



Project Document Cover Sheet

Project Information			
Project Acronym	Making Assessment Count		
Project Title	Making Assessment Count		
Start Date	1 November 2008	End Date	31 October 2010
Lead Institution	University of Westminster		
Project Director	Professor Gunter Saunders, saundeg@wmin.ac.uk		
Project Manager & contact details	Ms Yanna Nedelcheva nedelcy@wmin.ac.uk 02079115803		
Partner Institutions	None		
Project Web URL	https://sites.google.com/a/staff.westminster.ac.uk/mac/		
Programme Name (and number)	Curriculum Delivery		
Programme Manager	Lisa Gray		

Document Name			
Document Title	<i>Interim Report</i>		
Reporting Period	<i>for interim progress reports only</i>		
Author(s) & project role	Professor Gunter Saunders, Project Director,		
Date	February 2010	Filename	Mac_interim_March10_V4
URL	<i>if document is posted on project web site</i>		
Access	<input type="checkbox"/> Project and JISC internal		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General dissemination

Document History		
Version	Date	Comments

Interim Reporting Template

Project Name: *Making Assessment Count, University of Westminster*

Report compiled by: *Professor Gunter Saunders*

With contributions from: *Ms Yanna Nedelcheva, Dr. Mark Kerrigan, Dr. Mark Clements*

Reporting period: *September 09 – February 10*

Section One: Summary

Project Overview

Making Assessment Count (MAC), which completes in autumn 2010, was piloted during 2008-2009 in the School of Biosciences in conjunction with the university's Learning Teaching & Development Centre. A model for feedback at the core of the project engages students in deeper reflection on the comments they receive on coursework assignments. There are emerging plans to adopt the process or aspects of the process in other academic areas at Westminster, currently including Cognitive Science, Integrated Health and Languages as the project moves into its third and final stage.

Key Developments in current reporting period

1. Creation of a scaleable, corporate level process for MAC. The new system integrates with student records (SRS), facilitating the generation of reports for students and ensures that students receive their reports within minutes of completing the online questionnaire part of the process.
2. The linkage with SRS makes it possible to use the online questionnaire part of MAC with any student and any item of coursework with a record on SRS.
3. The new MAC system has been provided for use by the 2009/10 undergraduate cohort in Biosciences (~400 students) and all personal tutors (35 staff). To date over 311 students have used the system collectively generating over 1000 MAC reports.

Deliverables/Outputs

1. Functioning and scaleable Making Assessment Count process linked to student records
2. Revised [Student Guide](#) and support videos to using e-Reflect
3. E-Reflect [Handbook](#) for Staff
4. Conference papers and presentations (see links in section 3 below)
5. Updated project [website](#)
6. Object explaining the MAC process created for the Design Studio
7. Student-developed [website](#) on MAC

Key Achievements

1. Successful (as determined from initial evaluation) roll-out of MAC across the undergraduate provision in Biosciences (now part of the School of Life Sciences)
2. Significant participation from staff in the School during 'roll out' of MAC
3. Integration of 'know-how' from the TWOLER JISC project into the development of MAC with significant support from central computing services
4. Presentations given at numerous UK e-learning events and staff development events helping to raise the profile of the project.

Section Two: Activities and Progress

The main operational objectives for the reporting period were to:

1. Complete the re-development MAC (version 2.0) in light of feedback from the pilot and with the input of central computer services and the TWOLER project team (a JISC project in the Institutional Innovation programme investigating the development and use of Google apps by students).
2. 'Roll-out' MAC across the undergraduate provision in the Biosciences
3. Conduct early, initial evaluation of MAC version 2.0
4. Continue dissemination activities both internally and externally

The project team worked with central computing services over the summer to re-develop MAC creating MAC 2.0. This new version sought to take into account the key suggestions for improvement made by students and staff after the pilot as well developing a more automated process that could easily be scaled across the institution. Thus the new version of MAC is fully integrated with student records and technological approaches derived from TWOLER enable the generation of and return of reports to students within minutes of questionnaire completion.

