

Widening Participation Practitioners Write!

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Introduction

This chapter considers the role of writing for widening participation practitioners working in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom and the potential of practitioner writing to inform and reframe policy. We consider the role of the Office for Students (OfS) and how a new approach to access and participation, with a focus on evaluation and impact, may be both an opportunity and driver for practitioners to write. The extent to which these opportunities are realised will depend on the extent to which practitioners are supported. With two notable exceptions, which we discuss, the support for widening participation and equity practitioners to write has been limited. A review of the literature reveals the limited attention to practitioner writing in general, and the absence of any attention to widening participation practitioners in particular. This lack of recognition and support led to the development of a small-scale research study, which is currently in progress and the findings from which will be reported once fieldwork has been completed. The study aims to explore the extent to which widening participation practitioners view writing as part of their professional practice. In doing so it explores practitioners' motivations, both intrinsic and extrinsic, to write; the barriers and challenges practitioners face when they are motivated to write for publication; and the support strategies that enable them to do so. In addition to describing the methodological framework and data collection methods adopted by the study, consideration is given to the challenges of engaging with this vibrant and increasingly diverse community of practice.

For academics, the maxim 'publish-or-perish' is a reminder – sometimes a threatening reminder – of the importance of publishing. For early career researchers, a developing track record of publications may secure and ensure continued employment, leading to career advancement for the more experienced and prolific. There are also external drivers such as

the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the system for assessing the quality of research in UK universities and higher education colleges, which is also used to inform the allocation of funding to HEIs. Generally there is an expectation that all academics are not only motivated to write but also have the necessary skills to do so. However, a number of studies (Moore, 2003; Murray, 2013) reveal that this is not necessarily so, and highlight the benefit of interventions and programmes to develop academic writing for publication (Kempenaar and Murray, 2017; Wilmot and McKenna, 2018). There is no similar expectation that widening participation practitioners should write or publish in order to retain their job or be promoted. However, the contribution that widening participation practitioners make to the knowledge base is well recognised and encouraged, most recently by the OfS (2018a) in the guidance for access and participation plans (APPs) 2019-20. In the next section, we consider how the OfS regulatory framework may be a driver, and the nascent Evidence and Impact Exchange (EIX) an opportunity, for practitioners to engage in evaluation and research to a greater extent as well as write.

A new approach to access and participation

Under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) were replaced with a new market regulator, the OfS. Establishing the OfS was central to the Government's aim of reforming the system of higher education (HE) in England and Wales. The OfS (2018b) set out its proposed approach to access to and participation in HE in England in a consultation document: *A new approach to regulating access and participation in English higher education*. In setting out the context and rationale for this regulatory framework, in addition to the four key objectives relating to participation, experience, outcomes and value for money, the consultation document identified a number of priority areas. These priorities include: the approval and monitoring of APPs; annual monitoring and planning; APP targets; expenditure on access and participation activities; and evaluation. The OfS notes that to achieve 'transformational change' rather than 'incremental progress' the focus will be on how to 'achieve significant reductions in the gaps in access, success and progression...[and] ensure

our access and participation regulation and funding are outcome-based, risk-based, underpinned by evidence...’ (OfS, 2018b: 6).

Through the regulatory framework, consultation, and regulatory and guidance notices the OfS has signalled the increasing importance it places on evidence and impact. HEIs that charge above the basic tuition fee cap will be required to submit an APP for consideration by the Director for Fair Access and Participation. In their plans providers are required to set out how they will ‘...improve the equality of opportunity for under-represented groups to access, succeed and progress from higher education’ (OfS, 2018a: 4). The guidance specifically requires the sector ‘to use smart, evidence-based practice...’ (OfS, 2018a: 8). The OfS (2018c) has also set out detailed guidance on the range of data sources, both local and national, which providers may wish to draw on to better understand and report on their performance. In addition, providers are expected to demonstrate in their APP that they have a robust evaluation strategy to measure activities and support (OfS, 2018c). As Chris Millward (2018) noted, ‘A key issue here will be the availability and use of data and evidence and the development and sharing of innovative and effective practice’. To support this the OfS will fund an independent Evidence and Impact Exchange (EIX) for a period of three years, after which time it is expected to be self-sustaining. Initially the EIX is expected to collate existing research and identify gaps in the current evidence base. In due course, the EIX will generate research, which may be an opportunity for practitioners to contribute to a national evidence base. Whilst the EIX may be an opportunity and the APPs a driver for practitioners to write, the available support that they need in order to do so is limited.

