'Enhancing student performance and employability through the use of authentic assessment techniques in extra and co-curricular activities (ECCAs)'

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Introduction

The development of critical reasoning skills is vital in order to maximise student performance both academically as well as in terms of enhanced employability. Critical reasoning, along with other so-called wicked competences, is essential for a student's successful study whilst at University.[1] Indeed, as Barnett & Coate[2] observe, a central purpose of higher education is the development of an individual's identity, of which the formation of 'wicked' competences, such as those which '*cannot be precisely defined*'[3] but include creativity, critical thinking, among others, and which take on different shapes in different contexts, is an important part. Consequently, it follows that a Law School should not only seek to strengthen them as part of the curriculum but also adopt a mode of assessment that it sympathetic to this goal.

However, the reality within most Higher Education institutions is that the traditional 'paper-based' assessment strategy not only provides a pragmatic solution to the challenge of a general lack of time and resources to grade students *en masse*, but, when focused in a summative way, provides a useful tool "*to differentiate between students and rank them according to their achievement*".[4] In effect, it serves the testing culture that still remains deeply rooted within Higher Education and which, in turn, provides a defensible record of educational output in the form of ranked student achievement.

A traditional paper-based assessment simply is not compatible with the objective of developing creative, flexible, problem-solving students, as 'measurement' approaches tend

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[1] Berger.D & Wild.C (2015a), 'Giving students the third degree: Using authentic assessment techniques in extra and co-curricular activities (ECCAs) to improve teaching standards on academic law programmes', presented at the 20th International Academic Conference, IISES, Madrid

[2] Barnett.R & Coate. K (2005) 'Engaging the Curriculum in Higher Education' Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education and the Open University Press

[3] Knight.P (2007) Fostering and assessing wicked competencies, The Open University's Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

[4] Gulikes.J, Bastiaens.T & Kirschner.P (2004), 'A five dimensional framework for authentic assessment', Educational Technology Research & Development 52(3), 67

to dominate, which are in turn "*clearly unsuited to 'fuzzy' or complex competences*".[5] Instead, the authors contend that approaches such as authentic assessment or work-integrated learning, which rely less on strictly quantitative marking criteria, are more appropriately used for such purposes. Furthermore, the authors believe that the use of authentic assessment techniques in accredited and University-run extra and co-curricular activities (ECCAs) is perfectly placed to augment legal education. As long as the ECCAs are delivered with academic law degree learning outcomes taken under consideration, and are rigorously delivered by staff who are trained and experienced through internally, but preferably, externally, validated measures and professional body schemes, to elicit optimum student performance, students will benefit from authentic assessment in other indirectly connected areas of their academic lives.

Consequently, whilst a single traditional assessment has only one formative aspect – the feedback at the end – which, as Montgomery notes, is '*done after rather than before the writing, so [comments] cannot serve as guidelines, compromising the value of writing comments at all*',[6] the delivery of authentic assessment methods by way of ECCAs, provides a combination of formative and summative techniques throughout the assessment processes. This, in turn, impacts positively on student performance and has a positive cross-impact on their academic performance across the degree programme. This two-way communicative assessment strategy allows students to benefit from continuous mid-assessment feedback, which serves to best demonstrate the adversarial nature of the legal system and the demands placed on lawyers to provide clear, simple, usable legal advice – a skill best learned in the ECCA authentic assessment environment, rather than in the artificial 'one-shot'[7] approach to traditional coursework and paper-based exam assessments, which provides primarily a summative assessment and/or a weak/unusable formative element in future assessments.

