

LTC13D063

Title: **Student Effort Hours on UG and PGT Taught Modules**
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Issue

The attached paper sets out proposals for the enhancement of information relating to student effort hours on UG and PGT modules. The intention is to ensure that information provided to students is more consistent between courses and between Faculties. This was identified by ET as an important goal for 2013/14 and forms a small but important element in the University's strategy on enhancing student perceptions of Assessment and Feedback by clarifying for students the University's expectations in terms of HOW their 'effort' (or notional study hours) should be distributed across modules both in relation to assessment tasks, and in other aspects of their engagement (e.g. background reading, fieldwork, lab-based work, attendance at lectures, seminars etc).

The discussion around student effort hours and assessment tariffs began in TPPG in 2012 and was revisited again during 2013/14. The ADTP has included in this paper relevant extracts from TPPG meetings during 2013/14 so LTC members can, if they wish to, see how the discussion evolved and progressed.

To summarise, TPPG members felt that early attempts to clarify the relationship between student 'effort' and assessment tariffs was too focused on '**outputs**' (e.g. 3,000 words or the equivalent) rather than '**inputs**' (i.e. the amount of time/effort students devoted to engaging with assessment and the other elements of learning associated with modules (class time etc). There were also real concerns that a 'one size fits all' approach would be unhelpful, and fail to take sufficient account of the very varied formats and types of assessment employed on UEA modules across subjects as diverse as Maths and History.

The 'problem' – if one can describe it as such – can be illustrated by the difference between a 'standard essay' of 2,500 words in History, and a short piece of translation in LSC. The translation exercise may only be 500 words, but may require as much 'effort' to produce a high quality submission, as a 2,500 word essay. Similarly in quantitative subjects such as Mathematics, measuring effort by a simple word count is not helpful, and inserting an 'or equivalent' caveat also fails to help staff or students when it is far from clear what 'an equivalent' might look like.

Focus on inputs – and especially the expectations associated with effort hours in relation to key learning activities, was viewed as a more appropriate 'model' and one that allowed for diversity between subjects and faculties. As a result, the proposals evolved over time, with an increasing emphasis on 'inputs' as a measure of student effort hours on UG and PGT modules. Students on TPPG were very clear in their desire to see this information being provided and have specifically requested that information be provided, wherever possible and appropriate, on a weekly basis so that the amount of time they need to devote to key activities each week, is clear. Figures entered into the table will be 'indicative' rather than precise and it is recognised that, in reality, time devoted to activities may (quite legitimately) vary between weeks. The four Associate Deans for L & T are supportive of the proposals.

Recommendation

The paper sets out some proposals in the form of two 'simple' tables. The intention is that these tables should be used by staff to clarify student effort hours in module outlines for 2014/15. This should not absorb a great deal of time, but will constitute an important step

forwards in terms of clarifying the University's expectations, and in helping students to manage their time, and their 'effort' in an appropriate manner.

Resource Implications

It is not envisaged that these will be significant – module organisers will be required to complete the main table for each of the modules they lead. This should not take more than 15-20 minutes in most cases.

Risk Implications

It is not envisaged that any significant risks are associated with the proposals which are aimed at ensuring a more consistent level of information to students.

Equality and Diversity

It is not envisaged that any significant equality/diversity issues are associated with the proposals – indeed, the provision of this information will (which are aimed at ensuring a more consistent level of information to students) will help to ensure that students new to HE and those from WP backgrounds (and first generation HE) are able to make a smoother transition into their HE studies at UEA..

Timing of decisions

If approved the proposals will be implemented for 2014/15 academic year, across all UG and PGT modules in all Faculties.

Further Information

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Background

QAA has published clear guidance on study hours and these proposals ensure that these are embedded more explicitly into module outlines than ever before. This is particularly important with respect to Joint Honours degree programmes. In the past QAA audits have 'flagged' the provision of consistent information in modules in different schools in relation to Joint Degrees as an action point and QAA have already indicated in their response to our Mid Cycle Audit (2011/12) that they are likely to consider developments in relation to Joint Degrees when the University is subject to full audit in 2015/16.

