



# Implementing continuous credit assessments for enhanced student engagement

Benefits and challenges at The University of Edinburgh



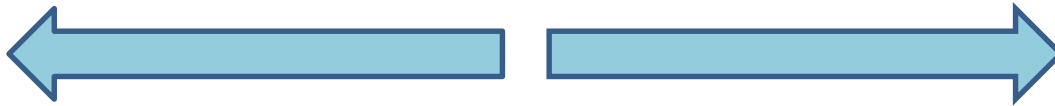
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# Programme outline

## English for Academic Purposes



### Term 1

- Social Science
- Philosophy
- Psychology
- Film Studies
- Art and Design Practice I

### Term 2

- Cultural Studies
- European Politics and Policies
- Reading English Literature
- Political Economy

### Term 3

- International Relations
- History
- Statistics
- Sustainability
- Art and Design II



## Assessment pattern 2015 - 2016

Term 1	Term2
<b>Summative</b>  Vocabulary test – 40% Discussion essay – 60%	<b>Summative</b>  Oral presentation – 40% Comparative critical review – 60%
<b>Formative</b>  Practice essay	<b>Formative</b>  Practice comparative critical review Practice oral presentation





## Assessment pattern 2016 - 2017

Term 1	Term 2
<b>Summative</b>  Vocabulary test – 30% Discussion essay – 45% <b>Continuous credit assessments x 5 – 25%</b>	<b>Summative</b>  Oral presentation – 40% Comparative critical review – 45% <b>Continuous credit assessments x 5 – 15%</b>
<b>Formative</b>  Practice essay	<b>Formative</b>  Practice comparative critical review Practice oral presentation





## Impetus for implementing CSAs

- Desire for evidence that students engaging earlier and throughout each term
- Desire that less weight be placed on end term assessments
- Desire for more parity in assessment across the IFP



## The CSAs in term 1 2016-2017

- Formalised and gave summative credit (5%) for the types of activities students would be doing anyway
- Provided students with formative feedback via a feedback sheet
- Gave students a mark for completion



## Student feedback on term 1 CSAs

- ‘The CSAs were very useful because each of them covered only one point (referencing, cohesion etc.) of academic writing, so it was easy to follow and it really helped to understand each point’
- ‘...the most useful part of the course’
- ‘Very insightful and informative...helped me pay more attention to the mistakes I didn’t know I was making’
- ‘Having the CSAs, I was able to see my progress over the weeks’
- ‘The feedback was the most important part of the process’





## Student feedback on term 1 CSAs

- 100% of students said that they found the CSAs useful in term 1
- ‘Formative assessment can have a powerful impact on student motivation and achievement’ (Cauley and McMillan, 2010)



## Challenges with CSAs term 1 2016-2017

- Disconnect between marks and feedback
  - All students completed all CSAs, so got 100% for each but formative feedback suggested areas for improvement
- Overall grades for term 1 inflated due to marks for completion
- Teachers overburdened with admin and marking
  - Too many pieces of paper (feedback sheets, emailed documents etc.)
- Teachers questioned whether CSAs can be both formative and summative



## Can assessments be both formative and summative?

- Harlen and James (1997) argue that:
  - important distinctions in function and characteristics between formative and summative assessment have become blurred
  - there is little genuinely formative assessment
  - we need to find a way of doing both that preserves the distinct functions and characteristics of each
  - teachers are struggling to cope with the burden of marking both formative and summative assessments



# Continuous summative assessments?

- Trotter (2006) argues that:
  - continuous *summative* assessment has a powerful impact on student motivation
  - students are overwhelmingly positive about it (mirrors our feedback on CSAs)
  - it provides ‘an enhanced learning environment’ for students
  - *does* require extra admin and marking from teachers but that the benefits outweigh this and therefore it is ‘worth it’



## Changes made for term 2

- Submission, marking and feedback via *GradeMark*
  - Fewer pieces of paper so theoretically less onerous for teachers
- Marks given for performance, rather than simply completion



## Student feedback on term 2 CSAs

- ‘Really constructive! I can clearly understand how I should improve’
- ‘I liked the CSAs because I don’t like doing all assessments at the end of the term. It’s helpful to me to continuously study every week’
- ‘I cannot explain how much I’ve improved from the comments’



## Student feedback on term 2 CSAs

- Two students use the word 'engage' in their comments
- '[CSAs are] a good practice to keep students **engaged** in the content and develop writing skills'
- '...CSAs make students **engage** with the subject and practice for the final essay'
- **100% of students said that they found the CSAs useful in term 2**



## Challenges and workarounds term 2

- Workarounds
  - Marks for performance, not just completion
  - CSAs conceptualised as summative, but with provision of feedback after each
- Onerous marking and admin burden not resolved
  - Use of *GradeMark* helped some but not others
  - Teachers not allocated enough time





## Emerging issues

- Issues around the nature of formative and summative assessment
  - Validity and reliability (Harlen and James, 1996)
- Issues around marking and administrative burden
- Different conceptions about what student engagement means



## What is student engagement?

‘Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution’ (Trowler, Higher Education Academy, 2010)



## How to measure student engagement?

- Impetus for CSAs began with what felt like a top down edict to ‘measure’ student engagement
  - Echoes of ‘performativity’, ‘infantilisation’ and ‘surveillance’ discussed by McFarlane and Tomlinson (2017)
  - Echoes of neo-liberal and new-managerialist agendas
  - Seen to be ‘engaging’ in ‘student engagement’
- Developed into something different because students *told us* the CSAs helped them
  - They *did* feel that their learning and their experience of the course was enhanced



## Looking to the future

- Trotter (2006) argues that spending time and effort with assessments like the CSAs is 'worth it'
- But is it sustainable?
  - Cohort of 45 = 225 CSAs per term
  - 0.5 hours to mark and give feedback on each = 112.5 hours per term in addition to traditional prep and teaching time
  - Large cohorts?



## References

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# Thank you

## Questions?

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