding Mechanisms**: Integration of methods helped illuminate not just what works but how and why it works for different student populations.
- 4. **Practical Implications**: The combined approach generated specific, actionable insights for service improvement while maintaining theoretical coherence.



These methodological reflections suggest value in continued integration of quantitative and narrative approaches when evaluating academic support effectiveness, particularly in contexts as rich and multifaceted as Oxford's collegiate system.

Conclusion

This study of academic skills development at Trinity College has integrated survey data from 61 students with in-depth narratives from eight MSC interviews to create a rich understanding of how students engage with and benefit from academic support. By combining these methods, we have gained insights that neither approach alone could provide.

Key Findings and Implications

Academic Development Patterns

Our findings reveal how academic skills development at Trinity College encompasses both technical competence and personal growth. Students demonstrate generally high academic self-efficacy (88.5%) but lower confidence in specific tasks (67.2% for exams), suggesting a gap between general capability and specific competencies. Student narratives like Student 3's journey from struggling with essay structure to mastering a logical framework demonstrate how tailored support can bridge this gap.

The intertwining of skills development with confidence building emerged as a particularly significant pattern. While students often sought support for specific technical challenges, the development of academic confidence appeared as a crucial parallel outcome. As the ASDL noted, increased confidence emerged as "a positive unintended outcome" of skills-focused support, suggesting that effective academic development must address both technical and affective dimensions.

The College-University Dynamic

The study highlights the distinctive role of college-based support within Oxford's broader academic ecosystem. Students demonstrated stronger connection to college (75.4% feeling part of the community) than university (62.3%), while valuing the complementary relationship between different support types. The ASDL's observation that "I benefit from there being distinct streams in college" reinforces the value of maintaining coordinated but distinct support roles.

This college-centric pattern creates both opportunities and challenges. College-based support provides accessible, personalised assistance that students clearly value, but the significant gap in university support perception (37.7% positive) suggests opportunities for better integration between different layers of provision. Student 6's experience with inconsistent implementation of support plans particularly highlights the need for better coordination across college and university systems.



Critical Transitions and Support Timing

Both survey data and student narratives emphasised the importance of well-timed support interventions, particularly during major academic transitions. Student 4's powerful account of returning from year abroad, Student 2's experience of entering university, and Student 7's approach to finals collectively highlight how transition periods create both vulnerability and opportunities for effective intervention.

These insights suggest that support timing may be as crucial as its content, with early intervention potentially preventing escalation of challenges. The pattern of increasing satisfaction with repeated ASDL engagement further suggests value in establishing support relationships early in students' academic journeys.

Supporting Diverse Learning Needs

While overall academic confidence was high among surveyed students, the MSC narratives revealed important nuances in how different student groups experience academic support. Student 6's account of navigating support as a neurodivergent student particularly highlighted how standard approaches may need adaptation to serve diverse learning needs effectively.

The varied experiences described in student narratives help explain survey findings on metacognitive strategies, where 95% of students felt confident in recognising concept understanding but only 47.5% in self-motivation. These patterns suggest that effective academic support must remain flexible enough to accommodate different learning styles and needs.

Future Directions

This study points to several promising directions for both practice development and further research:

Practice Enhancement

- 1. **Improved Support Integration**: Better coordination between college and universitywide services could enhance overall support effectiveness.
- 2. **Targeted Transition Support**: Developing specific resources for key academic transitions (university entry, year abroad return, finals preparation) could address periods of particular vulnerability.
- 3. Enhanced Support for Diverse Learning Needs: Expanding support options for neurodivergent students and others with specific learning requirements could improve equity and inclusion.
- 4. **Clearer Communication About Resources**: Addressing both practical and cultural barriers to support access should be prioritised to ensure services reach all students who could benefit.



Future Research

- 1. **Longitudinal Studies**: Tracking the impact of academic support across students' university careers could provide valuable insights into long-term effectiveness and optimal intervention timing.
- 2. **Comparative Studies**: Examining how different college support models serve diverse student populations could identify transferable best practices.
- 3. Accessibility Investigation: Deeper exploration of support access barriers could help institutions develop more inclusive academic support systems.

