



I Didn't Anticipate Doing That!

**Matching Student and Staff Expectations of
project work.**

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Context for case study

- Undergraduate Science degrees in Biomolecular Sciences
- Project defines 'Honours'
- Final year, 20% available marks (24 credits)
- Traditionally bench-based: experimental, in a lab, must be new work, can be in-house or external
- A few non-lab based, mainly survey-style



Anecdotal Evidence

"I won't offer projects based on my personal research any more because it is such a waste of reagents."

"I really wanted to feel I was doing 'real research' not something invented just to give me a project."

"Communication was such a problem that I abandoned my original idea."

"I could never find my tutor to help me with the practical work."

"Most students don't want to be stretched or think for themselves, they just want to be told 'do this, do that' and follow a recipe."

"This project was nothing like I expected."



Problem

Do staff and students have the same agenda and expectations from undergraduate project work?

Are students getting the right project for them?

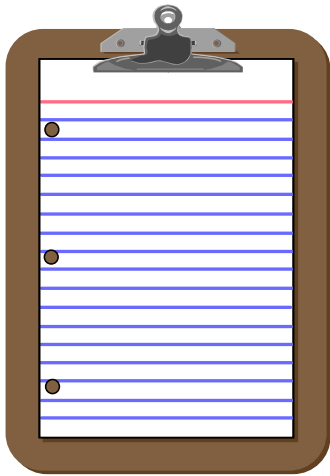


Allocation Problems

- Changing balance of students on programmes
- Programmes offered changing faster than staff turnover
 - Certain project titles very popular, others unwanted
 - Changing project allocation system to balance workload
 - Originally, chose from list of specific project titles
 - Now, choose subject areas and negotiate specifics with allocated member of staff
- Wanted to advise staff how to get best out of new system
- Investigation funded by HEFCE LTA strategy money (2001-3) and ILT Small Grant (2002-3)



