



Stimulus response assessment in a health policy module

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What is the assessment (description/purpose)?

The assessment is a stimulus response. It consists of 4 weighted sections. Each contains a short extract or quote, which acts as a stimulus for students. Each of these in turn has a number of questions attached. Some of these relate directly to the extract, others require students to develop arguments, read more widely, find new material or relate the extract to wider issues.

Which courses/levels is it designed for?

It is designed for a 10 credit module entitled 'Health Policy', which is delivered to 2nd year students in their first semester. It is part of our BA (Hons) Social Policy award. The second year of this programme focuses on providing students with a broad knowledge of the different welfare sectors. The following is a summary of the module content:

In many respects, the NHS has come to symbolise the welfare state in the UK. The module will examine the historical development of health provision throughout the twentieth century until the present day. Important developments since the 1990s have included the introduction of the internal market and the changes brought about by New Labour's introduction of initiatives such as primary care groups and health improvement zones. In particular the module will examine the NHS Plan, put forward by New Labour to improve and modernise the NHS. This ambitious long-term strategy is designed to overcome problems in the NHS, which is described as 'a 1940s system operating in a 21st century world'. Students will examine the relationship between the increasing emphasis on primary care and shifts in concepts of public health. Underpinning such developments is a variety of perspectives on health and health care. Students will explore the degree to which new patterns of health care reflect challenges to the dominance of the medical model.

In addition to examining the NHS, the module will also focus on different systems of health care provision in Europe. Students will assess ways in which different systems impact on issues such as funding, use of health services, responsibility for health and relationships between medical practitioners and users of services. The module will also look at the way in which different systems cope with contemporary health problems, such as the rise in chronic illness.

The module will introduce students to the use of different sources of data on levels of health and illness and utilisation of services, focusing on some of the problems of measurement. Students will also gain experience of analysing contemporary health policy both in the UK and in other European countries.

How did you come to develop it?

We revalidated our programme recently and one aim was to move away from too heavy a reliance on traditional methods of assessment, such as essays and exams. We wanted to expose students to a wider range of assessments so that they could develop a range of skills, whilst also limiting the opportunities for plagiarism. The Health Policy module was a particular challenge, as it covered a great deal of material. It would have been difficult to test all the learning outcomes within an essay. Using a stimulus response enabled students to be assessed across a range of areas. The learning outcomes are as follows:

Knowledge and understanding

1. Assess the development of health provision in the UK.
2. Compare different systems of health care provision in Europe.
3. Evaluate the rise of primary care.
4. Analyse different models of health and medicine.

Skills

5. Use different sources of data on health, illness and service utilisation.

What are the benefits in terms of students' learning?

Students often develop a lot of skills within a module that they subsequently have little opportunity to make explicit in assessment. They themselves do not always recognise how far their skills have progressed. The stimulus response format tries to capture this learning. For example, during the module several seminars were devoted to developing students' awareness of the extent and limitations of Internet-based health information. The class contained students with very diverse levels of confidence and experience. Seminars enabled students to support each other and share skills. Weaker students could be identified for more intensive support, if necessary. One section of the assessment followed this through, by specifically asking students to use their Internet skills.

The assessment placed a premium on students' ability to use material selectively. This forced them to consider why they were including material and what point they were using it to make. Sometimes students found this hard. One commented that she preferred essays, because 'you can put lots of stuff in and the answer's bound to be in there somewhere'! Hopefully, this assessment encouraged students to be more critical and to apply their knowledge to material.

Are there benefits for you as the teacher?

With essay based assessments, I find that students tend to filter out material which does not seem applicable to their chosen topic. However, the assessment format meant that students were able to see the relevance of more of what was covered in lectures and seminars. This approach gave students a very clear structure, but also required them to show some autonomy in locating and selecting material.

Feedback (student evaluation and your own reflection)

Students who had been used to our old programme, which was more essay based, were initially very suspicious of the format! Often it was the students who were most accustomed to getting high marks in essays who were reluctant to try something different. Yet overall, the level of achievement was very good. Most students said they were happier with the assessment once they got started on it. The fact that it was broken down into sections meant they were able to pace themselves by working on it throughout the module, rather than leaving it all till the end.

I was very pleased with the assessment, which was a new approach for me. The worst aspect was actually coming up with all the different sections. It was quite time-consuming to devise. However, it was fairly straightforward to mark. It was effective in that it made students address a range of topics, rather than letting them focus solely on those they were most comfortable with, as is often the case in essays. The fact that it was broken down into sections, though, meant that they had the opportunity to do well in some areas if not all.

Have you made changes in the process of developing the idea (did you encounter any problems eg. institutional/regulatory/relating to facilities and how were these addressed)?