Discussion

LTC members may wish to focus discussion around the following:

- 1) The merits of the proposals (in principle) as a means of ensuring greater clarity for students (and staff). Do they go far enough?
- 2) The details of the proposals, and the scope for 'adaptation' in schools.
- 3) Any issues likely to stem from the proposals (e.g. are they sufficiently clear; are they sufficiently flexible?)
- 4) Communication of proposals to Module Organisers, and monitoring of implementation and compliance.
- 5) Future integration of this information as guidance on Assessment, and/or in a future CoP on Assessment.

Student effort hours on UG and PGT Taught Modules

Introduction

The issue of ensuring greater clarity and consistency in the 'articulation' of student effort hours on undergraduate and post-graduate modules was discussed (again) at the March 2014 meeting of TPPG (see extracts below). TPPG considered a paper developed by the ADTP and agreed that:

- Schools should clarify student effort hours on modules.
- Effort hours per module should be clearly communicated to students
- This information could usefully be referred to at Visit and/or Open Days as a way of clarifying our expectations and the amount of time that students need to devote to their studies.
- This information was equally useful for staff and for students
- Students would particularly appreciate having effort hours expressed 'by week' rather than for the duration of a module as a whole.
- Information should emphasise student autonomy and the use of a wide range of contemporary learning strategies – this is catered for within the tables below.

Proposals

In accordance with FHEQ/QAA guidance, student effort hours will be based on the following number of total effort hours per credit:

1 credit = 10 student effort hours.

This results in the following 'effort hour totals' for modules of 20, 30, 40, 60 and 80 credits

Module size (credits)	Total student Effort Hours (QAA)
20	200
30	300
40	400
60	600
80	800

Module Organisers (MOs) and Course Directors (CDs) should ensure that different learning activities associated with modules are expressed in effort hours. The table below should be employed to articulate the range of discrete teaching and learning activities associated with each module:

Student effort hours associated with key teaching and learning activities

Learning Activity	Total effort hours (module)	Effort hours per week
a) Class sessions (Lectures, workshops, lab sessions, seminars etc.)		
b) Pre-class preparation and follow-up study		
c) Work-based or Placement Hours		
d) Formative assessments/activities		
e) Feedback/Feed-forwards sessions		
f) Summative assessments (essays, dissertations, oral presentations, worksheets, lab reports etc.)		
g) Background reading		
h) Exams/OSCEs		
i) Course Tests		
j) Tutorials (individual or small groups)		
Total effort hours (a + b + c + d + e + f + g + h + i + j) =		

Note: Given the diversity of pedagogical approaches and learning activities within modules across the 4 faculties, it is not expected that a figure for 'effort hours' is allocated for all categories (a – j) in the table above – a figure is only required where relevant or appropriate for the module concerned.

EXTRACTS FROM TPPG MEETINGS IN 2013/14

Extract from minutes of TPPG - March 2014

ASSESSMENT TARIFF AND EFFORT HOURS

TPPG made the following comments:

- (1) Schools should identify effort hours.
- (2) In visit day presentations, Course Directors state that students need to undertake research and work in their own time.
- (3) From a student perspective, the table "Guidance on Student Effort Hours" is not helpful and if the figures were broken down by week, that would be more useful.
- (4) Useful to communicate expectations to students.
- (5) Unsure if the document was meant for staff or for students, but it was felt that the document was for staff only.
- (6) At FMH LTQC it was felt that greater clarification was required, and caution should be taken about trying to make one size fits all. LTQC felt that the document was useful.

