

Business Costs of Assessments

Modes of Assessment

University assessments can be diagnostic (to identify learning needs of a student) wholly formative (for the benefit of student learning), wholly summative (contributing a mark that counts towards a progression decision) or a mixture of formative and summative and they currently fall into the following broad categories:

- 1 Coursework
- 2 Course Tests
- 3 School-Based Exams
- 4 Centrally Timetabled Exams
- 5 Assessment of Practice
- 6 Projects / Dissertations

1 Coursework

Coursework components may be assessed by the following modes, for example:

Written assignment with submission deadline
Practicals

2 Course Tests

These components are often regarded by academic staff as falling under the broad category of Coursework and may be assessed as follows:

Practicals
Observational assessments (e.g. OSCEs)
Oral/Listening Tests
Presentations
Computerised Tests
Time-constrained, Written Assessments

Students and LTC regard some Course tests to be similar to Exams which has led Exams regulations being applied to some Course tests.

3 School-Based Exams

These components are designated as Exams on SITS but can take the form of performance assessments, OSCEs, and examinations where specialist facilities are required, such as SCVA artwork, film presentation, laboratory practicals etc

4 Centrally Timetabled Exams

These are time-constrained, written assessments under exam conditions. The following assessment types are available for examinations:

EXOPB	Open Book
EXPPR	Pre-released Paper
EXPPT	Pre-released Paper and Texts
EXPTX	Pre-released Texts
EXSTD	Standard Exam
EXTXA	Texts/Materials Allowed

5 Assessment of Practice

In subjects leading to professional registration students may be assessed on their performance on placement and demonstration of practice-based skills.

6 Projects or Dissertations

These are substantial pieces of written work. In some ways these may be similar to a written assignment / piece of coursework, but are typically much larger and represent a higher proportion of marks or credit.

Assessment strategies

Course assessment strategies should be addressed in Programme Specifications, though the level of detail is variable with some courses having a full account and others being sketchy. For some courses, typically those involving PSRB accreditation, course assessment strategies may be set out in considerable detail. Some courses are just collections of modules with each module having an assessment strategy but there not being an overall defined course strategy. Programme Specifications taken together with module synopses and course handbooks should allow a thorough overview of course assessment strategies to be obtained.

Students with individual arrangements

UEA is required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to the assessment of students with disabilities by the DDA and SENDA. In recent years there has been a considerable increase in the number of students for whom individual arrangements need to be made-(Table 1).

Table 1 - UG exams in the May/June examination period

Year	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10
Students	6338	6420	6871	6956	7459	7549	7851
Modules	566	561	562	606	601	616	624
Seats	23309	24262	25184	25747	26639	27298	28791
Individual arrangements	623	707	980	1070	1306	1585	1652
% Individual arrangements	2.7	2.9	3.9	4.2	4.9	5.8	5.8

A common reasonable adjustment is extra time in an exam or course test for a student with a specific learning difficulty, but individual arrangements include the provision of a scribe, access to a PC, separate room with individual invigilator, and alternate modes of assessment. Though we are required to make 'reasonable adjustments', the number and complexity of these, and hence costs, are partly in our control as these reflect the number and variety of assessments mounted. Our expectation is that there will be an increase in the numbers of individual arrangements we make even if our student numbers remain constant as improved screening for specific learning difficulties (SpLD) leads to an increase in the numbers of students with an identified SpLD. ~8% of UEA students are disabled, ~4.5% with dyslexia. However, the incidence of dyslexia in the general UK population is ~10%. Moreover, a recent suggestion that the prevalence of dyscalculia in the general population is 6-7%, coupled with the fact that we have far fewer students with identified dyscalculia than dyslexia is another indicator of greater student numbers with a SpLD in future years.

Costs

It is recognised that the business costs of assessment in the University are significant but there has been no rigorous assessment of what those costs are. Costs have been increasing with rises in both the number of taught students and of modules. In addition, the requirement for PgR students to pursue skills training is leading to an increase in PgR students taking PgT modules. The types of costs incurred in administering the various modes of assessment are outlined below.

