

## **Interim report: Review of Pre-qualifying Research Methods Modules in the School of Health and Social Care, Oxford Brookes University**

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### **Summary**

This project has commenced in a timely manner as our school is currently reviewing the pre-qualifying research methods modules regarding fitness for purpose, flexibility and equity across the pre-qualifying programmes. We have at present a diverse range of research modules across a wide range of programmes which share a lot of common ground. These need to be streamlined so that repetition and lack of equity are ironed out and to facilitate shared learning where appropriate for increased cost effectiveness and integration of the students' learning experience.

### **Project objectives**

In order to synchronise the work of this project with the on-going work within the School of Health and Social Care, we commenced the work for this project with phases 3 & 4. We will focus on stages 1 & 2 when stages 3 & 4 are complete

### **Mapping exercise of module content**

We have mapped the existing learning outcomes in the different modules in order to determine the extent of overlap between the modules and to identify where learning outcomes could be joined together. This has been a very useful process and has highlighted areas of repetition and areas that are currently underrepresented in the teaching programme. We have used this mapping process to develop a model curriculum in which we have identified where a systematic programme of research methods can be taught in the new programme across the school.

### **Consultation with the teaching team**

We have consulted with all the programme leaders for the different fields across the pre-qualifying programmes. One of one interview have been carried out by HA to discuss the components of the proposed research modules. Details of these interviews have been minuted and held by HA. These interviews have been very useful for many reasons. Firstly, involving programme leaders in these initial discussions allowed for the requirements of each field to be integrated into the building of the modules and for each field to develop a sense of 'ownership' of the modules their students will study. Secondly, these discussions facilitated the transfer of ideas so that good practice could be shared and incorporated into the module. There were many instances in which good practice was shared and also where good practice existed in an individual field and had not been more widely reported or shared. In addition, the different needs of the students in the different fields were discussed and provision made to enhance the learning experience of both the strongest and weaker students. It was acknowledged that we need to cater for a diverse range of student ability and ideas for supporting the weaker students whilst challenging the more academically capable students have been discussed. These ideas focus on a two tier assessment – one level that has to be attained by all students and a further level that can be worked towards by more capable students.

## **Development of module content**

As a result of these two phases, we have developed a draft outline of the research teaching provision in the pre-qualifying programme.

In year 1, there will be a module, Introduction to evidence based practice (43710) taken by all pre-qualifying students that focuses on an introduction to using evidence in practice, with an emphasis on searching and evaluation of literature that students will encounter throughout their courses. This module has been the focus of most of the discussion within the different fields. It is agreed that it is a difficult module to get right, but also a most important module which will be used by students as a basis from which their research awareness will develop. The module is scheduled to run at the very beginning of the students' courses ie semester one so its suitability as an introductory module for research awareness and evidence based practice is critical.

It is anticipated that the module will commence with a research activity, for example asking the students to work in small groups to develop plans for a research project "Go and do...". The exact specification of the activity has yet to be decided and will need to be discussed further within the module teaching team. We will seek advice from other universities that have adopted similar activities in their first year programmes for ideas regarding good practice in this area. The challenge is to provide a meaningful activity which stimulates learning for all in the group, whilst retaining creativity. Once this activity has been undertaken to provide a general introduction to the ideas in the module, we will then focus on literature searching and evaluation in order to introduce students to the types of literature they are likely to encounter- from text books to research literature. This will require a degree of fine tuning- we will emphasise that students are not expected to fully understand all of the content of the research papers but they are expected to recognise the methods undertaken in a research report and to recognise the main findings. These themes of critical appraisal and evaluation are then picked up again in year two when the students are expected to begin to evaluate them using a more thorough and systematic approach.

In year 2, there will be the more traditional research module approach, which is taken as a preparation for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year research project/dissertation module. The 2<sup>nd</sup> year module will be taken as a choice of two modules, one which focuses on critical appraisal for those undertaking a literature review and one which focuses on research methods for those undertaking a research proposal for their research project/ dissertation.

We will introduce the idea of renaming the 3<sup>rd</sup> year dissertation module (currently named) to Research project.

## **Involvement of library staff**

We have also sought the involvement of the library staff in the development of the pre-qualifying research curriculum. Library staff offer a key service to all students. It has been recognised by many librarians and academic staff that at the present time, their advice and support is not shared equitably throughout the programme. This is due in part to the difference in cohort numbers in the different fields, leading to logistical difficulties in arranging librarian support. We have therefore sought to streamline librarian support within the shared module activity. After a

process of wide consultation with field chairs and the librarians, agreement has been reached to focus the input of the librarians into the first year using evidence in practice module (43710, described above). This has involved many negotiations at all levels of the institutions of the School and library but agreement has been reached.

**The next steps**

We will continue to explore the development of the new curriculum over the coming months with further meetings with key members of the pre-qualifying staff and will refine the content of the anticipated modules accordingly.

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