Final Reflections

This study confirms the value of Trinity College's academic support model while highlighting opportunities for enhancement through better integration of services, more targeted support during transitions, and clearer communication about available resources. Most significantly, it demonstrates how mixed methods research can provide rich, nuanced understanding of student experience and academic development within Oxford's collegiate system.

By prioritising student voice and experience while maintaining methodological rigour, this approach offers a template for understanding academic support that honours both the complexity of student development and the need for practical, actionable insights. This balance between theoretical depth and practical utility will be essential as institutions continue to develop academic support systems that can effectively serve increasingly diverse student populations.



Appendices

Appendix A: Detailed Methodology

A.1 Survey Development and Validation

The Trinity College evaluation utilised validated question sets from the Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) Academic Skills Questionnaire (ASQ), examining four key dimensions:

- 1. Academic self-efficacy: Measuring students' confidence in their academic abilities and skills
- 2. Cognitive strategies: Assessing approaches to academic tasks and learning
- 3. Metacognitive strategies: Examining how students monitor and direct their learning
- 4. Sense of belonging: Evaluating connection to college and university communities

The ASQ instrument was selected for its robust validation across UK higher education contexts and its alignment with the theoretical framework of academic literacies development. The instrument includes Likert-scale items (1-5 from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") across each dimension.

The survey development included:

- Collaboration with college stakeholders, including JCR representatives who provided input during question development
- Piloting with a small group of students to ensure clarity and relevance
- Addition of college-specific questions exploring engagement with the Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL)
- Inclusion of open-ended questions allowing for qualitative responses

Survey validity was strengthened through triangulation with other data collection methods, particularly the Most Significant Change methodology. This enabled cross-verification between quantitative metrics and qualitative narratives.

A.2 MSC Protocol and Implementation

The Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology was implemented through a structured approach that positioned students as active participants in the evaluation process:

Interview Protocol:

- Semi-structured interviews lasting 45-60 minutes
- Core question: "Looking back over your experiences with the Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL), what do you think was the most significant change that occurred in your academic development?"
- Follow-up prompts addressing specific examples, engagement patterns, academic confidence, and perceived barriers

Participant Selection Criteria:



- Representation across academic levels and disciplines
- Inclusion of both undergraduate and graduate students
- Diversity in engagement patterns with academic support services

Story Capture and Documentation:

- Written notes taken by CTL member/evaluator
- Creation of narrative summaries by member
- Member checking with participants to ensure accurate representation
- Preservation of student voice in final narrative accounts

Peer Review Process:

- 1. Anonymisation of all collected stories
- 2. Distribution to all participants for review
- 3. Facilitated discussion among participants to identify the most significant stories
- 4. Documentation of selection criteria and rationale
- 5. ASDL provided response to selected stories with pedagogical context

This participatory approach enabled rich insights into academic skills development from students' perspectives while creating opportunities for peer learning and collective reflection.

A.3 Data Analysis Methods

The evaluation employed a comprehensive analysis strategy combining quantitative and qualitative approaches:

Quantitative Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics for all survey items (frequencies, means, standard deviations)
- Comparative analysis across different dimensions of academic skills
- Identification of patterns and gaps between different measures (e.g., general vs. task-specific confidence)
- Cross-tabulation of support engagement with academic confidence measures

Qualitative Analysis:

- Thematic analysis of MSC narratives using an iterative coding approach
- Initial open coding to identify emergent themes
- Development of a coding framework based on key research questions
- Axial coding to establish relationships between themes
- Integration of peer reviewer perspectives in final analysis

Integration Methodology:

- Matrix approach mapping quantitative results against qualitative themes
- Identification of convergence and divergence between data sources
- Joint displays presenting quantitative and qualitative findings side-by-side
- Iterative refinement of integrated findings through team discussion



• Member checking with student representatives for validation

Limitations Considered:

- Self-selection bias in survey respondents and MSC participants
- Cross-sectional nature of data collection limiting causal inferences
- Contextual factors specific to Trinity College affecting generalisability
- Potential influence of researcher perspectives on qualitative interpretation

The analysis approach prioritised triangulation across methods to enhance validity and create a comprehensive understanding of academic skills development at Trinity College.

