9fed Gynhadledd Dysgu ac Addysgu

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# Crynoldebau / abstracts

The IBERS Skills Passport

Dave Whitworth

The acquisition of skills (both transferable and subject-specific) is built into IBERS degrees, with ‘skills-focused’ modules embedded into every year of every degree scheme.

In 2018, twenty IBERS BSc degrees acquired accreditation by the Royal Society of Biology (RSB), which required formal documentation of skills acquisition. The accreditation criteria required staff to directly observe students using skills, rather than assessing skills acquisition indirectly through the production of assessed work. For example, students had to be observed using a microscope correctly, rather than assessing their production of a microscope image. Previously, skills assessment had focussed on higher levels of cognition, for instance the ability to describe and analyse novel data. We did not tend to directly assess students on their technical competence in generating that data.

The solution we adopted for accreditation was the ‘IBERS Skills Passport’. The Passport is a document issued to each student, which requires them to reflect on the skills acquired during a teaching session. Students phrase a description of the skill they have obtained, which is then signed off by staff if they agree the skill has been demonstrated. The Passport (attainment of staff signatures from multiple modules) is then assessed as an element within the third year project module.

The passport highlights to students the importance associated with skills acquisition, forces them to reflect on their skills, and puts the onus on them to keep records of their skills (which many find beneficial when applying for jobs or further study). The Passport also minimises the burden on staff workload which could otherwise have been substantial, for instance if skills acquisition was recorded on a centralised database. The RSB accreditation panel praised the approach, which has also received lots of positive feedback from students.

The pandemic has forced us to change how we implement the passport. This year pre-signed ‘skills certificates’ were given to students who had demonstrated skills during practical sessions. The flexibility of the Passport also proved highly beneficial, as it does not stipulate which skills from which modules students need to acquire.