

PASS Case Study: Peninsula Medical School

Summary

Variety of Programme-Focused Assessment	<i>Integrative level/year assessment: As part of the overall programme assessment, students must complete assessments that demonstrate they satisfy all the learning outcomes which have been specified for one level/year of the programme (horizontal), or more than one level/year of the programme (vertical).</i>
Course	<i>Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery</i>
Faculty and institution	<i>Peninsula Medical School (PMS) Universities of Exeter and Plymouth</i>
Type/duration	<i>5 year undergraduate full-time</i>
Timing	<i>PMS was established in 2000. PFA introduced in 2002 with the first cohort of medical students. The programme was approved in three stages, Years 1 and 2, followed by years 3 and 4, and then year 5.</i>

Overview

The programme was developed due to the belief in the need for an integrated curriculum with integrated assessment. Most medical programmes are based upon a 2-year pre-clinical phase where the emphasis is on academic scientific learning, followed by a 3-year clinical phase where learning occurs in (normally) the hospital environment. PMS wanted to break this mould and articulated a parallel Programme Focused Assessment (PFA) approach to the programme. In year 1 the scientific learning is important but there is clinical learning too. Over the five years, the scientific learning decreases and the clinical learning increases. Students in the first two years are based on the university campus and the final 3 years in health care settings, but there is an appropriate mix of scientific and clinical learning in all years. A spiral curriculum was developed whereby topics are revisited longitudinally with the aim of reinforcing learning and allowing for increasing complexity, with plenty of time for student-selected special study units and electives, as well as self-directed learning. It was central to the philosophy of the programme that learning activities could contribute to of the assessment strands.

Main objectives

The course team used PFA to:

- Fulfil a belief in the need for an integrated curriculum with integrated assessment.
- Create learning activities which could contribute to *any* of the assessment strands.
- Enable increasing use of assessment in the real environment.

PFA format

The approach to PFA includes:

- Valid and reliable assessment of the programme through rigorous and robust involving theoretically informed approaches which defies rote learning.
- Assessment of programme outcomes including applied knowledge of life and human sciences, clinical skills, and personal and professional development.

Key assessment framework/regulations

- Each unit of assessment is a 'module' with associated credits, which allows the course to comply with the usual modular structure of UK undergraduate degrees. A variety of contexts and experiences, from small-group tutorial sessions to patient encounters, provide relevant learning for each assessment module which means that the assessment modules do not link directly to units of teaching.
- PMS principles included assessment policies, procedures and methods which are informed by best evidence and relevant educational theory and are sensitive to patients' best interests.
- The continuous cumulative assessment provides frequent opportunities for feedback and reflects student performance across the programme in relation to programme learning outcomes by evaluating knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Main impact on staff

- Recruitment from around the world of staff who believe in PFA. There is a comprehensive staff development programme.
- Regular feedback makes it easy to monitor student progress and development.
- Regular assessment and feedback is educationally desirable but it comes with an administrative cost.

Main Impact on students

- Medical training is viewed holistically with disciplinary boundaries blurred. The integrated curriculum and assessment helps students to develop authenticity and enables knowledge transfer. Students develop higher quality learning skills by applying their knowledge in a clinical context.
- Good regular feedback is provided by the assessment programme as it determines the standards students are working towards and demonstrates the standards students are achieving. This allows for refinement throughout the course helping students to stay engaged and motivated.

Further details

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