Whilst there are indications that current educational goals have shifted focus to the development of "*competent students and future employees*" as opposed to solely on the acquisition of knowledge,[8] commentators such as Segal[9] observe that Law Schools still pursue a traditional approach that "*emphasizes the theoretical over the useful*". He goes on

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[5] Knight.P & Yorke.M, (2003) Assessment, Learning and Employability. Maidenhead; Society for Research in Higher Education and the Open University Press

[6] Montgomery. K (2002), 'Authentic Tasks and Rubrics: Going Beyond Traditional Assessment in College Teaching', College Teaching 50(1),34

[7] Galanter, M. (1974) Why the 'Haves' Come Out Ahead: Speculations on the Limits of Legal Change' Law and Society Review, Vol. 9.1

[8] Op cit, n4

[9] Segal.D (2011) 'What They Don't Teach Law Students: Lawyering', New York Times

to suggest that lectures are frequently focused on out-of-date concepts such as "*the variety of property law in post-feudal England*" and that "*Professors are rewarded for chin-stroking scholarship, like law review articles with titles like 'A Future Foretold: Neo-Aristotelian Praise of Postmodern Legal Theory*".[10]

However, to compete, and ultimately succeed, in the current global environment, law graduates need to develop, and continuously hone, a variety of 'wicked' competences, including creativity, entrepreneurial skills, management ability and critical reasoning. Employers are increasingly placing an emphasis on the recruitment of graduates who have such 'wicked' competences[11] meaning that in a world of Day 1 outcomes, law graduates need to "*know less about Contracts and more about contracts*".[12]

A 'wicked' competence, such as creativity or critical thinking, cannot be precisely defined[13] and, inevitably, not only takes on different forms in different contexts / environments but it is something which is likely to keep on evolving within a graduate if nurtured at a sufficiently early stage of their University studies. Significantly though, such competences are not only of value to future employers, but are also necessary for a student's successful study whilst at University.[14] As noted earlier, there is also a view that a central purpose of higher education is the development of an individual's identity, of key component of which is the formation of 'wicked' competences.[15] Consequently, the authors contend that a Law School should seek to strengthen the development of competences, such as critical reasoning, as part of the curriculum.[16] It must be noted that championing these competencies is not the sole preserve of the legal profession, but are transferable and have cross-impact into many other cognate disciplines.

In this regard, Shepherd and Douglas[17] explored the development of 'wicked' competencies by Business Schools and noted that many lecturers taught logical thinking as opposed to that of flexible, entrepreneurial thinking. The danger of this approach is that logical thinking runs the risk of leading to incorrect and unworkable answers, even though a student's

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[10] Op cit, n9

[11] Tomlinson.M (2008), "The degree is not enough': students' perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability", British Journal of Sociology of Education 29(1), 49

[12] Op cit, n9

[13] Op cit, n5

[14] Berger.D & Wild.C, (2015b), Get Real: Using authentic assessment techniques to improve law degree academic performance', presented at the 2nd Teaching & Education Conference, IISES, Florence

[15] Op cit, n2

[16] Op cit, n3

[17] Shepherd,D.A. & Douglas,E.J.(1996),"Is management education developing or killing the entrepreneurial spirit?", Proceedings of the Internationalising Entrepreneurship Education and Training Conference, Amhem

underlying theoretical knowledge may be perfectly sound. In this regard, Shepherd and Douglas suggest that a student can only learn effectively when he/she undertakes a particular skill or competence in an environment as close to real life as possible. In other words, the goal for any higher education institution should be to provide authentic assessment opportunities; innovative learning methods that coincide with the requirements of potential entrepreneurs.[18]

The authentic nature of ECCAs '*requires students to make judgements [and] choices*'[19] and reflects Boud & Falchikov's observation that assessment should be seen as an act of informing a student's judgement.[20] A student can only learn effectively when he/she undertakes a particular skill or competence in an environment as close to real life as possible.[21] In this respect, ECCAs achieve the goal of providing authentic assessment opportunities wherein innovative learning methods coincide with the requirements of the current global environment.[22] However, such a change in emphasis is not without its challenges.

To be successful, any interventions to enhance the assessment of such soft skills or 'wicked' competences should start with the training of staff, not solely in relation to the utilisation of authentic assessment regimes but, perhaps more importantly, in terms of "*helping colleagues to appreciate the inadequacies of current practices that are typically – and wrongly – assumed to be 'good enough'*".[23] As such, Law Schools face the uphill task of not only updating and enhancing assessment practice but, at the same time, convincing colleagues of the need to move away from traditional 'one-shot' paper-based assessments.

