

The Making Assessment Count Consortium – JISC Benefits Realisation Project

1. Project aims and objectives

Project Aim

The main aim of the project was to derive successful approaches to the take-up and embedding of key outputs from the Making Assessment Count (MAC) project and the e-Reflect system within different institutional contexts and across a range of subject areas.

Specific objectives were to:

- a) Pilot in the current academic year a form of the Making Assessment Count (MAC) process that utilises e-Reflect in at least 3 of the partner institutions
- b) Assess the utility across different institutions and subject areas, of the SOS model for assessment feedback (derived from the MAC project) and the e-Reflect system, in order to identify further opportunities for piloting of MAC within the partner group and to derive a flexible model and toolkit for implementation at the practitioner level
- c) Utilise the expertise of the partner group to 'brainstorm' additional potential uses of the e-Reflect system (e.g. for examination feedback, for the creation of assessments in their own right)
- d) Derive a set of 'Feedback Principles', drawing on the results of the MAC project and the practical expertise and experiences of staff at the partner institutions

Of the objectives above, progress has been made with a, b and c. At the initial CAMEL group meeting (see below) objective d was discussed and it was considered that this was likely to overlap significantly with the work of the HEA SIG on feedback and assessment. Instead the consortium took the decision that it would prefer to try to develop some principles for 'Making Assessment Count'. Although potentially an overlap with the REAP principles there was a strong feeling that the nature of the work being done by the partners could lead to more practical 'principles' and that in the first instance these would best be encapsulated in the practitioner 'toolkit'.

2. What you did and how you did it

The project team have collectively implemented or planned (for academic year 2011/12) pilots of a MAC process at each of the participating institutions. Planning for these was initiated by a meeting of the CAMEL cohort to brainstorm ideas, focussing on how the MAC process developed at Westminster could be used in different contexts and for different purposes. This meeting was followed up by visits of the project director (from the lead institution, Westminster) to each partner. The purpose of these visits was to meet with small groups of academic staff who had already expressed an interest in using MAC via the local project team member.

At these workshop-type meetings the project director explained the MAC process and outlined the possibilities for adaptation derived in part from the brainstorming meeting referred to above. The academic (and other) staff present at these meetings were encouraged to discuss their own ideas for adaptation of the process to suit their context, thus adding to and refining the knowledge base of potential MAC variations. The project director also subsequently gave presentations on the MAC process to wider groups of staff at 4 of the partner institutions (Bedfordshire, City University, London, Reading and UWIC). These were also treated as opportunities to canvas further opinion on the broader utility of MAC.

After the initial CAMEL meeting all members of the project team were given access to a development server running e-Reflect 3.0 (output from Making Assessment Count). This was to enable the project team to try out e-Reflect and to show it to interested parties at their respective institutions. Feedback subsequently gathered by the Project Director was used to refine the software, generating e-Reflect 3.1. This version of e-Reflect is now available to download from the Design Studio pages for the project. In addition Westminster made available to each participating institution a server, running e-Reflect 3.1, for further demonstration to staff at their institution and for use in any pilots.

During the course of the project, the Project Director also made visits to other institutions to demonstrate and discuss the potential of MAC. The institutions visited included New Buckinghamshire University, University of Leeds and Sussex Downs College. The MACC consortium project was also outlined at one of the JISC workshops on the theme of Effective Assessment in a Digital Age (January 2011) and at a recent meeting of the Learning and Teaching Experts Group (July 2011). The consortium also presented its work at the Hertfordshire Blended Learning Conference and is due to present at ALT-C 2011. The work of the consortium has also been accepted as a paper for the Proceedings of ALT 2011^a.

^aKerrigan, MJP, Walker, S, Gamble, M, Lindsay, S, Reader, K, Papaefthimiou, M, Newman-Ford, L, Clements, M and Saunders, G. The Making Assessment Count (MAC) Consortium – Maximising Assessment & Feedback Design by Working Together. (2011). Proceedings of ALT-C *In press*

The project team established a presence for the project within the Design Studio and also within Cloudworks. The Design Studio page can be accessed via the URL <http://www.makingassessmentcount.ac.uk> and from that page there are links out to other resources, guides and to the latest version of the e-Reflect software.

3. Outcomes and lessons learned, including any early indicators of impact and sustainability

3a Outcomes

The pilots of MAC already undertaken or planned are summarised in table 1 below. It should be noted that the work undertaken at Westminster is considered a pilot within the context of the Consortium's work as it represents a very different application of MAC to that delivered in the original Making Assessment Count project.

