



**University of  
Roehampton  
London**

# Making Peer-Assisted Learning Count: Students as Partners in Delivering Learning and Teaching in Psychology

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# PAL from an academic perspective

- **Employability**
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Communication and listening skills
  - Analytical skills
  - Reflective skills
- **Lifelong learning**
  - Personal development (learner identity)
  - Confidence building
- **Inclusivity**
  - Academic credit for peer-assisting activity



# PAL from a psychological perspective

- The psychology of learning
  - Not just Pavlov's dogs!
  - Behaviourist, cognitive and social constructivist theoretical perspectives
  - Metacognition, motivation, self-regulation
  - Development of (learner) identity
- Psychological literacy
  - a psychology degree should not solely be about the employability of the graduate (Trapp et al, 2011, p.31)
  - the capacity to adaptively and intentionally apply psychological science to meet personal, professional and societal needs (Cranney & Dunn, 2011)

# The PAL Module

- 20 credit final year option
- Limited to a small number of students (n=30 max)
- Ten two hour taught sessions (every other week) – teaching and learning related topics
- Ten peer-assisting practical sessions with students in the compulsory research methods modules (verified by a log)
- Assessed by reflective report based on learning journal
- [http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/22906/4/psychological\\_literacy\\_copendium\\_final2\\_amended.pdf](http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/22906/4/psychological_literacy_copendium_final2_amended.pdf)

# Rationale

- Increase knowledge and confidence of peer-assisters
  - opportunity for rich practical learning of interpersonal skills
  - practical knowledge of the psychology of adult learning
  - develop reflective thinking and writing skills
  - teaching others as the best way to learn
- Development of metacognitive skills
  - critical reflection on own practice (thinking and writing)
  - self-regulation
  - development of meta-strategic knowledge
  - autonomy and independence
- Partnership with staff to enhance learning and teaching of research methods
  - Smaller groups
  - More one-to-one support

# Anticipated benefits for teaching and learning

- Increase retention and achievement of first year students by
  - providing another level of communication between teaching staff and students
  - facilitating engagement with research methods lab and seminar learning
  - providing a perspective on the importance of research methods in Psychology in relation to final year project work

# Academic content

- Ethical considerations in PAL
- Principles of Professional Development
- Principles of reflective writing
- Self-regulated learning
- Barriers and facilitators to learning
- Collaborative learning and team work
- Psychological learning theories
- Procrastination
- Inclusive teaching and learning

# Ethical issues in peer-assisting

- Respect for
  - Individual, cultural and role differences
  - Individual knowledge and experience of others
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Support self-determination
  - Inappropriate 'helping'
- Recognise limits of competence
  - Ask questions of senior tutors if unsure
- Integrity
  - Honesty and accuracy
  - Avoid exploitation and conflicts of interest
  - Personal boundaries
  - Addressing ethical misconduct

