

Suggestions for action

Setting the foundations for independent learning

- Talk to your students about their previous learning and teaching experiences.
- Find out their expectations of the course – how are they expecting to be taught, assessed and how do they expect to facilitate their own learning.
- Talk about your expectations (as a teacher, organiser and facilitator) and the requirements of the course.
- Reach a shared understanding of these expectations (see sections on [lectures](#), [supervision](#)).
- Talk about independent learning in the context of communities of learners and provide opportunities for developing study communities (through [group work](#), tutor-organised study buddies, online discussion boards).
- The [transition](#) for students into new ways of learning can be supported by providing early formative [assessment](#) and plenty of opportunities for students to explore their learning with peers and teachers.

Ongoing support – evidence suggests that effective and inspiring teachers:

- Take time to develop a ‘meta-awareness’ of other cultures (Ryan & Louie, 2007).
- Give an overview of the subject matter so that learners have a framework within which to build their knowledge. Consideration given to [internationalising the curriculum](#) will pay dividends as an accessible curriculum will be more easily engaged with by students looking to become autonomous learners.
- Recommend multi-media resources for independent study including texts, audio, internet and video. In the [case study](#) linked below, Andrew Cree from Teesside University describes how to build screen-capture movies of teaching slides to allow students multi-media access to his teaching outside class; the additional audio track seemed to benefit students and resulted in reduced failure rates.
- Find ways to motivate students using culturally inclusive pedagogy. [‘Motivating International Students’](#) by Dolan & Macias (2009) has several suggestions for motivating students in the classroom e.g. being welcoming, responsive and explicit. Whilst not necessarily directly affecting students’ skills in independent learning, the connections made between teachers and students in the classroom can motivate students to learn outside the classroom.
- Encourage and build confidence especially in the early stages by providing opportunities for students to bring questions and observations to class which have arisen from their independent reading.
- Remind students of the various support systems available to them especially a few weeks after induction when this useful information may have been forgotten.
- Provide un-assessed opportunities to test out students’ independent learning with tasks set between classes.
- When appropriate, create situations where students can control aspects of classroom learning such as selecting a reading for critical analysis for the next class so that they can practise freedom of choice and objective-setting with peers.
- Gradually move over time from a role as teacher to that of a learning facilitator and teacher (Scharle & Szabó, 2000) as students become more confident independent learners.

Tools for independent learning and self-organisation include:

- E-portfolios (collections of multimedia including text, images, audio, blogs) can be assembled by international students to demonstrate their learning over time (see Hill, 2009).
- Peer-mentoring schemes (UKCISA has a useful guide to setting up schemes, 2008).
- Study skills sessions (goal setting, time management, working to deadlines, self-appraisal, reading).
- Ongoing training in using online information. Crucial to independent learning are the skills and knowledge of effectively using online information. However, some international students find identifying databases and extracting resources difficult (Hughes, 2005). Ongoing support should be available both in the classroom and the library to help students use strategic approaches to finding the information they need, and in the right quantities by defining the scope of their searches.

Conclusions

The above suggestions are not meant to be prescriptive – you may read these knowing that some will not work in particular local contexts or that others may already have been used for decades to great effect in your department. Jin and Cortazzi (2006) and Kingston and Forland (2008) argue that, by whatever methods, focusing on independent learning should encourage lifelong learning. It should also contribute to a ‘cultural synergy’ where cultures are equally valued in the classroom, and the benefits for learning are reaped by all.