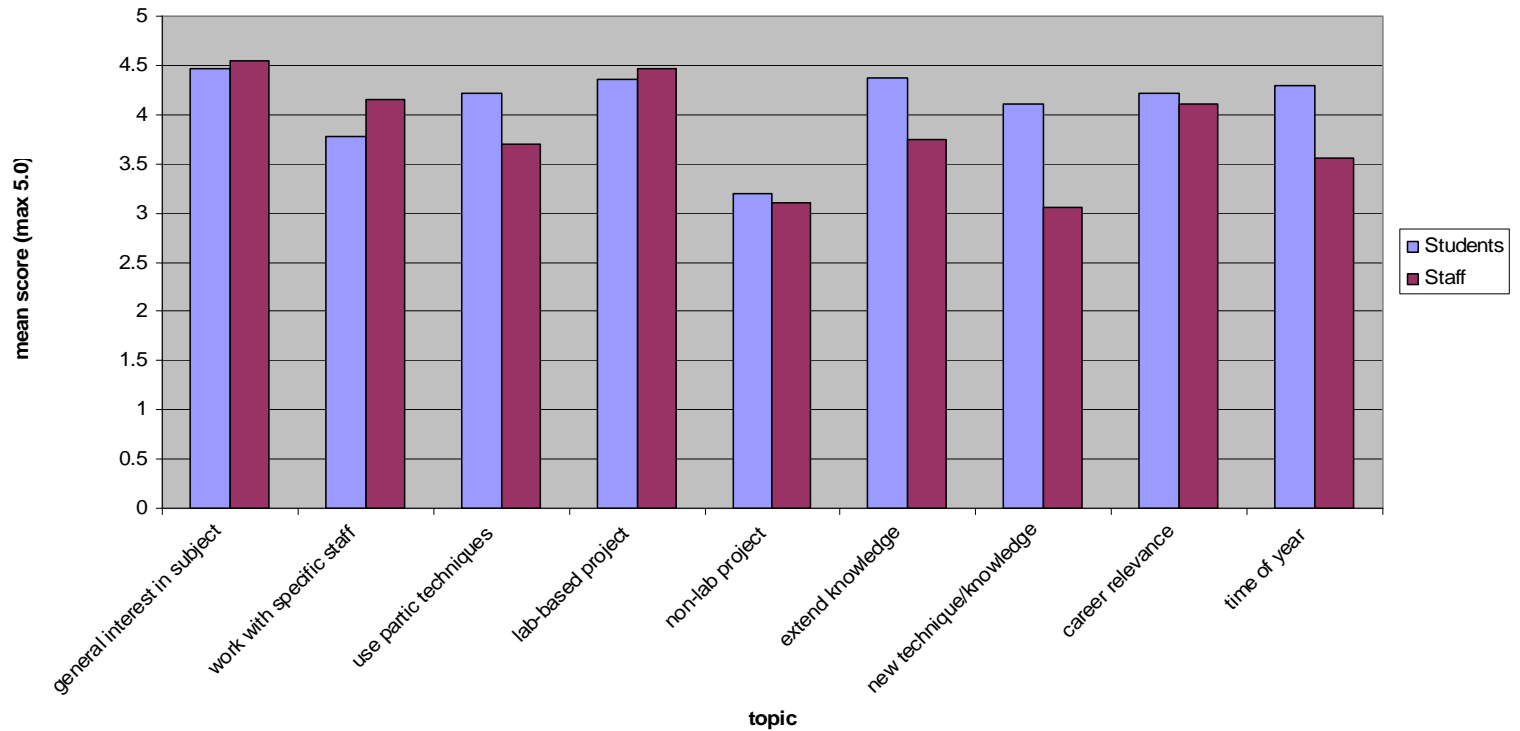
Questionnaires



- Questions in 4 areas
 - Factors involved in choices and their importance
 - Allocation: process and effectiveness
 - Setting up the project, initial understanding
 - Role of supervisor
- Tick box, rating statement 1-5 and free comment
- 20 responses from 30 staff (67%),
- 36 responses from 99 students (36%) + 47 responses from 121 students (39%)

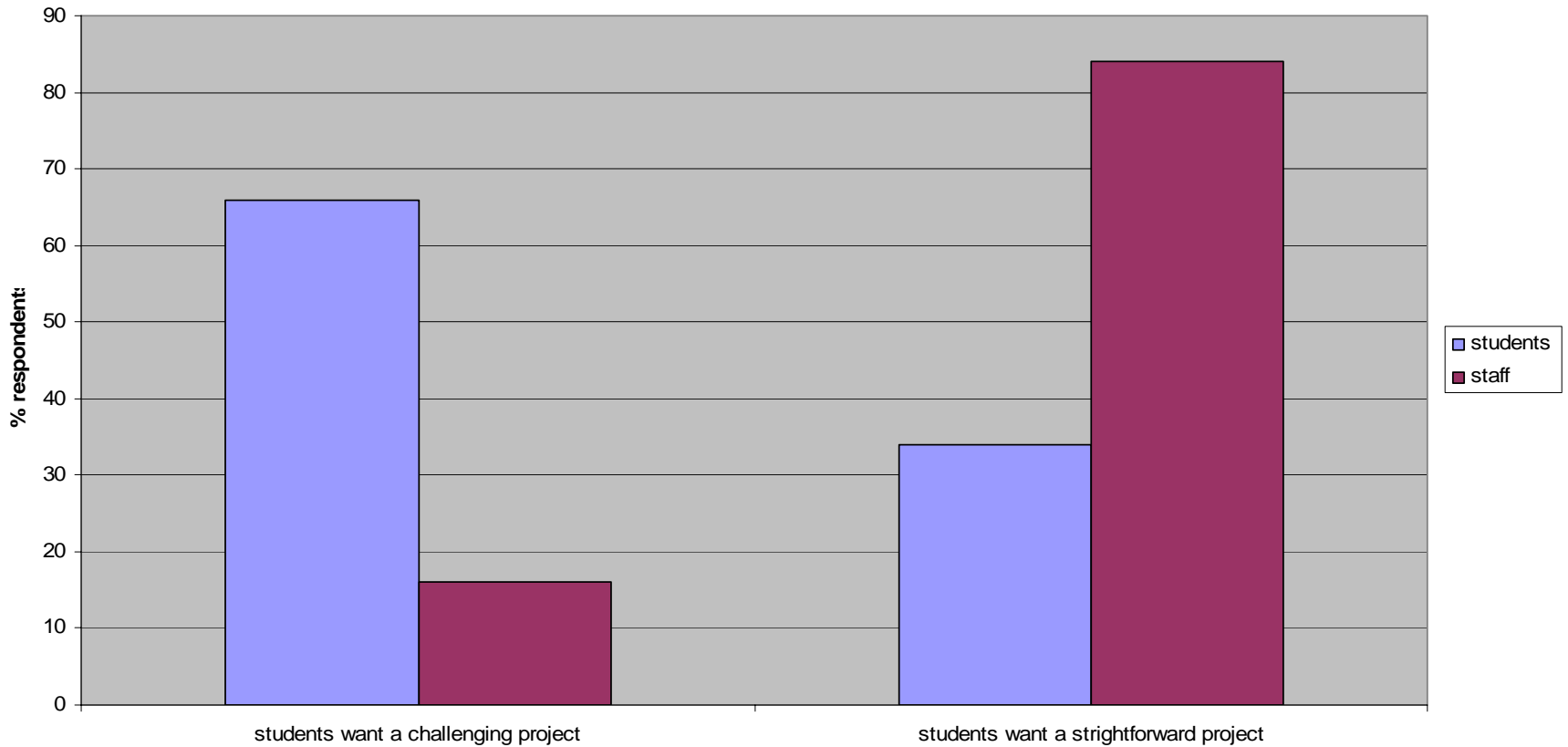
Choosing a Project

What is important when students choose a project?



