

Verdict on exams: “Could do better.”

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So what's wrong with exams?



Unintended “Learning Outcomes”

Outcome 1: (For most exams): Your ability to switch to writing in an unfamiliar way

Outcome 2: Your ability at speed writing

Outcome 3: (For some exams): Your ability to memorize and recall under time pressure

Outcome 4: Your skill and luck at question spotting

Outcome 5: Your exam technique

Outcome 6: (For some students only): Your ability to shut out your troubles during an imposed three-hour period, however severe they are

Outcome 7: (For some students only): Your faith that you can do exams after all

Outcome 8: Your cultural and educational capital.

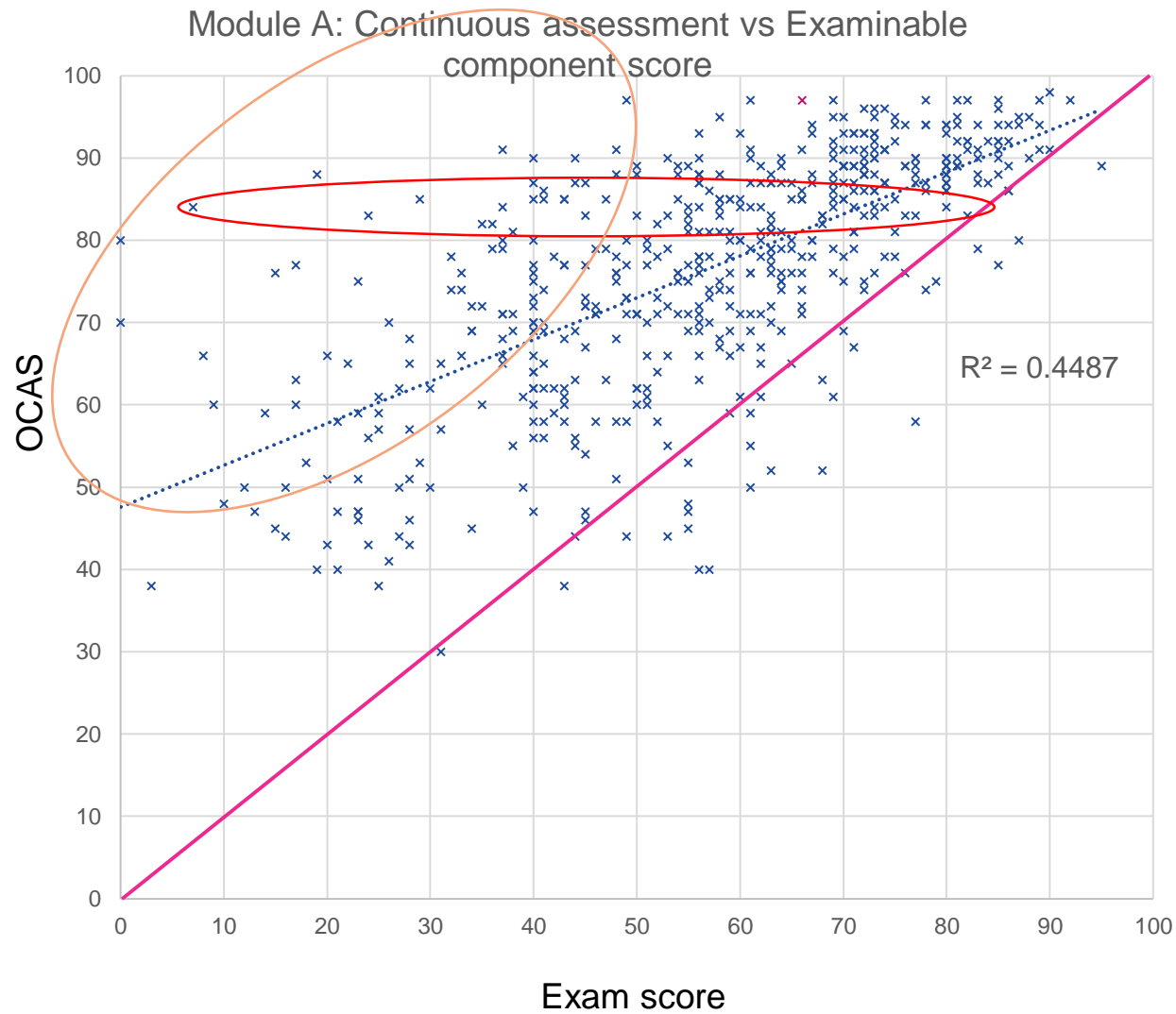
Missed opportunities

1. Set realistic tasks
2. Set rewarding tasks.
3. Exercise and develop self-study skills.
4. Provide useful formative feedback.

