

Summary of Course Workload and Assessment

Coursework

Assigned coursework may be summative or formative in its assessment.

- Every course must have at least one piece of formatively-assessed coursework with feedback.
- A 20-credit course may have in addition up to three pieces of summatively-assessed coursework.
- A 10-credit course may have at most one piece of summatively-assessed coursework.
- Courses without a final exam may have one additional piece of summatively-assessed coursework.

For each summative assessment the following must be fixed in advance: a scheme for allocation of marks to different components; the criteria for awarding those marks; and the weighting of the whole assignment towards the final course grade.

Feedback Timing

For all in-course assignments, marks and feedback must be returned promptly.

- The return date and the form of feedback must be stated in advance on the course web page, and on any exercise sheet describing the coursework.
- The return date must be no later than two weeks after the work is submitted by students.
- The return date must be in time for students to use the feedback in their next assignment: ideally before that assignment starts, and in all cases before that assignment is submitted.

Course Workload

Courses must not assign work that enforces an unreasonable load on students.

- A 20-credit course should not require more than 13 hours of work in any given week.
- A 10-credit course should not require more than 6–7 hours of work in any given week.

These include all contact hours — lectures, tutorials, labs — as well as directed reading, individual study, tutorial exercises and coursework.

Courses assessed entirely by coursework timetabled during Semester 1 may use the full 14 weeks of semester for coursework. All other courses must complete within the 11 teaching weeks of semester.

Contact Hours

Timetabled hours must not exceed 50% of course time each week.

- A 20-credit course would normally plan 3 or perhaps 4 hours of lectures each week; those with labs or extensive hands-on work might have only 1 or 2 hours weekly.
- 10-credit courses would normally plan 1 or 2 hours of lectures each week.

Teaching Support

Resource limits are in the School's Teaching Support Staff Policy. For a 20-credit course highlights include:

- Teaching Assistant: up to 60 hours; potentially a further 40 hours if summative assessment contributes 40% or more of the final grade, or if the course is new or being significantly redesigned.
- Marker: up to 4 hours plus 1 hour per student
- Tutors/Demonstrator: according to student numbers

For a 10-credit course all these are halved.

Course Workload and Assessment Profile

Assessment Methods

Assessment at degree-level in Edinburgh is about capability not competition: the aim is to establish the level of achievement in a specific area, not a student's rank in the class. It's also generally the work which is assessed, not the student. This is standard in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, but differs from “norm-referenced” practice common in North America where personal performance against peers is a key measure.

Part of this “criterion-based” assessment is that the University does not publish class rankings or percentile positions; and in many cases we don't even calculate them.

Strictly, each piece of assessment should evaluate the extent to which a student demonstrates achievement in one or more of the listed learning outcomes for the course. In practice, this means exams and their marking criteria are set separately from the learning and teaching on a course; and the students may take them independently from the course itself — as with resits, or retaking courses “assessment-only”.

Credit is awarded for successfully demonstrating achievement, typically by passing the designated assessments for a course. There is a relationship with the total number of hours a “typical student” might spend to reach that level of attainment; but it's the achievement itself which is assessed, not the route to it, and there is no formal “credit hour” or “student hour” of contact time required for attainment.

Coursework

Assigned coursework may be “summative” or “formative” in its assessment.

Formative assignments are “assessment for learning”; they don't count towards any final grade, but students learn through doing them and getting feedback on their work. This can include self-marking; group evaluation by other students; or audio, written or in-person feedback from tutors or the lecturer.

Summative assignments are “assessment of learning”; they evaluate whether the students can demonstrate what is described in the course learning outcomes. Summative assignments contribute to course grades, the lecturer is responsible for the marks awarded, and marking cannot be done by other taught students.

These are essentially tests: while students will often learn by doing them, their role in grading strictly limits possible approaches to the content and assessment of such assignments.

- Every course must have at least one piece of formative assessment with feedback. For example: submission of essay plans for feedback; written exercises brought to tutorials; in-class tests with peer marking; as well as standard pieces of coursework with feedback but no part in final course grade.
- A 20-credit course may have in addition up to three pieces of summatively-assessed coursework; or four if assessed wholly through coursework.
- A 10-credit course may have at most one piece of summatively-assessed coursework; or two if assessed wholly through coursework.
- Each summative assessment must have the following fixed in advance: a scheme for allocation of marks to different components; the criteria for awarding those marks; and the weighting of the whole assignment towards the final course grade.

