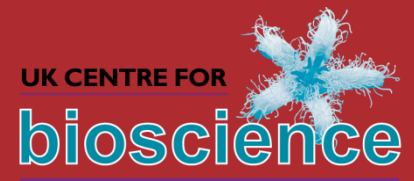


**Switching on the skills for lifelong learning:  
understanding how programmes and modules  
contribute to the development of learning  
autonomy**

*Dr Graham Scott; Dr Ray Goulder;*

*Mrs Chris Murphy; Mrs Julie Furnell*



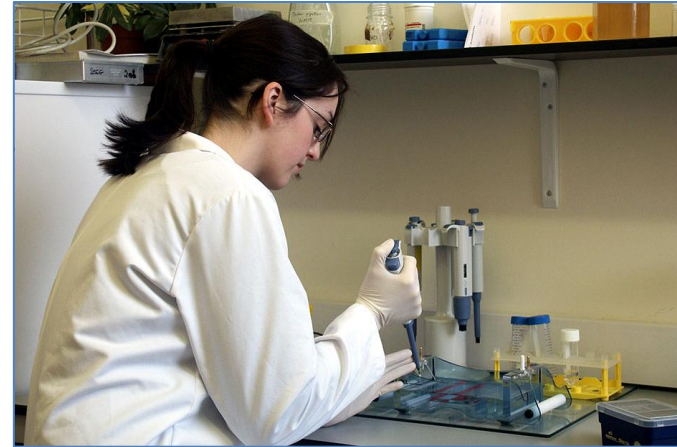
## Project Aims

- Understand staff and students' views on learner autonomy and independent learning
- Identify opportunities for and barriers to learner autonomy and independent learning
- Inform curriculum development



## Why is learner autonomy important?

- *Developing the skills necessary for self-managed and lifelong learning (QAA Biosciences Benchmark Statement, 2007).*
- *Providing opportunities for all students to realise their potential and develop the skills, attributes and values that are essential to .....lifelong learning ... (University of Hull, Learning and Teaching Strategy 2008-2012).*



# Why is learner autonomy really important?

- Its my responsibility and at the end of the day I have to push myself to do it.
- I applied to the Sea Life Centre and they wanted a lot of stuff on water analysis and how you'd manage an aquarium and you could pull that out of the lab work we've done or you could pull your field skills out so that you can say well "I haven't applied it to an aquarium but I've done this with whatever" and you can sample things and you actually know what you're doing before you get there.



*quotes from student interviews*

# Staff value student independence and autonomy

We want:

- [students] able to go and research it better with the appropriate guidance.
- [students with] confidence in their abilities to use transferrable skills
- [students] to be independently thinking, independently doing, independently working and independently writing it and independently submitting it.

*quotes from staff member interviews*



# Methodology

Quantitative approach

Questionnaire distributed  
to students at all levels  
(94 responses)

Statistical analysis

Qualitative approach

Semi-structured interviews with  
Staff (n= 15)

Semi-structured interviews with  
Individual students and focus groups  
(n= 29)