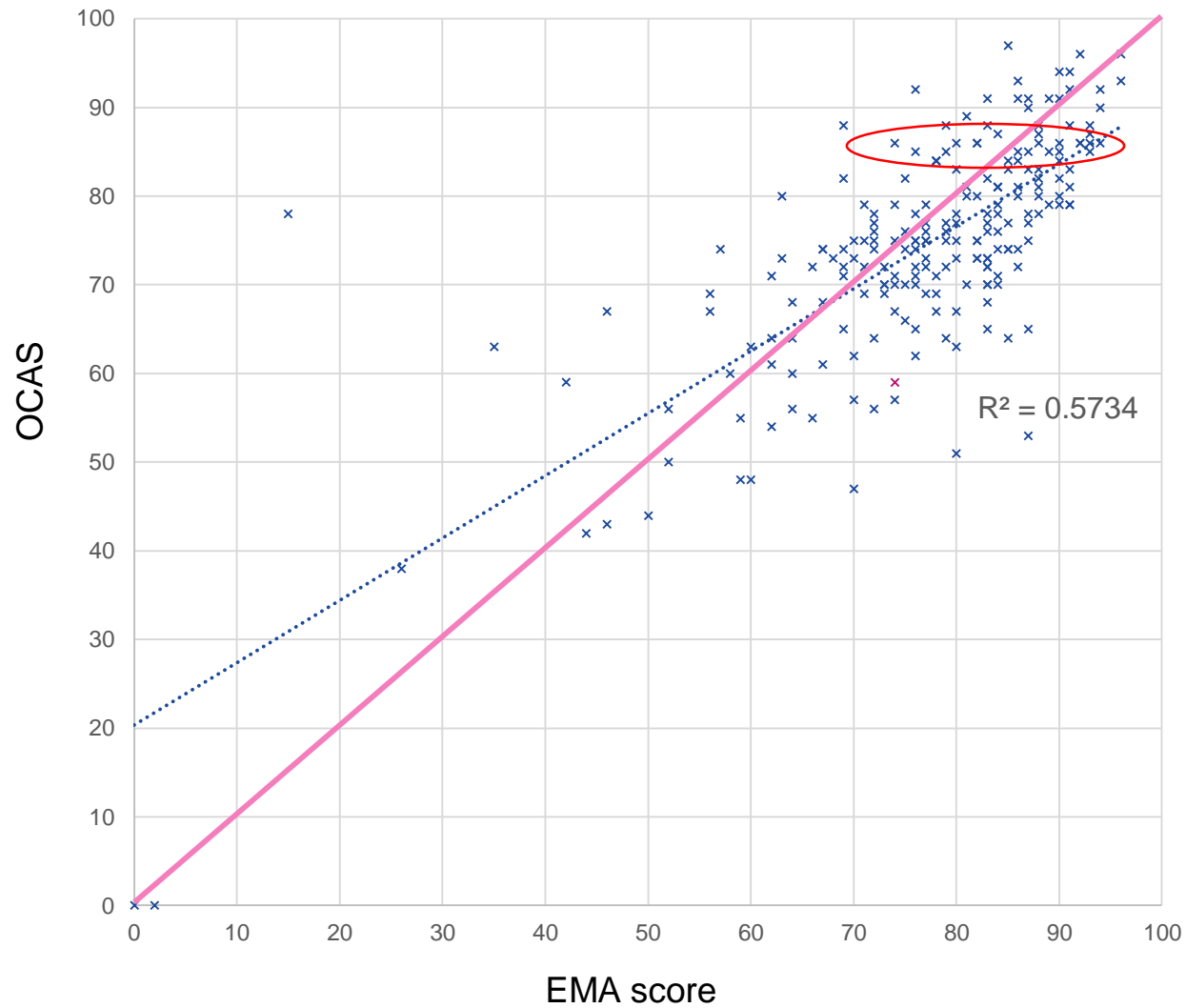
Summary of arguments against exams

- The role of the end-of-module examination is to test rather than to teach, whereas assessment by coursework achieves both outcomes.
- Because of time pressure, examinations do not result in work of academic excellence, whereas assessment by coursework enables students to produce their best work.
- Examinations require students to demonstrate their knowledge simply through writing, whereas assessment by coursework enables them to express themselves in other ways.
- Examination anxiety can affect some students' performance and sometimes their health, whereas assessment by coursework generates less anxiety.
- Students' academic performance is affected by variations in their physical and mental health, so it is fairer to assess them over a longer time than a brief examination period.

