

English at a higher degree – postgraduates’ perception of their English proficiency and how they seek assistance

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In order to obtain a clearer understanding of English language issues postgraduates face in Australia and how they obtain assistance, in 2012 the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) designed and launched an online survey, exploring those issues. The survey was anonymous, asked postgraduates in which areas they perceived a need to improve their English and where they went to seek assistance. It looked in detail at the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The scope of the survey went beyond English for academic purpose and included areas of social interaction and employment related communication.

The results provide an important insight into the impact English proficiency has on postgraduates’ academic and social experience in Australia. It also highlights how many postgraduates see good English skills as a vital key to success after graduation. The paper links the findings with current research on the international student experience in Australia and employability issues. It then makes a number of suggestions on how a more targeted and consistent approach to English support would be of special benefit to postgraduate students.