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A qualitative evaluation of external assessment of competency in experiential learning (ACTp study)

Sabrina Anne Jacob¹, Ailsa Power², Clare Depasquale³, Brian Addison³, Jane Portlock⁴,
Anne C Boyter¹

¹Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences, Glasgow, United Kingdom

²NHS Education for Scotland, Glasgow, United Kingdom

³Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, United Kingdom

⁴University of Sussex, Sussex, United Kingdom

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Background: One of the remits of the Pharmacy Additional Cost of Teaching (ACTp) Study was to develop competency-based assessments (CBAs) during experiential learning (EL) for student pharmacists in Scotland (Jacob et al., 2021). As this is a new undertaking for undergraduate pharmacy programmes, and based on previous recommendations, it was important to obtain expert opinions from other programmes with experience in CBAs undertaken by external assessors during EL.

Aim: To obtain the opinion of experts in other programmes on the structures and processes of CBA.

Method: Semi-structured, online, one-to-one interviews with lead academics, programme directors, and facilitators from Medicine, Nursing, Teaching, and Postgraduate Pharmacy programmes in the United Kingdom. Recruitment was done through purposive and snowball sampling. A descriptive analytical approach was adopted. Departmental Ethical Committee approval received.

Results: Nine academics/programme directors and seven facilitators participated. The method of assessment depended on placement sites and competencies being assessed. Quality assurance of marking was undertaken using tripartite reviews, peer-review of marking, and facilitator training. Suggestions included the development of learning and assessments that are similar to those in postgraduate programmes, to involve stakeholders in the design of assessments, and to ensure quality assurance of marking.

Discussion: There is a need to adopt a more collaborative and progressive approach to the tools and methods of assessment to accommodate students with different experiences and placement sites (Prescott-Clements et al., 2008; Clements & Cord, 2013). Embedding a quality assurance process to ensure consistency in marking is key.

In the next phase, key stakeholders, including students, academics, and facilitators, will be involved in the design of the assessment process.

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