

Narrative 5

Dr Mariann Rand-Weaver was Deputy Head of Learning and Teaching of the School of Health Sciences and Social Care at the time of the project. She lectured and was the module leader responsible for the BSc Biomedical Sciences programme.

Mariann became involved in the OULDI project when she attended, together with three colleagues from the School, the 2nd Learning Design Workshop held at the university on the 14th of July 2010. The course design team's specific intention in attending was to think about possible ways to redefine their programmes' assessment structure for mainly two purposes: to reduce assessment workload to staff whilst improving the quality of the teaching delivery, and also to improve the students' learning experience. The course team wished to explore further the possibilities within SR2¹ and also to share and discuss ideas with other participants.



Fig 1. Biosciences Course Design Team discussing new approaches during the Learning Design Workshop

During this one-day event, Mariann and the team from Biosciences were given the opportunity to review the design of their programmes. They were exposed to a series of learning design tools which included the 'At a glance' Course Map, and the Pedagogy Profile, to enable them to think of a holistic approach to Level design. The team had the opportunity to review the programme and level learning outcomes, rethink Level-based learning opportunities, discuss their current formative and summative assessment strategies, and explore which technologies could be integrated as part of the programme. A 'critical friend' was also assigned to Mariann and the team to provide constructive feedback on the various solutions under discussion. The following link points to documents that were produced during some of the activities conducted during the workshop, which kick-started their redesign of the Biosciences' assessment strategy.

<http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/4129>).

^{1 1} SR2: Literally 'Senate Regulation 2' – A recently proposed institutional policy change from a module-based to a level-based approach to curriculum design

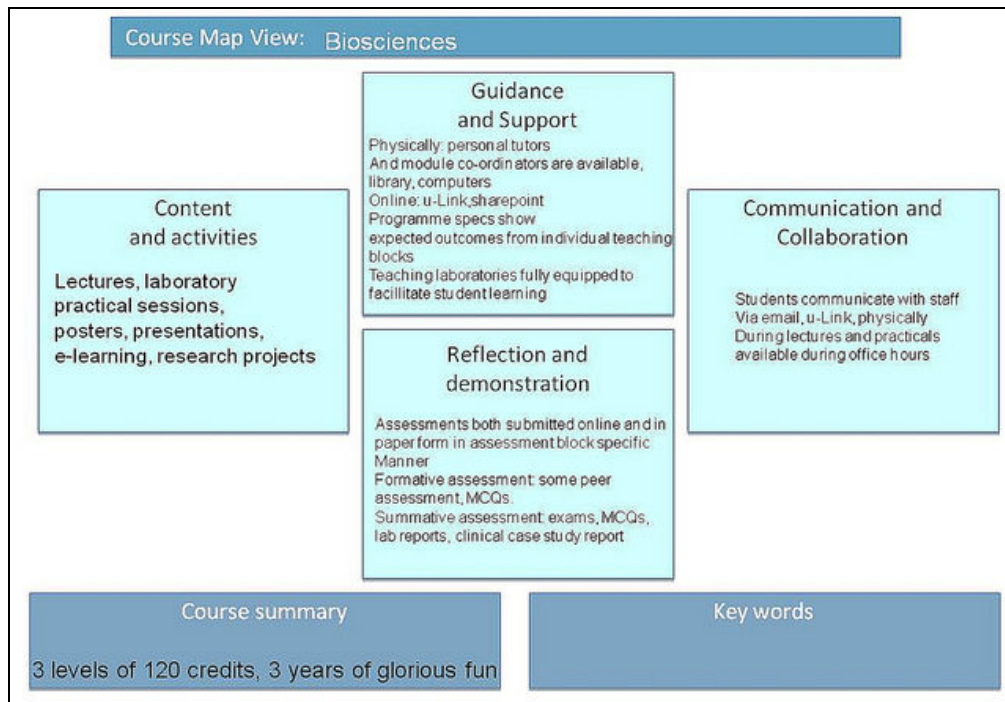


Fig 2. At a glance course map – Biosciences Course Design Team

Beyond the workshop, Mariann and the team continued working on the design initiated during the workshop with all the other lecturers within Biosciences. The end result is that the Undergraduate programme has been totally redefined, making use of the freedom offered by the revised SR2 framework, and Biosciences has moved away from the 'silo' module delivery approach to separate content delivered in Study Blocks) from assessment (contained in separate Assessment Blocks). The intended outcome, as Mariann remarks, is that 'students should be able to integrate information better, have to engage more and be more critically thinking'.

