Biomedical Sciences – Building students’ academic attributes and employability in Y1

Medical Sciences 1 (MS1) is a compulsory first semester, first year course for all year one entrants into the BSc (Hons) Medical Sciences degree programme. Embedded into this course are four sessions which help students build upon their scientific skills and alert them to the advantages of early career planning.

**School:** Biomedical Sciences

**Target Audience:**Year 1 undergraduate Medical Sciences students

**Staff Involved:** Medical Sciences Teaching Staff, Career Service, Information Services, Learning and Technology Services

**Date:**Four sessions, delivered annually, throughout Semester 1

Key features

To ensure our graduates remain highly regarded and sought after we must help them develop not only the academic skills so valued by employers but also encourage them to forward plan their career from an early stage.

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Being able to gather information, write and communicate effectively are academic skills fundamental to any successful student. However, the ‘rules’ of science writing may not be familiar to new entrants. Furthermore, new students can often feel swamped by the amount of literature available and can be confused in how to choose which references are credible and relevant. Two MS1 course sessions are dedicated to writing skills.

Furthermore, today’s students need to be aware of the need for early career planning and the disadvantage of leaving such explorations to the final year. Adoption of reflective learning practice to enhance both academic and professional career development is to be encouraged. Reflective learning is intrinsic to PDP portfolios which help identify strengths and weaknesses in students’ graduate attributes (including academic abilities) and so ensure students maximise their studies and career pathway. Two further MS1 course sessions focus on reflective learning and early career planning.

Planning

Teaching staff on the course take student feedback extremely seriously as a way to improve our courses and the student experience. Consultation with previous Honours students identified areas that they felt would have been of benefit if delivered at an earlier stage of their studies. Some students additionally identified workshops that had been extremely useful but which they had to search out and attend in their own time rather than have delivered as part of any course.

Teaching staff have incorporated the student ideas into two main themes – study skills and career planning. One session from each theme is delivered by teaching staff and the remaining session delivered by University staff from appropriate support areas.

Not all sessions were piloted in the same year as feedback, review and improvement is an on-going, dynamic process. Both Lorna Cox (Careers Service) and Anne Donnelly (Liaison Librarian) were approached by teaching staff with a view to delivering a session appropriate to new University students that may benefit their long-term studies and employability.

Sessions

**Study Skills Session 1**– The first session is based on effective literature searching and is held in the Main Library by the School liaison librarian. This session is held early in the course and advises students on how to obtain relevant and academically-regarded literature quickly and easily from a range of University-supported databases. This session goes into more detail than the introductory library session in Freshers’ week.

**Study Skills Session 2**– The second session is also held early in the course and concentrates on referencing and plagiarism. Informal class polls often show the emphasis on correct referencing and the understanding of plagiarism varies widely depending on previous schooling. Both aspects can be a cause for poor academic scholarship. By explaining why, how and what we reference as well as the reasons for plagiarism-checking students should learn at an early stage the importance of these factors so that it becomes a fundamental part of their academic skills set. This should give students ‘space’ in future years to focus on the content of their writing and improve their marks.

**Early Career Planning Session 1**– The first session introduces the students to the importance of reflective learning and the custom-made Medical Sciences PDP portfolio. If students can reflect on their learning experiences, consolidate their strengths and identify areas for improvement they can make changes to future learning and maximise their potential. Space is incorporated for logging voluntary/paid employment, societies and interests and, importantly, an area for reflecting on the employability these experiences develop. Being able to identify, articulate and evidence the skills and abilities gained both within their studies and through extra-curricular experiences is paramount to success in seeking employment. Again, informal class polls indicate students vary in their previous experience of reflective learning.

**Early Career Planning Session 2**– The second session occurs towards the end of the course and is held by a Career Service Advisor. The session focuses on what the Career Service does and how it can help students with their career at all stages of their study. The session alerts students to the advantages for today’s graduates to offer employers something ‘extra’; to offer more than just a good degree and to take full advantage of the opportunities UoE has to offer.

Resources

* Both teaching and liaison staff time for developing the initial sessions and updating these for subsequent cohorts based on student feedback.
* Teaching staff seeking out student opinion on how early years courses can help improve the student experience and future employment chances.
* LTS staff time for ‘rolling-over’ the electronic PDP portfolio each academic year.

Evaluation

MS1 course feedback suggests the referencing/plagiarism study skill session and the Career talk delivered by the Career Service are well received. Academic session 2011/12 was the pilot year for the ‘Effective Literature Searching’ session run by the Library and student feedback has still to be received. Student opinion on reflective learning and planning is very mixed; some feel it to be very useful, others of very little use.

Advice

* Do seek out opinion from Honours students and graduates about what they would find useful at the beginning of their studies to help improve their experience and employability.
* Do ask staff from support services if they can help; not only are they experts in their area but it allows joint working opportunities.
* Don’t expect all students to see the benefit of early career planning straight away. Similarly don’t expect all students to grasp the benefit of reflective learning.

Key contact

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<http://www.ed.ac.uk/employability/staff-information/how-employability-addressed/good-practice/mvm/building-students-academic-a>