Supporting practitioners to write

With two notable exceptions, support for practitioners to disseminate their work and write for publication has been lacking. The Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE) annual conference provides an opportunity for practitioners, policy makers and researchers with an interest in access, social justice and widening participation to disseminate their work. The associated peer review publication, which includes selected papers from the conference, enables practitioners to disseminate their work to a wider

audience. A review of the previous 15 annual FACE publications (2004-2018) reveals that a total of 356 papers were published by 654 authors. Recognising that for many authors this represents the first time that they have written for publication, the editorial team is supportive, providing constructive and detailed feedback. However, some practitioners may need support before they even get to the point of writing and submission.

In 2016 OFFA funded a writing programme *Write your paper in a year*, which was delivered by Sheffield Hallam University in the academic year 2016-17. The programme, which was oversubscribed, supported 21 practitioners from 14 HEIs and 3 third sector organisations to write for publication. Five papers were published in a special edition of the journal *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, one in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* and a number of others are going through the publication process (Stevenson et al., 2018). A parallel writing programme for equity practitioners was delivered by the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) at the University of Newcastle, Australia. This programme supported 15 practitioners and resulted in 5 papers being published in the journal *International Studies in Widening Participation* and 2 papers in other journals. Participants on both programmes were supported and mentored by an academic with experience of writing and the publication process.

Whilst a minority of participants had published to date, both programmes have supported a significant number of practitioners with their writing and provided guidance on the publication process. Writing for publication is no easy endeavour and the process can be lengthy and protracted depending on the target publication, the revisions required by reviewers and queries from editors. As noted, a number of papers are currently going through the publication process and more are likely to follow. That so many practitioners have published to date is testimony to the success of the programmes – both for the participants and their mentors – and demonstrates the extent to which practitioners are motivated to write. The number of papers published by widening participation or equity practitioners from both programmes reflects not only the challenges of the publication process, but also the challenges and barriers that practitioners face when they are motivated to write.

In the literature review we consider the barriers, both perceived and actual, that academics and practitioners encounter when they are motivated to write for publication. For practitioners, particularly widening participation and equity practitioners, where until recently there has been little or no expectation that they will write or publish, they may face additional barriers. For example, absence of institutional support and recognition may result in practitioners being denied the time and space to write as well as the lack of opportunity to develop their writing through participating in formal training or writing groups, or meeting with mentors. Whilst recognising the value of the opportunities discussed in this section and the high degree of support provided, if more practitioners are to be encouraged and supported to write there is a need for a deeper understanding of the barriers and challenges practitioners face when they are motivated to write for publication. This will enable appropriate support strategies and interventions to be developed and delivered to meet their particular needs.

There are numerous guides on academic writing for both undergraduate and postgraduate students (Crème and Lea, 2008; Thomson and Kamler, 2016) and academics (Murray and Moore, 2006; Sword, 2012), as well as writing for specific types of publication such as peer-review journals (Thomson and Kamler, 2013). In addition there is a well-developed body of literature which focuses on the experience of academic writing from the perspective of students (Itua et al., 2014) and academics (Cameron et al., 2009). In comparison there has been a limited focus on the experience of academic writing and writing for publication from the perspective of practitioners. Whilst a number of writers have turned their attention to practitioners the focus has been on nursing (Baldwin and Chandler, 2002; Keen, 2007), social work (Staudt et al., 2003), and library and information service staff (Bradley, 2008; Clapton, 2010). To date there appears to be a gap in the literature on the experience of widening participation practitioners writing for publication.

In the next section we review the literature on academic writing, drawing on studies focusing on academic staff as well as the limited studies on practitioners. Following the literature review, to provide context, we explore the vibrant and developing widening participation community of practice and the role of evidence informed practice. The methodology

and methods section sets out the ideas which informed the study and the methods of data collection. The concluding section outlines the next stages in the research and some tentative thoughts for future action.

Reading about writing – what the literature is telling us

In this section we provide a brief overview of the literature on reflective writing and writing as part of professional practice, followed by a more extended consideration of scholarly and academic writing. We consider the barriers to writing and publication, the support programmes and interventions that have been developed to overcome them and finally the motivation to write. We begin by considering the role of reflective writing in professional practice.

