

Activities for staff to encourage students to become independent learners

There are numerous areas to consider when building skills and strategies for students to become independent learners. Much of this can be achieved through conscious planning of courses and learning activities. Rather than simply transmitting knowledge, it is important to give students the opportunity to engage in their learning independently. Here are some things to think about when incorporating an autonomous learning approach within your curriculum and lessons:

Self-evaluation

Enable students to build on their confidence and develop future learning plans. In turn this will help your students grasp ownership of their learning which is key to student success. Evaluation is a process that should be undertaken as part of reflection and student progression (Cottrell, 2019).

The course guide and assessment criteria should be explicitly defined for students to implement appropriate self-evaluation. Students can use various methods to self-evaluate, such as:

- Self-monitoring is a good way to track the progress in knowledge or growth.
- Use feedback that is also effective to evaluate their learning.
- Reflection on their work.

In some maths topics, students can apply digital tools to self-assess their work, e.g., Photomath, Desmos, Probability Distributions, etc.

Study success planning

Suggest students produce an action plan for how they will succeed in their course/module. Study success planning is a metacognitive goal-setting process that encourages self-reflection and autonomy. Moore (1993) and Anderson et al. (1996) effectively used success planning during an MBA programme as part of a learning contract (sample template in *Supplementary Resources for Independent Learning*).

Developing analytical practice

Reinforce the need for critical thinking and analytical practice to be part of programmes at all stages across the different levels. Freire (2021) championed emancipatory education to support students to increase their value through challenging, critiquing and theorising as a means of seeking justice and attaining independence.

Prompting critical discussion in the classroom:

- Start the lesson with a controversial headline or blanket statement and ask students to make a note on their thoughts.
- Use a system for students to organise their ideas such as pros and cons, agree or disagree, or a brainstorm, challenging evidence.
- Feedback stage: students will then have to independently discuss their ideas verbally or in written form. You can use Poll Everywhere or Padlet to collect students' contributions.

Student participation in planning

Include students in the planning of their learning as this can be instrumental in enhancing learner autonomy. As students become part of the decision-making process (Browns, 2012; Thomas and Ottaway, 2015), it gives them a sense of fulfilment.

Here are some suggestions to involve students in curriculum and research development:

- When starting a new module, you can initiate with a tool to elicit students' areas of interests. This could be in the form of a word cloud, survey, multiple choice questionnaire. These can then be used as points of discussion at different stages of the module.
- Building group or online research tasks into the module can help towards formative assessment. Essentially, students should have freedom to access credible research of their choice. This can be through activities such as; resource finding, (planning) debates, asking students to log sources they've accessed according to themes and paraphrasing/summarising tasks.

Strategic curriculum design

Ensure there are activities/tasks at different stages of the learning process for students to take ownership of their learning and pursue further exploration of their subject and industry to further support their development. The primary driver for students achieving autonomy will be from academic staff input and the curriculum structure.

Report writing as an example of the activities at different stages of the students' journey:

- Level 4 - Introduce the genre of report writing for the subject specific discipline
- Level 5 - Critical analysis of findings and discussion
- Level 6 – Production of a final project/dissertation with emphasis independent research



Signposting to support services

Facilitate independent learning through the use of support services and tools (Wing and Chiu, 2019). Please note, this requires your awareness of the student body, support needs and entry pathways for students onto their respective courses (Thomas et al., 2022). This will allow you to incorporate autonomous learning strategies early on, including skills, for example: notetaking and signposting to credible literature and resources.

Support Services:

- Skills for Learning - Academic Writing, English Language, Maths and Stats
- Disability and Dyslexia Support
- Library
- Employability
- Digital Skills Training

Moreover, providing students with the appropriate skills and mechanisms (Hockings et al. 2018) to familiarise them with the task at hand will support students to develop independence (please see *Supplementary Resources for Independent Learning* for useful suggestions). This will enable students to build their confidence and motivation to allow them to succeed on their respective programmes (Wong and Chiu, 2019).