Appendix B: Detailed Survey Results

B.1 Academic Self-Efficacy Detailed Analysis

Item-by-Item Response Distribution:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am confident that I can get the exam results required to progress.	26.2% (16)	41.0% (25)	19.7% (12)	13.1% (8)	0% (0)
I have the academic ability to do well at university.	31.1% (19)	57.4% (35)	8.2% (5)	3.3% (2)	0% (0)
I can manage with the level of study required at university.	19.7% (12)	50.8% (31)	14.8% (9)	14.8% (9)	0% (0)

Key Patterns Identified:

- 1. **Confidence Hierarchy:** Students expressed highest confidence in general academic ability (88.5% positive), followed by study management (70.5% positive), with lowest confidence in exam performance (67.2% positive).
- 2. **Confidence Gap Analysis:** The 21.3 percentage point gap between general academic ability confidence and exam-specific confidence suggests a need for targeted support in translating general capability into specific task confidence.
- 3. **Neutral Response Analysis:** Highest neutral responses appeared for exam confidence (19.7%), suggesting uncertainty rather than outright doubt.
- 4. **Absence of Strong Negative Responses:** No students strongly disagreed with any self-efficacy statements, indicating a baseline level of academic self-belief even among those experiencing challenges.

The patterns suggest that academic support might be most effectively targeted at helping students translate general academic capability into specific task-related self-efficacy, particularly around high-stakes assessments like examinations.



B.2 Cognitive Strategies Detailed Analysis

Response Distributions for Each Question:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I can tell which information is most important when I study.	9.8% (6)	50.8% (31)	16.4% (10)	21.3% (13)	1.6% (1)
I can tell how reliable information is when I read something.	16.4% (10)	50.8% (31)	26.2% (16)	6.6% (4)	0% (0)
I can clearly explain my ideas, even when writing about complicated things.	18.0% (11)	57.4% (35)	13.1% (8)	11.4% (7)	0% (0)
I can confidently explain my ideas when talking to others.	18.0% (11)	54.1% (33)	21.3% (13)	6.6% (4)	0% (0)

Key Patterns:

- 1. Information Processing vs. Communication: Students expressed higher confidence in communication abilities (written: 75.4%, verbal: 72.1%) compared to information processing skills (identifying important information: 60.6%, assessing reliability: 67.2%).
- 2. **Critical Analysis Gap:** Nearly 40% of students were either neutral or negative about their ability to identify important information while studying, suggesting a potential area for targeted support.
- 3. Uncertainty in Information Evaluation: The high proportion of neutral responses (26.2%) regarding information reliability assessment indicates an area where students may benefit from additional skill development.
- 4. **Communication Consistency:** Similar confidence levels across written and verbal expression suggest students generally feel equally capable in both modes of academic communication.

These patterns point to potential areas for academic support interventions, particularly in helping students develop more robust information processing strategies while maintaining support for communication skills.

B.3 Metacognitive Strategies Detailed Analysis

Response Distributions for Each Question:



Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I can tell when I have understood a concept or idea.	47.5% (29)	47.5% (29)	4.9% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)
I can motivate myself to study when I need to.	13.1% (8)	34.4% (21)	24.6% (15)	18.0% (11)	9.8% (6)
I try to use ways of studying that have worked for me before.	31.1% (19)	62.3% (38)	4.9% (3)	1.6% (1)	0% (0)
When I am done with studying, I can tell if I have learned what I wanted to learn.	18.0% (11)	52.5% (32)	18.0% (11)	11.5% (7)	0% (0)
I think of several ways to solve an academic problem and then choose the best way.	18.0% (11)	41.0% (25)	24.6% (15)	13.1% (8)	3.3% (2)