The integration with student records makes it very easy for any coursework in any subject area across the university to make use of MAC (on the assumption that the same questionnaire used for the Biosciences provision is used). Should a subject area require or desire a different question set then some work would be required in the SQL reporting part of the process. As indicated above the development of MAC 2.0 has made use of know-how and ideas generated through the JISC funded TWOLER project. A diagram of the questionnaire processing part of MAC 2.0 is shown in figure 1.

In September 2009 the project team provided training to staff on the operation of MAC 2.0 and from early November the system went 'live' to all new undergraduate student in Biosciences who were inducted into the process through the level 4 core module Human Physiology and Anatomy. Prior to 'going live' the process was promoted to new students on a weekly basis in order to prepare them for the return of their first piece of marked coursework.

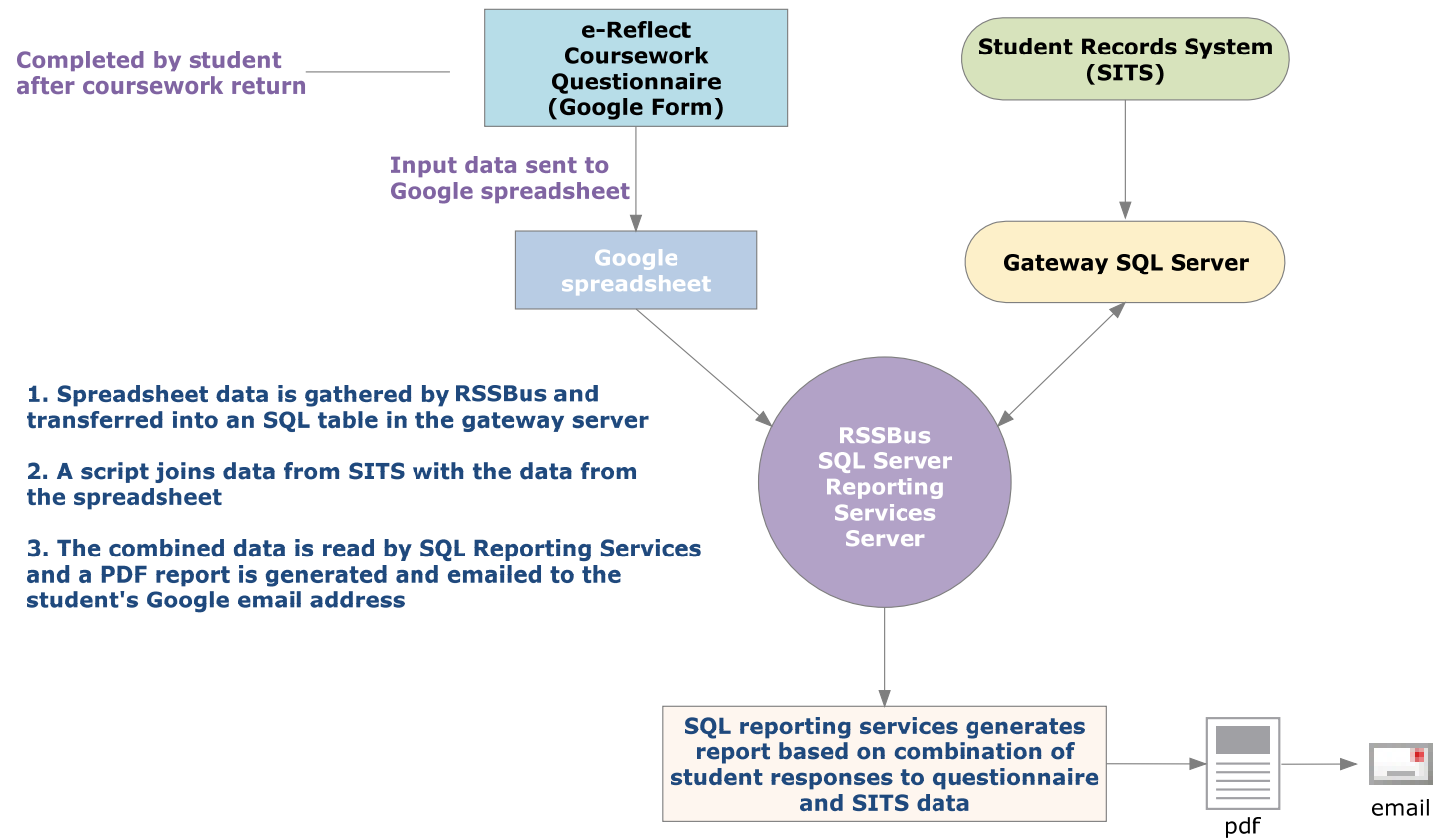
The first student coursework was returned late November and well over 100 students completed a questionnaire around this coursework within the first few days. Between the end of November and end of the calendar year a further 3 courseworks were returned to students and by early January over 311 students had between them completed over 1000 questionnaires leading to the generation of an equivalent number of reports emailed to students individually. Initially there were unexpected problems with the automated emailing of reports to students and for the first item of coursework manual intervention was needed to trigger the emailed report to be sent. However, this was subsequently 'fixed' for the second coursework return and currently students are, as was planned, receiving their reports within minutes of submitting a completed questionnaire. One item of coursework, on the Human Physiology and Anatomy module, included an assessed reflection on the MAC report derived from the coursework (the coursework was a laboratory report worth 25% of the module marks with 5% of that attributable to the quality of the student reflection in their learning journal). A surprisingly high number of students (120 out of 364) did not for some reason complete an entry in their learning journal for that particular coursework. Of the 311

Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology Programme

students who have completed questionnaires a total of 232 went on to complete reflective learning journal entries based around the MAC report derived from the questionnaire. As part of the evaluation to be done the reason for such a high number not completing an e-reflection potentially worth some marks will be investigated. As part of this deeper evaluation we will determine the range and spread of e-reflective cycles completed by individual students, in order that we can try to find out why some students have completed more e-reflect reports than others.

Staff participation has and continues to be a key issue (see preliminary evaluation conducted below). Some staff members 24 have so far made comments on their tutee's learning journals leaving 11 that have not. At this stage of the process we have no way to easily tell how many staff may have given face-to-face feedback to their tutees on their learning journal entries at tutorial meetings. However, 2 staff who have not commented on student blogs have told the project team that they have preferred to read a tutee's blog and then give feedback face-to-face at a tutorial meeting. Whilst, not an expected use of tool, this process does still meet the main objectives of the MAC philosophy.

Early in January we conducted a preliminary evaluation of the operation of MAC 2.0 by questionnaire to students and themes emerging from the responses obtained are presented in section 4 below. Staff feedback has been, at this stage, only via informal one to one or small group meetings. In fact feedback from some staff came immediately after students started receiving their first MAC 2.0 reports and led to amendments being made to some of the automated comments generated on reports. The project team has continued to present on the project at a range of external and internal events and these are detailed in section 6, Communication and Dissemination.



Overview of part of the e-Reflect process for automatic generation of operational feedback to students

Figure1

Section Three: Outputs and Deliverables

Expected Outputs from the Project

For the previous interim report we produced a table of expected types of output and this has been updated (see attached) with an indication of where outputs have already been achieved and to include any new expected outputs.

Expected technical outputs/system integrations

MAC version 1.0 used existing technology (blogs within Blackboard, Google forms). The diagnostic questionnaire that students complete after each coursework in MAC version 1.0 was processed using Excel macros. In MAC version 2.0 the questionnaire is linked to an SQL database and student data from the student records system is integrated with that database using SQL queries, enabling more efficient questionnaire processing and report generation. A diagram detailing the way in which data from the questionnaire is matched to a student record leading to generation and email of a report to the student is shown in figure 1.

