



# *From ghost-writing to learner engagement in writing assessment: How can an open book exam help?*

Eddie Cowling



Peter Holt



# Outline of today's talk

- The challenges we faced and the alternative we wanted
- The OBE: mechanisms and cycle and why is it different?
- York St. John adoption and research
- University of York adoption and research
- Limitations (and how to counteract them)

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# YSJ context and challenges

- Typical pre-sessional programmes offered
- Previously employed take-home essay (& short timed-writing)
- Increasingly frustrated by ghost-writing, online translation, copy and pasting...
- ...and lack of engagement

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Magazine

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By Andrew Bomford  
BBC Radio 4's PM programme

12 May 2016 | Magazine



Most students are happy to work hard, try their best and accept the consequences. But there are a host of commercial essay writers who are prepared to help those who can't be bothered.

Marek Jozek is the pseudonym he's currently using.

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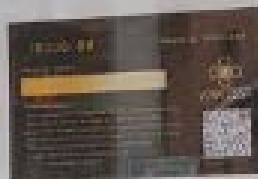
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# What were we looking for?

- Secure assessment: Reduction in time dealing with academic misconduct cases & confidence in ownership
- Valid and reliable approach to assessing writing
- Authenticity in terms of typical 1<sup>st</sup> year writing assignments
- Integrative reading into writing task which merges learning with assessment
- Positive washback on learning in terms of writing skills and increased engagement with the source texts used



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# Addressing the problem of outside assistance in pre-sessional writing assessments



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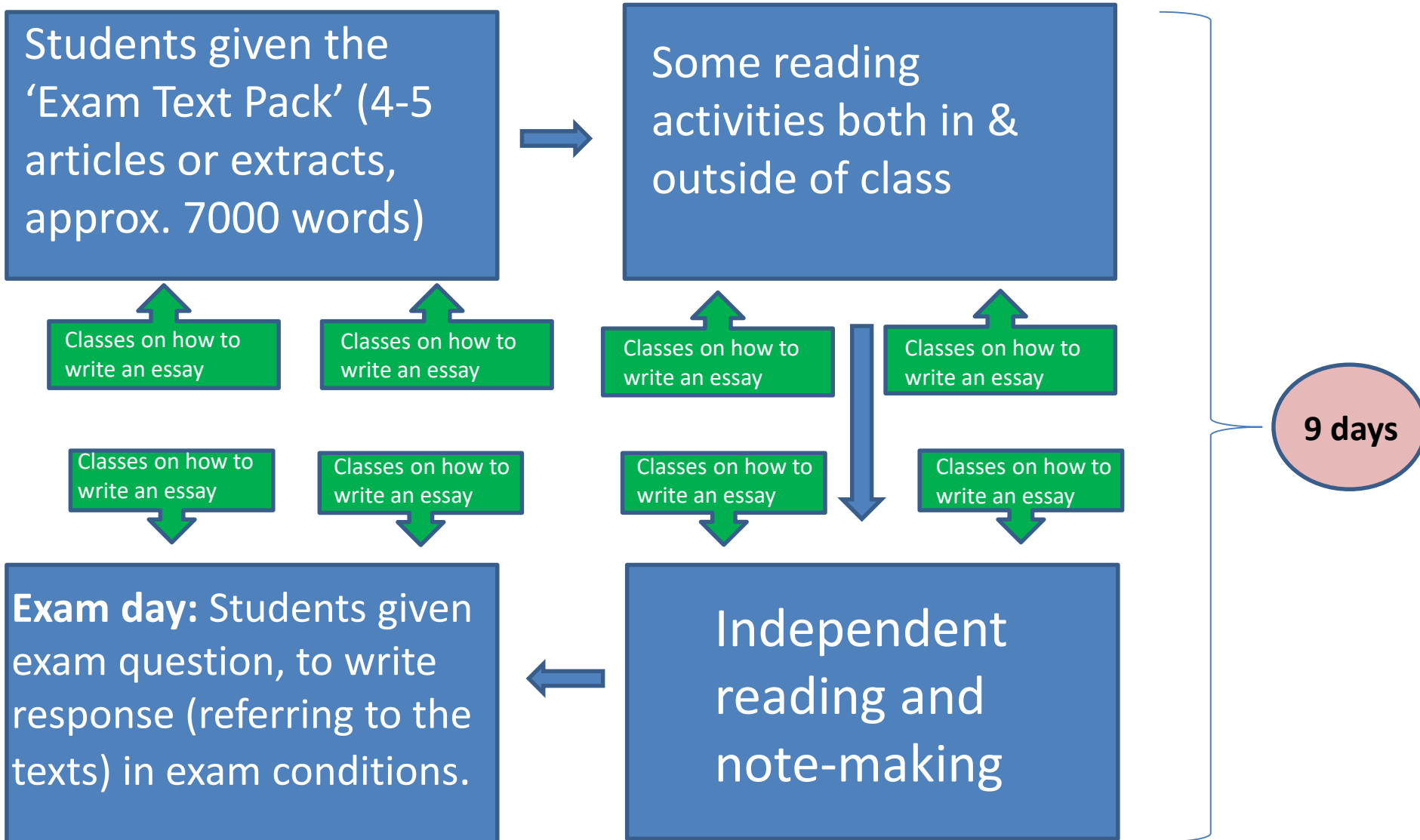
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### ABSTRACT

