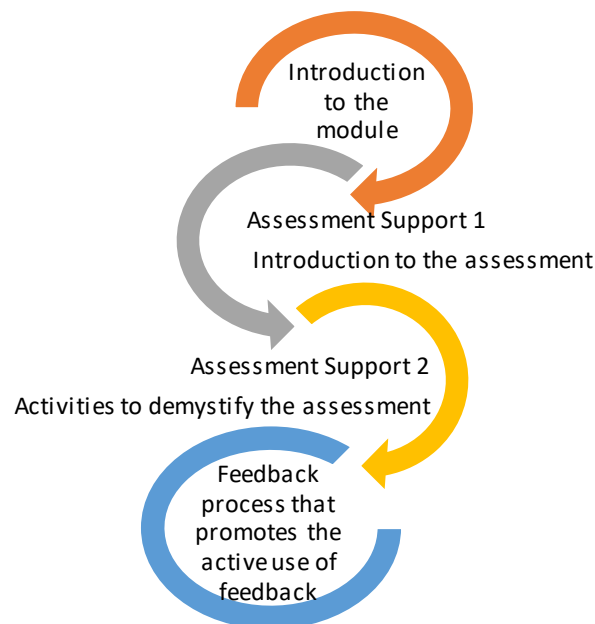


## Embedding Mental Wellbeing: Methods and Benefits Collaborative Enhancement Project 2021

### Embedding support for effective group working within a MPham module on personalised health care

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The Leicester School of Pharmacy deploys an assessment support and feedback road map across its programmes which is designed to help alleviate the anxiety associated with assessment by providing our students with a route through the assessment process; to develop their understanding of assessment criteria, and what meeting them looks like, and to promote their use of feedback. A key driver for the development of the roadmap was the appreciation of the poorer mental health of those enrolled on professional degree programmes and, in particular, the high stakes assessments of the Master's in Pharmacy programme as a stressor (Hanna et al., 2018; Lewis and Cardwell, 2018).



The second destination on our road map is a timetabled session where the assessment is introduced and this is the focus of this example of how we embed mental wellbeing in the curriculum which is being shared as part of the QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project - 'Embedding Mental Wellbeing'.

In Level 6 of our integrated Master's in Pharmacy programme, students study a 60-credit module on Personalised Health Care where they undertake a substantial coursework assessment. Part 1 of this assessment involves students working in self-determined groups to co-create a fictional patient, with a history drawn from all areas that can impact on health,

they identify factors that are priority areas for personalisation of the pharmaceutical care of their patient and deliver an assessed group presentation.

Pharmacists work as part of a multi-disciplinary team for the benefit of patients. We use group work within our programme because it facilitates the development of the skill set necessary for this including collaboration, time management and negotiation as well as an awareness of group dynamics, but it can be a stressful experience which is heightened when it is linked to an assessment (Cartney and Rouse, 2006). This assignment was the first time in the course that the learners had to work **as a group**, rather than **in a group**, collaborating to create a fictional character. It was also the first time they had the opportunity to draw on their own experiences to develop a character that aligned to their interests and had meaning for them which required negotiation within the group. Historically, we observed that when undertaking group work, not all groups functioned effectively which had a negative impact on the learners' mental wellbeing. It was therefore important to us that learners were able to work collaboratively in a supportive environment.

We developed a two-hour workshop which was co-designed and co-delivered by the academic responsible for the coursework, the module leader and the Course Specific Initiatives officer. We embedded the content on effective group work within the assessment support session itself to highlight its importance and because the discussions centred on the impact of diversity were equally applicable to their future role as a health care professional as they were to their role as a pharmacy student. The session began with an introduction of the coursework and discussion of the assignment parameters and key time points. The second section focused on effective group work and involved activities for students to share their thoughts on the benefits and challenges of working in groups, to provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the impact of diversity in group work, and to identify the key approaches they could use to facilitate the smooth running of their group work - to develop a tool kit for working together that would minimise conflict. The final part of the session focused on factors that could influence the personalisation of healthcare and provided a springboard for the initiation of the group work itself. Learners had access to a Padlet resource on effective group work for further support: [Working Effectively in Groups \(padlet.com\)](https://padlet.com)

Proactive embedding of support for mental wellbeing in the academic curriculum signposts the relevance of the support to the students. It also increased engagement with the content as students attended the timetable assessment support class in greater numbers than if it had been a drop-in session. During the workshops the tutors supporting the session were able to highlight the commonalities of working in a team from their own experiences, reinforcing the relevance of the activity to the students' current project as well as their future career path. The post-session feedback shows an increase of 2 points in confidence (1-10 scale) about working in a group pre and post-activity. The module team noted that it received fewer requests from students to arbitrate between group members than previously and, in conversation, students spoke positively about working in their groups.

Group project work should be initiated after students have been provided with guidance on how to work effectively together so they can avoid some of the common pitfalls. Embedding this support within the academic curriculum signposts the value of the content to the students and their involvement in active learning in the session enables them to create a toolkit for effective group working that has personal relevance to them and can facilitate improved mental wellbeing.

## References

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