Mode of Assessment	Academic Cost	Admin - Faculty Teaching Office Cost	Admin – Central Services Cost
Coursework	Setting assignments	Publication of coursework schedule to students, communication, setting up and	Policy development & review

		maintaining SITS assessment record per item of assessment	
	Marking and feedback	Coursework submission and return process – de-anonymisation. emptying boxes, record-keeping etc	Policy development & review
		Mark entry into SITS	
	Considering and Processing extensions	Record-keeping re concession and extension requests Marks entry to SITS	
	Late submission process	Late submission process & recalculation of marks	
		Stationery – cover sheets	
			SITS management
Course Tests & School-Based Exams	Setting assignments	Publication of schedule to students, communication, SITS maintenance	Good cause/concessions
	Invigilation	Organisation of invigilators. Stationery	Individual arrangements – concession approval, communication
	Individual arrangements - invigilation	Individual arrangements – room booking, communication	Administering sticker system for candidates with dyslexia, dyspraxia, etc. - DOS
	Marking; requests for second marking; double marking arrangements	Timetabling, booking rooms/laboratories/IT rooms, technical or lab support, actors for OSCEs	Appeals
		Moderation by external examiners	
		Appeals	
		Specialist resources or equipment	

		Good cause/concessions	
		Marks entry to SITS	
			SITS management
Central Exams	Drafting of first sit and reassessment exam papers; liaison with external examiners	Data checking of students/modules	Data checking of students/modules
	Liaison with external examiners	Production of exam papers	Checking of exam papers, Timetabling – main timetable, PGT timetable. non-standard (eg MBBS), individual arrangements
	Marking; double marking	Invigilation fees	Room booking – set up and preparations Liaison with porters/support staff
		Marks entry to SITS	Invigilation – recruitment, allocation, management, training, payment
		Good Cause/concession applications and communications	Stationery – booklets, materials, documentation, co-ordination
		Individual arrangements – communication, some invigilation, room booking, IT facilities, scribes	Good cause/concession applications and communications
			Software – CMIS, SITS – training and support
			pc (for individual arrangement candidates) – technical support prior to exams and throughout the series, including

			Saturdays
			Individual arrangements – concession approval, communication, invigilation, room , liaison with IT
			Management. allocation of additional admin support for exam venues
		Receipt/distribution of exam papers to markers	Receipt, storage & distribution of exam papers
Additional General Costs			
Good cause			
	Recommendations for appointment of external examiners	Appointment of external examiners: correspondence, information	Appointment of external examiners & Boards of Examiners: maintenance of lists
	Exam paper approval by externals	Exam paper approval by externals	External examiners - travel, accommodation, subsistence, fees
	Progress meetings and resulting action	Progress meetings and resulting action	Pass list production and circulation
	Sampling of coursework for moderation by externals	Sampling of coursework for moderation by externals	Stage 2 academic appeals
	Exam board papers preparation	Exam Board papers preparation Collection/.collation of students work for scrutiny by externals in some Schools	Medical Centre – supporting medical evidence for Good Cause and concessions
	Exam board decisions	Exam board hospitality	Allegations of cheating; meetings of SDC

	Stage 1 academic appeals	Stage 1 and 2 academic appeals	DOS – Educational Psychologist reports, assessment support, individual arrangement applications, stickers
	Allegations of cheating; meetings of SDC	Allegations of cheating	Liaison with Congregation team
		Exam board decisions and resulting action (minutes; SITS updates; correspondence with students);	Publication of past exam papers on portal
		Pass lists paperwork; transcripts	

General Points

Assessment strategies are, quite rightly, planned at school level by academic staff and this should continue to be the case. However, there is very little to guide the process other than references to learning outcomes. Considerations which might impact on assessment strategies with favourable consequences for the cost of assessments are:

1 Module assessment loads

There is no University-wide standard that states that a module of 'X' credits should typically have 'y' assessments or be assessed with a total of no more than 'z' words in answers. Decisions are mostly left to module leaders, although some Course Directors and/or School Directors of LTQ are taking more of an overview in this regard. However, this means that there is currently little that the University can do to control the costs. Should there be some guidance/instruction in this area, perhaps at Faculty level? There is an expectation that HEIs will be required to provide students with more detailed information about their courses (e.g. contact hours, individual study time) and assessment load would be a valuable addition for students as well as helpful management information.

