TESTA Tools

Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment

The Assessment and Feedback Audit

> The Assessment and Feedback Audit is a way of mapping assessment patterns across a whole programme. This document contains information about why the Audit can be useful, where it came from, how to do it and some suggestions about how to explore the results.

Why is it useful?

The audit draws on module descriptors and other paperwork to provide a picture of how assessment and feedback works across a whole programme. By giving a programme-level perspective it helps teaching staff to look beyond their own individual modules; they are likely to be very familiar with the amount and type of assessments in their modules, but they may not have a good understanding of how assessment works in the other modules that make up their students' programme. The audit provides information about the assessment and feedback experienced by the average student over the course of the programme.

The data provides a bird's-eye picture of how assessment is intended to work. This can then be contrasted with staff and student views of the reality of assessment. The Audit also yields objective data that help to contextualise students' views (whether gathered through questionnaires, focus groups or other methods).

Where did it come from?

The Audit was developed over 10 years ago as a way of characterising programme-level assessment environments. It is intended to capture a number of broad but important features of planned assessment and feedback regimes, and from very early on was used in conjunction with other methods of data collection (such as the Assessment and Experience Questionnaire) as part of the TESTA methodology.

What does it look like?

The purpose of the Audit is to generate objective figures for the following metrics, that can then be benchmarked against the TESTA averages.

- *Number of summative assessments*: The total number of summative assessments that a student will encounter, on average, across the programme. A 'summative' assessment is one that counts towards a class mark

- *Number of low-stakes summative assessments*: This is a subset of the summative assessments, and is specifically those assessments that contribute to a class mark but only up to a maximum of 10% of the class mark
- *Number of formative-only assessments*: The total number of formative-only assessments that a student will encounter, on average, across the programme. A formative-only assessment is one that does not count towards a class mark
- *Variety of assessments*: The number of different assessment formats that a student will encounter, on average, across the programme
- *Proportion of marks from examinations*: The percentage of the total marks contributed by formal examinations
- *Volume of written feedback*: The number of words of written feedback that a student will receive, on average, across the programme

How do we conduct the Audit?

The Audit involves consulting programme documentation and samples of feedback to compile the relevant figures. There are four steps to conducting the Audit. (Please note that the Audit requires the ability to view relevant pages on Myplace in order to see submission points, class material and feedback that students have received).

1. Through discussions with the Programme Lead, staff from the Department/School office, and consulting programme handbooks, draw up an outline of the programme consisting of the modules that a typical student will take across the different years. Where students select from a range of modules (as is typical in later years) use the modules taken by the highest proportion of students on the programme. The purpose at this stage is to generate a picture of the modules taken by a typical student on the programme.
2. Consult individual module descriptors to ascertain the number and type of assessments encountered in each module (including whether they are summative or formative-only, the contribution to the class mark if they are summative, and the format of the assessment). Look for the assignment submission points on Myplace class pages to check that module descriptors are up-to-date, and to find any formative assessments that have Myplace submission points but aren't included in the formal documentation.
3. To calculate the average amount of feedback that a student on the programme receives, use Myplace to sample feedback that students have received for each assessment, e.g. five samples per assessment. Try to ensure that samples run across the grading range. Feedback may be in the form of full text, or comments on work using Turnitin. This assumes that feedback is returned electronically.
4. Use the data collected to generate figures for each year of the programme, and for the programme as a whole.

How do we interpret the results?

Triangulation

One of the main benefits of the audit is to provide some more objective information that can put the more subjective data from the (staff and student) questionnaires and focus groups in context. For example, the questionnaire data provides evidence about whether students and staff feel that sufficient feedback is provided; the audit provides insight into how much feedback students (on average) actually receive. This kind of triangulation can be very useful for understanding differing expectations.

Comparisons to other institutions

As averages from other programmes and have participated in TESTA are available, the audit figures can be benchmarked to give a sense of whether the amount of summative assessments, for example, are particularly high or low. TESTA averages are provided in the Appendix. (Averages are not available for all of the measures explored by the Audit)

Comparisons between years

In addition to comparing Audit figures with the TESTA averages, it can be illuminating to compare the figures for each year of the programme. This can reveal patterns (e.g. more feedback in final years, more low-stakes summative assessments in first year) that can be a useful point of discussion.

What are some common Audit findings?