Feedback from FMH on Effort Hours Paper considered at March 2014 TPPG

"In regard to the effort hours paper – There was no problem with the effort hours themselves, it's common practice and greater clarification would be very welcome to students and staff ; however we do not agree with the suggested split at the end that there should be an even division between contact and independent hours. It ignores the inherent variation and demands between subject areas (and the notion that students will need greater structure and direction early in their studies with greater self-direction as they progress). We also felt that this undermines the academic notion that a greater proportion of time ought to be spent on exploration and further reading of a topic, and assessment preparation, than being *taught* things. Our fear would be further increases in the expectation of being taught everything needed, a problem we already encounter. We understand the intention, but we risk ending up with a secondary education approach rather than a tertiary one and ignores good pedagogical practice.

We agree that the indication of effort associated with modules provides further clarity but would also want to adopt a stance where student autonomy and use of a wide range of contemporary learning strategies is appropriately reinforced.

So the effort paper is to be welcomed, giving students an indication of what is expected is helpful on all sides, as long as it is not seen as the maximum! And of course for our programmes we have for many years already specified how the 200 learning hours (for 20 credits) is apportioned!

Where both these papers seem to be going is a learning contract. i.e. the rights and responsibilities of students and what they can expect in terms of learning support. Rather than having a range of documents and policies (none of which most students will read) wouldn't it be better to highlight the key points in a document to which all students need to sign up and linked to the Student Charter?"

Document considered at TPPG - March 2014

Student Effort Hours on UG & PGT Taught Modules

Introduction

In May 2012 TPPG considered whether there would be value in developing a set of guidelines relating to assessment tariffs and notional study (effort) hours on modules. At the time it was decided that this would be problematic due to disciplinary differences in the way that assessment was framed at module level. In Nov 2013 TPPG considered a guidance paper on Assessment Tariffs, but it was felt at that time that the paper was too focused on word counts as a 'proxy' for effort, when, in reality this was largely meaningless in many quantitative subjects. The guidance was thus felt to be too limited in its validity and usefulness to students. It was suggested at this meeting that the emphasis should be more on inputs (e.g. effort hours) rather than 'outputs' (e.g. specific word counts linked to module credit weighting).

Rationale

As was made clear in the ADTP's Nov TPPG paper There are a number of good reasons for exploring the possibility of adopting a standard set of guidance for UEA staff and students, and these still apply:

- 1) The review of assessment which formed part of the preparatory work leading up to the development of the New Academic Model showed that assessment practice had become inconsistent across Faculties in terms of the 'effort hours' attached to assessment, and the resulting 'workload' implications for students.
- 2) In the lead-up to Institutional audit (Higher Education Review) it will be helpful to ensure that we are taking active steps to ensure a more consistent 'student experience' across the University – especially as regards student study hours per module.
- 3) Many other good universities have developed clearer assessment guidelines which place constraints on the variation which is allowed across modules. At Newcastle University, for example, clear guidance pertaining to Assessment Tariffs has been in place since 2006. Similar tariffs are in place at Durham.
- 4) Joint honours – these programmes were identified in the QAA 2009 audit and the mid-cycle QAA review of 2011 as an area for development. Having a standardised assessment tariffs will ensure consistent provision of information for Joint Honours students.
- 5) Students taking 'Defined Choice' modules outside their home School will receive more consistent information in their module outlines.
- 6) The University needs to convey clear expectations of what is meant by 'effective engagement' – student effort hours are a clear and sensible means of doing so.
- 7) Publishing clear information of student effort hours per module would help to address the indicators in Chapter B3 of the UK Quality Code on 'Learning and Teaching', and Chapter B6 on 'Assessment'. See:

Chapter B3:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B3.aspx>

Chapter B6:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B6.aspx>

Notional student effort (study) hours

The expectation that Universities should require a minimum of **10 hours notional study time per credit** was set out in the QAA's Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England, which was published in 2008.

See:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/documents/creditframework.pdf>

This equates to:

- **200** hours per 20 credit module
- **300** hours per 30 credit module
- **400** hours per 40 credit module
- **600** hours per 60 credit module

Disciplinary differences

We all recognise that assessment strategies on different courses and individual modules vary between disciplines and there are often very good subject-related reasons for this variance. Few would wish to see, or expect to see, a 'one size fits all' approach to the design of formative or summative assessment on UEA degree programmes. However, it would seem less controversial that the number of student 'effort hours' (study hours) related to **assessment should be roughly comparable between disciplines** (i.e. a student in philosophy shouldn't have to devote three times as many hours to assessment-related activities as one in Nursing or visa versa).

Benefits

The benefits of clearer guidance in relation to effort hours invested in assessment-related study would include:

- Clearer guidance for staff – so they can more effectively manage student study on their modules by setting clear expectations.
- Clearer guidance for students – so they know how much of their time to allocate to assessment-related activities between different modules.
- Clearer alignment between module size and the 'effort' or study hours expected in relation to assessment.

Recommendation to TPPG:

TPPG to consider the following guidance for all taught programmes (UG and PGT) – see the table below. This table is much less prescriptive than the recommendations which came to TPPG for discussion in November 2013. The table focuses purely on 'effort' hours (inputs) rather than outputs (e.g. word counts), and does not attempt to use word counts or the presence/absence of exams as a proxy for student effort/study time. The table allows academic staff to consider how much time/effort they can reasonably expect students to devote to assessment-related activities (whether formative or summative) and it does not attempt to set minimum or maximum numbers of assessment, or exams, since the assessment design of modules is best left to the expert staff who are leading them. Although there is no prescriptive guidance on types or number of assessments staff will need to ensure that they consider the maximum 'effort hours' in the table in order to ensure that their students are not unfairly disadvantaged or advantaged (e.g. by being set assessment tasks which place an unreasonable expectation in terms of effort hours).

We have three main expectations of the students:

1. That they turn up to, prepare for and follow-up on teaching events
2. That they hand in (on time wherever possible) good quality summative work to be assessed.
3. A third expectation is that they engage in formative activity - this can be counted under either of the headings above (1 or 2) rather than being an end in itself, as formative activity is part of the pedagogical/learning process.

Typically in a Faculty like SSF taught contact hours for a 20 credit module would be 40-50 hours, with the figure being slightly lower on HUM modules and higher in those in some SCI programmes (e.g. Pharmacy) and in most FMH programmes. Despite these variations in 'contact time' one might reasonably expect students to spend roughly equivalent time preparing for and/or following-up the teaching events which might include lectures, practice/skills-focused sessions, seminars, tutorials, lab sessions or workshops. The rest of allotted notional study hours we might reasonably expect to be dedicated to independent study for formative activity/summative assessments. If we conceptualise the learning experience in this way, with student effort hours focussed on the two main expectations above (with formative activity featuring possibly in both), we could summarise these expectations in tabular form as follows:

Guidance on Student Effort Hours

Module size (credits)	Total student Effort Hours (QAA)	Face to face teaching events and preparation/follow up	Independent study (including time for to prepare for summative assessments)
20	200	100	100
30	300	150	150
40	400	200	200
60	600	300	300

Following through the rational of this, it means that for a 20 credit module with one piece of summative coursework (let's say, essay) and one piece of related formative (like a literature review, essay plan or annotated bibliography) the students would be expected to devote about 100 hours (or 12 days at approx. 8 hrs of study per day) to face-to-face teaching events and preparation/follow-up study, and a total of 200 effort hours for the module as a whole (or roughly 25 days at approx. 8hrs per day) if we include independent study (including time preparing for summative and or formative assessments).

Document considered at TPPG – Nov 2013

Assessment Tariffs on UG Taught Modules

Introduction

In May 2012 TPPG considered whether there would be value in developing a set of guidelines relating to assessment tariffs and notional study (effort) hours on modules. At the time it was decided that this would be problematic due to disciplinary differences in the way that assessment was framed at module level.

However, there are now a number of good reasons for revisiting this issue and exploring the possibility of adopting a standard set of guidance for UEA staff and students.

