



PATS FOR CLINICAL ACADEMICS NEW TO THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT: A TEAM BASED APPROACH



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- Priority Focus and explanation of PATS variation

The focus was Quality Assurance (QA) of a specific unit and Quality Improvement (QI) of access for students in the Bachelor of Paramedic Practice (Conversion Pathway), a fully online course providing a degree conversion pathway for paramedics holding diploma level qualifications. This PATS variation used a teaching team approach and included mentoring and professional development.

The whole teaching team participated in the PATS program, collectively focusing, initially, on a single unit with the goal that skills gained could be applied to other units in the course.

The QA activity consisted of benchmarking a unit in the degree program against UTAS best practice recommendations, with a particular focus on best practice in the online environment.

The QI activity aimed to change the delivery and assessment of units in the conversion degree to provide more flexible access to students in the online course, specifically, improving access for remotely located students. Student evaluation surveys had highlighted an issue for students in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) when on deployment with limited or no Internet access. The teaching team initiated a project to provide remote students with flexible learning options and assessment options.

Why

The Bachelor of Paramedic Practice (Conversion Pathway) is a relatively new course drawing staff principally from the clinical environment rather than academia. It was identified that these new staff would benefit from experienced teachers providing mentoring and professional development and advice.

The course was developed in response to market demand and curriculum development and implementation was relatively quick, with limited time and resources for reviewing outcomes

CASE STORY



during the implementation phase. The teaching team felt that it was timely to review the units with a particular focus on student engagement in the online environment and respond to feedback via student eVALUate surveys. It was agreed to use the PATS program to support the review process.

Additionally, a Quality Assurance activity was also taken to benchmark the unit against UTAS best practice recommendations with a particular focus on best practice in the online environment.

People

The teaching team for the course (3 tenured, 1 contract staff member), with mentoring and professional development provided by the Associate Head of Learning and Teaching, School of Medicine and an academic from the Faculty of Education experienced in online delivery, particularly with mature aged students.

Timeframe

Ongoing

Scope: Course

The specific PATS activity was focused on a unit during the semester of delivery, but in the context of a teaching team wishing to review all units in the course for quality assurance.

- Key Outcomes

PATS Variation – outputs and outcomes

The focus on student engagement and satisfaction in the clinical based units resulted in a different approach to setting up and managing discussion boards for students, and this approach has been adopted for other units in the course. The pilot of a flexible approach to assessment occurred with no technical issues and general student acceptance.

Staff involved gained ethics approval for the pilot study to survey student responses to the changes. Due to small numbers (low response rates and small enrolment numbers) there was no measureable change in student evaluation of the units, however, informal feedback from students has been positive. A larger survey is being prepared, following a successful teaching development grant application, which is intended to elicit student views on what is needed for flexible learning, in particular for Australian Defence Force students, and enable a sound, sustainable approach to design for online learning. This could be further developed and recommended for a faculty-wide approach, or to inform the University's procedures and policy on assessment for ADF students to complement the existing UTAS Student Reservist, Emergency Services, Elite Athletes and Performers Support Policy.

System level impacts

Within the University of Tasmania, this PATS variation for the Bachelor of Paramedic Practice (Conversion Pathway) degree aimed to have impact at *IMPEL levels 1, 2, 3 and 4*.

1. **Team members:** teaching team approach supports collegial culture and professional development. .
2. **Immediate students:** delivering quality assurance of units in the course and improving access for remotely located students improved ability of students to meet course and unit outcomes. The current project on flexible approaches is currently aiming to improve the experience of



Australian Defence Force (and potentially other remote students) in the Bachelor of Paramedic Practice (Conversion Pathway).

3. **Spreading the word:** dissemination has occurred through discussion at Paramedic Curriculum meetings which has led to implementation of the Quality Improvement activities through a number of units. It is planned to disseminate at relevant conference, for example, Teaching Matters, Paramedic and Australian Defence Force conferences.
4. **Narrow opportunistic adoption:** One member of the PATS team has been asked to join a working group tasked to review the UTAS Student Reservist, Emergency Services, Elite Athletes and Performers Support Policy.

- Learning

1. Barriers and opportunities

Time is a major barrier with a trimesterised course, compounded by a lack of experience in Learning and Teaching for the paramedic clinical academics.

Opportunities included staff commitment to learning and teaching, focusing on a specific project to improving the delivery of course and meet the identified needs of remote students. We were also able to engage some resources for a research assistant to support the development of the project.

2. What worked well

Enthusiasm has translated to activities demonstrated by sharing workload and good teamwork dynamics. A successful application for a small internal teaching development grant (to employ a research assistant) has helped maintain the project's momentum.

3. What didn't work well

In general the project worked well however the shift in focus to flexible education has directed attention away from the original QA agenda.

Although QI focus and activities appear to be working well, the QA focus appears to have been dropped in the process. This may be linked to limited time of staff and also the nature of QI focus in responding to a specific problem of improving access for remotely located students.

4. What was learnt

The importance of leadership to drive the project was vital in the development of team collegiality, supported by regular face-to-face meetings. This requires an ongoing commitment for leadership and in addition having resources, for example, a research assistant, to support the quality research focus.

5. National System Impact

IMPEL Level 3: Contributions to knowledge in the field; growth or spread of disseminated ideas; serendipitous adoption/adaptation by people beyond the project's intended reach.