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**Abstract**

The 'independent learner' is a key construct within discourses of educational policy and practice in the UK. Government policy statements stress the importance of developing learner independence, and higher education pedagogical practices tend to rest on the assumption that students are independent learners. This paper draws on research with undergraduate students in a post-1992 university to offer a critical appraisal of the discourse of the independent learner. The paper examines students' perceptions of independence in both their first year of undergraduate study, and in the later years of their degree courses. Support for learning and issues related to asking for help are discussed. Whilst students tend to both expect and want to be independent, it is suggested that dominant constructions of the independent learner are gendered and culturally specific, and as such are inappropriate for the majority of students in a mass higher education system. (HRK / Abstract übernommen), Leathwood, Carol, E-Mail: c.leathwood@londonmet.ac.uk