The OU context



Module B: Continuous assessment versus EMA score



Alternatives to exams

- collaboration that is similar to that experienced by practitioners or experts in the field
- simulations of role-play or scenarios;
- problem tasks that are like those encountered by practitioners or experts in the field;
- resources (documents, data, etc.) taken specifically from real-world case studies or research;
- tasks that students find meaningful;
- examinations taking place in real-world settings;
- a range of assessment tasks rather than just the ‘traditional’ ones;
- demonstration and use of judgment;
- students being involved in the negotiation of the assessment task;
- a test of how well the student thinks like a practitioner/expert in the field (i.e. ‘in tune’ with the ‘disciplinary mind’).

- meaningful
- aligned to learning outcomes or objectives (which implicitly would be termed as authentic)
- resources taken specially from real world case studies or research.

(Whitelock and Cross, 2012)

Comparison of assessment types against five usefulness criteria (Highly abridged and crudely adapted from Race, 2014)

Assessment	Rating against criteria: Validity (V) Fairness (F) Whodunit? (W) Real world (R) Feedback (Fb)	Advantage	Disadvantage
Traditional exam	V F W R Fb 1 2 5 2 1	High on whodunit. Quick to mark.	Unfair to many. Poor range of tasks. Little feedback.
Short answer exam	V F W R Fb 3 3 5 3 1	Fairer on writing speed. Breadth of knowledge.	Poor on depth of knowledge. Little feedback.
Multiple-choice exam	V F W R Fb 3 3 4/5 3 3/4	Can quickly test a wide range. Can be good where quick decision-making is a LO.	Hard to design well. Element of luck. Emphasises accurate reading of question.

Comparison of assessment types against five usefulness criteria (Highly abridged and crudely adapted from Race, 2014)

Assessment	Rating against criteria: Validity (V) Fairness (F) Whodunit? (W) Real world (R) Feedback (Fb)	Advantage	Disadvantage
Essay	V F W R Fb 2 1 1/2 2 2/3	Rewards ability to argue well. Rewards depth of knowledge.	Marking takes long. Writing style too strong an influence.
Annotated bibliography	V F W R Fb 4 4 4 5 4	Rewards reading around. Breadth and depth.	Highly dependent on information literacy. Google and Wikipedia too tempting.
Report	V F W R Fb 3/4 3 2-4 4 4/5	Avoids “sudden death” Can blend collaborative and individual work.	Strict word limits to prevent too much time spent by student

Comparison of assessment types against five usefulness criteria (Highly abridged and crudely adapted from Race, 2014)

Assessment	Rating against criteria: Validity (V) Fairness (F) Whodunit? (W) Real world (R) Feedback (Fb)	Advantage	Disadvantage
Portfolio of evidence	V F W R Fb 4 3/4 2-4 4 4/5	Wide range of evidence. Reflective learning.	Long to mark. May reward quantity over quality.
Oral exam	V F W R Fb 3/4 2/3 5 4/5 3/4	Excellent for whodunit. Allows probing of responses.	Nervousness may affect student. Difficult to guarantee fairness.
Individual presentation	V F W R Fb 4 2/3 5 4/5 3/4	Excellent for whodunit. Good for depth of learning.	Assessment long. Drift of assessment standard over the day – affects fairness.

Comparison of assessment types against five usefulness criteria (Highly abridged and crudely adapted from Race, 2014)

Assessment	Rating against criteria: Validity (V) Fairness (F) Whodunit? (W) Real world (R) Feedback (Fb)	Advantage	Disadvantage
Poster	V 4 F 3 W 3/4 R 4/5 Fb 4/5	Room for visual and written evidence.	Can be hard to make relative judgments. Can be subjective.
Artefact	V 4 F 2/3 W 4/5 R 4/5 Fb 5	Useful as enduring evidence. Competition can be motivating.	Fairness can be affected by unseen external help. Can be difficult to weight in relation to other assessments.

References

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THANK YOU



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