**INTRODUCTION**

With the assertion that assessment shapes the experience of students and influences their learning behaviour more than teaching, assessment in higher education has come under increasingly close scrutiny and is a key domain in the annual National Student Survey (NSS). Poor early experiences of assessments may be associated with high attrition rates. Concerns around high attrition rates of MPharm stage 1 students and relatively poor scores on Assessment and Feedback in the NSS in 2010-2011, led to assessment practice being identified as a possible contributory factor adversely affecting students’ learning.

**TESTA**, an evidence based approach to mapping programme assessment environments was employed as a tool to critically evaluate assessment processes and procedures and support the development of an effective assessment strategy.

**AIM**

To promote the **cognitive development** of pharmacy students through a sustainable programme **assessment** practice that promotes **meaningful learning**

**METHOD**

12-month audit utilising **TESTA** methodology. Combined data sets obtained from three sources provided a bird’s eye view of assessments resulting in assessment programme portraits.

- **Students**
  - Assessment Experience Questionnaire: 28 question survey instrument (9 scales) designed to measure student perceptions of programme assessments
  - Focus group meetings
- **Module leaders**
  - Programme assessment patterns
- **Programme documentation**
  - MPharm assessment regimen

**AUDIT CYCLE**

- **TESTA** audit of programme assessment practice
  - Assessment programme portrait
  - Interventions:
    - Volume of summative assessments reduced
    - Formative assessment opportunities rebalanced
    - Use of reflective learning tools increased

- **2011**
  - **Renewed focus on role of formative assessments and the development of self-directed lifelong learners.**
  - **Redesigning of diagnostic, formative and summative assessments to underpin sustainable programme assessment**
  - **Programme revalidation**

- **2012**
  - **TESTA** audit of programme assessment practice
  - Retention and progression data reviewed
  - Learning, teaching and Assessment strategy for the new integrated MPharm developed

- **2013**
  - **Renewed focus on role of formative assessments and the development of self-directed lifelong learners.**

**RESULTS**

**Assessment Experience Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Categories in 2010/11</th>
<th>MPharm 2011/12</th>
<th>Mean of 9 programmes (3-year)</th>
<th>Range of 9 programmes (3-year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of assessments</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32 – 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summative assessments</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26 – 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessments</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0 – 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of summative assessments</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7 – 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of timed exams</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>3% - 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback returned</td>
<td>officially 21 days; but up to 42 days</td>
<td>officially 21 days</td>
<td>20.4 days</td>
<td>17 – 28 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume of oral feedback</td>
<td>942 hrs</td>
<td>664 hrs</td>
<td>6 hrs 40 min</td>
<td>37min – 30hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact hours (% total hours)</td>
<td>1513hrs 31.5%</td>
<td>1357hrs 27.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Programme Portrait**

**CONCLUSION**

- No quick fix in relation to assessments; time is required to fully embed changes in assessment practice
- Students do not necessarily recognise all forms of feedback if not linked to future assessments
- High quality formative assessments which feed forward required for sustainable assessment and lifelong learning
- Increase in formative assessments provided more structured opportunities for feedback and was appreciated. “...we had a mock paper and they put feedback online of what, they required... that was good. More opportunities for use of feedback embedded in new MPharm curriculum
- Staff commitment is critical; **TESTA** provides a useful methodology for the visualization and promotion of sustainable assessment practice

**REFERENCES**

1. AEQ with Scales: TESTA website. Available at www.testa.ac.uk/resources/research-toolkit/
   Accessed 28 May 2013