Outputs produced in this reporting period

- Functioning MAC version 2.0 process with enhanced questionnaire processing, integrated with student records and scaleable across academic schools
- Student and staff guides to using MAC version 2.0
- Design studio object detailing the MAC version 2 process
- 4 conference papers/presentations (at [ALT-C 2009](#), the ePortfolio 4YF Conference September 2009, Organised by the ECs Leonardo da Vinci Programme (<http://scas.acad.bg/epconference/>), the [Ulster E-learning Conference](#) and the JISC Experts Group)

An unexpected output at this stage is the 'idea' to make use of the data collected via student questionnaires to generate reports for module and course leaders, which would amount almost to 'real time' feedback on the assessments provided for students. These reports would essentially provide an opportunity for course teams to act on feedback from students about assessments within the academic year in which the student feedback was received. The project team are due to submit (by April 1) a second stage bid for funding to the Biosciences subject centre to take this aspect further.

Section Four: Evaluation

The project team has largely kept up with the detailed evaluation plan but the bulk of this reporting period has been focussed on developing version 2.0 of the MAC system and on implementing the system across the undergraduate degree in Biosciences. However, we have collected baseline data from the 09/10 undergraduate Biosciences intake via questionnaire on their previous experiences (pre-university) of assessment and feedback. Over 103 questionnaires were completed and preliminary analysis suggests that general student perception of assessment and feedback is similar between pre-university and university. Interestingly, students recognised that less assessment guidance is provided at University and they do not have the opportunity to submit drafts of work prior to the assessment deadline. In addition we were able to get 40 students to respond to an online questionnaire in early January to provide some initial feel for students' perceptions of the MAC 2.0 process. Out of the 40 students 4 gave an overall negative view of MAC with specific comments including:

- Time consuming
- Complete waste of time

Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology Programme

- Report revealed nothing new
- Didn't understand the report

The remainder all gave positive responses to the questions posed on the evaluation questionnaire and as a group clearly could see the value of MAC. Themes that emerged from this group included a clear understanding of the potential link between MAC and improvement. Specific comments that appeared commonly included high praise for the value of certain components of the report such as the graphical representation of performance over time and the advice on how many hours should have been spent on completing the coursework. However, students from both groups highlighted the importance of tutors responding in a timely fashion to their reflective learning journal entries.

Our next major evaluation task as detailed in the evaluation plan (April – May 2010) will be to answer the question: **How did the wider implementation of MAC in Biosciences go? What other Schools have taken up the idea? What has been achieved in Biosciences and in other Schools?**

The project team have drawn up the following outline implementation plan for the next phase of the evaluation:

Task	Methodology	By when	Lead and Notes
Baseline data on new students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire to determine previous experience of feedback 	Questionnaire done – analysis to be completed and written up	MK
Collect student data on use of MAC in current period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary questionnaire already completed online • Additional questionnaire to be done – use the same questionnaire as we used for the pilot? Will this be done in class? • Student focus groups 	Now, and then again before Easter break? Is that feasible and does it make sense to do it twice? How many courseworks do they still have to take through eReflect?	MC– Mark has circulated questions used last time. Can we feed back to him any suggested changes/additions
Collect initial overall staff views of MAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire? • Follow up with individual interviews 	Easter	TEAM
Find out how staff who engaged managed their involvement (e.g. how did they manage commenting on blogs, how did they use eReflect in tutorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with individual/groups of staff 	Easter	GS/YN

meetings?			
Analysis of learning journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and summarise • Categorise on thematic basis 	Easter	GS