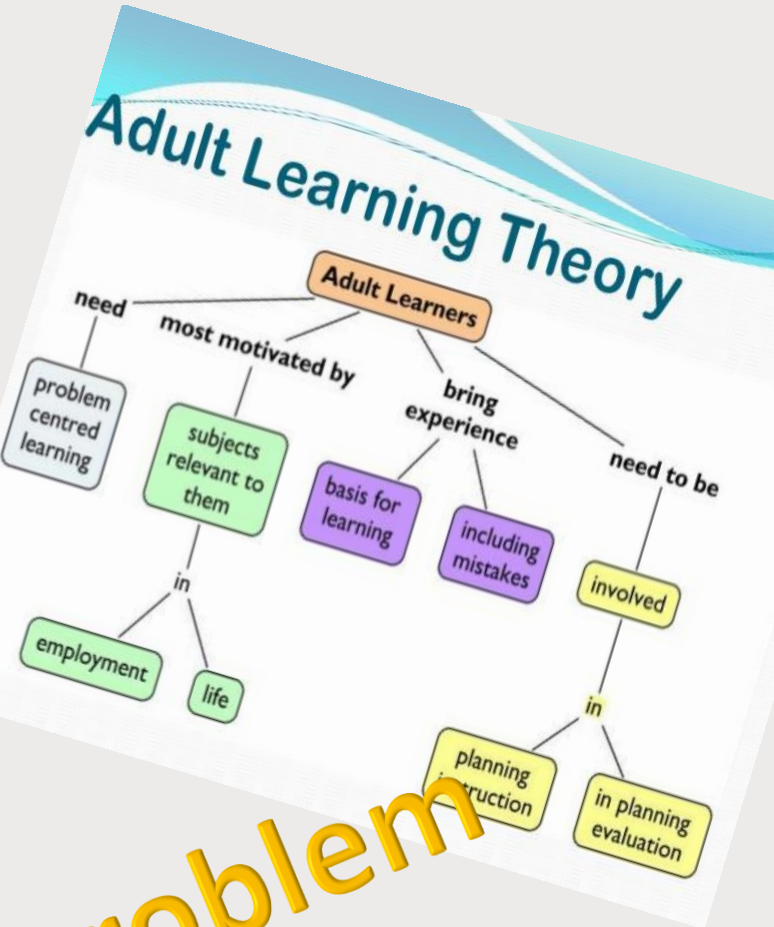


How does this relate to adult learning theories?

Emotional intelligence

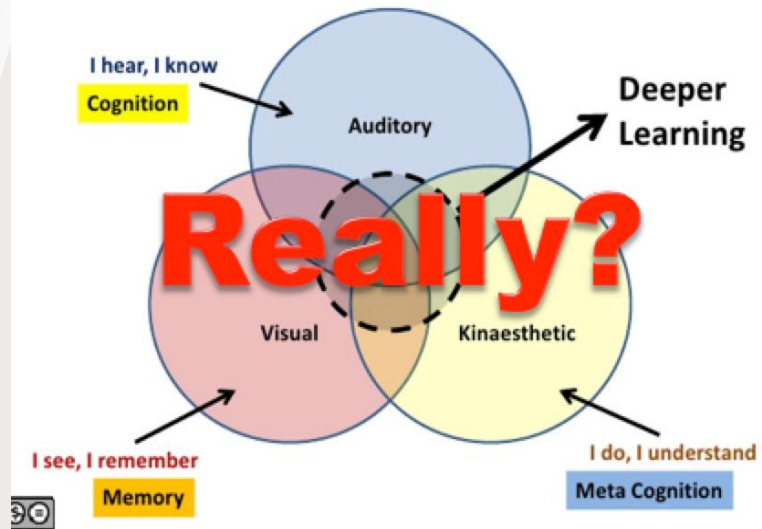
Reflection

Motivation



problem solving

Situated learning



Self directed learning

# Reflection

“It is our understanding that the ability and willingness to continually reflect upon professional experiences in general and difficulties and challenges in particular, are prerequisites for optimal development.”

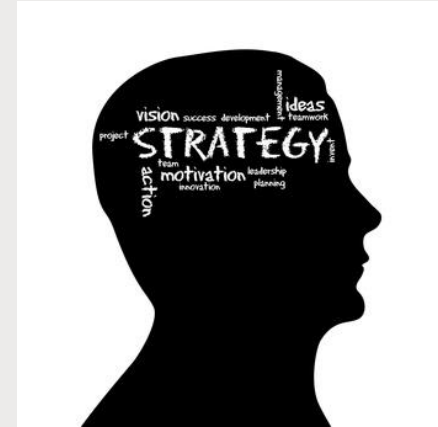
*Ronnestad and Kovolt 2003*



# Conceptions of Learning

## What are conceptions of learning?

Conceptions are **subjective** and **personal thoughts** and understandings towards a subject.