- *Little formative-only assessment.* It is common for the audit to find very few instances of purely-formative assessments. In some cases this may be because purely-formative assessments are set on an informal basis, perhaps on paper in class, and may not be visible on Myplace or included in class documentation. However, purely-formative assessment is generally not common. This is often because teaching staff feel that students are unlikely to engage with assessment that does not count towards a class mark.
- *Large amounts of low-stakes summative assessments.* While formative-only assessments are often rare, teaching staff are normally very aware of the benefits of small focused assessment designed to support student learning. This can sometimes lead to a proliferation of low-stakes summative assessments, particularly in earlier years, and particularly in certain kinds of classes (e.g. lab classes). It may be worthwhile exploring staff and student perspectives to see whether such assessments do fulfil the intended formative function.
- *Low levels of written feedback.* You may find that students receive relatively low amounts of written feedback, compared to the TESTA averages. The questionnaire and focus group data may shed light on this, but it is important to be aware that the audit does not measure other forms of feedback, such as verbal feedback. For example, it is common in Engineering subjects for students to receive verbal feedback on problem attempts in tutorial sessions.
- *Higher levels of written feedback in later years.* It is common for students in later years to receive more feedback, on average, than those in earlier years. Reasons for this include longer and more complex assignments, smaller class sizes, and classes more related to the research interests of teaching staff. This often unintended allocation of resources can be an interesting point of discussion for staff, as there may be a rationale for instead providing more feedback to students in earlier years, as they get to grips with assessment requirements.
- *High levels of variety in assessment formats.* The Audit sometimes finds high levels of variation in assessment formats across programmes. This can be due to the heterogenous nature of some programmes, and the increasing use of innovative and non-traditional forms of assessment. The use of novel assessment formats has numerous benefits, but it is important to explore the impact on students. A high level of variety can cause problems for continuity, as students find it hard to apply feedback if they rarely encounter an assessment format more than once. It can also be problematic for students to encounter new assessment formats for the first time in their final year, when assessments are likely to make a greater contribution to their

final degree mark. It may be useful to explore whether students get sufficient chances to practice certain types of assessments prior to encountering them in highly-weighted contexts.

TESTA Tools

TESTA ('Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment') is way of helping teaching staff to work together to improve assessment and feedback across whole programmes. By providing evidence about how well assessment and feedback supports students' learning TESTA can help staff to improve the coherence and coordination of programmes. A centrally-resourced version of TESTA is provided to Schools/Departments by in the year prior to their Internal Review. Alternatively, this guidance is provided so Schools/Departments (or individual programme teams) can make use themselves of the tools that make up the TESTA method: the Assessment Experience Questionnaire, the Audit, and the Focus Groups.

For more information about the TESTA Tools, please visit

https://www.strath.ac.uk/sees/educationenhancement/innovationandgoodpractice/TESTAtools/

If you have any questions about the TESTA Tools, please contact educationenhancement-quality@strath.ac.uk

Further reading

These papers describe the initial development of the Assessment and Feedback Audit.

- Gibbs, G. & Dunbar-Goddet, H. (2007) *The effects of programme assessment environments on student learning* (Oxford, Oxford Learning Institute). Available at: https://www.uio.no/om/organisasjon/utvalg/utdanningskomiteen/moter/2007/011107/O_sak1/HEA%20Assessment%20report%20FINAL%20(3).pdf
- Gibbs, G. & Dunbar-Goddet, G. (2009) 'Characterising programme-level assessment environments that support learning', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 34(4): 481-489

A number of papers have been published that make use of the Audit, and include results broken down by discipline and by institution type (research- vs teaching-intensive).

- Jessop, T. & Maleckar, B. (2016) 'The influence of disciplinary assessment patterns on student learning: a comparative study', *Studies in Higher Education* 41(4): 696-711
- Jessop, T. & Tomas, C. (2017) 'The implications of programme assessment patterns for student learning', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 42(6): 990-999
- Jessop, T., El Hakim, Y. and Gibbs, G. (2014) 'The whole is greater than the sum of its parts: A large-scale study of students' learning in response to different programme assessment patterns', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 39(1): 73-88
- Tomas, C. & Jessop, T. (2019) 'Struggling and juggling: a comparison of student assessment loads across research and teaching-intensive universities', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 44(1): 1-10

Appendix

Below are the figures collected from programmes that have participated in TESTA at other institutions. They are drawn from Jessop and Tomas (2017), which reports a study drawing on 73 programmes that participated in TESTA from 14 different UK institutions (Strathclyde was not included). The table below shows the median figures, as well as the figures for low, medium and high programmes. The figures for 'low' are those for the lowest 25% of programmes, and the figures for 'high' are those for the highest 25% of programmes. The figures for 'medium' constitute the inter-quartile range: the middle 50% of programmes.

The figures in Jessop and Tomas (2017) relate to three-year programmes (standard in the UK outside Scotland), they have been adjusted in the table below for a four-year programme.[1] They can be readjusted for a five-year integrated Masters programme.

Characteristic	Median	Low	Medium	High
Number of summative assessments	57	Below 44	44-64	More than 64
Number of formative-only assessments	7	Below 1	1-25	More than 25
Proportion of marks from examinations	20%	Below 10%	10-30%	More than 30%
Variety of assessment methods	11	Below 8	8-15	More than 15
Written feedback in words	8,220	Less than 5,066	5,066-10,533	More than 10,533

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[1] Original figures have been divided by 3 and then multiplied by 4 to create the 4-year averages. The figure for 'proportion of marks from examinations' has not been adjusted.