

First-Year Students' Experiences of Learning and Teaching in the Biosciences

This keynote reviews findings from a large-scale, four-year ESRC-funded research project which was concerned with undergraduate courses as 'teaching-learning environments' (i.e. taking account of a wide array of influences on the quality of students' learning) in the biosciences and three other contrasting subject areas. The keynote focuses on questionnaire and interview findings from the three first-year bioscience course units surveyed, which had with intakes ranging from less than 100 to over 600, and matching differences in the size and scope of their staffing inputs. For the most part, the students' experiences were positive ones, and staff were generally perceived as friendly and approachable. Three areas of challenge emerged where the experiences of the students had been more varied: engagement with students' diverse backgrounds and aspirations; the provision of guidance and feedback on assigned and assessed work; and managing large and diverse course teams.

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