

Problem-Based Learning (PBL)



In the 20th century medical education experienced far-reaching changes and developments. The introduction of problem-based learning (PBL) challenged the established master-pupil approach which had been a dominant feature of medical education throughout its existence.

Maastricht University is specialised in problem-based learning techniques. The School of Health Professions Education also applies PBL in its educational research, training programmes and courses.

PBL in short

PBL's main focus is to generate students that are independent, enterprising problem-solvers. To achieve this, education in Maastricht transcends individual study and lectures; in Maastricht students study real-life problems in small groups. As a group, students analyse a problem and try to find the best solution. A tutor sits in on the group meetings to guard the process and monitor the level of the discussions. To prepare the students for real life, they are also provided with skills training sessions, to learn the skills that are needed in their field of study. Not all programmes are alike, however, which is why every faculty employs its own version of PBL.

PBL stimulates independent learning

PBL is a student-centred, as opposed to teacher-centred approach. The basic study material does not consist of lectures and readers, but is made up of a collection of programmatic case studies ('problems') accompanied by relevant literature suggestions. Based on the analysis of a problem by a group of some 10 students, the students individually collect new information. This information is discussed and synthesised in the next group meeting. Independent learning is stimulated and rewarded. Students define their own learning objectives on a continuous basis through a stimulating process of problem analysis, goal setting, theory application and problem solving.

Dynamic Programme of the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences

The Maastricht Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences was, after the McMaster University in Canada, the second university in the world to implement PBL as the dominant educational strategy in medical education. In addition to its broad experience with PBL, Maastricht has always been eager to further develop this educational method. Many experiments, developments and a good deal of research have contributed to the expertise of our staff. The Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences has also enriched the PBL approach with its own additions like e.g. the progress test and a clinical skills training programme for undergraduates commencing on the very first day of the medical programme. The dynamics of the programme are illustrated by major curricular reforms implemented in the late eighties and a second one that started in the academic year 2001/2002.

For more detailed information on PBL, see the [position paper](#) of the Network TUFH attached.