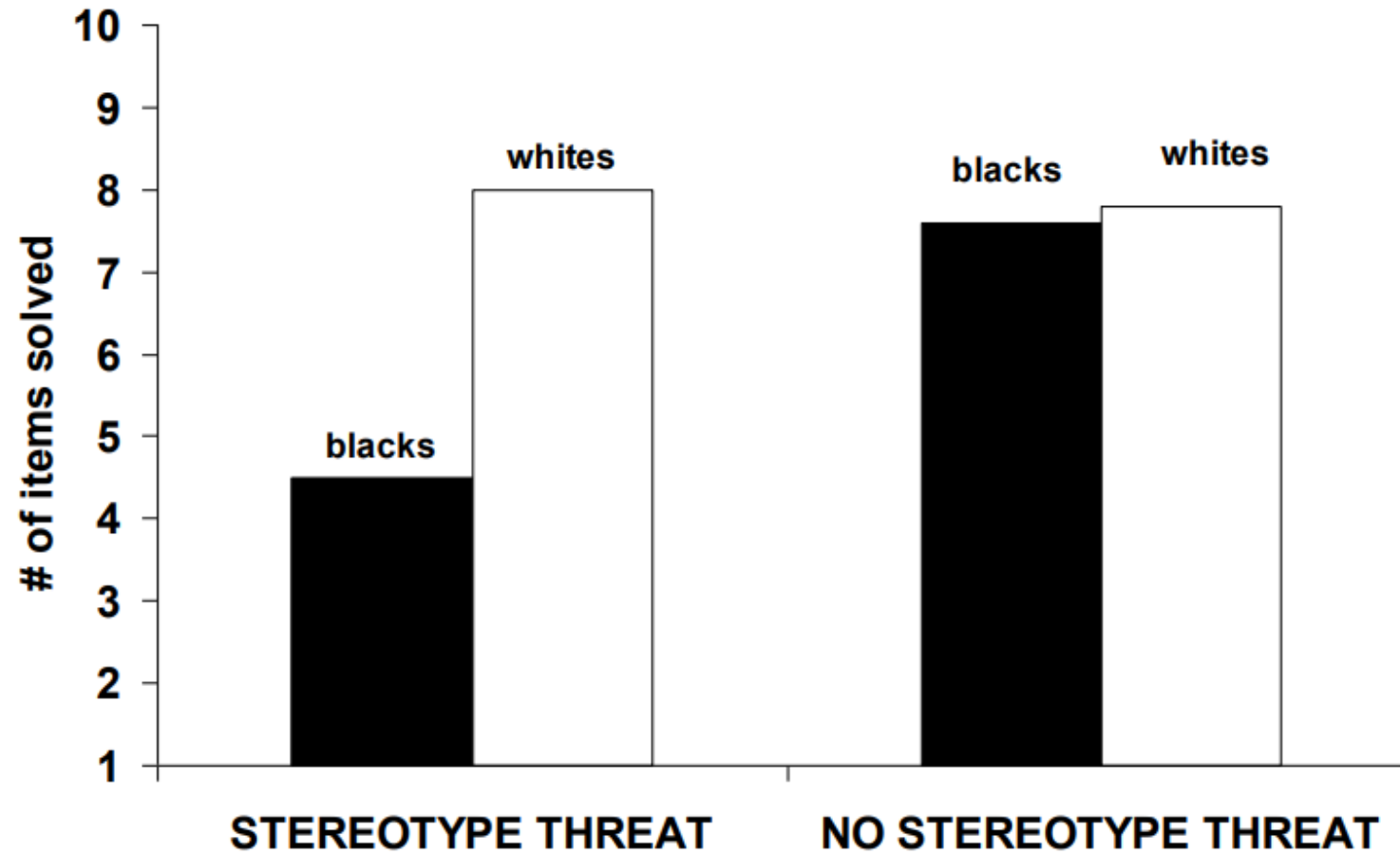


The belief that Psychology is a subject not involving numbers is shared by some individuals, therefore when statistics are introduced, the conceptions about “numbers” arise.

These conceptions may affect the way students learn research methods, as well as if and how they apply the learned skills in real-life settings (Kawulich, Garner, & Wagner, 2009).

# Stereotype Threat Effects on Black Students' Performance

Steele & Aronson, 1995



# PAL sessions in practice

- Detailed resources, passed to peer assisting module for briefing
- A staff member greets peer assisters and act as point of contact within the workshop
- Addressing queries from peer assisters
- Monitoring engagement of peer assisters and providing encouragement
- Peer-assisters operate autonomously
- Tutors treat peer-assisters as partners based on values of trust, mutual benefit and reciprocity.