I did not encounter any major problems. The main issue I had to bear in mind was that students who had their own access to the Internet were often better placed than those who had to rely exclusively on university facilities. Consequently, I had to design the assessment in such a way as not to disadvantage this later group.

Stimulus response

Word limit 2000

This stimulus response consists of four parts. **You must answer all four parts.** The guidance notes that follow the assessment are very important. You should ensure that you read and adhere to them.

Part 1 (40%)

Changed systems for the NHS

6.2 The 1948 settlement assumed central accountability for the NHS. The sound of every dropped bedpan was to reverberate around Whitehall, in Nye Bevan's immortal phrase. But this accountability was more apparent than actual. The reality is that a million patients every day rely on the skills and judgement of highly trained frontline professionals, so the NHS cannot be run from Whitehall.

6.3 The last Government's 'internal market' attempted to address this problem. But by fragmenting the NHS, standards remained variable and best practice was not shared. Competition between hospitals was a weak lever for improvement, because most areas were only served by one or two local general hospitals. Other methods of raising standards were ignored. The market ethos undermined teamwork between professionals and organisations vital to patient-centred care. And it hampered planning across the NHS as a whole, leading to cuts in nurse training and a stalled hospital building programme.

6.4 Our aim is to redesign the system around the patient. That means not repeating the mistakes of the past. The top down government model failed to provide the local innovation, and the responsiveness to deliver sustained improvements in patient care. The internal market imposed a false market on the health service. The result was not better incentives, but more fragmentation, a lottery in provision and excess bureaucracy.

(Department of Health (2000). The NHS Plan – A plan for investment. A plan for reform. (Cm4818-I). www.nhs.uk/nationalplan/nhsplan.htm pp56-57)

Read the above extract, and answer the following questions:

- i. What were the main aims of the internal market within the NHS?
- ii. In what respects can the internal market be said to have failed?
- iii. In what key ways does The NHS Plan intend to reform the NHS system?
- iv. Assess the extent to which the NHS according to The NHS Plan represents a health care system that is fundamentally different from the internal market.

Part 2 (20%)

Freeman (2000: 1) argues that:

...the health system can be disaggregated into subsystems of delivery, finance and regulation. These might be described as the functional processes of the health sector.

Using Freeman's classification, answer the following questions:

- i. Compare the key features of the current NHS with those of one other European country. You should present this comparison in the form of a table.
- ii. From your table, identify and discuss what you see as the most significant points of similarity and difference.

Part 3 (20%)

Organisations responsible for official data have the almost impossible task of keeping up with changing social phenomena and rapidly evolving policies while at the same time maintaining the continuity of particular series.

(Kerrison, S. & Macfarlane, A. (2000). Setting the scene. The Government Statistical Service and the collection of official health statistics. In: S. Kerrison & A. Macfarlane (eds) Official Health Statistics: An unofficial guide. London: Arnold, p10.)

Answer the following questions:

- i. Explain and illustrate how official data reflect 'rapidly evolving policies' in health care. You should back up this discussion using data taken from official sources on the Internet.
- ii. In an appendix, you should specify briefly exactly how you located your information and provide print outs of sources used. These need not be print outs of entire documents or data series; they may simply be specific pages, provided that the evidence you have used is highlighted and that they feature the web address. (The appendix is not included in the word limit.)

Part 4 (20%)

Although collectivist and Green ideas have done much to place and maintain public health on the agenda, the liberal/individualist perspective has remained extremely influential with regard to the nature of the interventions adopted. This to some degree confirms the conclusion of Mills and Saward (1993) that the British state has tended to favour negative liberty, the freedom of the individual from interference, rather than positive liberty, which implies constraint on some activities in order to enable individuals to flourish. This explains in part the reluctance of both Labour and Conservative governments in the past to adopt tougher regulatory policies to improve public health...

(Baggott, R. (2000). Public Health: Policy and politics. Basingstoke: Macmillan, p249.)

Answer the following questions:

- i. Illustrate Baggott's argument with examples of public health policies that show the influence of different ideological perspectives.
- ii. How convincing do you find Baggott's argument?

Guidance notes

- One of the skills being tested by this assessment format is your ability to select and synthesise appropriate material. You will not have space to provide comprehensive or lengthy answers. It is not necessary to include detailed introductions or conclusions for each section. Try to make sure all your material is relevant.
- It may be appropriate to list points in certain places. However, do not neglect to explain points. You need to demonstrate that you understand material, not simply that you can reproduce it.
- Although the extracts included here may form your starting point, you will need to read more widely. For example, part 1 is based on *The NHS Plan*, but you should not make this the sole text you refer to.
- All material **must** be referenced properly throughout. This includes any material that you may wish to include in the format of bullet points or tables, for example.
- There is no specific word length for the different questions within each part. You should use your judgement regarding the relative importance of your material. However, you should note the overall weighting for each part.



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