

# PASS Case Study 5:

## Summary

Variety of PBA	Assessment blocks (including synoptic examinations at every level of the course) focus on the integration of both specific and general course outcomes, and are specified separately from the formal teaching (study blocks). Assessment blocks can relate to a number of study blocks.
Course	Biomedical Sciences
Faculty and institution	School of Health Sciences and Social Care Brunel University
Type/duration	3 year undergraduate (plus optional placement year)
Timing	Full programme introduced in September 2011

## Overview

The BSc in Biomedical Sciences (with specialist routes) was revised from the existing course, primarily to resolve 2 major issues: teaching staff were struggling to cope with the assessment workload following significant increase in student numbers; and students were not demonstrating sufficient integration across the different modules. Staff wanted to improve students' critical thinking and analysis and to break down the impression that students were treating modules as 'silos'. Students were also failing to carry over important learning from year to year.

The revised course takes advantage of new assessment regulations at Brunel which allow courses to specify teaching (study blocks) and assessment tasks and activities (assessment blocks) separately so that one assessment block can relate to several study blocks. Courses can also include conventional modules where the study and assessment blocks completely coincide.

The re-planning exercise used subject benchmarks more extensively in order to look at outcomes for the whole programme and also to specify level learning outcomes. Level I has a common core which students must pass –this change led to fewer fails and fewer re-assessments. At level II, students can opt for different specialisms. At level III there is a compulsory project worth 40 points of assessment which is integrative. There is a synoptic exam at every level of the course, using over-arching seen questions which bring in general issues such as ethics, as well as possible incorporation of topical themes from science in the media.

The revisions to the course have enabled a major reduction in assessment and staff time has been shifted to provide more contact and student support.

## Main objectives

- To focus assessment on overall course outcomes and improve course integration.
- To enable more formative assessment and improve students' skills in critical thinking and analysis.
- To ease/shift staff workload and provide better student support.

## PFA format

- Assessment blocks relate to one or more study blocks.
- Assessment blocks have different forms depending on the focus of the assessment, e.g. for 2<sup>nd</sup> year practicals, the lab practical sessions are formative and students are given a range of data and have to write a scientific paper for one of the assessment task.
- Synoptic examination worth 20 credit points at all 3 levels

## Key assessment framework/regulations

- New institutional regulations introduced for 09/10 academic year.
- These require all courses to specify study blocks (teaching and study), assessment blocks (no more than 40 credit points each), and modules (where study and assessment blocks coincide completely).
- Option courses are usually available only as modules.

## Main impact on staff

- Assessment load reduced by 2/3rds.
- Reduction in assessment workload used to increase staff contact time.
- Teaching structure has not changed significantly, except for the introduction of two Critical Thinking blocks (5 study points apiece)

## Main Impact on students

- Having Level 1 as core (introduced 2 years ago) has led to fewer fails and re-assessments at Level 1. The impact of the changed assessment structure can only be evaluated at the end of 2011/12.

## Further details

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Further information	A more detailed case study of this example is being prepared and will be available on the PASS website