

PASS Case Study 7

Summary

Variety of PFA	Educative forward-looking assessments, synoptic assessment, continuous portfolio assessment of capabilities
Course	MPharm
Faculty and institution	University of Bradford School of Life Sciences
Type/duration	4-year undergraduate full-time programme or 5-year undergraduate sandwich programme
Timing	September 2012 with year 1 intake

Overview

This case study covers work in progress and will be updated as new information emerges.

Bradford School of Pharmacy has designed a new MPharm Curriculum (Curriculum 2012) which was implemented in September 2012. Drivers for this change included: some passive and disengaged learners; students compartmentalising knowledge into modular 'silos'; students learning to the assessment with the focus on assessment of learning; a learning and teaching strategy that is too teacher-centred; an overloaded curriculum.

The new programme adopts a transformational outcome-based approach i.e. one that is designed back from the outcomes required at graduation. The learner-centred learning, teaching and assessment strategy shifts the focus to 'assessment as learning' with students receiving immediate feedback on their performance in weekly readiness-assurance tests on pre-class content prior to using new knowledge in-class to solve collaborative team-based application exercises. The strategy focuses on developing and assessing skills and abilities that students will need in the workplace post-graduation. Accordingly the methods of assessment clearly align with the outcomes and are forward-looking (educative) rather than backward-looking (auditive) in nature.

The programme comprises of an agreed 'core', to prevent curriculum overload and to encourage deep rather than surface learning plus a number of non-core student selected components designed to promote self-directed learning and enhance motivation to learn. The curriculum will be thematic rather than modular, adopting a spiral approach with themes introduced at a basic level in year 1 and revisited each year, each time increasing in depth, breadth and complexity.

The curriculum will be delivered using a learning and teaching strategy called 'team-based learning' (TBL), This learner-centred strategy develops inter-personal, team-working and critical thinking skills and which utilises the benefits of peer support and peer learning. By introducing this strategy we aim to develop motivated learners who are effective problem solvers, critical thinkers and who possess the skills to become independent, life-long learners.

The goal of TBL is to develop a student's ability to achieve higher levels of cognitive learning by applying their new knowledge in a team environment in the classroom. Beyond learning the course material, students develop skills in critical thinking, communication, interpersonal relationships, teamwork and consensus building.

The assessment strategy makes more use of formative feedback, ongoing assessment for learning, synoptic assessments (of students' abilities to use their new knowledge for the benefit of patients and service users) and ongoing portfolio-based development and assessment of their capabilities for employment. Students utilise all learning experiences, whether they be in the classroom, in the workplace or in their community and reflect on their performance in and development of key capabilities needed in the workplace. These are focused on the pharmacist as a: communicator; collaborator; educator; problem solver; self-directed learner; manager; scholar and health-care professional.

Curriculum 2012 was approved with six commendations at internal validation in April 2012 and externally accredited for a full six years by the General Pharmaceutical Council in May 2012.

Main objectives

- Assessment that is clearly aligned with the programme outcomes
- Educative assessment i.e. forward-looking rather than auditive assessment i.e. backward-looking
- A more balanced approach to assessment i.e. increase the emphasis on 'assessment as or for learning' and reduce the importance of 'assessment of learning' i.e. for the purposes of certification
- Providing immediate feedback to formative and summative classroom assessments to aid learning
- Reduce content to a core curriculum but increase opportunities for student-selected electives.
- Introduce a learner-centred instructional strategy that motivates and rewards pre-class learning and which utilises class time for learning how to use this new knowledge in a team environment.

PFA format

- Forward looking educative learning and assessment
- Integrated synoptic assessments of students' ability to apply their new knowledge for purposeful future tasks beyond graduation.
- Ongoing Portfolio-based assessment of capability

Key assessment framework/regulations

- The University is currently reviewing its frameworks so it is difficult to predict what changes to regulations, if any, may be needed at this stage.

Main impact on staff

- Staff Development skills in: facilitation of learning; use of new technology; the principles of team-based learning; writing effective group activities.

- Additional faculty time in preparing student-study guides and writing MCQ tests and effective application exercises.

Main Impact on students

- Initial feedback is very positive and student generally like the student-centred approach
- Students are engaged in their learning and prepare for class as they are motivated, through assessment reward and through team-loyalty, for doing to.
- Teams are actively learning and engaged when working on and solving team-based application activities during class
- Minor issues identified that relate to the size of pre-class study guides, the timetabling of summative tests throughout the week and drop-in academic support sessions which are easily overcome.

Further details

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