Key Patterns:

- 1. Awareness vs. Action Gap: Students showed extremely high confidence in recognising understanding (95% positive) and applying proven study methods (93.4% positive), but much lower confidence in self-motivation (47.5% positive) and strategic problem-solving (59% positive).
- 2. **Self-Regulation Challenge:** The marked drop in confidence for self-motivation suggests a critical gap between knowing effective study approaches and maintaining the drive to implement them consistently.
- Metacognitive Hierarchy: Clear hierarchy emerged from concept understanding (95% positive) → proven study methods (93.4% positive) → learning outcome assessment (70.5% positive) → strategic problem-solving (59% positive) → selfmotivation (47.5% positive).
- 4. **Strategic Flexibility Gap:** The contrast between confidence in using proven methods (93.4%) and confidence in exploring multiple approaches (59%) suggests students may tend to rely on familiar strategies rather than adapting to different academic challenges.

These patterns indicate that academic support might be most effective when focusing not just on study techniques but on helping students develop more robust self-regulation strategies, particularly around maintaining motivation and developing strategic flexibility.

B.4 Sense of Belonging Detailed Analysis

Response Distributions for Each Question:



Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel I belong at university.	23.0% (14)	39.3% (24)	16.4% (10)	21.3% (13)	0% (0)
I made the right decision in choosing to study at this college.	47.5% (29)	42.6% (26)	8.2% (5)	1.6% (1)	0% (0)
I made the right decision in choosing to study at this university.	37.7% (23)	45.9% (28)	11.5% (7)	4.9% (3)	0% (0)
I feel supported by my college.	27.9% (17)	37.7% (23)	21.3% (13)	9.8% (6)	3.3% (2)
I feel supported by this university.	9.8% (6)	27.9% (17)	31.1% (19)	27.9% (17)	3.3% (2)
I see myself as part of the college community.	31.1% (19)	44.3% (27)	13.1% (8)	8.2% (5)	3.3% (2)

College vs. University Comparison:

Dimension	College Positive	University Positive	Difference
Choice Satisfaction	90.1%	83.6%	6.5%
Support Perception	65.6%	37.7%	27.9%
Community Belonging	75.4%	62.3%	13.1%

Key Patterns:

- 1. **College-University Differential:** Consistent pattern of stronger connection to collegelevel structures compared to university-wide ones, with the most pronounced gap in support perceptions (27.9 percentage points).
- 2. **Response Distribution Patterns:** College-related measures elicited more definitive responses, particularly toward strong agreement, while university measures generated more moderate and neutral responses.
- 3. **Connection Hierarchy:** Clear pattern from strongest connection (college choice: 90.1%) to weakest (university support: 37.7%), suggesting progressively weaker engagement as it extends from immediate college environment to broader university structures.
- 4. **Support vs. Choice Gap:** Substantial drops between satisfaction with institutional choice and perceptions of support (24.5% for college, 45.9% for university) suggest potential disconnects between expected and experienced support.

These patterns suggest that the college environment successfully creates spaces where students feel both supported and able to belong, while university-wide structures may present greater challenges for student navigation and connection.



B.5 Support Engagement Patterns Detailed Analysis

Support Usage Statistics:

Support Type	Number of Students	Percentage
Advice from tutors	49	80.3%
1:1 sessions with ASDL	. 17	27.9%
Workshops	6	9.8%
Drop-in hours	6	9.8%

ASDL Session Attendance:

Number of Sessions	Number of Students	Percentage
No sessions	44	72.1%
One session	8	13.1%
Two sessions	5	8.2%
Three or more sessions	5 4	6.6%

Overlap Analysis:

- 15 of 22 students (68.2%) who accessed ASDL services also sought advice from tutors
- 8 students reported using ASDL services but attended no formal sessions, suggesting engagement through other means
- Students using multiple support types showed higher academic self-efficacy scores