The challenge!!

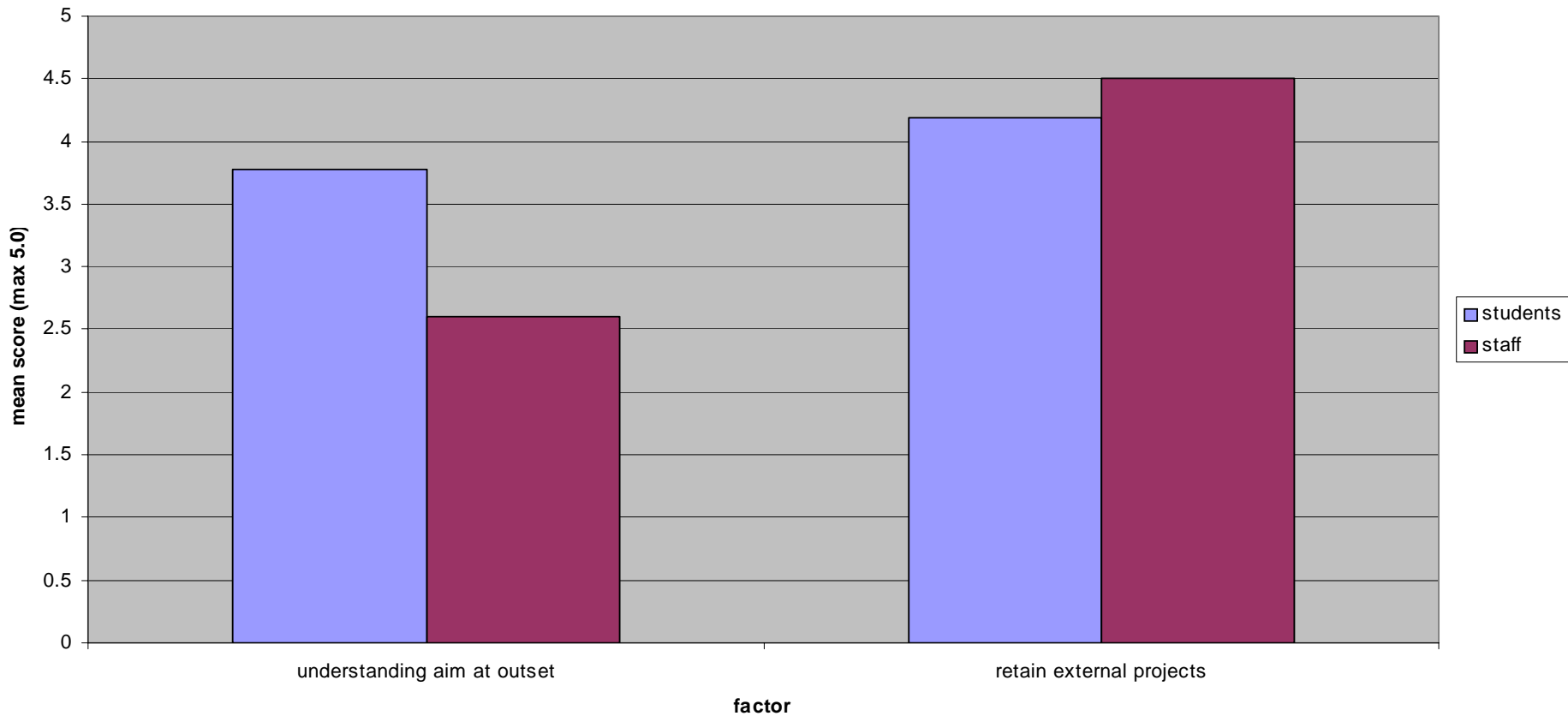
Do students want to be challenged?





