

Formative thresholded assessment: Is it working?



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University

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with contributions from many other individuals and module teams

A project to evaluate the impact of a Faculty-wide change in assessment practice.

Background – why the change?

- Formative thresholded assessment was introduced to save resource and to enable high-quality assignments to be developed and then re-used;
- The move away from summative continuous assessment also offers the potential to free students from anxiety over the minutiae of grading of TMAs and iCMAs, and to encourage them to concentrate on the feedback provided.

What do we mean by formative thresholded assessment?

- Students are required to demonstrate engagement by getting over a threshold of some sort in their continuous assessment;
- However, their final module grade is determined by the module's examinable component alone.

Two models of formative thresholded assessment are being trialled:

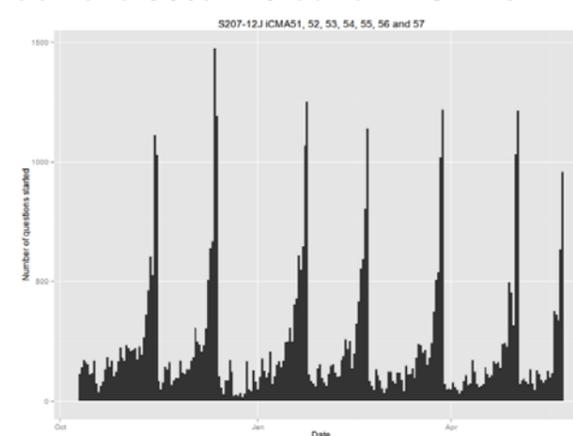
- (a) Students are required to demonstrate engagement by reaching a threshold (usually 30%) in, say, 5 out of 7 assignments;
- (b) TMAs and iCMAs are weighted and students are required to reach a threshold (usually 40%) overall.

Findings

- ✚ TMA and iCMA submission rates are slightly lower than with summative continuous assessment, but there appear to be no substantial changes as a result of the change in assessment practice;
- ✚ Students who submit all TMAs and iCMAs do better in the examinable component (unlikely to be a causal effect); however for some students, choosing to omit continuous assessment components in order to concentrate on revision appears to have been a sensible strategy;
- ✚ There were some problems when students were taking a module with summative OCAS and a module with formative OCAS concurrently, especially when TMAs were due on the same date;
- ✚ As an incidental side-effect of the project, we received some early warning signs of problems caused by the changing student population at level 1, and of overcommitted students at all levels.

iCMA engagement

Hard cut-off dates seem to be effective in maintaining engagement, even for a module where students only need to achieve 30% in 5 out of 7 iCMAs:



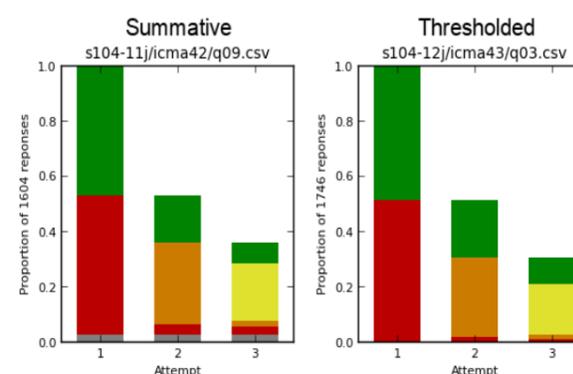
“The elephant in the room”

Many students and ALs have a poor understanding of our assessment strategies, including conventional summative continuous assessment. This is in line with a frequently found result that students have poor understanding of the nature and function of assessment (e.g. Carless, 2006; Orsmond & Merry, 2011).



Depth of iCMA engagement

So far there is no evidence that students engage less deeply with iCMAs in formative thresholded use than in summative use; there is substantially more variation between individual questions. Repeated colour = repeated response; green = correct; grey = blank; red, orange, yellow = incorrect.



Taking the work forward

- We are working towards greater consistency and transparency in Science Faculty assessment practice;
- We are emphasising the importance of personalised feedback on formative thresholded assignments;
- We are using ‘assessment commentaries’ to prevent full tutor notes being plagiarised when TMAs are re-used;
- We are retaining formative thresholded OCAS, but introducing a TMA (to assess e.g. writing up of practical work) into OES;
- Further evaluation is underway – see Allman et al. (2014) poster.

References

- Allman, S., Rostron, C., Budd, P., McIntyre, N., & Jordan, S. (2014) Associate lecturer and student views of Science Faculty feedback processes. Poster at eSTEEeM Conference, May 2014.
- Carless, D. (2006). Differing perceptions in the feedback process. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 219-33.
- Orsmond, P. & Merry, S. (2011). Feedback alignment: Effective and ineffective links between tutors' and students' understanding of coursework feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36(2), 125-136.