- 1) The review of assessment which formed part of the preparatory work leading up to the development of the New Academic Model showed that assessment practice had become inconsistent across Faculties in terms of the 'effort hours' attached to assessment, and the resulting 'workload' implications for students.
- 2) In his visits to UEA in 2011, Professor Graham Gibbs was struck by the inconsistencies in assessment expectations between programmes.
- 3) In the lead-up to Institutional audit (Higher Education Review) it will be helpful to ensure that we are taking active steps to ensure a more consistent 'student experience' across the University – especially as regards student study hours per module.
- 4) Many other good universities have developed clearer assessment guidelines which place constraints on the variation which is allowed across modules. At Newcastle

University, for example, clear guidance pertaining to Assessment Tariffs has been in place since 2006. Similar tariffs are in place at Durham.

- 5) We have an opportunity to design an online Module Outline Template that can be 'pre-populated' with key information from LTS – student effort hours information can easily be integrated into this information.
- 6) Joint honours – these programmes were identified in the QAA 2009 audit and the mid-cycle QAA review of 2011 as an area for concern. Having a standardised assessment tariffs will ensure consistent provision of information for Joint Honours students.
- 7) Students taking 'Defined Choice' modules outside their home School will receive more consistent information in their module outlines.
- 8) It will help to ensure that key information about notional study hours per assessment is conveyed to students, thereby ensuring that expectations regarding 'engagement' and effort are consistently articulated at University level and across all faculties.
- 9) Developing a higher and more consistent standard of information relating to points 1-9 above will also enable the University to address the indicators in Chapter B3 of the UK Quality Code on 'Learning and Teaching', and Chapter B6 on 'Assessment'.

See:

Chapter B3:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B3.aspx>

Chapter B6:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B6.aspx>

Notional study hours

The expectation that Universities should require a minimum of **10 hours notional study time per credit** was set out in the QAA's Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England, which was published in 2008.

See:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/documents/creditframework.pdf>

This equates to:

- **100** hours per 10 credit module* (these have been removed under the NAM)
- **200** hours per 20 credit module
- **300** hours per 30 credit module
- **400** hours per 40 credit module
- **600** hours per 60 credit module

Disciplinary differences

We all recognise that assessment strategies on different courses and individual modules vary between disciplines and there are often very good subject-related reasons for this variance. Different programmes have different programme outcomes and these drive the assessments within modules and across programmes. This is how it should be.

Few would wish to see, or expect to see, a 'one size fits all' approach to the design of formative or summative assessment on UEA degree programmes.

However, there is a difference between assessment design, and the framework within which assessments are located at module level. What follows is a set of proposals which suggest how such a framework might be constructed. As always with developments of this kind, there is a balance to be achieved between 'empowering' academics to devise assessments which they feel are best suited to their discipline, and ensuring a consistent student experience, with the workload for students in history, say, being comparable (though different in detail) to that of students in Chemistry.

If we can agree that the number of effort hours (study hours) related to assessment should be roughly comparable between disciplines (i.e. a student in philosophy shouldn't have to devote three times as many hours to assessment-related activities as one in nursing or visa versa), then this means we might also then be able to agree on some reasonable 'limits' to the workload attached to assessment between degree subjects.

What follows is a discussion document in which some basic guidelines are sketched-out for colleagues to consider. As ADTP I am acutely aware that these constitute a significant break with existing practice at UEA in the sense that no such guidelines currently exist. I hope that colleagues will welcome, however, the opportunity to explore the benefits that could stem from them.

The benefits include:

- 1) Clearer guidance for staff, and especially staff new to HE teaching, who have already requested additional guidance when devising their assessment strategies.
- 2) Clearer alignment between module size and the number, length and weighting of assessments, which would result in a better 'fit' between credit and 'effort' or study hours.
- 3) More clearly expressed expectations for students, so they have a better sense of how to prioritise their time and studies between modules.
- 4) Ensuring that students are not confused by overly-fragmented assessment strategies with too many different kinds of assessment on a single module. Research indicates that students often struggle when presented with too great a variation in assessment tasks.
- 5) Clearer alignment between module size (measured in credits) and the number, length and weighting of exams. Given the move, with the NAM, to a 4 week examination period, tariffs of the kind set out below would help us to collectively 'manage-down' the number and length of exams accordingly.

