

**Case study title:** PeerWise: A tool for peer-assisted learning in medical undergraduates

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### **Summary**

PeerWise is a free on-line platform to allows students anonymously to set single-best answer questions for their peers to answer. Setting questions is a valuable way to learn (assessment for learning), and answering questions set by fellow students on the same course gives valuable learning. Students can be motivated by league tables and badges that reflect their contribution to PeerWise.

### **Background**

Students often request formative (practice) material to help their learning. Faculty often put their efforts into writing high quality summative questions and may have less motivation and time to prepare formative questions. By encouraging students to write questions for each other, a bank of formative questions is built, bespoke to a particular course, with minimal effort from staff.

I identified this first through a webinar with Paul Denney in Auckland (whose team invented PeerWise), and subsequently met him during my sabbatical in Auckland in 2013.

### **Approach**

In September 2013 I first introduced PeerWise to the new cohort of Year 1 students on the new '[C21 integrated case-based curriculum](#)'. During a 1-hour session in a lecture theatre, with students advised each to bring a web-connected device, I introduced them to PeerWise, and each student answered two pre-prepared questions, before each attempting to write their own question for the whole cohort to answer.

Over the coming months, and particularly just before examinations, their use of PeerWise, both in writing and answering questions, increased; however, about 5% of students wrote about 90% of the questions and most students simply answered questions.

I subsequently re-introduced the Year 1 cohort to PeerWise when they started Year 2, and have been pleased by the engagement from this and subsequent Year 1 and 2 cohorts.

### **Outcomes**

Our formal feedback session (focus group) suggested the resource has been very helpful for revision. From Year 3 onwards, however, students in the School of Medicine do not engage much, preferring to obtain practice questions from commercial sites.

We are now working on developing a bank of formative questions derived from the best rated of the PeerWise questions in Years 1 and 2, which could be made available free of charge on the Internet.

### **Learning points and insights**

PeerWise works best for large cohorts of students where there is a greater chance of students being interested in question writing and more comments and feedback on individual questions.

I am planning the sharing of a Year 1/2 PeerWise course with other medical schools, which may help to motivate students and to increase the likelihood of comments etc. on individual questions.