# Briefing for PALs sessions

- Peer assisters briefed in-person prior to commencing peer assisting
  - Opportunity to ask questions
  - Define their role
  - Set ground rules and expectations
- Future briefing is done virtually
  - Guidance sent to peer assisters a week before session
  - Provided with all materials that will be used in class
  - Given opportunity to complete exercises and check answers
  - Can request tutorial with tutor prior to peer-assisting session

# Example Briefing Info

## Week 7

### Peer Assisted Learning Briefing for next week



#### RM1 Topic for Week 8: Correlation

Topic provided  
to peer assisters

Next week (week 8), first year students will be shown how to perform correlations between variables using SPSS and how to interpret this.

Prior to the workshop, they are expected to have watched an animated lecture on the RM1 site as well as done some reading about correlations. To learn how to perform and interpret correlations, first years will be given four exercises to complete. It is strongly advised that you aim to complete at least one of these exercises prior to the workshop, so that you can be confident in supporting students with any concerns they may have. You can view and attempt these exercises by going to week 8 of the RM1 moodle site. You have reviewer access to the [RM1 moodle site](#), so you can view materials that have been 'greyed out' and are invisible to first year students.

Info provided  
to peer  
assisters  
about  
student tasks  
and how they  
should help

-  Worksheet - Performing Correlations
-  Workshop Exercises - Correlation Answers
-  RM1 Workshop Plan for Tutors - Week 8

Worksheets, exercises and  
workshop plan provided  
to peer assisters

# Peer-assisting Session Attendance Log

Student Name (Block Caps) \_\_\_\_\_ ID Number \_\_\_\_\_

Peer-assisting session no.	Module you are peer-assisting	Date	Name of tutor	Signature of tutor
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				



# Assessment and Feedback

- Formative Learning Journal (pass/fail, 20% of module grade)
  - Min 100 words after each peer-assisting session
    - Nature of session, timing, date
    - Your involvement – type of learning activity
    - Your observations – how does learning happen?
    - Your reflections – how does this relate to your own conceptions of yourself as a learner?
  - Within two weeks of PAL session
  - Tutor will check regularly (every 2 weeks) and provide feedback

# Learning journals

I have just completed my first peer assisting session in the research methods module. Before I came, I felt a little apprehensive because I have not done research methods in a while. Therefore, I felt like I may not give the correct level of help to the students. I have never done peer assisting so I was not sure if the students will like the help or not also, how I would go about helping them.

The students were working on their quantitative research. Many of the students asked help about the results section of the report. I was told that I should not give the answers to them. This made it harder for me to help them because I was not sure how I can explain how to use the SPSS without actually showing them. I felt like I was not helpful and not reaching my full ability to peer assist.

An approach that I had tried to use to help the students was that, I asked them what they know and if they have read the lecture slides which has examples which may help. I knew this as I had done this module in my previous years of university. To my surprise, many of the students did not have a double check at the lecture slides as well as the sample tests. It seems that students did not look at materials themselves and help themselves before seeking help. But I did understand where they were coming from because when I was a student I did not look at lecture slides for help until the end of the year when I was really struggling. I thought I had the ability to try and figure it out myself. One reason for this is that I wanted to try and learn myself.

# Learning journals

But, there was this girl. She sat alone and seemed a bit distracted and confused. I asked her how she was doing and she said she was a bit confused and couldn't be bothered to do anything this week. I simply told her about my experience about the workshops towards my assignment. I told her it might seem hopeless to do these practice tasks over and over again, but in the end, it would be helpful for her when she is writing her assignment task. She told me she was a bit stressed as her report was due in January, which meant she had to do it over Christmas holidays. I recommended her to stay in her workshops and write the result section while she was in her workshops as she can get help from tutors or her peers. She told me it was a really good idea and thanked me for helping her. Although, I didn't chat with a lot of people from this session, I feel I helped at least one student.

# Assessment and Feedback

- Reflective Report – 3000 words
  - Based on observations/ reflections in learning journal
  - Related systematically to academic content on the psychology of adult learning
  - Can be themed around one or more specific topics
  - Can develop your own title for the report

# Reflective reports – personal development

I remember battling with my lack of confidence before my first ever peer-assisting lesson. I felt like I did not have the right to help the students in that classroom due to my perceived lack of expertise in research methods. I did not want my insecurities to build a barrier between the students and myself, so I had to overcome questions like ‘am I even good enough to help these students?’ I did this by checking my answers with teaching staff and staying calm when speaking with the students. I still remind myself that I am able to help my juniors with their psychology workload because I have experienced it before. When I did not see any positive effects on the students, I curiously asked one of the teaching staff whether they saw a difference when a peer-assister was helping. To my surprise, this tutor was very positive and said ‘definitely, they really open up so much more’. I saw this unravel as I went into different classrooms and spoke to the students more. They did seem to share a lot more and engage with the peer-assisters such as myself. This helped me to realise that peer-assisting resembles a support network for students as they feel more comfortable to ask a fellow student a question rather than a tutor (Balloo et al., 2013).