Alongside this change in approach to assessment, there is also the need to update the content of Law School courses. This too requires buy-in from colleagues who may be reluctant to move away from a long-standing defensible curriculum to one more closely attuned to the needs to the legal sector.[24] In this regard, Professor Rubin (former Dean at the Vanderbilt Law School) reflected on his failure to convince colleagues to update and

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[18] Cumming J.J., & Maxwell G. S. (1999). Contextualising authentic assessment. Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice, 6, 177-194

[19] Burton, K. (2011) 'A framework for determining the authenticity of assessment tasks: applied to an example in law', Journal of Learning Design, 4(2)

[20] Boud, D. & Falchikov, N. (2007) 'Rethinking assessment in higher education: Learning for the longer term', New York: Routledge

[21] Op cit, n17

[22] Op cit, n18

[23] Op cit, n3

[24] Berger.D & Wild.C, (2015c), 'Getting the job done: Using authentic assessment techniques in extra and co-curricular activities (ECCAs) to improve law students' employability prospects', presented at the International Academic Conference on Teaching, Learning & E-learning, CIAE, Vienna

refresh the School's first year Contracts class, commenting: "*Some members of the faculty got a little overstressed by all the change…Planning a new course, you have to move out of your comfort zone a little in terms of teaching. And there is always the fear that your school will wind up being seen as an oddball place*".[25] Yet it is precisely this approach that the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) has sought to encourage via its Day 1 outcomes, and one that lies at the heart of the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Law (2015) which provides that: '…*a law graduate is far more than a sum of their knowledge and understanding, and is a well skilled graduate with considerable transferable generic and subject-knowledge, skills and attributes… We encourage Law Schools to help students to articulate to employers what they can do and what their qualities of mind are by using this statement:*

> *Ability to produce a synthesis of relevant doctrinal and policy issues, presentations of a reasoned choice between alternative solutions and critical judgment of the merits of particular arguments*
>
> *Ability to apply knowledge and understanding to offer evidenced conclusions, addressing complex actual or hypothetical problems*
>
> *Ability to communicate both orally and in writing, in relation to legal matters, including an ability to listen and respond to oral stimuli including questions and instructions.*'

If Law Schools are to remain relevant and at the heart of legal education over the course of the next decade, there needs to be a movement away from the traditional to that of the current, not only in terms of programme focus and curriculum content but also in terms of assessment. The acquisition of knowledge tested via traditional modes of assessment is not enough.[26]

Most importantly of all though, whilst academic achievement is still seen as a significant dimension of employability, students – and their families - increasingly see the need to add value to them in order to gain an advantage in the job market.[27] Consequently, the goal of every modern Law School must be to embed the use of authentic assessment[28] as it not only enhances a student's 'wicked' competences by taking knowledge out of the abstract and into reality, but also enhances academic performance by requiring students to make '*judgements [and] choices*' in real time.[29]

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[25] Op cit, n9
[26] Op cit, n4
[27] Op cit, n11
[28] Op cit, n18
[29] Op cit, n19

In this regard, the authors examined five sets of School-specific data which demonstrates (i) the entry tariff of the entire student cohort, (ii) the entry tariff of the student control group who participated in ECCAs, both relating to those students graduating in the 2014-15 academic year. As will be noted later, these datasets show that the control group was a true reflection of the capabilities of the general student population. Following this, the authors compared (iii) the academic performance of the control group who undertook ECCAs during their studies, as well as (iv) the performance of the entire student cohort over the same period. Finally, the authors reviewed (v) the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DHLE) rates (employability) for students over the past five years. Based on this data, the authors assert that there is a direct and positive correlation between exposure to authentic assessment techniques, and improved general academic performance as well as student employability.