For practitioners to work effectively in a rapidly changing and complex education system, where they need to problem-solve, analyse and evaluate, reflective practice is a core skill (McGuire et al., 2009). Whilst the concept of reflective learning is not new and can be traced back to Dewey (1916), it is contested in terms of value and practice. A number of writers (see for example Schön (1983), Knowles (1984) and Kolb (1984)) have developed the concept. It is Schön's (1983, 1987) focus on experiential learning for professional development which seems most relevant to the community of widening participation practitioners. For Schön (1987: 31) reflective practice is 'a dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become... more skilful'.

As noted previously, the practice of reflection is contested; for some it is an individual internal dialogue (Harvey and Knight, 1996), whilst for others it is social and interactive (Brockbank and McGill, 2007). We see reflection as more than just thinking. Reflection does require an internal dialogue but we see the value of engaging in social interaction, not just through dialogue, but also through writing. Reflective practice becomes more useful when 'harnessed to the explorative and expressive power of creative writing' (Bolton, 1999: 243). Reflective writing provides practitioners the opportunity to review, develop and, where appropriate, share practice, but before they do so, many have to overcome barriers to

writing. In the remainder of this section we move from reflective writing to consider scholarly and academic writing.

The barriers to writing and publication, both perceived and actual, are well documented in the literature and can be categorised in terms of resources, skills and knowledge, and psychological barriers. In terms of resources the most common barrier cited by academics and practitioners is the lack of time (Boice, 1987; Staudt et al., 2003; Bradley, 2008; Devlin and Radloff, 2014) and for academics working in a performative culture there may also be a requirement to ensure publication of outputs within stringent time constraints (Aitchison and Lee, 2006). However, whilst recognising that writing is time consuming, Boice (1987) notes that, in the context of academic staff in the United States, released time for writing was not effective and that claims of insufficient time for scholarship and writing led to an irrational distress.

A lack of skills and knowledge is cited by both academics and practitioners as a barrier to writing (Clapton, 2010). Similarly a lack of knowledge of the publication process (Pololi et al., 2004; Kapp et al., 2011) may prevent inexperienced and less experienced writers from progressing any further. Interestingly Morss and Murray (2001: 48), drawing on their experience of delivering an academic writing programme, note that technical writing skills are not necessarily a barrier, but rather that the lack of ‘a framework that puts writing for publication in real time and space’ is. They noted that prior to the course, participants expressed the need to improve their writing skills, yet their writing productivity increased despite the limited focus on these skills during the course. The increase in productivity, they argue, is due to the increase in confidence reported by practitioners and a lack of confidence rather than skills is a barrier.

The psychological barriers that prevent writing, reported in a number of studies, mainly relate to self-confidence, fear and anxiety (Pololi et al., 2004; Aitchison and Lee, 2006; Clapton, 2010). A fear of rejection (Clapton, 2010) may in some cases be based on a previous experience of writing for publication (Kapp et al., 2011). For some this may be the fear of being scrutinised by others (Murray and Moore, 2006), and being sensitive and, in some cases, resistant to feedback (Pololi et al., 2004).

There is a well-developed literature on support programmes and interventions to facilitate writing for academics and practitioners. Although somewhat dated McGrail et al. (2006) undertook a systematic review of interventions to increase academic publication rates. They identified 17 papers that reported on writing interventions which they categorised as writing support groups, structured writing courses and writing coach/mentor. All of the studies reported an increase in publication rates following the intervention. Whilst the studies reported on used a variety of evaluation methods not all of them provided pre and post intervention data on participants' outputs. Reporting on the implementation and evaluation of a writing coach in a faculty of nursing in a US university, Baldwin and Chandler (2002) noted that it was difficult to assess impact due to a number of compounding factors. They concluded that:

Coaching has enabled scholarly writing in this nursing school to advance from a territory of high priority and low follow-through behavior to a realm of inner-directed and institutionally supported activity that earns faculty the recognition and rewards they deserve. (Baldwin and Chandler, 2002: 14)