Key Engagement Patterns:

- 1. **Complementary Support Use:** Students typically used ASDL support as a complement to rather than replacement for tutor guidance, suggesting synergistic rather than competitive relationships between support types.
- 2. **Repeat Engagement Value:** Students attending multiple ASDL sessions reported higher satisfaction, suggesting benefits from sustained engagement rather than one-off interventions.
- 3. **Reported Barriers:** Key barriers included time constraints, awareness gaps, unclear understanding of potential benefits, and communication challenges.
- 4. **Support Integration:** Students who engaged with multiple support channels demonstrated higher confidence levels across academic self-efficacy measures, suggesting mutually reinforcing benefits.



These patterns suggest that maintaining distinct but coordinated support services better serves students than consolidating different types of support, while highlighting opportunities to enhance awareness and accessibility.

Appendix C: Student Narrative Summaries

C.1 Anonymised Student Stories

Student 3 - Mastering Logical Essay Structure

The most significant change for Student 3 came from learning how to structure essays logically through ASDL support. They explained that the ASDL "explained the questions I should ask myself; this changed the whole logic; she made me understand." The student brought tutor feedback indicating "ideas [are] great, but not the way you express yourself" and found that reviewing this with the ASDL provided a "general understanding" of "how [an] idea works; how it works for [...] literature."

Key insights included understanding that "every sentence has a role to play in the development of the argument" and using "linear progression" where "First line [presents] what I claim; then line, have to be careful; use to link evidence directly." The student now chooses the "best evidence" to "match the questions" and connects ideas more effectively. They reported increased confidence, noting "I understand the model now; it is now fine, [though it] takes a long time to incorporate this model." Their "ability to express myself better" improved measurably through ASDL support.

Student 4 - Reintegrating After Year Abroad

Student 4 highlighted challenges returning from a year abroad, describing feelings of "displacement" and finding the prospect of re-entering Oxford academics "daunting" and "terrifying." The ASDL helped them rebuild academic confidence and develop strategies for re-engagement. This student's experience highlighted the vulnerability of transition points and the value of targeted support during these periods.

Student 6 - Navigating Academic Support with Neurodiversity

Student 6 provided crucial insights on navigating support as a neurodivergent student, noting that while individual support could be helpful, systemic challenges remained: "colleges don't understand me and my brain" and interventions were "often more to my detriment." They highlighted inconsistent application of Student Support Plans where "tutors 'need to be a lot more consistent' in following Student Support Plans, rather than the current approach 'where each tutor does their own thing'." However, they described the ASDL as "one of few staff who understand my disability."

Student 8 - Developing Strategic Reading Approaches

Student 8's narrative focused on transforming their approach to academic reading through ASDL guidance. They learned to prioritise effectively and extract key information rather than attempting to read everything exhaustively. Their story highlighted the complementary relationship between ASDL support and tutorial teaching, with peer reviewers noting "the



ASDL's ability to complement the tutor's engaging with 'ideas' with the necessary structure to engage with these ideas."

Student 11 - Overcoming Reluctance to Seek Help

Student 11 described initially avoiding help-seeking until reaching crisis point, influenced by a "toxic" perception that "you constantly feel you are up against everyone in college." Their story highlighted how institutional culture affected help-seeking behaviours and demonstrated how effective support could break this cycle when finally accessed.

Student 12 - Transforming Approach to Reading Lists

Student 12's story centred on shifting their perspective on reading lists from "a checklist" to "a thinking activity." This metacognitive development transformed their approach to academic preparation and engagement with course materials.