Example Assessment Tariffs

The following assessment tariffs provide a suggested framework for assessment on 20, 30, 40 and 60 credit UG modules. (See overleaf) They include guidance on exams, coursework and notional study hours per assessment, the latter driven by weightings.

ASSESSMENT TARIFFS 1

20 credit module (200 hours notional total study time)

Exam

Proportion of assessment (for module)	Upper limit
100%	3 hours
70%	2 hours
50% and under	1 hour

Assessed Summative Coursework

Proportion of assessment (for module)	Upper limit
100%	4,000 words or equivalent
70%	3,000 words or equivalent
50%	2,000 words or equivalent
30%	1,000 words or equivalent

NB: Coursework might be made up of, for example, 2 x 2000 word essays rather than 1 x 4000.

Assessed Formative Coursework

1,000-1,500 words or equivalent

Effort Hours devoted to assessment

Proportion of assessment	Proportion of effort hours
100%	80 hrs minimum
70%	60 hrs minimum
50%	40 hrs minimum
30%	20 hrs minimum

Effort Hours devoted to independent and guided study

120 hours minimum

ASSESSMENT TARIFFS 2

30 credit module (300 hours notional total study time)

Exam

Proportion of assessment (for module)	Upper limit
100%	3 hours
70%	2 hours
50% and under	1 hour

Assessed Summative Coursework

Proportion of assessment (for module)	Upper limit
100%	6,000 words or equivalent
70%	4,000 words or equivalent
50%	3,000 words or equivalent
30%	2,000 words or equivalent

NB: Coursework might be made up of, for example, 2 x 3000 word essays rather than 1 x 6000.

Assessed Formative Coursework

1,500-2,000 words or equivalent

Effort Hours devoted to assessment

Proportion of assessment	Proportion of effort hours
100%	120 hrs minimum
70%	90 hrs minimum
50%	60 hrs minimum
30%	30 hrs minimum

Effort Hours devoted to independent and guided study

180 hours minimum

ASSESSMENT TARIFFS 3

40 credit module (400 hours notional total study time)

Exam

Proportion of assessment (for module)	Upper limit
100%	3 hours
70%	2 hours
50% and under	1 hour

Assessed Summative Coursework

Proportion of assessment (for module)	Upper limit
100%	8,000 words or equivalent
70%	6,000 words or equivalent
50%	4,000 words or equivalent
30%	2,500 words or equivalent

NB: Coursework might be made up of, for example, 2 x 4000 word essays rather than 1 x 8000.

Assessed Formative Coursework

2-2,500 words or equivalent

Effort Hours devoted to assessment

Proportion of assessment	Proportion of effort hours
100%	180 hrs minimum
70%	140 hrs minimum
50%	90 hrs minimum
30%	50 hrs minimum

Effort Hours devoted to independent and guided study

220 hours minimum

ASSESSMENT TARIFFS 4

60 credit module (600 hours notional total study time)

Exam

Proportion of assessment (for module)	Upper limit
100%	3 hours
70%	2 hours
50% and under	1 hour

Assessed Summative Coursework

Proportion of assessment (for module)	Upper limit
100%	10-12,000 words or equivalent
70%	8,000 words or equivalent
50%	6,000 words or equivalent
30%	4,000 words or equivalent

NB: Coursework might be made up of, for example, 2 x 2000 word essays rather than 1 x 4000.

Assessed Formative Coursework

2-3,000 words or equivalent

Effort Hours devoted to assessment

Proportion of assessment	Proportion of effort hours
100%	240 hrs minimum
70%	180 hrs minimum
50%	120 hrs minimum
30%	60 hrs minimum

Effort Hours devoted to independent and guided study

360 hours minimum