Authentic assessment

Authentic assessment '*mirrors the tasks and problem solving that are required in the reality outside of school*'.[30] The concept of authentic assessment is well established[31] and is typically defined as the selection of particular modes of assessment which "*authentically allow a student to demonstrate (the) ability to perform tasks, solve problems or express knowledge in ways which simulate situations which are found in real life*".[32] It tests a student's ability to solve hypothetical problems, which then assesses how effectively a student solves a real-world problem, and requires students to apply a broad range of knowledge and skills which are '*closely aligned with activities that take place in real work settings, as distinct from the often artificial constructs of University courses*'.[33] As noted earlier, in order to learn effectively students have to construct meaning from what they are doing;[34] authentic tasks serve as vehicles for such learning. In this regard, authentic assessment '*can raise aspirations and increase intrinsic student motivation through explicit demonstration of career alignment and relevance of curriculum activities*'[35] and through explicit preparation for employment due to the relevance of the tasks undertaken.[36]

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[30] Ormiston, Meg (2011). Creating a Digital-Rich Classroom: Teaching & Learning in a Web 2.0 World. Solution Tree Press. pp. 2–3

[31] Wiggins, G. P. (1993). Assessing student performance. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

[32] Hymes, D., Chafin, A., & Gondor, R. (1991). The changing face of testing and assessment: Problems and solutions. Arlington VA: American Association of School Administrators

[33] Op cit, n20

[34] Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2007). Teaching for quality learning at university (3rd ed). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press (Society for Research into Higher Education)

[35] QUT Office of Teaching Quality, (2009)

[36] Herrington.J & Herrington.A (1998) 'Authentic assessment and multimedia: How University students respond to a model of authentic assessment, Higher Education Research & Development 17(3),305

Authentic assessment can be incorporated into almost any type of course delivery, including the traditional academic law degree. However, despite the signposts erected by the SRA, QAA or indeed the wider legal sector at a national and international level, it may be true that some academics are still reluctant to veer too far from the long established model of legal education for fear of being regarded as the aforementioned 'oddball'. As a result of this conservative environment its methods have been largely centred on extra and co-curricular courses (ECCAs), as they have largely oral components, and have evolved over time from the original aim to increase student engagement, as opposed to directly augmenting the academic learning process. Whilst the indirect benefits of student engagement and the improvement of academic performance have been recognised by Hart et al[37] who state *'through the process of engagement, students are more likely to experience a positive and fulfilling approach to the accumulation of the 'legal content' in their law degree'*, it is our assertion that ECCAs have done more than simply increase student engagement. We argue that authentic assessment in ECCAs has a direct, and significant, impact on student performance and student employability; students, who actively participate in University run and accredited ECCAs, excel on the law degree.[38]

The authors assert that the reason why ECCAs are so effective in raising academic achievement and student employability is that the formative assessment techniques utilised within, are vital to increase 'wicked' skills such as critical reasoning – the key transferable component to law degree success. A combination of formative and summative techniques used throughout the assessment processes improves student performance and provides an effective learning environment in which students undertakes a particular skill or competence in an environment as close to real life as possible.[39]

This two-way communicative assessment strategy allows students to benefit from continuous mid-assessment feedback, which serves to best demonstrate the adversarial nature of the legal system and the demands placed on lawyers to provide clear, simple, usable legal advice – a skill best learned in the ECCA authentic assessment environment, rather than in the artificial 'one-shot' approach to traditional coursework and paper-based exam assessments, which provides primarily a summative assessment and/or a weak/unusable formative element in future assessments. In this regard, the authentic nature of ECCAs not only '*requires students to make judgements [and] choices*'[40] but also fits with

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[37] Hart, C. et al (2011) 'The real deal: using authentic assessment to promote student engagement in the first and second years of a regional law program', Legal Education Review, 21 (1)
[38] Op cit, n14
[39] Op cit, n17
[40] Op cit, n19

Boud & Falchikov's observation[41] that assessment should be seen as an act of informing a student's judgement. This is reflected in further benefits, such as increased confidence in critical reasoning skills and, ultimately, in enhanced student employability.

Extra and co-curricular activities (ECCAs)

The authors have developed a range of ECCAs within their Law School, each designed to echo a different area of legal practice, including among others Mooting; War of Words (WoW); Mock trials; Debating; and Mediation. Each course runs throughout the academic year, incorporates formative and summative assessment methods and is delivered in at least three separate assessment stages and involves an element of public speaking. Each course (apart from mediation) also incorporates an element of competition, to align with the adversarial nature of the UK legal system.