Institution	MAC Pilot	Status
University of Bedfordshire	International Business students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level	Pilot planned for semester 2 2011/12
City University London	All undergraduate students in Politics Department; strong linkage to personal tutoring; work will be done in Moodle	Pilot through Moodle to start early academic year 2011/12
University of Greenwich	Planned to be used in teacher training for PhD students.	Pilot to start semester 1 academic year 2011/12
University of Reading	Life Sciences undergraduate projects. Will be used in a phased manner to guide students through the preparation stages of their undergraduate project	Pilot to start in academic year 2011/12
UWIC	Pilot completed with 90 undergraduate Sports Science students	Semester 2 2010/11
Westminster	Pilot completed on use of MAC to facilitate learning from and feedback on examinations	Semester 2 2010/11

Table 1 – Actual or planned MAC process pilots within the consortium

At UWIC essentially the same MAC process as used at Westminster in the original Making Assessment Count project has been piloted with 90 first year undergraduate students on the BSc Sports Science programme for an essay assignment. The questionnaire used in the process was designed by the staff at UWIC. Like the questionnaire used at Westminster in the original MAC project, the questions were designed to encourage students to think about what they achieved and how they achieved it. Successive questions prompt the students to indicate whether they fully understood what was required of them, whether they used the assessment criteria and whether the feedback they received was useful. Students were also asked whether they had made a plan for their essay before starting, whether they thought the mark received was the highest they could have achieved and what they plan to do next with the assignment.

A focus group was held with the students post the pilot to get some preliminary idea as to the value of the MAC process to them and to what extent they thought it had or could help them. The students were collectively extremely positive about the process. They all said that they had benefited from the experience of using the MAC model, including the e-reflect questionnaire and blog. When asked how they had benefited, most responded that it had made them think deeply about their own strengths and weaknesses, the ways in which they approached their assessment task, areas for future development and the usefulness of tutor feedback.

At City University London the International Politics department has a well developed face-to-face personal tutorial scheme for students. The scheme allows for 1:1 personal tutorials, but generally the department does not feel that students make sufficient use of the tutorial time made available to them. As a consequence, the department plans to use an adapted form of the MAC process to help link the students' work with the face-to-face tutorial meetings. In the pilot to be undertaken in academic year 2011/12, first year Undergraduate students will complete a questionnaire designed to help them reflect on their first essay-based assignment. As in the MAC model at Westminster, students will subsequently complete a reflective statement about their essay to identify areas for improvement. However, unlike the Westminster model, the staff will not be commenting online on students' reflections. Instead, in the final stage the students will book a face-to face-tutorial using an online scheduler. The student's reflection on their work will inform the tutorial. At City there is a strategic focus on the use of Moodle to support teaching and learning activities. Accordingly, work within the Educational Support Team has built the MAC process into Moodle. The table below outlines how the tools in Moodle will be used to support the MAC process.

Moodle Tool	Process
Moodle Quiz tool	Delivery and collection of operational feedback questionnaire through multiple choice questions and collection of student reflections using the essay question.
Moodle Scheduler	Booking and management of tutorials.
Moodle HTML block	Aggregation and display of the activities and guidance to ensure correct path through the MAC model.
Moodle Gradebook	Online submission, dissemination of grades, subject specific and operational feedback and reflections to tutors and students.

Table 2 – How Moodle will be used at City to facilitate student interaction with a modified MAC process

At the University of Reading the e-Reflect tool will be used at various stages of a year-long research project. Students will complete an e-Reflect questionnaire on the preparation of the literature review for their research project immediately after the submission deadline for that component (early July) and again after the return of the assessed review (early October). Also, students will reflect on their performance at the end of the laboratory work or data collection period (March) and again this will be through completion of an e-Reflect questionnaire. It is also envisaged that the same will happen on submission of the project report (April).

At the University of Westminster this year, the School of Life Sciences have adapted the original MAC process so that it can be used to facilitate feedback on written examinations. The new process is based on the e-Reflect 3.1 tool and comprises of two stages. The first stage requires students to complete a questionnaire on an exam they have just taken. The online questionnaire prompts the student to predict the grade they expect for the exam asking several questions about the way they prepared for and answered the exam paper. The automated e-Reflect report derived from questionnaire completion provides tips on how to improve their future exam performance based on the responses they gave. Students then go on to write a reflection in their learning journal.