Section Five: Outcomes and Lessons Learned

A significant outcome to date has been the establishment of a real difference in perceptions between students and staff regarding the use of feedback. This was established in the pilot phase where students said they both read and valued their tutors' comments whilst teaching staff felt there was little evidence that students acted on the advice given, representing a poor return on the time and effort expended. We have still to follow up and explore this difference with the current new cohort of students (and potentially with last year's pilot group) but it is interesting that a potentially significant driver behind the development of MAC (staff perception that students do not read their feedback) may not be 'real' for a significant proportion of students. However, although more students than we thought do seem to read their feedback evidence the project has gathered suggest that they find it difficult to contextualise and use the feedback strategically (this came out of the student focus group). This outcome has already made staff think about whether the feedback they give is appropriate (particularly when a proforma is used). An unanticipated outcome therefore is that staff have started to change the way they give feedback and now try to include a few suggested action points to help students identify how to improve their future performance.

It seems reasonably clear from the feedback we have obtained so far that the MAC reports can also help some students to use their feedback in a more structured way. In addition anecdotally (at present) the project team have gained the impression that some students see the MAC reports as something of significance and importance that they can keep and show to others (not necessarily just their tutors). On the other hand it is clear that some students (we currently believe a minority) see the reports as trivial and irrelevant. Although we are at a relatively early stage of evaluation it is tempting even now to suggest that these two extremes may derive from students who have been graded at opposite ends of the spectrum of the mark range with the poorly graded students more often not finding the process as beneficial as we would have hoped. It could well emerge that MAC is of little benefit to students who are performing very badly unless the process is able to lead them to productive face-to-face meetings with tutor and/or assessor. The project team will endeavour to collect evidence to support (or otherwise) this emerging assumption through the evaluation to be done.

Section Six: Communication and Dissemination Activities

The project team have in the current reporting period presented at 3 external conferences, (at [ALT-C 2009](#), ePortfolio 4YF Conference September 2009, Organised by the ECs Leonardo da Vinci Programme (<http://scas.acad.bg/epconference/>) and the [Ulster E-learning Conference](#)). This builds on the 3 conferences in the last reporting period. We feel that the presentations we are doing at conferences (and at events organised by the JISC and HEA e.g. we presented at the JISC Experts in this reporting period) are proving most effective at disseminating the existence, goals and initial progress with the Making Assessment Count project. For example later in February we are presenting at a staff development conference at Middlesex University and this has arisen directly from one of the external presentations we have previously given (a Pro-Vice Chancellor at Middlesex actually attended a presentation and reported back to their e-learning director). Middlesex are planning a

strategic development around e-feedback and are interested in ensuring that the principles of Making Assessment Count are fully considered in their planning. In the same way the delivery workshops at the University of Ulster arose via the profile raised through giving presentations at other conferences.

We have continued to maintain the project website and a blog but have no statistics to show the extent to which these are an effective means of 'real' dissemination. Our feeling is that personal contact at conferences and events is proving to be the best method of dissemination with the website (and blog) useful resources to which to refer interested parties prior to any subsequent follow up meetings.

In a similar manner the project team have continued to vigorously promote the Making Assessment Count project internally at Westminster with presentations (for example the project team recently delivered the first in a new series of learning & teaching seminars at Westminster streamed live both internally and externally and also presented at the October meeting of the institutions' Learning Teaching & Student Support Committee). In addition shorter updates to groups of staff at meetings of School Learning Teaching & Quality Committees have been made.

Section Seven: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

Our aim has always been to consistently have all students and staff participating in the project. Although to date student participation and staff participation has been good the project team has some concern that students who have a negative view of MAC (which we believe from preliminary evaluation to be a minority) could have a disproportionate influence on the sustainability of the approach within the Biosciences provision. The effect could be particularly significant if indeed it is the case that the poorly performing students are in the main the ones that have difficulty seeing the benefit of MAC. Clearly a major aim of all Schools is to help the poorer performing students (at the same time as enhancing the development of students who do well from the outset.