2 Modes and frequency of assessments

Modes of assessment are a matter for academic decision with no University-wide guidance or regulations in place (apart from guidance as to recognised methods of assessment and rules regarding the amount of assessment in one

mode or another) or accountability for costs. Key issues that drive the planning of assessment strategies might include:

- which form(s) of assessment will adequately and appropriately measure the learning outcomes set for each module?
- should the assessment be summative or formative? Could the number of summative assessments be reduced without detracting from student engagement in learning?
- how regularly is it necessary to assess learning outcomes?

2 Length of Exam Papers

Again, this is an academic decision that might be rooted in School convention and tradition and there is little University-wide guidance but timetabling 3 hour examinations can be problematic for students with individual arrangements, and therefore it will have cost implications. Table 2 summarises the length of UG exams in the May/June period for the past 2 years.

Table 2

Length (hours)	2008/9	2009/10
1	14	19
1.5	2	0
2	421	423
3	179	182

Future considerations:

- Should the length of exam papers be linked to credit value? (eg level 2 module to be no more than two hours; whilst level 3 module could be three hours?)
- Should cost be a consideration?

3 Structure of Assessment Cycle

There are currently four main assessment periods which are supported by the central Examinations Office, as follows:

PGT January Series:	1 Week
PGT Easter Series:	1 Week
UG/PGT May-June Series:	4-5 Weeks
Reassessment:	7 Days

The principle adopted for undergraduate assessment from c2000 was that a so-called '12-12-6' structure should apply with six weeks set aside for undergraduate assessment at the end of a session. This remains the case.

It is acknowledged that this assessment cycle, however, does not support all examined assessments in the University and that it is necessary for many examinations and course tests to be administered at School level outside the published period, which incurs a disproportionately high cost for Schools. An example of this is the cost to the Norwich Business School of administering MBA examinations in December. Another significant example is the large number of assessments administered by the Nursing and Midwifery Assessment Office. The impact of the newly-opened UEA London Study Centre has yet to be felt. It is also likely that there will be an increase in the trend towards differing start dates, particularly for postgraduate taught provision, and perhaps also for undergraduate provision in the future. There may be an increase in the number of part-time students too.

Future recommendations for reducing the cost of assessment at School level might include:

- Further economies of scale (how might this be achieved?)
- Further assessment periods
- Reducing the number of summative assessments

4 Course Approval

- Should we plan for resourcing assessment strategies at the course approval stage? This will require a much greater focus on the range of assessment strategies as part of the course approval process than currently pertains
- How could this be achieved?
- Should there be a University 'standard' to which Schools will be expected to adhere (with certain exceptions for provision which has PSRGB requirements)
- Is this type of accountability desirable and would it be effective in controlling the cost and enhancing the quality of assessment?

Conclusion

Without the benefit of a properly-conducted costing exercise and based purely on the information provided above, the conclusions are:

- Course Tests are likely to be the most costly form of assessment due to the high level of academic and support staff time involved in their arrangement. The other significant cost factor is the lack of economies of scale which might be available with a centralised (albeit expanded) Examinations Office service.
- There is a high cost element to all assessments in the form of academic marking time and the number and frequency of assessments

is a key issue in the future consideration of the business costs of assessment.

Next steps

- 1. It is recommended that a properly-conducted costing exercise be carried out to ascertain as far as possible the total effort devoted to assessment.**

How should we do this? Can we use TESS monies? Should we seek the input of 'SUMS' as a University project? Should we do it in-house via a selection of a limited number of modules (perhaps 10 per faculty) and conduct a TRAC-like exercise?

- 2. It is recommended that Course Directors be required to set out the academic rationale for assessment strategies at a course level. This could be done in concert with the implementation of new degree regulations, which will require School-based reviews of taught courses and will be of considerable benefit to students. It may also be revealing to staff who will obtain an overview of the assessment load of their courses.**