

which splits the academic year into two equal terms. Most UK institutions operate on a three term year. The effect is that a course that would have normally been taught over three terms is either packed into a single semester or run over two semesters, with two assessment periods in contrast to the single assessment period in the three term year.

Such developments raise questions concerning the students' learning experiences, law lecturers' teaching experiences, the role of external examiners and the maintenance of academic standards.

The article discusses the findings from a UK survey about the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate education with respect to data collected about modularisation and semesterisation and their impact upon assessment patterns. The survey data indicate that the combination of modularisation and semesterisation, under which law subjects are split into small segments of information and assessed at increasingly small intervals, results in a real risk that this type of structure significantly affects both course delivery and student learning with corresponding implications for student achievement. It encourages surface learning rather than deep learning by concentrating a student's workload into periods of intense activity, preventing them from studying any subject at depth. Advice is offered as to how to design learning modules which encourage deep rather than surface learning by students.

### **An experience in peer assessment in LL.B year 1**

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The article seeks to persuade law teachers to utilise peer and/or self assessment. The pressure of work is forcing even those lecturers who are most resistant to innovation to consider using peer or self assessment. These methods are in keeping with the current trend towards encouraging students to be responsible for their own learning. Students in peer and self assessment programs become more effective learners and develop transferable skills important in the field of employment by being aware of their own competencies.

It is desirable when introducing peer and self assessment regimes to negotiate and discuss with students what the syllabus should contain. However, this is problematic in a law teaching context, as the students have little idea of the content of the course at the beginning and the syllabus is already determined by external bodies, such as admitting authorities. In addition, the criteria used to assess the students' work could not be negotiated because other markers would not necessarily apply them. The peer and self assessment criteria must therefore be applied to the traditional assessment tasks such as problem questions in assignments and exams.

Criteria were given to students in order to allow them to evaluate their work and that of other students. The assessment criteria were as follows: the law must be accurate; the answer must identify the litigants; the principles of law being discussed must be clearly stated; authorities must be used to

support the principles, clarify their meaning and support the argument; the position argued by both parties must be identified; the answer should be written such that a reasonably intelligent client would be able to understand it; and there should be no irrelevant material.

Tutorials were used to teach students how to identify and assess each criterion. Self and peer assessment is a practical skill like mooting and negotiating exercises and writing advices to clients. Such learning techniques encourage deep learning where the student endeavours to understand the material rather than merely to memorise it. As students are given the assessment criteria to be used in assessing the work of peers, they are mindful that their work will be assessed by their own peers. Hence, they use the published criteria as a guide to the content and structure of their own work.

Whilst peer and self assessment has its advantages it flies in the face of traditional university culture. Many lecturers do not believe that students have the competence to assess themselves and feel that they are losing control of the assessment process. However, experience suggests that this is not the case. Student assessment has been found to be in line with staff assessment, with little variation in the marks awarded by staff and students for the same piece of work. Law graduates are going to need to exercise the kind of integrity and ability to self-evaluate that self and peer assessment presuppose if they are going to provide a satisfactory service to their clients.