In addition, and in line with the recommendations of Bhaerman & Spill,[42] each ECCA has a competency statement which specifies the way in which each skill is employment related and how attainment is quantified, measured, and verified. In other words, the School provides a definitive module documents for each ECCA which "define the skill, describe how it enhances employability, specify the level of proficiency to be reached, itemize the indicators of success that will be measured, identify the means of measurement, and explain the basis on which the need for the skill was determined".[43] Proof has also offered to demonstrate that gain occurred as a result of program participation.[44]

To ensure the 'authenticity' of the assessments, there are two bespoke facilities for the ECCAs: The authentic Crown courtroom; and the bespoke mediation centre. Most Law Schools deliver practical courses in featureless classrooms, inauthentic to the environments encountered in practice. However, at the School of Law, the Courtroom is an open forum with spectator areas, an authentic distance between Bar and raised bench, authentic and imposing décor. The Mediation Centre has a glass-fronted central meeting room with separate caucus meeting rooms for client instructions/negotiations in private. Students become comfortable with challenging environments and quickly become accustomed to the formality of the settings.

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[41] Op cit, n20

[42] Bhaerman.R & Spill.R, (1998) A Dialogue on Employability Skills: How can They be Taught?, Journal of Career Development, 15(1), 41-52

[43] Op cit, n42

[44] Op cit, n1

Taking mooting – which has a long standing presence within legal education[45] - as an example of a discipline which requires and implements continuous mid-assessment formative feedback: There is one thing constructing an argument and giving advice in a paper-based exam scenario (which does not matter which 'side' the student takes as long as they make the soundest argument possible); but when the student is forced to represent a hypothetical client, who will not likely readily accept advice that their case lacks merit, the student starts thinking creatively, and will develop an argument mid- assessment, if the original prepared position does not seem to be effective.

During a moot, the student commences the oral assessment with a prepared skeleton argument, which has been submitted before the moot, to allow the assessor to prepare questions. The timed (usually 10-20 minutes) oral assessment is a 'conversation' between the student and the tutor, designed to test the student's knowledge of not only the relevant law relating to the topic, but also the student's intelligence in understanding why the legal principles exist and how they correlate with other topic areas. Depending on the standard of the student, the tutor is able to tailor the questioning to allow the student to develop the argument well beyond that of the original written skeleton. However, this requires tutors 'to become ever more skilful in their ability to evaluate teaching situations and develop teaching responses that can be effective under different circumstances'.[46]

Indeed, since there are no 'right' answers in law, the assessment is perfectly attuned to discovering more than simply a student's legal knowledge – it is also an effective means of testing emotional intelligence and wider knowledge of social and political issues. As Ku (2009) notes, assessments which support open-ended responses "*make it possible to assess [an] individuals' spontaneous application of thinking skills on top of their ability to recognize a correct response*", thus enabling the tutor to evaluate a student's 'wicked' competencies such as their critical thinking performance. Furthermore, by developing a student's arguing skills, the tutor is able to demonstrate that the construction of a legal argument is closely aligned with critical reasoning skills – a skill which is not usually expressly taught as a part of the academic degree curriculum, but which is a vital component for optimum law degree performance.

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[45] Keys, M. & Whincop, M. (1997) 'The moot reconceived: some theory and evidence on legal skills', Legal Education Review 8(1)

[46] Darling-Hammond.L & Snyder.J, (2000) 'Authentic assessment of teaching in context', Teaching & Teacher Learning 16(5), 523

Of course, as noted earlier, probably the most important factor in the successful delivery of ECCAs is the quality of supervision provided by lecturers. This needs to be direct, close, attentive and responsive. As Bhaerman & Spill observe, "*good supervisors hold students and clients to fair standards that are clearly expressed, understandable, and firmly--yet sensitively--applied. They also provide constant feedback.*"[47] To accomplish this, lecturers require good social and communication skills, as well as to work with students as a coach and mentor so as to provide support when necessary and challenge when appropriate. To ensure assessment standards are maintained, Berger & Wild[48] explain how authentic assessment can be used as a teacher-training and monitoring aid.