Writing courses by their nature are didactic and are often the first writing development opportunity that less experienced academics and practitioners engage in. Writing groups vary in both duration and frequency of meetings, but like writing retreats they provide psychosocial support as well as focusing on writing and reviewing. A common feature of such writing groups is that they oppose the vertical supervisor/teacher relationship (Aitchison and Lee, 2006) and are often peer led (Danvers et al., 2018). All too often academic and professional development adopts a deficit and quick fix model. However, if development is to be sustained and embedded consideration needs to be given to contextual factors. In this case, writing should be '...embedded in the real work of academics...' (Grant, 2006: 486) and thought of as a *local practice*. Therefore, '...sites of learning close to the context of daily work are thus preferred over those organised and conducted outside a faculty' (Lee and Boud, 2003: 188). Although there are exceptions, few studies consider the emotional aspects of writing and identity shifts (Lee and Boud, 2003), for example, how writing can be seen and used as a transformative force and a means of

transgressing and challenging dominant academic cultures (Pereira, 2012), and, in the context of widening participation practitioners, an opportunity to begin ‘...pushing the boundaries of who can write and how’ (Burke, 2008: 199).

If practitioners are not motivated then writing skills alone will not lead to text production and publication. Developing motivational tools, Berger (1990) argues, in the context of a writing mentoring programme for social work faculty in the US, is necessary. Various tools, ranging from ‘timetables’ and writing assessment to ‘projection’ and ‘channelling’ are suggested. Other studies have identified a range of motivations including: sharing ideas, professional development, raising their profile, publicising an organisation or issue and, in some cases, financial reward. Unlike Bandura (1986) we do not view motivation, in this case motivation to write, as a unitary concept where practitioners are either amotivated or motivated. We see motivation as a continuum, along which individuals vary in both the level and orientation of motivation. We draw on the work of Ryan and Deci (2000) whose ‘self-determination theory’ distinguishes between different types of motivation, based on objectives or goals. Whilst most activities, in this case writing, may be seen as extrinsically motivated and non-autonomous, self-determination theory proposes that the degree of autonomy can vary. Extrinsic motivation may come through a process of internalisation and integration. Internalisation comes from a sense of belonging, for example, to a community of practice, where there are shared values, and integration from transforming the task of writing, for example, to become their own (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In comparison to extrinsic motivation the role of intrinsic motivation receives less attention in the literature on academic writing. Exploring the role of intrinsic motivation in relation to writing is important: ‘Because intrinsic motivation results in high-quality learning and creativity, it is especially important to detail the factors and forces that engender versus undermine it’ (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 55).

Given these gaps in the literature – primarily an absence of research on the role of writing for widening participation practitioners – and an increasingly diverse and expanding HE sector it seemed timely to undertake a small scale study to explore the extent to which widening participation

practitioners were writing – everyday writing, reflective writing and in some cases writing for publication. Before outlining our study in the next section we provide a brief overview of the shifting identity of our research participants, widening participation practitioners, who operate in an increasingly performative environment.

Widening participation – a vibrant and developing community of practice

Widening participation in HE is a vibrant and developing community of practice. Although somewhat dated now, a previous study (Hudson and Pooley, 2006) on the support and recognition needs of widening participation practitioners provided an insight into their background through an online survey. The survey was completed by 276 practitioners which represented a 20 per cent response rate based on an estimated population of 1400. The majority of respondents, 72 per cent, were first in family to attend HE. Nearly all respondents had an undergraduate degree or equivalent (96 per cent) and the majority (57 per cent) had some form of postgraduate qualification. The research was undertaken at the zenith of the government funded Aimhigher programme, which was designed to raise awareness, attainment and aspirations of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and promote progression to HE. Over ten years later there are no ‘...professional development pathways...’ for these practitioners (Gazeley et al., 2018: 1).

Since the study was published there have been significant changes across the HE landscape, not least in access and widening participation. The cessation of funding for the Aimhigher programme inevitably led to restructuring within institutions. Whilst most institutions previously had separate widening participation and outreach teams, many became subsumed within marketing and recruitment departments. The shift in focus from outreach to include retention and success has resulted in more appropriate, and in some cases additional, support for learners from widening participation backgrounds. Consequently staff involved in supporting the retention, attainment and progression of learners from widening participation backgrounds may also describe themselves as widening participation practitioners.