Thematic analysis



# Do we encourage autonomy and independence? perceptions of teaching staff

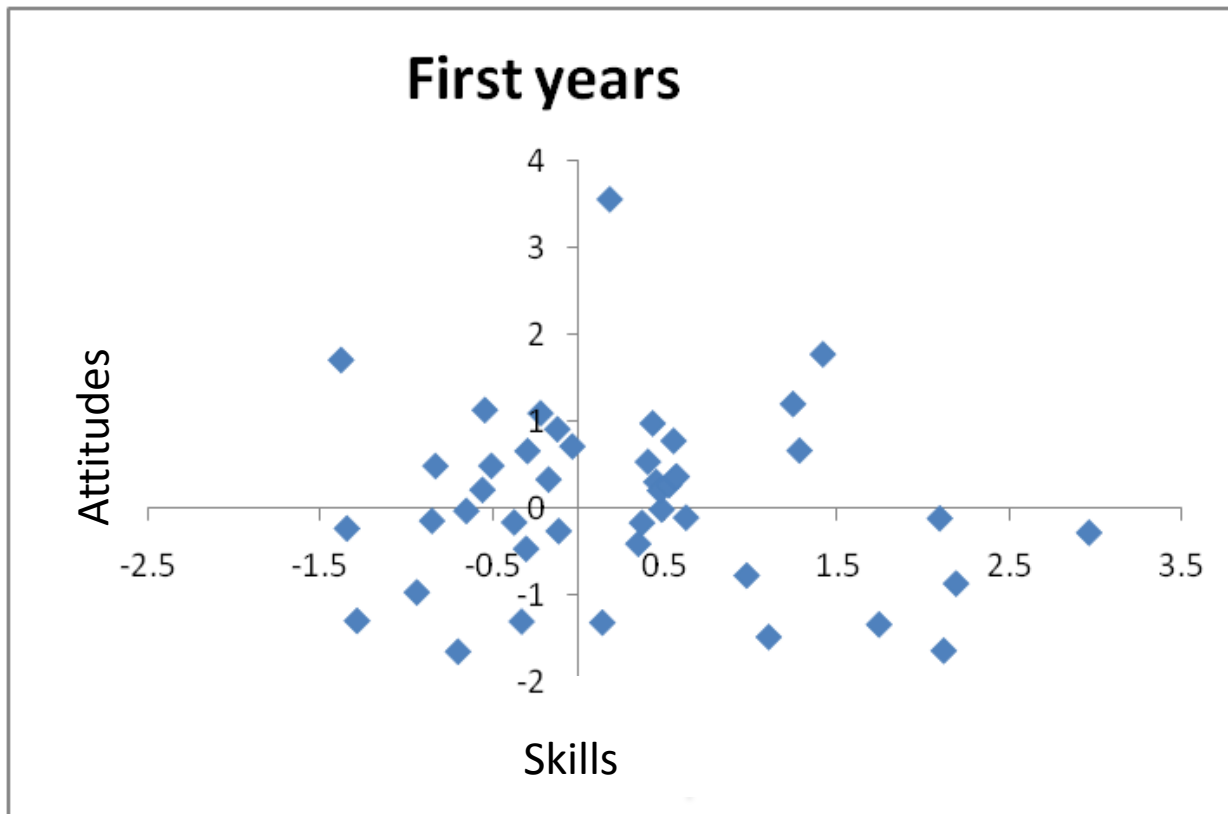
- Yes we do
  - encourage questioning, provide opportunities for extra work, encourage critical thinking, encourage study groups, enquiry based learning
  - ALL students should be independent learners by graduation
- With the caveats
  - autonomy progression 1<sup>st</sup> year to final year
  - no good just telling them to F-off and find out (FOFO), “that’s just being lazy in your teaching”

## Do we always encourage it? perceptions of teaching staff

- No we don't
  - “probably not because I just give them information”
  - “students should be independent anyway”
  - “I’ve found them [*finalists*] incredibly reliant on me for even the simplest things”
- But
  - if students perform poorly in their final year it’s a reflection on our teaching rather than their ability

