

Quality assessment through the professional staff lens: Breaking down the binary divide in higher education

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Higher education institutions (HEI) can no longer afford to conceptualise their workforce as binary. The traditional 'us and them', academic and professional staff division is unsustainable if HEI are to meet the increasingly high expectations of students, increased governance and accountability pressures from external bodies, and greater industry engagement. All of these pressures culminate to impact on the assessment of students, particularly in relation to assessing clinical competency. Students expect a fair and high quality assessment process, various accreditation bodies require valid and reliable assessment, and the professionals with whom which new graduates will be working alongside also have a vested interest in ensuring competency of their colleagues. The Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) is a commonly used method of assessing clinical competency, with a plethora of literature from the perspective of the clinician or academic existing on the topic. However, the role professional staff play in implementing an OSCE, and their voice in the broader OSCE discourse is missing. In an OSCE, students move through a series of timed stations, where they demonstrate their clinical competence on a standardised patient under simulated conditions. Students are marked using checklists and global rating scales by an examiner, usually a practicing clinician. Organising and conducting a successful OSCE requires more than just academic input due to the intricate logistical and technical requirements of this form of assessment. This presentation presents a case study of the OSCE process at an Australian university through the lens of professional staff. It highlights the types of skills and expertise that professional staff bring to the design, development and delivery of an OSCE. It also examines the nature of the relationship between academic and professional staff regarding the OSCE, and highlights the impact that *all* staff have on student outcomes. The findings offer insights into the type of workforce needed in order to run the OSCE model of assessment in a sustainable manner and demonstrate an example of how the traditional binary divide is broken down through a collaborative partnership that leads to a successful assessment experience for students.