BACKGROUND: Monash Pharmacy offers recent graduates with a relevant science degree accelerated entry into 3rd year after successfully completing an intensive summer bridging unit (Introduction to Pharmacy).

OBJECTIVE: To compare oral vs. written examination performances of graduate-entry (GE) vs. undergraduate-entry (UE) pharmacy students in their final (4th) year capstone unit (Integrated Therapeutics - Preparation for Practice)

METHOD: We performed retrospective analysis of OSCE and written examination results of final year students over 3 years (2015-2017).

RESULTS: Both GE (n=135) and UE (n=500) groups performed better in the written exams involving clinical problem-solving case studies compared with OSCE stations involving role-play scenarios for problem solving and oral communication.

- In written exam, UE students performed better than GE students (mean exam score 81% vs. 78%) with significantly higher proportion of UE students (61% UE vs. 44% GE) receiving high distinctions (HD = marks ≥80%).
- In comparison, GE students performed better in oral exam (OSCE) with higher scores (mean OSCE score = 70% vs. 68.5% for GE vs. UE). However, <20% of students from both groups achieved high distinctions in their OSCE (18% GE vs. 16% UE).
- A weak positive correlation was seen between written and oral examination marks for both groups: Pearson’s r = 0.3 and 0.2 for GE vs. UE groups.

CONCLUSIONS: Mature GE students and younger UE students achieved similarly in written and oral exams, but with different strengths, likely related to their learning and life experiences.

- Significant differences in written vs. oral exam results could be attributed to differences in the levels of Miller’s pyramid of competence assessed in these examinations.
- Written examinations traditionally assess “Knows” and “Know-hows” whereas clinical oral examinations (such as OSCEs) are designed to cover both cognitive and behaviour domains assessing knowledge, skills and attitudes. In our study, OSCE (oral examination) presented to be a more robust and challenging assessment for both graduate-entry and undergraduate-entry pharmacy students at final year level.
- Assessment design and support activities catering for mixed learner groups (such as GE and UE groups) need to be more complex but also present interesting opportunities for peer learning.
- Findings from this study contributed toward the design and development of the graduate-entry pathway for our new Vertically Integrated Master of Pharmacy curriculum.