



Embedding Undergraduate Research in Practice: Enhancing Student Experience and Outcomes through Staff-Led Projects

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Abstract

Undergraduate research is widely recognised as a high-impact educational practice that enhances student engagement, confidence, and graduate outcomes (Campbell et al., 2025; Walkington, 2015). However, supervising undergraduate projects presents persistent challenges, including constrained timeframes, variation in students' prior research experience, and the need to balance independence with structured guidance (Crossley & Maini, 2025). This poster presents a staff-led, scaffolded research model designed to address these challenges while aligning with Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) priorities relating to student experience, educational gain, and outcomes. The model embeds undergraduate projects within ongoing staff research in semi-professional and professional football, engaging students in authentic, real-world contexts. Drawing on principles of research-based learning and scaffolded supervision, students are supported through the full research lifecycle; design, ethics, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Independence is developed progressively through sustained mentoring, modelling of expert practice, and structured project design, supporting inclusive participation and the development of research self-efficacy (Elder et al., 2022). In parallel, the model provides a structured pathway for staff to develop supervisory expertise through supported engagement in mentoring undergraduate research (Crossley & Maini, 2025). Evidence from the initiative indicates increased student engagement, enhanced research confidence, and clearer understanding of the application of academic knowledge in professional contexts, with students contributing to applied outputs and progressing into graduate roles. This work contributes to the growing evidence base supporting "students as researchers" pedagogies (Walkington, 2015) and demonstrates how staff-led, scaffolded approaches can enhance inclusivity, employability, and real-world impact. The model offers a scalable and transferable framework for embedding authentic undergraduate research in higher education.

Keywords

undergraduate research, scaffolded supervision, student experience, employability

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