While the traditional 'paper-based' assessment strategy provides a pragmatic solution to the problem of a general lack of time and resources to grade students en masse, the argument which might be made that authentic assessment is too 'resource-hungry' to be used across the assessment framework in academic law degree delivery, is rebutted by the authors.[49]

Formative v summative assessment

Authentic assessment is normally a two-way communication scenario, which means that students are able to respond to their assessor mid-assessment and make tweaks and minor adjustments to their performance as they familiarise themselves with their assessor's demands, personality and character traits. This means that the assessment is within a constant formative framework with a summative assessment at the end, followed by a formative assessment when feedback is provided. A traditional paper-based assessment has only one formative aspect; the feedback at the end.[50] Equally, this mode of assessment is primarily used in a summative way to support 'the testing culture - and, as such, does not sit easily with the development of 'competent students and future employees'.[51]

As Garfield observes "*the primary purpose of any student assessment should be to improve student learning*"[52] by "*enhancing the problem-solving and critical thinking abilities of students*".[53] In this regard formative assessment "*occurs as part of a progressive learning exercise, and where the main purpose is to facilitate student learning… [Whereas]*

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[47] Op cit, n42
[48] Op cit, n1
[49] Berger.D & Wild.C, (2016), 'Burning the Paper Tiger: Using authentic assessment techniques in academic law degree delivery', presented at the International Education Conference, Clute Institute, Venice
[50] Op cit, n6
[51] Op cit, n4
[52] Garfield.J (1994), Beyond Testing and Grading: Using Assessment to Improve Student Learning, Journal of Statistics Education 2(1)
[53] Op cit, n6

summative assessment reports on and certifies the "achievement status of a student".[54] Authentic assessment naturally incorporates both methods, as two-way interaction between participants/assessor is encouraged and inevitable - formative and summative assessment methods are not mutually exclusive. Students are able to you respond to their assessor mid-assessment and make tweaks and minor adjustments to their performance as they familiarise themselves their assessor's demands, personality and character traits. This means that the assessment is within a constant formative framework with a summative assessment at the end, followed by a formative assessment when feedback is provided.

It is this formative-rich, authentically assessed environment which improves student performance in not just ECCAs, but on the law degree and beyond in terms of their employability. The student is made to, in effect, constantly review their performance and enter a mind-set which tests 'wicked' competencies such as flexibility, confidence, critical reasoning, psychological evaluation skills, and response skills. Interestingly, these are also all skills which help the student who is studying for a paper-based assessment (Knight 2007).

This replicates legal practice which also incorporates both methods: Formative: The legal community relies largely upon self-regulation, education and improvement, to ensure that practitioners provide clients with exemplary service – without which it cannot be said that the system upholds the Rule of Law. Inns of Court, the Bar Society, the Solicitors' Regulation Authority et al, require practitioners to develop themselves and others throughout their professional careers. The nature of the hierarchical court system and authorship of legal journal articles are a form of peer-led formative assessment of court judgments. Summative: The UK legal system is adversarial in nature and demands a 'winner' and a 'loser' in each case.

In the traditional 'one-shot', paper-based assessments, a student is able to ask for feedback after the exam has been sat, but how effective will it be? In such instances, a student is unlikely to recall the precise assessment questions and/or the frame of mind in which he/she was in on that day. As such, the feedback will have limited resonance with the student. Equally, the next paper-based assessment may very well be either an entire Semester or, in some instances, an entire academic year away, meaning that implementation of feedback will be limited in its effectiveness. This is supported by Sadler (1989) who states that the timing of feedback is critical; suggesting that feedback on formative assessment rather than

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[54] Sadler, D.R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. Instructional Science, 18 (2), 119

summative assessment assists students in identifying the gap between their goals and their current knowledge and skill level.