It is too early to say how we address this, not new risk, but potentially unexpected effect of a subset of students. The more complete evaluation of the roll-out which is planned over the next few months, if favourable, will be an important tool to convince staff of the desirability of sustaining the system for the majority of students. It may also be sensible in the future to treat students with low marks slightly differently through the MAC process.



There have been no 'big' changes to the original project plan. However a significant change in the implementation of the plan has seen the nature of the technology driving the questionnaire and report part of MAC change dramatically. At the outset of the project it had not been envisaged that the process would become so integrated with corporate systems so quickly. However, through the link with the TWOLER JISC project it has been possible to put in place a quite substantial part of the technical infrastructure required for any School in the university to, for example, make use of the information on the student record system to facilitate the generation of MAC reports.

Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology Programme

A further opportunity that has arisen has already been highlighted in section 3. The possibility of making use of the data collected via student questionnaires to generate reports for module and course leaders is an exciting one which we believe could change the way in which student feedback on the conduct of a course from their perspective is monitored. A proposal has currently just passed the first filter for HEA funding.

Section Eight: Collaboration and Support

We have seen the programme manager at programme meetings (both specific to the Delivery programme and also at a joint meeting of the Delivery and Design projects) and other related JISC meetings (e.g. the Experts group). These face-to-face encounters have provided ample opportunity to discuss any issues associated with the progress on and management of the project. We have also had extensive feedback and support from the programme manager and support team on our first interim report. We would hope that through contributing at these meetings we would have, through exchange of ideas and synthesis of project outputs, been able in some small way to input into discussions for subsequent programme ideas.

We have previously asked for help with our evaluation work and had planned a meeting with the external experts provided to us specifically to discuss ways of analysing qualitative information. However, we have simply not had the time to take up the offer. We will in the next few months seek to address this as we move in to the final evaluation phase and will especially be seeking some help and advice around analysis of student learning journals. We are in the process of completing a case study around the project for a JISC publication on e-assessment/feedback. We are working with Ros Smith and the case study will include a video scheduled for filming on the 10th March 2010.

We like our cluster group a lot. As stated in our first interim report the cluster group, and the critical friend, provide plenty of scope for external 'sounding out' in relation to our progress and next steps. With the input of the programme manager/support team and critical friend/cluster group we have not been short of positive encouragement, ideas and information about what is going on of relevance elsewhere.

JISC also offer a wide range of other opportunities for us to find out more about what is happening (e.g. the illuminate series of seminars & face-to-face seminars). However, finding the time for all of the opportunities made available to us is difficult and at times the number of emails we receive inviting us to attend one event or another seems 'overpowering'. We endeavour to attend as many as possible and ask for resources from meetings we can not attend

Section Nine: Financial Statement

Total Grant	£200,000	Duration of project	2 years
Reporting Period	1 September 2009 – 28 February 2010		

Budget Headings	Total budget allocated	Expenditure this reporting period	Total expenditure to date	Further information
Staff				
Travel & Subsistence	15000	1648	4338	
Equipment	2500	129	3691	
Dissemination activities	17000	2476	4313	
Evaluation activities	5000	0	0	
Other (please specify)	10000	0	0	

Checklist:

Before you return this report:

- Ensure that your project webpage on the JISC site is up to date and contains the correct information. Attach details of any required amendments to this report. Project webpages can be found from: www.jisc.ac.uk/curriculumdelivery
- If there have been any changes to the original project plan and/or work packages, ensure that amended copies of the relevant sections of your project plan are attached to this report.
- Identify and name any areas within this report that you'd like removed before the report is made public (*see below)

***Please note** the interim reports will be made available on the JISC website and on the Circle site with the budgetary information removed. We recognise that projects may occasionally address very sensitive issues. We would like you to present as full a picture in this report as you can as the lessons you learn are valuable to us. We assure you that any issues you identify as confidential are removed before the report is made public. Where such issues do represent valuable lessons for the community we will involve you in further discussion as to how they could be passed on without identifying institutions or individuals.