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Benefits and barriers when writing for impact

Your invitation to join a pilot Writing Support Group for early career ISBE scholars

(RSVP by 14 November)

Following several recent successful collaborations between ISBE and AMED, we are now inviting you to express an interest in participating in a pilot project, consisting of a facilitated, face-to-face Writing Support Group for early career ISBE academics/researchers.

Rationale

The production and consumption of rigorous, persuasive writing in all its phases, formats and contexts is central to academic and research work. Yet, despite existing formal arrangements, such as 1:1 and group supervision and taught modules, many early career researchers often feel left largely to their own devices, and at sea. The stress of conforming to REF assessment can be particularly challenging. Researchers often find it hard to make the necessary time and commitment to write, and to talk about their writing-related issues with others who are in similar circumstances. This comes at some cost to the frequency, quality, and quantity of their input, output and impact through writing, and can prevent researchers from realising fully the benefits and satisfactions that flow from good writing.

Underpinning principles of this pilot project

We're basing this invitation on a set of three assumptions:

1. Academic research and writing involves supportive social/relational *as well as* formally assessed individual/solitary activity¹.
2. It's important to *talk* about your writing that is (not) in progress, and to exchange ideas and experiences concerning all sorts of writing-related issues, as an integral part of doing the writing itself. These issues can be as much practical and psychological as they are methodological and technical, and may well include juggling competing demands and priorities on your time, and overcoming inertia.
3. From time to time, *at any stage of the writing process* - and especially during the early stages - it can help to come together with others who are in the same boat, in a small, informal, facilitated community of writing practice. Issues that arise might include various 'writing up' requirements, struggles with progress reports and theses, Proposals, beginning to write for publication, and drafting Abstracts.

If this pilot writing support project proves successful, we'll look for ways to make such opportunities more widely available within the ISBE community.

Proposed process



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Our aim is to augment (*and not to replace*) existing, more formal arrangements within individual HEIs. For the pilot, we're inviting some 6-8 volunteers who are prepared to commit to participating in a two-part facilitated workshop, each part separated by several weeks. This would allow any insights derived from Part A to be discussed and developed with key stakeholders 'back at the ranch', as well as interim developments and insights about writing to be shared with peers in Part B. Part A will take place on Saturday 3 March, and Part B on Saturday 12 May, 2018. Each session would last from 10 am to 4 pm, at Birmingham City University. To develop each other's writing further, you'll engage with peers in a spirit of critical friendshipⁱⁱ, which is a form of reciprocal, well-intentioned and sensitive challenge and support according to a clear set of groundrules.

Depending on participants' issues, the workshop could develop along the following lines:

- Welcome, introductions and explanations of the social writing process
- Agenda-building, based on participants' writing-related issues
- Free writing
- Action Learning conversations with peers around issues arising
- Writing to develop individual writing projects
- Optional 1:1 discussions with a critical friend and/or facilitator
- Group Review and individual action planning
- A chance to rehearse purposeful writing by contributing to AMED's journal.

Participation in the pilot is free, although you would be responsible for your own travel and subsistence. You are welcome to bring your own packed lunch. The number of places is limited, so we may have to adopt a first come, first served principle.

About your facilitators

Your Lead Facilitator will be Dr **Bob MacKenzie**, who is commissioning editor of AMED's quarterly online journal *e-Organisations and People* and Convenor of the AMED Writers' Group. Dr **Kayleigh Watson**, is an ISBE trustee and co-ordinates the development of the ISBE Early Career Researcher forum. Kayleigh will work alongside Bob as Co-Facilitator.

Interested?

If this opportunity appeals to you, please click [here](http://www.amed.org.uk/forum/topics/social-writing-spaces-for-early-career-academics) (<http://www.amed.org.uk/forum/topics/social-writing-spaces-for-early-career-academics>), answer the questions that you'll find there, and **return your answers to Bob @ bob@amed.org.uk by 14 November**. If you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact Bob or Kayleigh beforehand.

ⁱ E.g. Murray, R. (2015). *Writing in Social Spaces: a social processes approach to academic writing*. Abingdon & NY, Routledge/Society for Research into Higher Education.

ⁱⁱ E.g. MacKenzie, B. (2015). "Critical friendships for coaching and mentoring in writing." *e-Organisations and People* **22**(1): 42-51.