Where students fail to engage with formative work, it may help to set assignments that lead directly into the compulsory summative component. For example, an assignment to submit, to a deadline, draft work for feedback indicating ways it can be improved and highlighting any clear errors; where this is then later worked up into the full and final summatively-assessed coursework.

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- The return date and the form of feedback must be stated in advance on the course web page, and on any exercise sheet describing the coursework.
- The return date must be no later than two weeks after the work is submitted by students.
- The return date must be in time for students to use the feedback in their next assignment: ideally before that assignment starts, and in all cases before that assignment is submitted.

Course Workload

Courses must not assign work that enforces an unreasonable load on students. This relates to both the absolute number of hours expected, and also the opportunity students have to balance this across weeks — a piece of coursework over five weeks gives students more flexibility to plan their work than one due after a single week.

Naturally, some students will spend longer on particular work than others; and some may allocate their time poorly — but courses should not assign so much that even the most competent and well-organized student cannot arrange a working timetable.

No course should rely on some other parallel course having a low workload in any given week; unless that course is a specific co-requisite.

A 20-credit course is one-third of a student's weekly timetable; a 10-credit course is one-sixth.

- A 20-credit course should not require more than 13 hours of work in any given week.
- A 10-credit course should not require more than 6–7 hours of work in any given week.

These include all contact hours — lectures, tutorials, labs — as well as directed reading, individual study, tutorial exercises and coursework.

Courses assessed entirely by coursework timetabled during Semester 1 may use the full 14 weeks of semester for coursework; although any lectures and tutorials must be within the 11 designated teaching weeks.

Other courses must have all lectures, tutorials, and coursework completed within the 11 teaching weeks of semester.

For an example 20-credit course with an end-of-year exam, the notional 200 hours assigned by SCQF would be allocated as follows:

11 teaching weeks x 13 hours + 4 days exam preparation + 1/2 day sitting exam + 20 hours “programme level activities” — the 10% of student time taken up with Innovative Learning Week, Personal Tutor meetings, welcome week, and everything else not specific to an individual course.

Weekly Hours

The calculations of working hours are based on a standard of 40 study hours per week. The University has no clear policy on this, but Assistant Principal Ian Pirie has confirmed that the hours of engagement expected from students must be within a maximum 40-hour week.

The University instructs students to commit to no more than 15 hours per week on outside paid work during semester. Together these give a 55-hour working week.

All this, of course, assumes a student with perfect planning and organisation. In practice, many students will have weeks when they spend hours well beyond this. Having per-course limits cannot prevent that, but it does put this under students' control rather than us effectively dictating specific weeks of overload.

The Fiction of 10 Hours per Credit Point

Straightforward calculation assumes that if a 120-credit year of study occupies 30 weeks of 40 study hours, then a student has 10 hours for each credit point on a course. Like any constrained scheduling problem, it really doesn't work like that, and the workload profile recognises this. In practice, for many courses it is just about possible to schedule with only a 10% overhead; except for coursework-only courses in Semester 2, where around 160/80 hours is the practical limit for 20/10 credit courses. Course descriptors list this overhead as "programme level" activities.

Contact Hours

For any course, only part of students' time is spent in timetabled activities: lectures, labs, tutorials. In general this should not be more than 50% of course time each week, and for certain kinds of course it may be much less.

A 20-credit course would normally plan up to 3 or perhaps 4 lecture hours each week. This might be supplemented with tutorials or labs, and courses with extensive hands-on or lab work might have only 1 or 2 lectures slots in a week.

10-credit courses would normally plan up or 1 or 2 lecture hours each week; possibly supplemented by 1 tutorial hour where appropriate.

Teaching Support

Resource limits set an upper bound on the teaching support that the School can provide for any course. These bounds are set per student and scale with the credit weighting of the course.

The tariff is set out in detail in the School's Teaching Support Staff Policy. For a 20-credit course highlights include:

- Teaching Assistant: up to 60 hours; potentially a further 40 hours if summative assessment contributes 40% or more of the final grade, or if the course is new or being significantly redesigned.
- Marker: up to 4 hours plus 1 hour per student
- Tutors/Demonstrator: according to student numbers

For a 10-credit course all these are halved.

Policy agreed by Informatics Board of Studies 2015-11-04

See paper tabled at that meeting for additional notes and discussion