

# Multiple choice testing in a level 1 History course

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## Rationale

This assessment technique was introduced for several reasons. The main objective was to improve attendance at lectures at the end of the course, the norm being that attendance declines dramatically around the time that the second and final piece of written assessment is due. Also, in general terms the test is designed to improve lecture attendance throughout the course and to encourage students to review lecture notes and WebCT notes and to develop and encourage a general knowledge of the course and the history of the period.

## Description of the Practice

A short multiple choice class test/examination was introduced to Stirling's first semester introductory module: Kingship and Nationhood: Medieval Scotland, c.1100-1513 (c.140 students). This is the first time that the History Department at Stirling has introduced such an assessment mechanism. Forty multiple choice questions with four options for each were set and the students given 45 minutes to complete the paper. The test was given at the end of this course and was worth 10% of the course assessment. Questions were related specifically to the content of course lectures and were provided by the four lecturers on the course, although half of the questions related to the last third of the course and after the last piece of course work had been submitted.

The four lecturers were asked to provide two multiple choice questions for each of the module lectures in the first two-thirds of the course and six questions from each lecture in the last third. From this (a total of 60 questions) the course coordinator (also one of the lecturers) made a selection of 40 questions. The lecturers were invited to suggest pictorial questions and 15% of the questions were such questions and, on the day of the test, a separate illustration sheets was attached to the question sheet and multiple choice answer form (a boxed form where the correct answer is shaded). Assessment on this course consists of two essays (35% and 50), a small oral element from tutorials (5%) and it was agreed to make the multiple choice test 10% of the total. Although the 10% weighting is small the test was compulsory.

## Implementation

In preparation the compiling of the test itself was time-consuming. However, marking time was substantially cut down with all marking done by the course coordinator using a master film of the correct shaded boxes placed over each test paper. The test papers were anonymously completed with student registration number only appearing, plus each student's individual tutor's name as an extra checking procedure for those who incorrectly recollected their student number (of which there were a few). The accuracy of marking was audited by another member of staff who checked 20% of the scripts.

The students handled the test reasonable well with marks ranging from 10 to 34 out of 40. An analysis of the marks suggests that most students attended the final lectures on the course. Students who required special exam arrangements, due to dyslexia etc, handled the test well. 128 students took the test from a maximum class of 140, the missing students being largely those who have dropped out and a couple who were ill.

The test was implemented satisfactorily. However, it was concluded that a resit/deferred multiple choice exam for ill or absent students would not be practical and that such students will be offered a short essay as an alternative. Planning a multiple choice test for a handful of students would not be a productive use of time.

## **Impact**

The main success story of this new exercise was a dramatic improvement in attendance at lectures in the last third of the course, with attendance on average up 25% on previous years. Meanwhile, feedback from students suggests they found the test hard but fair. This multiple choice test will become embedded in this module for the foreseeable future and the introduction of such an assessed element can now be considered for Stirling's other first and second year modules, where appropriate.