C.2 Peer Review Process Outcomes

Selection Criteria Applied:

- Impact on academic performance and outcomes
- Transferability of skills developed
- Sustainability of changes over time
- Integration of technical skill development with confidence growth
- Balance between specific skills and broader academic development

Key Observations from Peer Review:

- Students consistently valued development of both specific skills and broader confidence
- Confidential, one-on-one support was highlighted as particularly valuable
- Early intervention was identified as critical for preventing escalation of academic challenges
- Integration of ASDL support with tutorial teaching was seen as complementary rather than duplicative
- Students appreciated concrete frameworks and models that made abstract writing advice actionable

Areas of Consensus:

- Student 3's story was selected as most significant because it demonstrated clear technical progression while also addressing confidence development
- The development of sustainable, transferable academic skills was valued above quick fixes
- Support that acknowledged both academic and emotional dimensions of learning was particularly impactful
- Explicit instruction in academic conventions benefited students regardless of background

Reflections on Process:

- Students found reviewing peers' stories validating of their own experiences
- The process helped students articulate their own academic development more clearly
- Peer review highlighted common challenges across different disciplines and academic stages



• The collaborative nature of the selection process fostered community and shared understanding

C.3 ASDL Perspective and Contextual Notes

Extended Summary of ASDL Response:

The ASDL's response to the student narratives provided valuable pedagogical context. While increased confidence was not an explicit course goal, it emerged as a positive unintended outcome of the individualised support approach. The ASDL emphasised developing students as "genre analysts" in their fields, helping them identify and adapt to discipline-specific writing conventions.

Central to the ASDL's methodology was connecting skills development to deeper understanding: "I endeavour to ensure any advice I provide is always connected to the 'why', providing the students the reason for doing these things." This approach aimed to develop independent learners rather than creating dependency on support.

The ASDL identified a distinct supportive role complementing tutorial teaching: "I benefit from there being distinct streams in college: subject tutors will talk to them in one way and must by necessity challenge them... and I can slot into that as a more nurturing role." This complementary relationship enabled students to receive both rigorous academic critique and supportive skill development.

Historical Context:

Trinity College's academic skills support has evolved over several years, with the ASDL role created to provide dedicated, embedded academic skills development. The position was designed to complement rather than replace existing tutorial teaching while addressing broader academic development needs.

Pedagogical Framework:

The ASDL's approach draws on academic literacies theory, viewing writing development as embedded within disciplinary practices rather than as generic skills. Key principles include:

- Focusing on disciplinary genres and conventions
- Building metacognitive awareness of academic processes
- Developing students' capacity for self-assessment and revision
- Contextualising academic skills within disciplinary knowledge
- Creating safe spaces for academic risk-taking and development

Future Directions:

Based on student feedback and evaluation findings, several potential developments have been identified:

- Enhanced integration with tutorial teaching through structured communication channels
- More targeted support during key transition points (entry, post-year abroad, finals)



- Development of peer mentoring to complement one-to-one support
- Creation of discipline-specific resources building on common challenges
- Improved accessibility through streamlined booking processes and follow-up mechanisms

Appendix D: Survey Instrument and MSC Protocol

D.1 Complete Survey Instrument

Academic Self-Efficacy

The following statements relate to how you feel about studying at university from an academic perspective. Please think about each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

- I am confident that I can get the exam results required to progress at university. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 2. I have the academic ability to do well at university. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 3. I can manage with the level of study required at university. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree

Cognitive Strategies

The following statements are about how you study. Please think about how you go about learning and studying generally and indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

- 1. I can tell which information is most important when I study. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 2. I can tell how reliable information is when I read something. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 3. I can clearly explain my ideas, even when writing about complicated things. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 4. I can confidently explain my ideas when talking to others. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree

Metacognitive Strategies

The following statements are about your learning. Please think about how you go about learning and studying normally. Then indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

- 1. I can tell when I have understood a concept or idea. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 2. I can motivate myself to study when I need to. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 3. I try to use ways of studying that have worked for me before. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree



- 4. When I am done with studying, I can tell if I have learned what I wanted to learn. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 5. I think of several ways to solve an academic problem (e.g. how do I revise?) and then choose the best way. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree

Follow up question: Can you tell us more about how you monitor, plan, and direct your own learning? Please provide examples.

