

English for Academic Purposes: A New Discipline in Norway?

Ann Torday Gulden, Oslo University College

EAP as a term is relatively new in Norway and encompasses both student and staff training in Higher Education. Where academic staff are concerned, the 'purposes' element of the acronym may range from teaching international modules, chairing and participating in meetings, presenting a paper at an international conference, tutoring exchange students in clinical practice, to preparing articles for publication.

EAP has been available to students in higher education in Norway throughout the last decades at least, since some of their professional interaction and many of their syllabus texts are in English. Domain loss is registered in several fields, particularly with regard to professional terminology (see the Norwegian Government White Paper, Stortingsmelding nr. 35, *Mål og mening. Ein heilskapleg norsk språkpolitikk*, June 2008). At Oslo University College (OUC), English courses are available to engineering and business students, whereas other faculties must struggle. This is also the case in other applied sciences institutions of higher education in Norway. It will be necessary to expand the EAP portfolio for more categories of students, since they are graduating into an increasingly internationalized society.

In 2006 staff competences in English became a priority at OUC and a range of EAP courses was devised. These courses are unique in Norway and not yet the norm in the larger European context. Much conference activity takes place at home and abroad, and EAP for staff is now part of the institutional portfolio at OUC. Courses are all needs-analysed and task-based, i.e. closely work-related. The academic writing course now carries 6 ECTS points, is recently adopted by the Bergen University College, and cooperation is being developed between centres of EAP expertise in the UK, the Netherlands and Norway to optimize EAP interventions for staff training.

Thus OUC pioneers EAP in its more extended form, addressing staff competences and linking EAP colleagues. The EAP programme for staff

at OUC emerges from the identification of skills gaps to provide an optimal EAP service. The EAP enterprise has developed in stages.

Stage 1: Before 2003 there was little contact between the teachers of English in the various faculties at OUC. Teachers of English didactics at the education faculty, teachers of English for engineering and business students, as the only teachers of English on campus, had no organized cooperation with one another. The OUC Forum for Professional English was therefore initiated, first as an informal gathering from time to time, and subsequently established as a forum for consultative purposes. In an institution like OUC, where applied sciences dominate, teachers of English are placed in faculties to remain close to subject teachers and their respective disciplines, so a centralised language faculty would be counterproductive.

Membership in BALEAP, the British Association of Lecturers in EAP was sought initially, succeeded by more contact with the Netherlands. Both countries have long experience in EAP. Contact with Sweden developed from a BALEAP conference in the UK. The combination of EAP impulses from the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands as 'outside' points of reference seems the most appropriate recipe for the successful development of EAP in Norway, for mainly cultural reasons.

Stage 2: Norwegians are well schooled in general English, but there are aspects of EAP teaching in which we would do well to cooperate at a national level to improve academic English. Best EAP practice is the aim, and alignment to systems of European benchmarking would be advisable if practically applicable. Further aspects of cooperation, not least for collegial and social purposes, would seem useful to promote the same purposes. EAP should be established as a bona fide academic discipline in this country as it is in other countries to which Norway may be compared. So in 2006 an initiative was taken by EAP teachers at The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Telemark University College (HiT) and OUC to locate as many EAP teachers as possible from institutions of higher education in Norway, and to arrange a meeting. The group wrote a strategy document outlining the aims of a new Norwegian Forum for EAP (NFEAP) for teachers and researchers in the subject who have comparable professional challenges. NFEAP focuses on the need for improved staff skills, as in the following excerpt from its mission statement:

Most institutions of Higher Education in Norway have internationalization high on their strategic agenda. Undergraduate and Master's degrees and modules are offered in English to international and Norwegian students. Bilateral staff exchanges involve many researchers and academic staff at institutions of higher education in Norway. International conference participation and increasing pressures to publish are part of the picture nationwide as are the planning and organization of joint research and teaching projects across national boundaries.

This raises three questions:

- Are the teaching staff in the HE sector in Norway proficient enough in English to teach at an adequate level?
- Are their skills in English optimal in the context of conferences, written academic work and the initiation of and participation in international networks?
- Can teaching and administrative staff tackle the linguistic and cultural challenges involved in cooperation with international students/contact with partner institutions abroad?

Formal and informal investigations of these issues have revealed a skills deficit. Most academic and administrative staff in the HE sector in Norway need training in English for Academic Purposes. Some programmes are being run at HE institutions but the initiatives are fragmented geographically, and there has been little contact between EAP specialists in Norway.

To address these issues, regular NFEAP seminars have been arranged at OUC. The summer seminars last for two days and the autumn seminar, one day. These meetings will be continued. The first seminar took place in June 2007, when staff from the English teaching section at the University of Hertfordshire, one of OUC's Erasmus partner institutions and a comparable institution as well as having long-established expertise in EAP, were invited to give papers on the way EAP is integrated and taught there. In November 2007 NFEAP again met with guests from abroad to discuss issues such as:

- Intercultural classrooms: achieving improved cross-cultural communicative competence
- Research on English Medium Instruction in Higher Education in Norway, What can NFEAP do as an organisation to promote better English in the Norwegian HE sector?

-Who does what in the setting of standards for English medium teaching/research activity in academe?

The topics for the NFEAP summer seminar 2008 were 'Teaching Academic Writing' and 'The internationalisation of Academic Staff'. EAP colleagues from the UK and Sweden were invited to speak, as were EAP researchers working in Norway. A guest speaker who directs internationalization in a comparable HE institution to OUC, Hanze University Groningen in the Netherlands spoke on European contexts and the required EAP competencies for university staff. The systematic implementation of EAP interventions for staff at higher education remains the challenge.

NFEAP meetings have been successful, not only academically but also socially, providing a hitherto non-existent national forum for collegial contact and cooperation in the discipline of EAP. Sub-groups are now engaged in international conference panels and workshops (at the European Seminar for Studies in English, ESSE Aarhus 2008, and the European Association for International Education, EAIE Antwerp 2008), as well as other joint projects. Three member institutions (OUC, NTNU and Bergen University College, HiB) are cooperating to provide a week-long course in academic writing for Norwegian academics at the Norwegian Study Centre in York, spring 2009. More cooperative initiatives are imminent.

NFEAP is a useful and thriving forum, organised lightly. The annual general meeting is held at the end of the summer seminar. The next NFEAP meeting at NTNU on November 19th 2008 will be on the topics of language and vocabulary acquisition (workshops) and the effects of dominance of English in Norwegian academia.

To conclude: EAP is now a sturdier plant in Norway than it has been, and it is still growing. NFEAP is a viable organization, currently anchored at OUC. Not all EAP teachers in Norway are as yet located, but the search is on for more members and contacts. OUC has been generous in funding and hosting the initial NFEAP events, which have been well attended by 30-40 participants each time. Since the position of English in Norway is controversial with regard to the effects of loss of domain in the indigenous language, much research is needed. However, the endeavor of raising EAP competence in Norway from basic to academic English must continue in order to enable optimal presentation of

important research and research cooperation internationally. For more information please see the following web links:

http://www.hio.no/for_tilsette/fellestjenester/organisasjons_og_personals_eksjonen/kurs_og_kompetanseutvikling/forum_for_professional_english_fpe/nfeap
<http://www.hio.no/content/view/full/70792>