In Budge & Gopal's study[55] 93% of their participants indicated that they would like to receive feedback progressively, with one respondent commenting specifically on the importance of timing: "*I think every subject should be graded throughout the semester, allowing plenty of feedback and therefore the opportunity to achieve a HD. No student should be shocked or surprised at the end of a semester when the grade is significantly lower (or 'Failed') than what they expected.*" Furthermore, 75% of respondents indicated that feedback motivated them to study. In particular, students have an interest in "*receiving feedback about their strengths and weaknesses [so as] to enable them to apply this to their learning and incorporate it into future assessment*".[56]

Consequently, the function of assessment needs to move away from being predominantly summative in nature to performing the formative goal of enhancing student learning. Increasing the authenticity of assessments within the Law School has had a positive influence of student learning, motivation and engagement. This mirrors the work of Pascarella and Terenzini who show that student engagement is central to student success, going on to suggest that "when there is engagement with programmes designed to evoke complex achievements, as well as more straightforward ones, then rich achievements are more likely to be visible." [57]

Summary and recommendations

After having considered the five datasets within the School of Law relating to the cohort of students graduating in the 2014/15 academic year - (i) Average entry tariff for the entire cohort of students; (ii) Average tariff for the cohort of students who actively engaged with ECCAs during their studies; (iii) The overall achievement of the entire cohort of students graduating in 2014/15; (iv) The overall achievement of the cohort of students who engaged with ECCAs graduating in 2014/15; and (v) student employability rates (DHLE results) for the past five years - we reached the following conclusion.

Turning to the two datasets involving the average entry tariff for the entire student cohort and for the subset which actively engaged in ECCAs, the information was gathered

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[55] Budge.K & Gopal.S (2009), "Feedback: Working from the students' perspective", ATN Assessment Conference, RMIT University
[56] Op cit, n55
[57] Pascarella.E. & Terenzini.P. (2005). How college affects students (Vol 2): A third decade of research. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
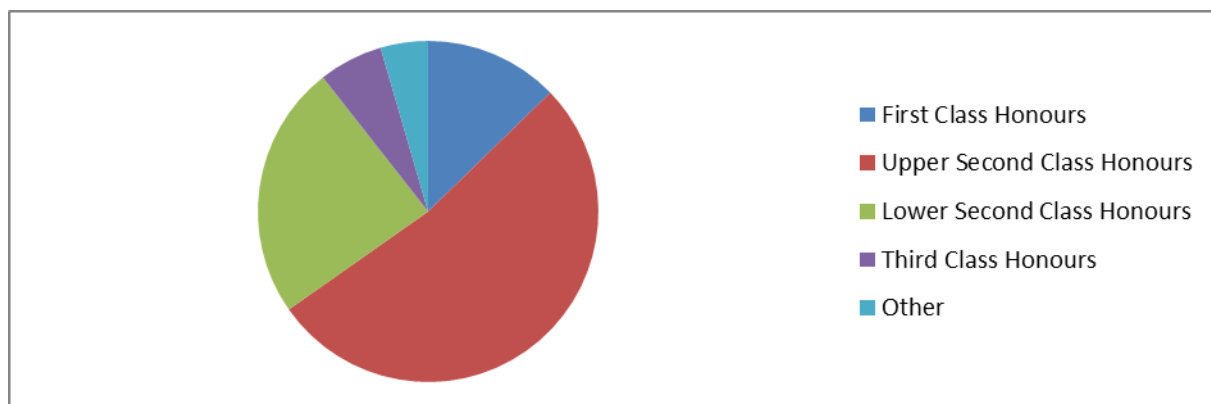
independently by the University as part of its admissions process and based on the UCAS tariff system which governs entry to Universities and Law Schools across the United Kingdom. By way of background, the UCAS tariff system was developed so as to enable broad comparisons to be undertaken between a wide range of qualifications by universities and colleges. However, it should be noted that not all qualifications are provided with UCAS tariff points. In addition, tariff points are usually only counted for the highest level of achievement within a subject. As such, a student's AS levels will not be counted if he/she has gone on to achieve a full A level in the same subject. As such, it is acknowledged that there may be instances where student achievement has not been factored into the entry point data gathered by the University as part of the UCAS tariff system. Nevertheless, this applies across both cohorts and produced the following two averages:

- The average entry tariff for the entire cohort graduating in 2014/15 was 329 points
- The average entry tariff for the subset of students who engaged in ECCAs and who graduate in 2014/15 was 307 points.