Sense of Belonging

The following statements relate to how you feel about currently being a student at university. Please think about each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

- 1. I feel I belong at university. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- I made the right decision in choosing to study at this college. □ Strongly disagree □
 Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 3. I made the right decision in choosing to study at this university. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 4. I feel supported by my college. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 5. I feel supported by this university. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree
- 6. I see myself as part of the college community. □ Strongly disagree □ Disagree □ Neither agree nor disagree □ Agree □ Strongly agree

Follow up question: Can you tell us more about how you experience college and the University of Oxford? Please provide examples.

College Academic Support

Trinity College provides academic skills support through a combination of guidance from your college tutors and a dedicated Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL). The following questions ask for you to share your thoughts on how well this support system has worked for you.

- 1. Have you engaged with any of the following means to academic support? (Select all that apply) □ Workshops □ Drop-in hours □ 1:1 sessions □ Advice from tutors
- 2. How many of the sessions offered by the Academic Support and Development Lecturer did you attend?

 None

 1
 2
 3
 or more
- 3. Did you experience any barriers in engaging with the Academic Support and Development Lecturer's offerings?
- 4. With regard to the ASDL offer of support, please give examples where you feel additional support would be beneficial.



5. How has the academic skills support influenced your overall experience and performance in your studies at Trinity College? Please give examples of where you feel additional support would be beneficial.

D.2 MSC Interview Protocol

Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome and thank participant for their time
- Explain purpose of the interview: to understand significant changes in their academic development through engagement with academic support
- Confirm recording consent and discuss confidentiality
- Explain MSC methodology and how stories will be used

Main Question (10-15 minutes) "Looking back over your experiences with the Academic Support and Development Lecturer (ASDL), what do you think was the most significant change that occurred in your academic development?"

Probing Questions (30-35 minutes)

- 1. "Could you describe a specific example or story that illustrates this change?"
- 2. "What was your situation before this change occurred?"
- 3. "How specifically did working with the ASDL contribute to this change?"
- 4. "How has this change affected your broader academic experience at Trinity?"
- 5. "Which types of ASDL support have you engaged with (workshops, drop-in hours, 1:1 sessions)? Which were most valuable and why?"
- 6. "How has working with the ASDL influenced your academic confidence or sense of belonging?"
- 7. "Have you experienced any barriers or challenges in engaging with academic support?"
- 8. "What do you think is working particularly well in the current academic support provision?"
- 9. "What improvements or changes would make academic support more effective for you?"

Wrap-up (5-10 minutes)

- Ask if there's anything else the participant would like to share
- Explain next steps in the MSC process, including story selection and peer review
- Thank participant for their time and insights

Story Documentation Template

Title: [Brief descriptive title capturing essence of change]

Participant Code: [Anonymous identifier]

Academic Level: [Undergraduate/Postgraduate]

Support Engaged With: [Types of ASDL support accessed]

Situation Before Change: [Brief description of starting point]



Nature of Change: [Detailed description of the significant change identified by participant]

Contributing Factors: [How ASDL support and other elements contributed to change]

Impact on Academic Experience: [Broader effects on student's academic journey]

Direct Quotes: [Key verbatim quotes that capture the essence of the story]

Peer Review Guidelines

- 1. Read all stories carefully, considering:
 - What type of change does each story represent?
 - How significant is this change for the student's academic development?
 - What factors contributed to the change?
 - How transferable might these insights be to other students?
- 2. Select the story you feel represents the most significant change, considering:
 - Depth of transformation
 - Sustainability of change
 - Relevance to broader student experience
 - Potential implications for academic support practice
- 3. Document your selection rationale, explaining:
 - Why you selected this particular story
 - What aspects of the change you found most significant
 - \circ $\;$ How this story might inform academic support development $\;$
 - \circ $\;$ Any connections to your own academic experience
- 4. Participate in group discussion to reach consensus on the most significant story, being prepared to:
 - Articulate your reasoning
 - Listen to others' perspectives
 - Consider multiple dimensions of significance
 - o Work toward shared understanding of evaluation criteria