Reading-into-writing assessments on pre-sessional language programmes typically employ either a take-home essay format with a substantial reading component or an exam-based writing task with a reading component of perhaps only one or two pages. While both approaches reflect a welcome trend towards more integrative models of validity for the assessment of academic writing, their usefulness may nevertheless be undermined by their task design. The apparent recent increase in the activity of ghost writers, often facilitated by various technological means, can cast sufficient doubt over the authorship of take-home essays to invalidate the assessment. The exam-based task, on the other hand, may suffer from construct under-representation (Messick, 1996: 6) since its limited reading component requires little or no expeditious reading (Weir and Urquhart, 1998: 98–100) of the longer texts commonly associated with university study. This article describes a response to these validity issues in the form of an open-book-exam, concluding that the processing of longer texts outside the exam room combined with the security of a written response under exam conditions can reduce the time spent on dealing with plagiarism cases arising from outside assistance while at the same time demonstrating some positive washback on learning (Messick, 1996: 6) in terms of increased engagement with the source texts used.

# *The OBE cycle: one iteration*



# Post-OBE research

- Research exploring impact of the task design on:
  - Learning behaviour
  - Levels of motivation inside and outside of class
- 117 students completed questionnaires
- Semi-structured interviews with 13 students
- Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 9 tutors



## ***Questionnaire and interviews results***

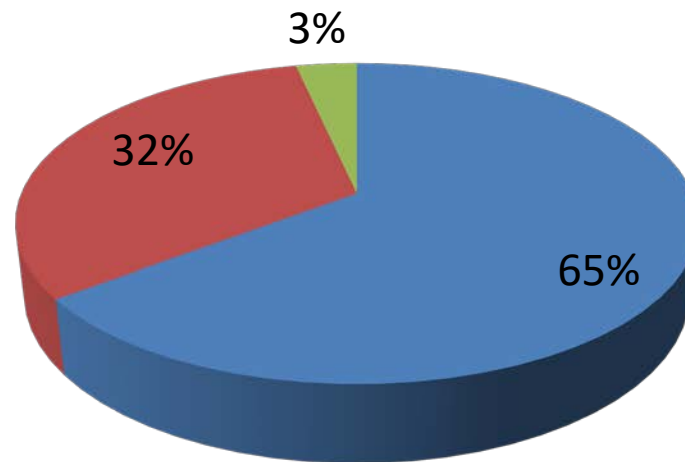
# Washback on test takers' learning behaviour:

## Motivation to engage with the texts

*You didn't know the question before the exam. How did this affect your motivation to read the texts before the exam?*

### Motivation to read texts with exam question unknown

- Read most/all of the texts to get prepared
- Read to get a general idea of the content, & then waited for the exam to see the question
- I wasn't very motivated to read the texts. Instead I waited for the exam to see the question



# Washback on test takers' learning behaviour: Motivation to read

18 The most encouraging findings come from school-based studies, especially those focusing on PES curriculum programs. While a wide range of physical activities seem able to offer valuable environments for social development, school-based programs have a number of advantages, such as access to nearly all children, fewer external pressures to emphasize outcome and competition, and the ability to integrate social education with the similar teaching across the school curriculum (Shields, 1995). Intervention studies have produced generally positive results, including improvements in moral reasoning, fair play and sportspersonship, and personal responsibility (Ewing et al, 2002). It also seems that the most promising contexts for developing social skills and values are those mediated by suitably trained teachers and coaches who focus on situations that arise naturally through activities, by asking questions of students and by modelling appropriate responses through their own behavior.

