

problem based learning. This, we term, enquiry based learning (EBL) (McHarg & Kay, BDJ submitted). In the first two years, students work through a series of cases based on the human life cycle. Each lasts two to three weeks and is designed to steer students towards specific learning objectives and direct students to engage with a range of topics. A case on early childhood, for example, might focus on embryology, early tooth development and the physiology of growth in terms of life sciences, but will also look at issues like communication with parents and consent and introduce clinically related areas such as preventive strategies. Each group is led by a facilitator, an experienced practicing dentist whose role is to provide guidance and ensure that specific learning objectives attributed to each case are achieved. These can, in turn, be mapped to the First Five Years, the Peninsula Dental School learning outcomes or indeed any other appropriate documentation, for example, that describing the competencies required of a dentist in Europe.

Students in their first two years can expect to work through the life cycle twice in each year. Each time a specific age range is revisited the knowledge gained previously will be reinforced and expanded. Developing the example given previously, when revisiting early childhood the embryology might be expanded to introduce common craniofacial deformities such as cleft palate, and to explore how they relate to events in normal development. In subsequent years this will evolve into consideration of management issues so a 'spiral of knowledge' can be introduced. The material covered in each case is supported by an ongoing programme of keynote lectures or 'Plenaries' given by Peninsula staff or outside speakers. A significant proportion of the 'Plenaries' cover Life Science topics either directly or in a cross disciplinary fashion. Whilst basing our programme around self-directed learning we recognise that some students need guidance over and above what can be achieved in a wholly self-directed programme when tackling complex issues such as those encountered in some areas of the basic and applied sciences. To address this, EBL sessions are supported and supplemented by those dedicated to the life sciences and offer opportunities for small group teaching and increased contact time with subject specialists in these areas.

The life sciences are part of an integrated assessment programme in which academic tutors play a central role. Students are required to keep reflective portfolios which are formally reviewed at six weekly intervals. There are summative assessments in the form of

MCQ's at the end of the first and second years and life science topics may be included into our programme of progress testing which will take place throughout the course.

Basic Medical Sciences, therefore, form a central part of our curriculum, and one which we take very seriously. We endeavour, however, to get students to engage with the complex issues in a contemporary and relevant way, involving both subject specialists and members of the broader dental community. So far, our students have been tremendously positive and have engaged with life sciences with commitment and enthusiasm. Although several have considerable basic science expertise they have found the opportunity to channel their knowledge into a focussed clinical direction a real and enjoyable challenge which, in turn, will provide a sound foundation for a clinical career. We intend to everything we can to ensure that this trend continues.



RAE Panel now deliberating....

The RAE panel's deliberations have now commenced and the panel's final assessments will impact significantly on HEFCE / SHEFCE finding to dental schools and hence staffing levels. We look forward to a positive outcome to the assessment exercise for dentistry nationally, which may then help to maintain staffing levels with consequent benefits for teaching as well as research.



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