# Reflective reports – linking to literature

Ryan and Shim's (2012) found that practical help seeking from peers was linked to lower achievement over time. Students just requesting answers from their peers and try to have it easy are less likely to achieve well, as they put less effort in to their work. This was not the case from what I observed... Students explained that they asked their peers because they felt more confident talking to and discussing issues with them, whilst also looking at guidance on moodle. I found the opposite to Ryan and Shim (2012), as students who did not ask for help actually achieved lower, but why is that when they knew they needed help they did not ask?



CRITERIA



SCALES

	Excellent	Good	You could improve here	This needs some work	You need to try harder
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>Description of relevant events and situations</p>	Description is succinct and supports reflective evaluation of events and situations particularly well	Description is succinct and appropriate	The account of situations and events is mainly descriptive and tends to take over from reflective work	The account of events/situations remains entirely descriptive. Not all ideas are focused and relevant to adult learning.	The account of events/situations remains entirely descriptive. Events and situations described are not directly relevant to adult learning.
<p><b>Reflection</b></p> <p>Reflection on learning situations and observed events</p>	Deep reflection: you ask self-critical questions regarding beliefs and values underlying your own and others' behaviour.	More than a story: Your reflection is focused on learning from experience, you comment appropriately on events with some questioning of your own and/or others' motives	There is little commentary on events or analysis of behaviour. You focus on your PAL experience as if it could relate to big questions to be asked and answered but without directly addressing these questions.	You need to analyse events and behaviours more consistently, looking at what lies behind the surface. Try to comment more on your own and others' motives in the learning situations you describe.	There is no analysis, commentary or reflection on events and situations.
<p><b>Literature</b></p> <p>Critical evaluation of literature which is directly relevant to the points being made</p>	You consistently make appropriate connections between published literature and the events/situations you are reflecting on. Very effective, sustained use of directly relevant literature in supporting the reflective and evaluative work.	You draw on appropriate literature to illustrate and evaluate points you are making, however, these connections are not explored in their full depth. Effective use of literature in supporting the reflective work.	You occasionally draw on appropriate literature in your reflection, however, this is not sustained throughout the reflective essay or you do not make in depth connections that support reflective work. Literature needs to be critically evaluated in relation to situations and events.	You make some references to literature but it is not always clear how this relates to events/situations discussed or how it is relevant to your reflective account.	You make no reference to relevant literature.
<p><b>Viewpoint</b></p> <p>Consideration of alternative view points and acknowledgement of others' points of view</p>	There is internal dialogue to explore alternative explanations and viewpoints. You consider the views of others (including those represented in relevant literature) consistently and in detail. There is a real sense of different, equally valid viewpoints. You effectively explore multiple perspectives.	You analyse your PAL experience in a manner which acknowledges the possibility of different view points and consider others' points of view occasionally (including those represented in relevant literature). There is a notion that events can be understood from more than one perspective.	Your account of events is rather linear, although you occasionally hint at different interpretations of the events. Only one (your own) point of view is considered. The ideas of others (including those represented in relevant literature) may be mentioned but are not explored or related to the meaning of the experience. Questions may be	This is a completely linear account of events. There is no acknowledgement that there may be different viewpoints (including those represented in relevant literature). Only one (your own) point of view is considered.	There is no sense of a viewpoint here nor any acknowledgement that there may be different viewpoints (including those represented in relevant literature). You need to reflect on your PAL experience from your own and others' perspectives. You make no reference to your own or others' motives, emotions or context of experience. This is
<p><b>Context</b></p> <p>Experience in context including relation to frame of reference at different time points and external events and constraints</p>	There is an acknowledgement of the passage of time, experiences may have had a different frame of reference at the time. Relationships to your own previous experiences as a learner are fully explored	There is some acknowledgment of how time has affected the frame of reference of your PAL experiences. You make some links to your own previous experiences as a learner but you need to explore the relationship with these more fully.	There is little consideration of contextual frame for your PAL experiences either in terms of time or your previous experiences as a learner. You present a single construction of reality rather than a reflection on how different contexts may have influenced different learning experiences at different times.	You present a single construction of reality rather than a reflection on how different contexts may have influenced different learning experiences including your own at different times. You need to explore the different meanings the learning experiences may have had if adopting different perspectives.	There is no sense of how context (time and/or previous experiences) influence current learning experiences and situations described.
<p><b>LOs</b></p> <p>Learning outcomes</p>	You have demonstrated excellent experiential and intellectual understanding of adult teaching and learning, have communicated a clear understanding of students' learning needs and have described the key features of peer-assisting as a skillful practice relating this critically to theory and research pertaining to adult	You have demonstrated good experiential and intellectual understanding of adult teaching and learning, have communicated an understanding of students' learning needs, describe the key features of peer-assisting as a skillful practice related to theory and research pertaining to adult learning. You have	You have demonstrated some experiential understanding of adult teaching and learning and students' learning needs, however, you need to identify the key features of peer-assisting as a skillful practice related to theory and research pertaining to adult learning. Your reflection needs to be a more sustained attempts at reflecting in	Key learning outcomes only partially achieved, or failed to achieve one of the stated learning outcomes	Key learning outcomes substantially not achieved.