Whilst institutions and Aimhigher partnerships evaluated their activities and interventions a HEFCE commissioned review of the evidence by Gorard et al. (2006) was critical of practitioner research. These criticisms were summarised as:

...pseudo-research, poor quality reporting of research, deficiencies in datasets, analytical errors, a lack of suitable comparators, obfuscation, a lack of scepticism in general, and the regular misattribution of causal links in particular. (Gorard and Smith 2006: 575)

Whilst HEFCE (2006) addressed some of these concerns through a further review based on a survey of evidence from HEIs and issuing further guidelines, doubts were raised about practitioners' expertise to conduct research and their vested interest in reporting success.

With the introduction of student tuition fees, institutions were required to report on their widening participation activities. As the monitoring and reporting mechanisms have developed and evolved from Widening Participation Strategic Assessments (WPSAs) to Widening Participation Strategic Statements (WPSSs), and from Access Agreements to APPs, the requirements for robust evaluation have become increasingly demanding. Institutions have responded in a number of different ways; some have created dedicated institutional widening participation research and evaluation units, some have fostered collaboration between practitioners and academics, and others have contracted out some outreach and evaluation activity. As Burke (2012) notes the insights and experience of practitioners have previously gone unnoticed and unrecognised and they have been largely excluded from the research process. Drawing on the work of Freire (1970), Burke (2018: 12) argues that:

...if we are to develop more powerful strategies to build equity in higher education, we require a praxis-based approach that brings together academic researchers with equity practitioners to enrich our understanding across these domains.

However they are described, as 'blended professionals' operating in a 'third space' (Whitchurch, 2008), or describe themselves, as 'pracademics'

(Stevenson et al., 2018), the community of practice has developed and undertakes an increasingly wide range of activities.

It seems appropriate to revisit this important community of practice, to learn more about the background of current practitioners and explore the extent to which writing – both everyday writing and writing for publication – is part of their professional practice. The next section provides a brief outline of the methodology and methods used for the research study, which is currently in progress.

Research study – aims, methodology and methods

In this section, we set out the methodological approach and the data collection methods adopted for the study. The data collection methods include an online survey, qualitative interviews and material generated from exercises at a small number of writing workshops. We also briefly discuss the challenge of defining widening participation practitioners and the challenges that this posed in terms of promoting the research and recruiting respondents.

The design of the study was informed by critical realist ideas, in particular the work of Archer (2007). Archer argues that there is a variety of conflicting opportunities for people to act in different ways in response to ambiguous social situations. For individuals there is a tension as they balance their freedom to act in a particular way based on their values with personal, institutional, cultural and structural constraints. As Wilkins and Burke (2015) note, many practitioners have to negotiate and reconcile a commitment to social justice with a neoliberal system of higher education. The focus of the research on the constraints and enablers to writing coincides with Archer's (2007) view that social structures are interpreted by social actors based on their values.

The participants for the study are widening participation practitioners currently working in a UK HEI. We adopted a broad definition of the term widening participation practitioner to include staff on professional and administrative contracts as well as academic and research contracts

since we believe this more accurately reflects the diversity of practitioners in the sector. However, estimating the number of staff in HE who might describe themselves as widening participation practitioners is challenging for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) staff record does not capture job roles at this level of specificity. Secondly, there is no single professional or membership body which practitioners must join or register with in order to practice. Thirdly, of the three leading sector bodies for widening participation practitioners, both FACE and the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) have institutional membership whilst the Higher Education Liaison Officers Association (HELOA) has individual membership. None of the membership organisations has complete coverage of the sector and there are overlapping memberships. Finally, as noted previously, the shift in policy focus from access and outreach to retention, attainment and progression has resulted in more appropriate, and in some cases additional, support for learners from widening participation backgrounds. Consequently staff involved in supporting the retention, attainment and progression of learners from widening participation backgrounds may also describe themselves as widening participation practitioners. The online survey conducted by Hudson and Pooley (2006), as part of their study on support and recognition needs of widening participation practitioners, also provided a useful snapshot of practitioners' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity and highest educational qualification.

The online survey for *Widening Participation Practitioners Write!* contains 5 sections and a total of 28 questions. The majority of questions are fixed choice to which respondents are asked to provide single or, where appropriate, multiple responses. Some questions provide space for additional comments and a small number of questions are free text. The survey takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete depending on participants' responses. It focuses on: experience of what Lea and Stierer (2009) have termed 'every day writing'; reflective writing and writing for publication; motivation for writing; support strategies and interventions; barriers to writing and publishing; and finally demographic information. The survey is open at the time of writing and initial calls to action have been posted via two JISCmail (an email discussion list service for UK education and research communities) lists, Action and Access

and Widening Participation, as well as through the leading membership organisations, FACE, NEON and HELOA. Findings from the survey will be used to inform subsequent qualitative interviews.