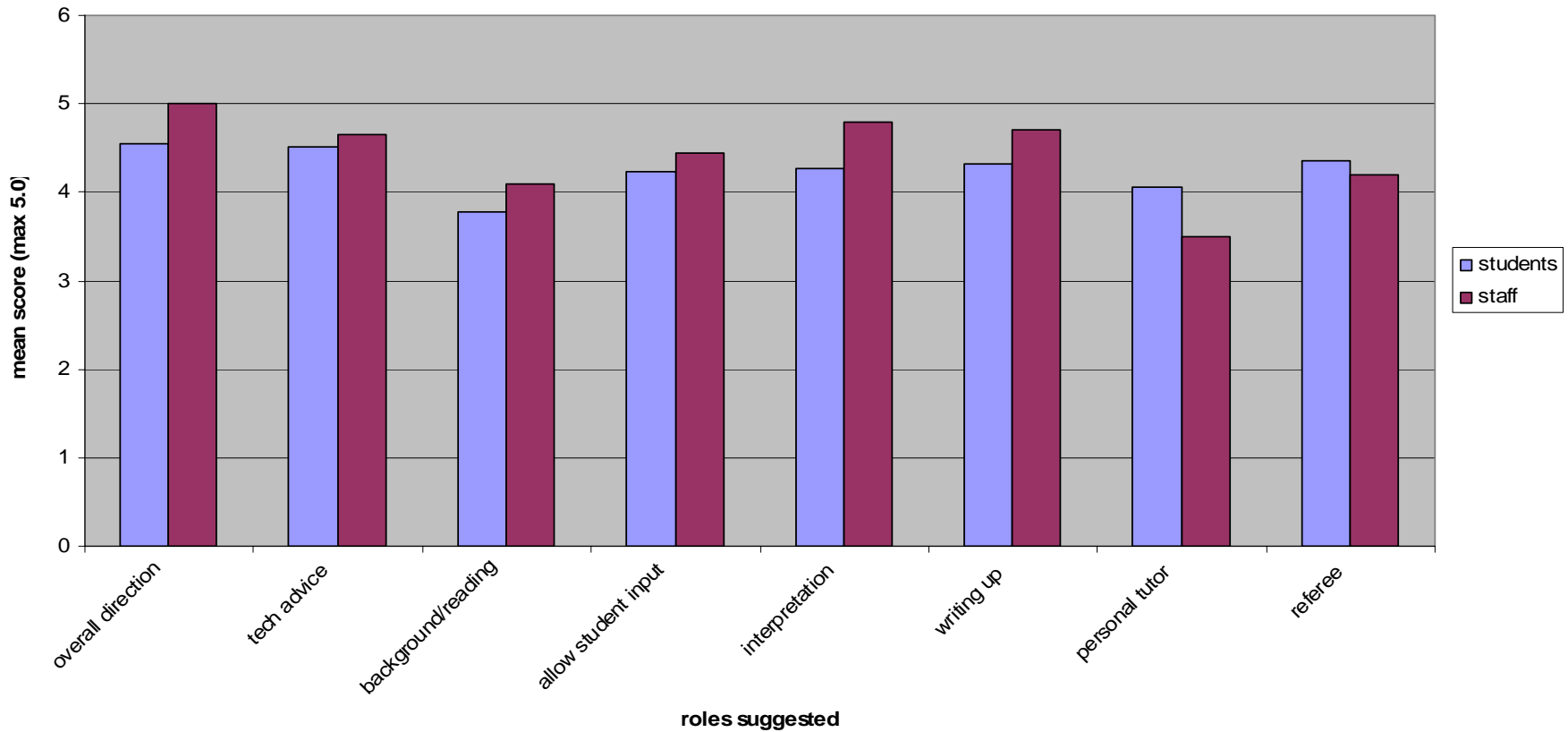
Setting up project

Comparison of factors involved in setting up projects



Role of supervisor

Importance of possible roles of project supervisor





Recommendations to Staff

- Find out rest of student timetable and negotiate time of year for lab work
- Involve student in project design, try to find out what they want, and be prepared to go into areas which are new to them
- Check that words like 'challenging' mean the same to you as to the student
- Be prepared to let go of the analysis and writing up



What else?

- There were no significant differences in opinion between students on the two allocation systems
- Both staff and students are very satisfied overall with the new allocation system; have made refinements as a result of suggestions
- Investigated what 'challenging' means by interviews of staff and students



Students (7) on 'challenging'

- Solve problems alone (4)
- New subject area or developing technique (3)
- Outcome not predictable (2)
- Think for yourself (2)
- Potentially publishable (2)
- Higher standard than 'straightforward'
- Plan day to day work yourself. No guidance



Staff (4) on 'challenging'

- Involves difficult or advanced techniques (4)
- Original research, may not be successful (2)
- Student input in design/development
- Student needs to think about work
- Student has input into unexpected results
- Results require thought to interpret



Students (7) on straightforward

- Has clear aims and objectives (5)
 - Detailed lab methods available (5)
 - Timetable predictable (2)
 - No unexpected problems or results (2)
 - Uses well established techniques
 - Student guided through project
-
- Could develop into something more challenging (consolidation then development)



Staff (4) on 'straightforward'

- Uses simple, published techniques (3)
 - Superficial or limited investigation (2)
 - Supervisor can predict the way the project will develop
-
- Students need to be guided at first, given more to do if they prove able to cope (consolidation then development)



What next?

- Extending the analysis to
 - work place tutors/ external supervisors
 - undergrads & staff in other subject areas (Pharmacy, Chemistry, Biological and Earth Sciences)
 - post-graduate students (MSc)
- Considering dissertations/literature reviews/WBL (ie other types of individualised learning)
- Module choices??



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