# Occasional behaviour issues

I have unfortunately had several reports that you were involved in some disruptive behaviour during the Individual Differences lab class that you were peer assisting in yesterday. Although we encourage peer assisters to develop friendly relationships with the students that they are assisting, it is very important that during class time you are professional, discussions are kept to the lab class task and that any social chat is left until after the session. I have heard that you were helpful in the other sessions you have been in so hopefully this was an anomaly. I have copied in Gina as the module convener for the module that your peer assisting is associated with and would recommend that you set up an appointment to speak with her further about this incident.



# Challenges

- Role definition of the peer-assister
  - Teacher, tutor, peer?
  - What is an appropriate level of support for the learner?
  - Communication skills of peer-assisters
- Insecurity about own knowledge/skills
  - Anxiety about not knowing the answer to research methods questions
  - Anxiety about the responsibility of taking on a 'tutoring' role
- Safeguarding of peer-assisters and students
  - Difficult to ensure appropriateness of relationship (outside of class)
  - Issues not reported

# More challenges

- Poor uptake from 3<sup>rd</sup> year students
  - Typically between 8 and 15 students opt for this module
  - Not considered 'efficient' by management and under threat of axing
- Difficult to communicate the benefits of this module
  - "I thought it was for people who want to be teachers"
  - Personal development unfashionable in a marketized HE sector?
  - Too risky for students?
  - Very different to everything they experience in year 1 and 2 (not least the students as partners aspect)

# Benefits

- Students enjoy academic work in a much smaller group than usual
- Students invariably experience personal growth – but are often surprised by this themselves
- Reflective assignment allows experiential learning to mature, become subject of conscious thought and active personal development
- Module evaluations are invariably positive, but based on small numbers
- Alumni have commented specifically on the value of this module in preparing for employment

# Student Feedback

Honestly, I didn't expect that this module is going to be so interesting, beneficial and useful

**Students' views 2015-16:**

***Peer-assisted learning is one of the most beneficial modules I have picked. The module has helped me to grow and develop skills by engaging in the informative and critical discussions, interacting with different students and practicing my presentation skills. I would recommend it to anyone who truly wants to develop a great range of skills by the end of university.***

***Its a common misconception that people who take this module want to go into teaching but I think its surprising how much it teaches you and how much you are able to give other students without realising, it truly is a rewarding and enjoyable experience***

# Addressing the challenges

- Broadened scope of module
  - The Psychology of Lifelong Learning
  - Students may draw on work/volunteering experiences as well as PAL
  - Collecting feedback from students who have completed the module which is fed back at subject briefings
- Any ideas how to encourage students to challenge themselves?

# Thank you for listening

- Any ideas how to encourage students to take up the challenge?
- [r.pauli@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:r.pauli@roehampton.ac.uk)