Developing excellence in independent learning

[Poster]

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Developing Excellence in Independent Learning

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Project Outline.
The idea of 'stretch' and the need to make courses challenging are key indicators that will inform the upcoming teaching excellence framework. For all students with varying academic abilities to be stretched, independent learning associated with more tailored learning experiences will become increasingly important. The project will study staff and students’ behaviour and approaches to independent learning and the factors that contribute both positively and negatively to this.

Aims
Independent learning comprises, by far, the largest portion of a student’s time in higher education. Even in the most contact-heavy subject, typical of STEM subjects, the module specification will allocate around 70% of a student’s effort to independent study. We aim to survey staff and student attitudes and approaches to independent learning at Loughborough, focusing on students across all years in two Undergraduate programmes in distinctly different subject areas (Materials Engineering and English). Understanding student motivation/demotivation in independent learning is critical to inform and encourage module development towards more individual student learning.

What we will do:

- Examine levels of independent learning in the modules of the programmes.
- Interrogate independent learning activities on LEARN and how and when students engage with them.
- Conduct semi-structured interviews with students and staff followed by student-developed questionnaires, polls and focus groups.
- Produce a clear and accessible set of resources for academics with informed pedagogical approaches to promote effective learning and teaching activities for independent learning.

Impact
- The understanding generated from the project will form the basis of a tailored and individual approach to learning to ensure students maximise their capabilities.
- By engaging and directing their own learning, students will ultimately feel greater ownership and value in their degree.
- Methodologies developed during the project could be extended to investigate independent learning in post graduate programmes (e.g. including Loughborough London), 1 week block-taught modules etc.

Figure 1: Average percentage guided independent study in undergraduate modules for Materials and English and Drama