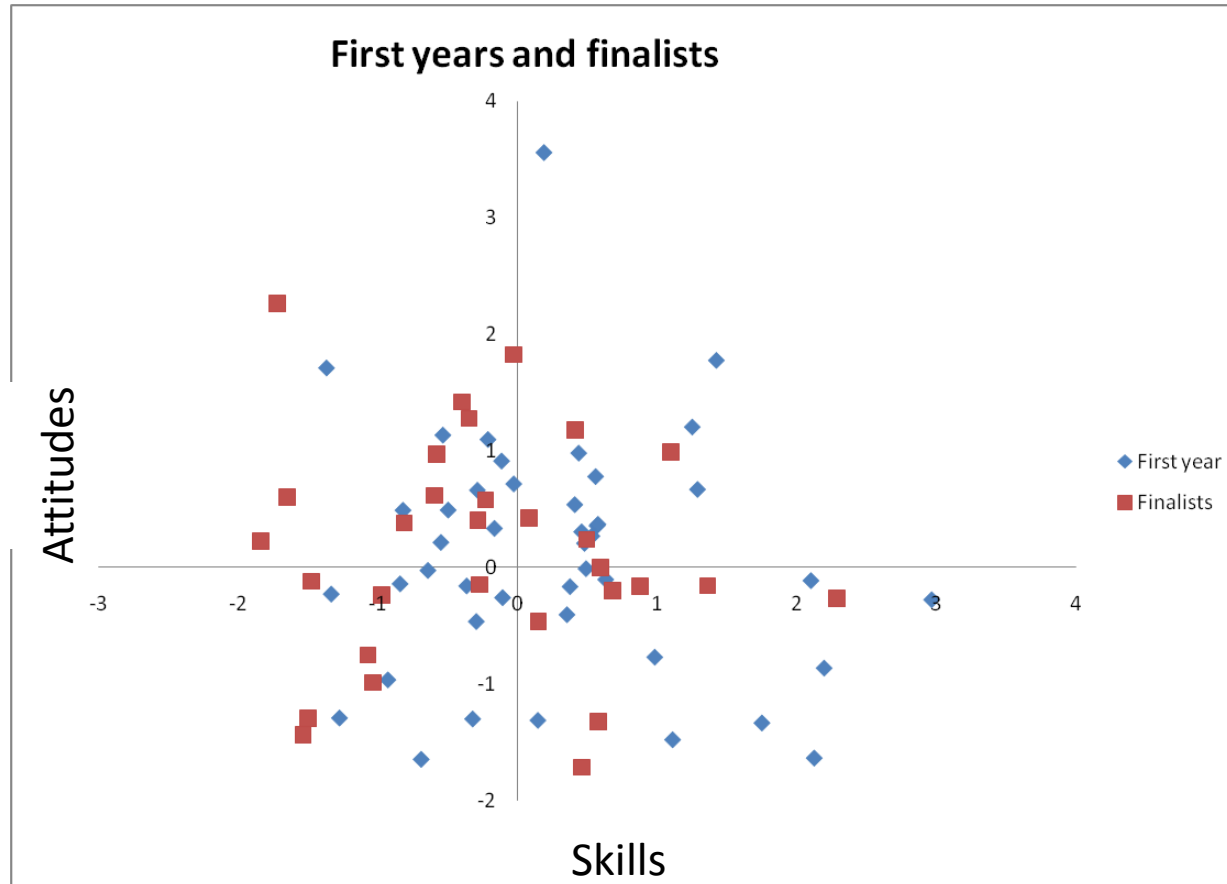


# Autonomous learning scale

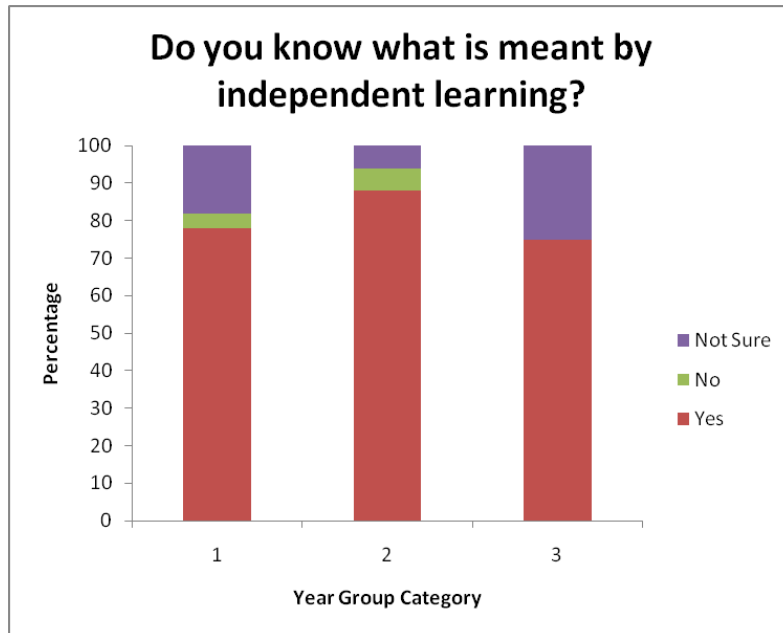


Macaskill A & E Taylor (2010) the development of a brief measure of learner autonomy in university students. *Studies in Higher Education* 35(3): 351-359