The second stage of the process is initiated one month later (once all exam papers have been marked and approved by the exam board) at which point students are provided with an opportunity to see one of their exam papers annotated with written feedback. Students then complete a second e-Reflect questionnaire about their performance comparing the grade they predicted to their actual grade. They are sent a second automated report with suggestions of areas for further reflection after which students complete a second entry in their learning journal which is shared with their personal tutor. The tutor then provides additional advice to the student either online or during a face to face tutorial meeting.

3b Lessons learned and early indicators of impact and sustainability

An indication that MAC has made an impact is that all six institutions have been able to plan or implement pilots in a relatively short period and at a time when the sector is facing significant resource challenges. In 4 cases (Bedfordshire, City University London, Greenwich and Reading) the pilots will not take place until the next academic year. Accordingly any basic evaluation will not be possible until later in the next academic year. It has not been possible to extensively evaluate the two pilots that have been undertaken within the scope of this project. However feedback collected from a student focus group at UWIC is very encouraging (see above). At Westminster to date no feedback has been collected from students on this latest variation of MAC. However anecdotal evidence from academic staff has been more positive than that obtained from staff for the original MAC process, which was focussed on coursework.

Another early indicator of impact is the work undertaken at City to integrate the MAC process into their VLE. This strongly suggests that City is committed to developing a MAC solution that is embedded within the centrally supported system. Indeed, it has become clear from discussions that whilst some of the institutions have or will pilot a MAC process using the standalone e-Reflect 3.1 system, their ultimate goal is to see the tool integrated in some way with their institutional VLE. This has come through very strongly from almost all of the academic staff who have been part of the meetings/workshops at each institution. Allied to this is the difficulty encountered in obtaining support at each institution for local installations of e-Reflect. This led to Westminster hosting installations of e-Reflect for each institution for demonstration and piloting.

It is clearly not that straightforward to engage staff at other institutions in making use of a tool/system that has been developed elsewhere. This is well known and there can be a variety of reasons for this including the need to persuade staff of the value of the change to

them, the difficulty in gaining support internally for the changes and the degree to which the tool/system can be adapted to context. The approach taken here, involving at each university an individual with a cross-institutional role, has certainly helped to engage small groups of staff quite quickly. In the case of City it has also facilitated the inclusion of a MAC process within their centrally supported VLE. Finally, the fact that it has been possible to implement or plan implementations of MAC at each institution adds face value to the view that the original MAC process is one that is adaptable for use in very different contexts. Not only is the consortium seeing use across different subject areas but collectively the pilots are implementing MAC in subtly different ways and for different purposes.

The consortium believes that the toolkit that has grown through the conduct of the project will be of help at the practitioner level. However what will be important in the future for deeper embedding across an individual institution will be how the outcomes of the pilots can be used to impact on institution wide processes and procedures around assessment and feedback.

The consortium has worked very well together but mainly through face to face meetings and conventional email communication. Unfortunately, as a group, the consortium was unable to make effective use of the Cloudworks space. There was simply not enough time for the team to engage outside of the planned face to face meetings. In addition there was insufficient resource to undertake any planned and consistent networking via Cloudworks with the objective of engaging the wider community.

Outputs and deliverables to the wider sector (including pages on the Design Studio)

- New version of the open source version of e-Reflect (version 3.1) enhanced in line with feedback from partner institutions
- Design Studio presence accessible via the URL <http://www.makingassessmentcount.ac.uk>
- Practitioner toolkit accessible via the Design Studio including sections on:
 - Overview of MAC – terms and definitions
 - Examples of MAC processes/ideas for exploiting e-Reflect
 - Downloadable e-Reflect software
 - Guides to using e-Reflect
 - [Guide for editors](#)
 - [Guide for students](#)
 - [Guide for tutors](#)
 - Making Assessment Count YouTube channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/makeassessmentcount?feature=mhum>
- Proceedings of ALT-C *In press* - Kerrigan, MJP, Walker, S, Gamble, M, Lindsay, S, Reader, K, Papaefthimiou, M, Newman-Ford, L, Clements, M and Saunders, G. The Making Assessment Count (MAC) Consortium – Maximising Assessment & Feedback Design by Working Together. (2011).

Budget statement

Overall the project is within budget although more was spent on staffing than anticipated balanced by an underspend against materials and resources.

Budget activity area	Budget	Actual	Variance
Staffing	£3643.04	£4659.08	+£1016.04
CAMEL meeting (to cover travel costs and administrative support at each institution)	£4515	£4000	-£515
Materials and resources	£1820	£1142.80	-£677.20
Total	£9,978.04	£9801.88	-£176.16