An analysis of YSJU assessment, and towards an assessment taxonomy
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Introduction

This report presents an analysis undertaken by colleagues in Academic Quality Support of the types of assessment in use at YSJU. There are three reasons for undertaking this.

1. As part of the wider initiative on assessment – particularly the work on analysing the volume and timing of assessment – it is helpful to know what types of assessment a student (and staff colleagues in their marking and feedback) are experiencing and when. [For example: are there several presentations taking place close together? Is there a collection of essays due in at the same time?]

2. In the future, when YSJU issues a HEAR – Higher Education Achievement Report – to each student, then the type of each assessment component needs to be clear to the reader (including not only the student, but potential employers).

3. In constructing or reviewing “YSJU graduate attributes”, we may wish to assure ourselves that each graduate has experienced particular types of assessment.

It is proposed to create an assessment taxonomy, so that each modular assessment component has a particular and predefined type. As well as clarifying the sort of assessment that each student encounters, and providing a basis for analysing the assessments that are used within specific programmes, it may also be helpful in encapsulating an overall YSJU assessment offering. It will also support the design of the learning experience, in which assessment is integral.

What information do we have already?

Each component of assessment within a module has the following associated information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>assessment component information</th>
<th>SITS field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sequence number (to identify it)</td>
<td>mab_seq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 type</td>
<td>ast_name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 description</td>
<td>mab_name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weighting</td>
<td>mab_perc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 qualifying mark</td>
<td>mab_qmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (module) learning outcomes that the component assesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 the deadline for the assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of these, all are recorded in SITS apart from (currently) the related learning outcomes and the deadline. The assessment type is neither sought explicitly on the module specification nor approved at a scrutiny event, but is constructed in Registry from the approved description.

The related learning outcomes are documented on the module specification and in Moodle, and the deadlines in Moodle. These are somewhat less accessible than the information in SITS.

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1 Some HEIs have used only two different types of assessment on the HEAR (“exam” and “coursework”). At the other end of the spectrum, some have well over a hundred different “types”: some of these may be very similar; others may be used once only across the HEI. Working solutions lie somewhere between these two extremes.

2 In the future, this could be a drop-down menu used when designing and specifying assessment for a module.

3 whether the component must be passed; or a reasonable attempt made; or that the module overall must be passed without any further component requirements needing to have been met

4 Usually, SITS holds information on summative assessment only; formative assessment is not included (at present).
Analysis of current assessment types

For the academic year 2014-2015, the assessment types shown in the leftmost columns of Table 2 are used. The table also shows the frequency of their use by faculty; the overall frequencies are depicted in Figure 1 as a word cloud. It is clear that there is a preponderance of particular types. Equally, some of the nomenclature (“coursework”, “assessment”, “assignment”, “file”, “pack”, …) is not that helpful.

Where the assessment type was ambiguous or unclear, the analysis used the accompanying description of the assessment, rather than – simply – the assessment type.

Proposal for an assessment taxonomy

The eight types of assessment shown in Table 1 are proposed; the order is not significant. They are characterised on the belief that as students progress through their programme of study, they will – in general – move from shorter, tightly-controlled assessments to those over which they themselves have greater autonomy and which take place over a longer timeframe (for example: from time-limited written examinations and short essays on given topics to a major project and reflection on their progress and abilities).

Each proposed category can, of course, be subdivided: (academic) written work may encompass anything from a 250-word abstract to a Masters dissertation; a written examination may be closed or open book, seen or unseen, short-answer, multiple choice, online, self-test; … and so on. But each proposed type has particular characteristics of “time” and “autonomy”.

The existing assessment types which it is proposed “belong” to a single new type are shown in italics in Table 1. The key properties which characterise each assessment type are also included.

Next steps

1. Reach consensus on the proposed YSJU assessment types.
2. Convert each of the existing types in SITS to one of the new types.
3. Use the newly-defined types in the analysis of assessment volume and deadlines.
4. Analyse the types of assessment experienced by students on particular programmes.

Combining the initiatives on assessment deadlines and the taxonomy allows an assessment timetable to be produced which, in turn, facilitates analysis. Two examples are included: these are anonymised current YSJU programmes with only very slight modifications made.

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6 A “portfolio” is not included as a type: it is proposed that this is “normally” a collection of artefacts, written work and/or reflections, coupled with an over-arching contextual statement and/or self-reflection.

7 “Time” and “Autonomy” are independent characteristics. Assessment type could additionally be characterised as “write – make – show – tell”.

8 Every existing assessment component has been assigned to one of the eight proposed categories, but there is not a one-to-one mapping for the following types:

assessment, assignment, case-study, catalogue document, coursework, critical reflection, critique, document/other analysis, documentary, documentation, file, individual/research project, negotiated learning agreement, oral examination, piece of writing, plan, portfolio/resource file/module fol, project, reflective account, reflective document, report, review / critique, transcription, work, work based project, written evaluation.

9 This will not change the description of the assessment itself, although it may be necessary to divide some single assessments into weighted components. Clearly, the latter would need discussion by the programme team and formal QSC approval (though it may be appropriate to “batch” such changes).

10 The analysis of the existing assessment types by Academic Quality Support includes a proposal in the new taxonomy for every existing assessment component type.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Type</th>
<th>Characteristics and Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **examination** | time-limited under staff-controlled conditions  
| | aural, examination, final examination, multiple choice questions, take home exam, test, timed assessment |
| **written work** | academic writing, including referencing; often word-limited (or -guided)  
| | annotated bibliography, audit, blog, commentary, critical study, discussion, dissertation, essay, exercise(s), introduction, manuscript, on-line posting, proposal, rationale, research file, research paper, research project, research proposal, special study, statement, strategy, study, written debate, written paper, written submission |
| **(creative) artefact** | creative; original; form is important  
| | cognitive map, composition, concept, creative writing, exhibition of work, film, group project, handout, manifesto, mindmap, music product, pack, pamphlet, preparatory models and conceptualisation, prototype, text, visual artefact, written design |
| **practical** | used to demonstrate a skill in real time (live)  
| | audio file, demonstration, numerical assignment, observation, peer observation, performance, practical assessment, practical demonstration, practical exam, process based assessment, solo performance |
| **presentation** | a prepared student-led live event (but on a topic proposed or approved by staff)  
| | group presentation, individual presentation, poster presentation, presentation |
| **viva voce** | an examiner-led live event  
| | viva |
| **(self-)reflection** | self-paced evaluation of self, reflecting skills, knowledge, attitudes, …  
| | diary, journal, learning journal, learning statement, profile, reflective journal, reflective summary, research journal, self-commentary |
| **external** | used where requirements are set by an external body  
| | attendance, placement, training, pre-requisite for placement |

Table 1: proposed assessment types at the left, with characteristics and existing examples

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11 e.g.: a PSRB setting requirements for health and safety, lifting and handling, or hygiene; hours required by a PSRB to be spent in a placement; or another HEI undertaking assessments approved by YSJU (such as on an exchange module or in validated provision).