# Autonomous learning scale



# Student perceptions



Independent learning is.....  
 revising, background reading,  
 synthesising information, goal setting,  
 motivation, not being spoon-fed, taking  
 responsibility, applying skills in new  
 situations and understanding how you  
 did it

“making further notes to your lectures and doing extra reading”

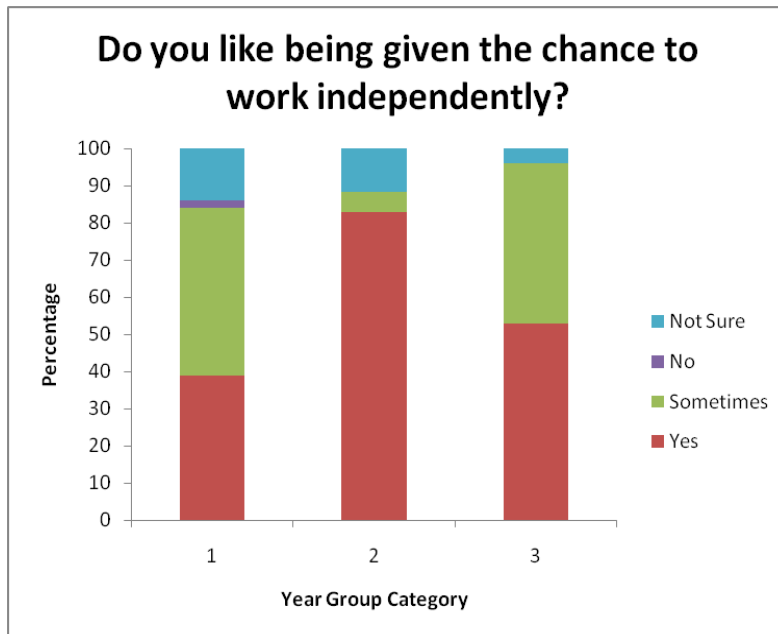
“working by yourself” - “self motivation”

“students taking responsibility for their own learning”

“not constrained by instructions just left to learn in your own way at your own pace”

“applying skills obtained from the course independently to produce work and to understand the processes involved”

# Student perceptions



Concerns around independent learning  
 preferring to work with others,  
 going in the wrong direction,  
 needing support,  
 lack of interest means no motivation

“You have to be motivated. If you’re not you’re screwed.”

“It’s a bit daunting at first”

“You have to step out of your comfort zones for those kind of things”

“You can’t be creative and force it I don’t believe you can learn if you don’t want to”

# Connecting practice and needs

## Staff

Reduce control over time.

Promote ownership of learning.

Allow student topic choice.

Teach the process of enquiry.

Increase personalised learning at all stages.

Instead of content provide tools and then give them the freedom to use them.

## Students

Should be allowed to do more stuff that you're actually interested in. You should find out what we want to learn.

I've developed in myself, for me that's just as important as a piece of paper.

When I'm sat watching university challenge I can answer a hell of a lot more questions than when I started.

# Key themes – ongoing analysis

## Staff

### Opportunities

good practice (self and other)

willingness to change to enhance support

### Barriers

time

development  
delivery  
feedback

class size

teaching space

fees

## Students

### Positives

desire for autonomy  
awareness

time-management

paid work

good practice (individual and shared)

understanding curriculum  
“design”

### Negatives

fear of failure

neophobia

paid work

Please contact us for more information, to give us your input as critical friends or to follow the project.

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Thank you to the Centre for supporting this project



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