

Abstract 5B

Improving the quality of the student learning experience in the Level 1 Psychology teaching laboratory

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For first year psychology students, the support provided by GTAs in the student computer lab environment plays a vital part of the first year experience and in development of graduate attributes such as presentation skills and data analysis. For GTAs, teaching experience is key in development of post graduate attributes and transferable skills. While the benefits of formal training for GTAs have been well documented (Prieto & Meyers, 2000), recent research has highlighted the importance of students being involved in the process of teaching and learning (Bovill et al., 2008). We aimed to address these issues by investigating how feedback from first year student's experience of the laboratory course could be used to improve current GTA training. This FELT funded study aimed to 1) evaluate students' experience of their level one psychology laboratory and 2) use this evaluation to direct training and support for GTAs. A short questionnaire was completed by approximately 250 first year psychology students. The questionnaire focused on two main areas of the student experience. Firstly, we intended to assess the students' evaluations of various responsibilities held by GTAs. More specifically, we wanted to discover the methods of GTA assistance that were most favoured by the students, so that these methods could be developed in future GTA training. Secondly, the evaluation examined the student experience of learning in the practical laboratory.

Student attitudes to both taught labs and student-led labs were assessed in terms of student motivation and attendance patterns at these labs. Overall students were satisfied with the support provided by GTAs, but reported that their experience would have been improved by having more GTAs, and GTAs being more approachable. Students reported that GTAs were most helpful in taught lab sessions, and that they learned more effectively in this way, but preferred the flexibility of student-led labs. Consequently, GTA training now emphasises the importance of being a friendly and approachable point of contact for first year students, and the structure of the laboratory course is being updated to take into account student feedback. The implications of these findings will be discussed in relation to the conference themes of developing graduate attributes in first year students and support for early career researchers in gaining transferable skills through teaching.