It is clear to see that whilst the average score for the ECCA subset is slightly lower than that for the entire cohort, it is nevertheless in line with the entry achievement of other students. As such, the expectation would be for the two cohorts to perform, and ultimately to graduate, within similar parameters of one another.
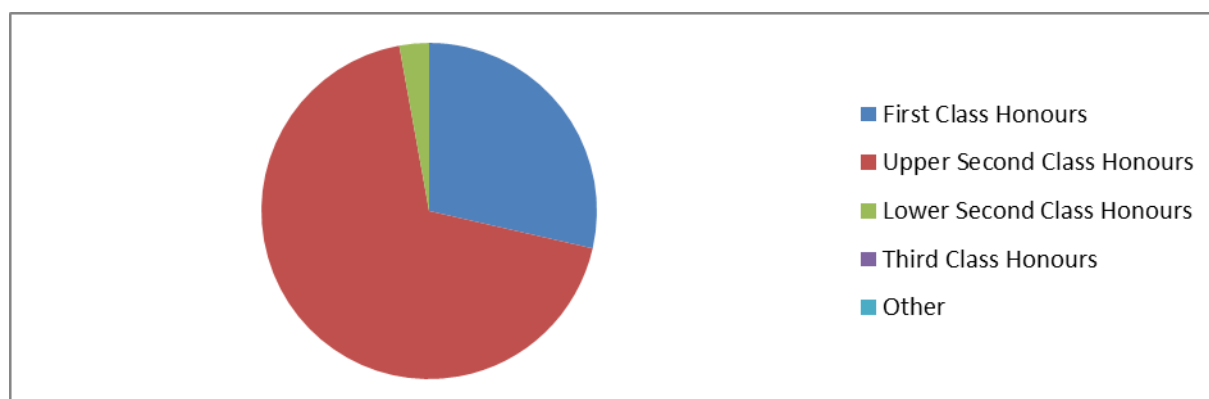
Focusing on the exit data for these two groups of students, information has once again been derived from the University's academic registry and student performance following examination boards and associated resit opportunities. The following figures illustrate the performance of each group:

Figure 1: Academic Performance of the entire cohort (2014/15)

Source: Own University's academic registry

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Figure 2: Academic Performance of the ECCA engaged cohort (2014/15)

Legend:
- First Class Honours
- Upper Second Class Honours
- Lower Second Class Honours
- Third Class Honours
- Other

Source: Own University's academic registry

As may be noted from Figure 1, 65.2% of the entire cohort graduated with a good honours degree (defined as being either a first class honours or upper second class honours degree). A further 24.2% achieved a lower second class honours degree, with a further 10.6% either achieving another exit award of choosing to resist the following year. By comparison Figure 2 illustrates that 97.2% of the student cohort which engaged with ECCAs during their academic studies achieved a good honours degree. A further 2.8% achieved lower second class honours, with no-one receiving either a third class honours degree.

Based on this data, the authors assert that there is a direct and positive correlation between exposure to authentic assessment techniques, and the improved academic performance of students engaged in ECCAs. Whilst there is considerable mileage in extending this analysis across a three to five year period so as to better understand the impact of authentic assessment on student achievement within the School, there is a clear link to be made between the introduction of the School's co-curricular programme and the significant increase in the student achievement rates.

Turning to the School's DHLE results, a similar upward trend is readily identifiable. In 2014, the School's DHLE result was 93.5% (compared with a University average of 93.5%), an increase of 4.3% from the 2013 figure of 89.2% (compared with a University average of 88.8%). For 2012, the School's DHLE result was 86.2%, compared with a University average of 86.6%. The result for 2015 is 98.5%, reinforcing the positive benefits to be gained from widespread student engagement with the co-curricular programme and the impact of social media on the establishment, and maintenance, of a student oriented community.

Whilst there is considerable mileage in extending this analysis across a five year period so as to better understand the impact of authentic assessment on student employability within the School, there is a clear link to be made between the introduction of the School's co-curricular programme and the significant increase in the School's student employability rates. Nevertheless, it is our conclusion, that ECCAs are a vital component in augmenting academic law degree delivery to improve student academic performance, and while the courses might be accredited, they are voluntarily undertaken, and as Henry et al[58] observe, the individual will always ultimately be responsible for their own success.

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[58] Henry.C, Hill.F & Leitch.C, (2015), "Can entrepreneurship be taught? Part II", Education & Training 47(3)

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