An evaluation of the student and tutor experience of a residential summer school event (OPTIMAX)

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Aim: To explore the experiences and perceptions of students and tutors who participated in a Erasmus funded 3 week residential summer school event (OPTIMAX) during August 2013.

Introduction: European funding was acquired to subsidise a 3-week Erasmus Intensive Programme (IP) residential summer school looking at dose and image quality (OPTIMAX). This was held at the University of Salford during August 2013.

The multi-cultural and multi-professional experiences of tutors and students from five different European countries were explored in this unique event with the intention of developing a series of recommendations to optimise the organisation of similar future events.

Method: Student and tutor focus groups collated personal accounts, perceptions and experiences of OPTIMAX. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to moderate and guide both focus groups.

Data collection: Seven radiography students participated in the student focus group, representing: Norway (2), UK (1), Portugal (1), Netherlands (1) and Switzerland (1). There were 5 participants in the tutor focus group, representing: Iraq (1) (Radiographer & Physicist), Switzerland (1) (Nuclear Medicine Technologist), Iran (biomedical scientist) and Portugal (2) (both radiographers). Data for both focus groups was collected using digital audiotape.

Data Analysis: Recordings from each focus group were transcribed verbatim and analysed using QSR NVivo version 10. Thematic analysis was used to synthesise the data and helped to identify any reoccurring categories / themes relating to the student and tutor experience of OPTIMAX.

Results: OPTIMAX was seen as an opportunity to learn more about image quality and dose and to also work in collaborative groups with students and tutors from different cultures and professions to their own.

Student 6: I learned how to communicate with people from different countries and to see what is important in different countries compared with my own country

Student 7: Working in a group was a great experience in which to learn. I learnt a lot from the other students

Student 6: I think it was very good to have something else [social events] organised rather than just learning activities

Student 1: I think this is a great experience for us, so we can get to know people from other countries

Student 5: My group had eight students, but for me it was big group to do research with

Tutor 1: You gain some new knowledge especially from your colleagues and from the students also. People from different professions have their own approach to research, and you can learn from them

Tutor 2: My group worked hard [together] and now have some new skills

Tutor 2: I agree regarding the length of some of the presentations [lectures] being too long for students

Tutor 3: ... it is not useful to have a second tutor for a short time. I think you really need two tutors for the whole 3 weeks

Tutor 4: I don’t think there was enough time. People ended up doing a lot of work outside [of hours]

Both focus groups identified areas or made recommendations on how they thought that OPTIMAX might be improved.

Outcomes: Students and tutors considered the residential summer school as a positive experience, especially in regards to the collaborative learning experience with multi-cultural and multi-professional group working.

Discussion: It is important to recognise that consideration must be accounted for when undertaking multi-cultural or multi-professional group learning, such as the size of the group and clarity of the learning outcomes. Tutor leadership is vital to ensure involvement of all group members, whilst maintaining a clear and co-ordinated learning strategy to complete tasks. In some cases it may help to have a clear brief to support intended learning outcomes within the group.

Funding has been awarded for a second residential summer school and recommendations identified from this evaluation will be utilised as part of this.

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1. NVivo qualitative data analysis software; QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012.