

Preparation and support of clinical verifiers who assess student portfolios in the specialist practitioner qualification at the University of Nottingham

The award of Specialist Practitioner Qualification has been available as part of Continuing Professional Development opportunities at the University of Nottingham since its inception as part of the PREP framework in 1995.

In 2002 with the development of a new and expanded Learning Beyond Registration framework (LBR), the UKCC (UKCC Standards for Specialist Practice: UKCC, 2001) elements of

- Clinical Practice
- Care and Programme Management
- Clinical Practice Leadership
- Clinical Practice Development

were mapped and integrated into specialist pathways of the new programmes. This enabled both students and verifiers to identify where each component fitted within the overall degree framework.

Undertaking the Specialist Practitioner Qualification element of the programme provided students with the opportunities to explicitly demonstrate the integration of specialist knowledge and skills into practice. The award is achieved by the completion of a portfolio of evidence which is an integral part of the degree programme.

Portfolio development and assessment is facilitated by a specialist clinically based verifier and pathway teacher to ensure that knowledge and skills are contemporary and integrated into practice.

The key to the success of this element of the LBR Framework has been the strong links with practice in the development of the detailed portfolio guidelines and the ongoing relationship with clinical verifiers. Verifiers are participants who are identified by students as willing to undertake this role.

All verifiers take part in a preparation workshop in order to facilitate understanding of the process. This workshop also includes discussion of the roles and responsibilities of the student, verifier and academic member of the tripartite of participants that play undertake the process.

Great emphasis is placed on the fact that portfolio development is the responsibility of the student and the verifiers play an important facilitators role.

Given the nature of the role of verifiers supporting students on a one to one basis many voiced concern, particularly in the early days, of feeling isolated as often there would only be one student undertaking the Specialist Practitioner Qualification within their practice arena. There were also many challenges facing students and verifiers in undertaking the Specialist Practitioner Qualification. This was particularly related to workload issues of students with the diminishing quantity of study leave available. For both students and verifiers there were also the demands of clinical work and this could create tension and conflict at times. To help alleviate these, a number of support mechanisms were developed:

- Verifiers support group which met twice annually as a forum to discuss issues and explore experiences. This was also utilised as an opportunity to critically

review the portfolio guidelines, for example, guidelines were developed on how to develop a learning contract to assist both students and verifiers in this process.

- A discussion forum on the LBR website was developed as an alternative means of support for verifiers who were unable to attend support groups.
- Attendance at the Portfolio Moderation Board was offered in order to give verifiers the opportunity to review completed portfolio and question issues around the quantity and quality of evidence and how this related to the UKCC Standards.
- Verifiers had direct access to specialist pathway academic staff and it was the responsibility of the students to ensure that a tripartite meeting was organised on a bi-annual basis. This meeting was an opportune moment to review progress to date and other support to both student and verifier.

There is a direct feedback mechanism to senior education staff in seconding Trusts with regard to the support both verifiers and students require to undertake the Specialist Practitioner Qualification so that they were aware of the demands on both if this was to be completed successfully.

These mechanisms have certainly played an important role in supporting both students and verifiers and resulted in an outstanding grade for partnership work.

Elaine Cook, LBR (Undergraduate) Course Director, University of Nottingham
Elaine.M.Cook@nottingham.ac.uk