



ASSESSMENT WORKLOAD AND EQUIVALENCES

The issue of exploring student and staff workload with assessment, is mentioned in the advice around module design¹, however it is often easier to address this issue at a more School, stage or programme level.

Manchester Metropolitan University advised staff that:

<http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltia/issue17/fielding.php>

- Heavy assessment workloads may lead to surface learning (e.g. Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Kember and Leung, 1998).
- In general, excessive student assessment workloads lead to excessive staff workloads and tend to lead to poor ratings for teachers (Trigwell and Prosser; 1991).
- Fewer assessments create space for faster and better feedback.
- QAA Programme Reviews often highlight student workloads as a problem. For example: *“there appears to be a lack of an effective mechanism to plan and monitor student assessment workload.”*

Schools are encouraged to come together to discuss and set their own assessment workload guidelines, often referred to as *assessment equivalents*. In recognition of subject level differences in assessment practices and styles, programme/school-specific guidelines are considered to be most useful. Assessment Equivalence Guidelines should help to:

- Ensure equity and consistency in student assessment workload across a programme/school
- Provide an indication to students of the relative effort required to complete an assessment - linked to the credit value of the module
- Ensure that new/innovative assessments are not just added-on to the assessment workload without removing an equivalent assessment piece
- Incorporate student effort and/or word count considerations into assessment design
- Assist new or less experienced staff in setting assessments.

It is important that Assessment Equivalence guidelines are not over-interpreted as they are based on notional student hours or effort, length or word count.

¹ UCD Module Design Principle no. 6 – Consider the student work-load demands within the module, as well as in parallel modules.

Setting Assessment Equivalence Guidelines for your own Programme/School

A good starting point for setting assessment equivalences is to identify the commonly used assessment methods in your programme/school. For each assessment method consider (i) the relative weighting within the module, and (ii) expected notional student effort (hours/words).

There is some interesting debate on the workload issue in the following website <http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltia/issue17/fielding.php> which also includes some examples to work with but these should only be used as a guide for more local contextualised discussion on the issue.

Examples of Assessment Equivalence Guidelines

Guidelines on Student Effort associated with Assessment Types from Manchester Metropolitan University

Assessment	Student Effort	Hours (total)
1 hour of examination (including unseen, time-constrained coursework)	1h assessment plus 9h student preparation	10
Seen essay or similar (1500 words)	1h writing/typing plus 9h student preparation	10
Practical report	Writing/drawing graphs 2h plus 3h student preparation	5
Oral presentation (10 minutes)	5h student preparation	5
Poster (individual)	Assembly 4h (including drawing figures etc.), design 6 h (including gathering and organizing information)	10
Poster (group)	Assembly 4h (including drawing figures etc.), design 6h (including gathering and organizing information)	10
MCQ (1 hour)	1h assessment plus 9h preparation	19
Tutorial (1 hour)	Preparation and writing	5

Example from London South Bank

<i>Equivalent to 1000 essay words</i>
Examination or timed test 1 hour
Essay in foreign language 300 words
Group report 750 words per member
Reflective journal or learning log 2000 – 2500 words
Oral presentation 20 minutes
Group presentation 10 minutes per member
Clinical assessment 10 minutes

Assessment elements and % worth of unit marks

(Example is based on UK 20 credit module, equivalent to 10 ECTS credit module)

Assessment	Weighting
Book review 800 words	10% of unit marks
Short oral presentation (e.g. 5 minutes)	10%
Seminar paper 1000 words	15%
Essay 1500 words	25%
Report 1500 words	25%
Portfolio 60000 words	100%
Project/short dissertation 60000 words	100%
Examination answer 1 hour	25%
Standard dissertation 12,000 word 40 credit unit, which may be assessed by a single percentage mark, or sub-divided into sections totalling 200 marks	
Postgraduate paper 4000-6000 words	100%

Napier University – Guidance to staff on Assessment Workloads

- It is a fundamental principle that the assessment load, and the effort required from student to complete that load successfully, should be broadly equivalent across modules which have the same credit value.....For this reason, using assessment quantity benchmarks is important.
- Schools are encouraged to set guidelines around word counts (or equivalents) for students, e.g.

	Assessment weighting	Suggested upper limit
20-credit module (=10 ECTS)	100%	5000 words
20-credit module	70%	3000 words
20-credit module	50% or below	2500 words

University of Northumbria

- Two assessment tasks would be the maximum per 10 credits* and many modules would need only one assessment
- No more than two methods of assessment per module
- For modules assessed by formal examination, two hours would be the maximum for a 10 credit module
- Whatever form of assessment is used, to avoid over-pressurising students, one fifth of the notional student workload should be considered the period of time allocated for all (formal and informal) assessment, including preparation and revision time. This guideline should not be exceeded.
- UK 10 Credit module equivalent to 5 ECTS Credit module

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