The department now has reduced its summative assessments by two thirds and staff are spending some of the time which they would have spent marking in conducting formative activities to increase interaction between students and staff.

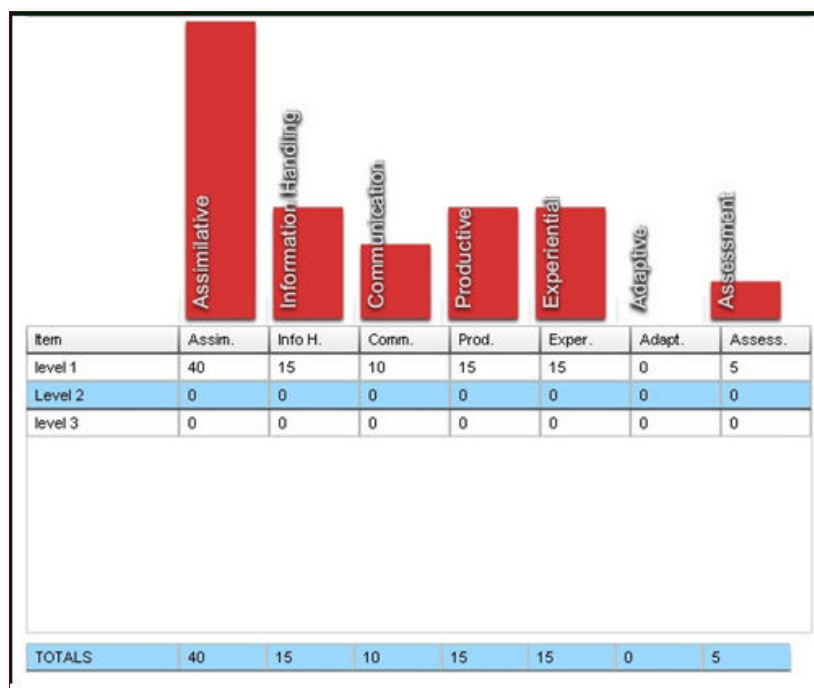


Fig 3. Pedagogy Profile for the Level 1 taught Programme

In hindsight, Mariann feels that the Biosciences team’s involvement in the Learning Design Workshop instigated the process to this major redesign of the assessment. She thinks that the materials developed during the workshop activities, especially the session on reviewing the high level Programme outcome and reconstructing the level outcomes, were indeed the starting point.

Another added benefit derived from the workshop was the fact that participants had an opportunity to dedicate a day entirely to reflect and think collaboratively on ways to enhance their programme design and delivery methods. This, Mariann remarks, was something which no one had experienced previously. Collaboration and team work are vital to the success of implementing opportunities offered by the new SR2 framework, so having the opportunity during the workshop to work in a team was extremely useful.

“This changes how we work... so, whereas in the past, I could do my module and my assessment without any interference, now when assessments are going to cover several subject areas it means really cooperating with my colleagues and I will have a team of people doing the marking, so there is going to be challenges around consistency. So yes, it is having to change how we operate, how we do our teaching”

Sharing ideas with the ‘critical friends’ was also perceived as extremely valuable by the Biosciences team:

“You are only as innovative as your brain allows you to be and if you are the only person doing it you will find yourself limited and if you are a small group of people who are always thinking in the same vein, then you are going to be limited. So having somebody from outside is actually really helpful”.

Mariann however, did not find the use of Cloudworks and Compendium very useful during or after the workshop. This is due to the fact that staff is constantly under pressure to do things, with very little time to experiment with new tools and/or ‘thinking time’.

On a positive note, the revised assessment design is closely aligned with student needs, programme characteristics and requirements and resources. In the past, students have

complained about too many assessments. Now with this new approach, the assessment load is spread throughout the year.

“So we let students know at the beginning of the year what all their assignments for the year will be so they can plan and they can gather the information as they go along before they have to submit, so this will hopefully improve their workload as well. We also hope that this would give them a better experience because we will have more formative activities and thereby give them the staff-student interaction that they would like. I feel that what we are requiring them to do will challenge them in ways which will be appreciated by employers. So I think yes, there is better alignment between student requirements, resources and programme design”

So as Mariann indicated ‘it is a win-win all round’ for both students and staff.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Biosciences approach to implementing SR2 has not only proved successful within the department, but also across the School since other departments will follow suit in the coming academic year.