Respondents who complete the online survey will be invited to indicate their willingness to contribute further to the study by participating in a qualitative interview. Up to 15 practitioners will be selected, based on their experience – none, some, extensive – of writing and publishing. The interviews will seek to explore the extent to which practitioners see writing as part of their professional practice and the extent to which they undertake ‘everyday’ writing, reflective writing and writing for publication. We will explore in more depth their motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, to write and in some cases publish, the barriers and challenges to producing text, and the initiatives and support structures which enable them to write for publication. Having piloted the interview schedule, interviews are expected to range from 45-60 minutes in duration. With respondents’ consent interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Findings from the online survey and interviews will be used to inform the development and delivery of a small number of writing workshops for practitioners. The aim of the workshops will be to prepare practitioners to present their work at a practitioner or academic conference and produce a written output. The output may take the form of a paper for an academic journal or an edited collection of conference papers, a blog post or an article for a newsletter. The workshops will be facilitated by widening participation practitioners with experience of presenting to and writing for a wide variety of audiences. The workshops will provide practitioners with an opportunity to engage in a number of writing exercises, such as free writing, share and review writing, and begin the planning process for a presentation and written output. Participants will be invited to contribute to the research study by sharing worksheets or exercises completed during the workshop.

In developing the research study we recognised that only a limited number of practitioners actively engage with the wider community of practice and fewer are likely to engage with the academic literature. Consequently,

we were mindful when using the terms ‘scholarly writing’, ‘academic writing’ and ‘writing for publication’ with practitioners. Our concern is that in the context of HE these terms signal a particular type of writing, mainly produced by academics and researchers, and usually disseminated in a particular type of publication, namely peer review journals. From undertaking a review of the literature we note that the majority of studies report on individuals who have written, or have participated in some form of intervention, such as working with a writing coach or attending a writing retreat, with the aim of writing for publication. From engaging with widening participation practitioners we recognise that not everyone sees writing – particularly reflective writing and writing for publication – as part of their professional practice.

Conclusions

The discussion in this chapter considered the role of writing for widening participation practitioners. In the context of access and participation it noted the opportunities that the new OfS (2018b) regulatory framework, with a focus on evidence and impact, together with the nascent evidence and impact exchange, might afford widening participation practitioners in terms of research and writing for publication. Whilst acknowledging this as an opportunity and driver, the limited recognition of practitioner research and support for practitioners to publish was noted. This absence was also noted in a brief review of the literature in which we argued that reflective writing, as well as scholarly and academic writing, is an important part of professional practice. Whilst reflective writing may primarily benefit individual practitioners, it also has the potential to inform the practice of others. Writing for publication, not just in peer review journals, but also a range of other publications, is an opportunity to share good practice. The focus of the OfS on evidence and impact may be both a driver and an opportunity for practitioners to write. Developing a stronger voice through publication could also enable practitioners to have a greater influence in framing policy. To date the support for practitioners to write is limited and may not necessarily meet their needs. This lack of support led to the development of the small-scale study that aims to explore the extent to which writing is seen as part of professional practice.

As noted in the introduction and section on methodology and data collection methods, the study is ongoing. At the time of writing, the online survey is open and calls to action are being circulated to encourage practitioners to participate. In developing the study and undertaking fieldwork we faced two challenges. Firstly, widening participation practitioners are less of a discrete group than they once were. They are more heterogeneous and diverse in terms of their academic background and the work they undertake. Secondly, would practitioners see writing as part of their professional practice, and if not, would they conclude that the research was not salient to them? From the survey responses we will identify interview respondents based on their experience – none, some or extensive – of writing for publication. Findings from the study will enable organisations in the sector to develop their continuing professional development provision and dissemination activities to better meet the needs of practitioners. At institutional level academic developers may also wish to draw on findings from the study to inform their work with practitioners. In concluding, we have to agree that ‘Academic writing can be exhilarating, or quietly pleasurable, or plain hard work’ (Grant, 2006: 483).

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