Student-authored MCQ revision questions

What did/do you do?

Students write their own multiple choice questions which are compiled into an online database. The database then provides a revision resource.

Who is involved?

Dr Debbie Bevitt and Dr Nick Morris, Biomedical Sciences

All 1st year BioMed students, when the project started there were c260 students, currently (2011/12) 370 students

How do you do it?

Each semester students are expected to write one multiple choice question, provide the correct answer and distractors (incorrect answers) and a reference for the correct answer.

The process begins during a seminar at the start of the year where the students are introduced to the process and the rationale for it, emphasising the benefits of peer learning and the knowledge they all have. It is emphasised that the questions will not be checked by staff, partly to encourage students to learn from each other as well as recognise their own learning but also as it would be a huge task for staff to check. This project uses bespoke software developed by Nick Morris and a similar system could be set up using PeerWise software.

Later in the semester students are asked for their question, answer and reference. Each year a different area of the curriculum has been specified. Each student receives an individual email telling them which area of the curriculum to focus on. This means that the question bank is gradually covering the entire syllabus. The student questions are added to the database. All questions are marked as either not checked by academic staff or checked, if this has happened - usually only if there is a concern about the question.

At the end of semester 2 teaching a random selection of questions is taken from the database and used in a 'pub quiz' format for groups of 25 students as a revision aid and a more 'fun' activity.

The questions are also made available online to students as a revision aid. Students can ask for a set of 5 questions, either drawn from the whole database or focused on specific curriculum areas. Questions can be accessed via mobile phones.

Why do you do it?

The project was set up to:

- provide practice questions for students to use as part of their learning and revision
- move students to become more independent, more able to recognise learning from peers as legitimate
- increase their ability to self test recognising their own knowledge and abilities.

Does it work?

Providing there is minimal assessment attached students are very willing to participate. Students get a very small mark (1%) for adding a question and the same for participating in the pub quiz activity. When no marks were given participation dropped dramatically.

Students make extensive use of the question bank as a revision aid, suggesting they recognise the quality of the questions put there by their peers as being high and relevant.