19 Of related concern is the issue of social inclusion and exclusion. Combating social exclusion, or the factors resulting in people being excluded from the normal exchanges, practices and rights of modern society, has become a focus of attention for governments and nongovernment organizations in recent years. Mickelwright (2004) has argued that PES not only reflects but can also contribute to some groups' social exclusion. However, positive experiences do seem to have the potential to, at least, contribute to the process of inclusion by bringing individuals from a variety of social and economic background together in a shared interest, offering a sense of belonging to a team or a club, providing opportunities for the development of valued capabilities and competencies, and developing social networks, community cohesion, and civic pride (Bailey, 2004).

explain

social



Economics, analysed the finances of one public high school in the Pacific Northwest, she and her colleagues found that the school was spending \$328 a student for math instruction and more than four times that much for cheerleading—\$1,348 a cheerleader. "And it is not even a school in a district that prioritizes cheerleading," Roza wrote. "In fact, this district's strategic plan" has for the past three years claimed that math was the primary focus."

"Many sports and other electives tend to have lower student-to-teacher ratios than math and reading classes, which drives up the cost. And contrary to what most people think, ticket and concession sales do not begin to cover the cost of sports in the vast majority of high schools (or colleges).

"Many of the costs are insidious, Roza has found, "buried in unidentifiable places." For example, when teacher-coaches travel for game days, schools need to hire substitute teachers. They also need to pay for buses for the team, the band, and the cheerleaders, not to mention meals and hotels on the road. For home games, schools generally cover the cost of hiring officials, providing security, painting the lines on the field, and cleaning up afterward. "Logistics are a big challenge," says Jared Bigham, until recently the supervising principal of two schools in Copperhill, Tennessee, and a former teacher, coach, and player. "Even though the coaches are in charge of the budgets, I still have to oversee them and approve each expenditure. You're looking at 10 different budgets you have to manage."

"The kind of constant, low-level distraction may be the greatest cost of all. During football season in particular, the focus of American principals, teachers, and students shifts inexorably away from academics. Sure, high-school football players spend long, exhausting hours practicing (and according to one study, about 15 percent experience a brain injury each season), but the commitment extends to the rest of the community from late-night band practices to elaborate pep rallies to meetings with parents. Athletics even dictate the time that school starts each day: despite research showing that later start times improve student performance, many high schools begin before 8 a.m., partly to reserve afternoon daylight hours for sports practice.

"American principals, unlike the vast majority of principals around the world, make many hiring decisions with their sports teams in mind—a calculus that does not always end well for students. "Every school in the entire country has done this," Marcia Gregorio, a veteran teacher in rural Pennsylvania, told me. "You hire a teacher, and you sometimes lower the standards because you need a coach."

decrease the standards to employ teacher and to employ better sports coaches.

One especially relevant set of findings, in this regard, relates to the development of perceived physical competence. It has been suggested that self-esteem is influenced by an individual's perceptions of competence or adequacy to achieve, and that it is also worth considering the growing interest in the relationship between PES and students' general attitudes toward school (Marsh and Kleitman, 2003). The evidence supporting such claims is limited and is mostly based on small-scale studies or anecdotal evidence. However, some studies report generally positive outcomes in terms of pupil attendance following the introduction of PES schemes, and there is evidence from studies of pupils at risk of exclusion from school that an increase in the availability of PES programs would make the school experience more attractive (Fejgin, 2001).

On the theme of the relationship between PES and attitudes to school, it ought to be acknowledged that not all pupils enjoy such activities, at least when presented in certain ways. For example, Fuchs et al (1988) argued that many girls acquire a progressive disillusionment with certain aspects of PES and totally disengage from participation as they move through secondary schooling. So it would be misleading to suggest that PES will necessarily contribute toward positive attitudes to school in all pupils as inappropriate provision might actually increase disaffection and truancy. More positively, though, there is a great deal of research showing that when PES activities are presented in attractive and relevant ways to girls, they can enjoy participation as much as boys (Sabo et al, 2004).

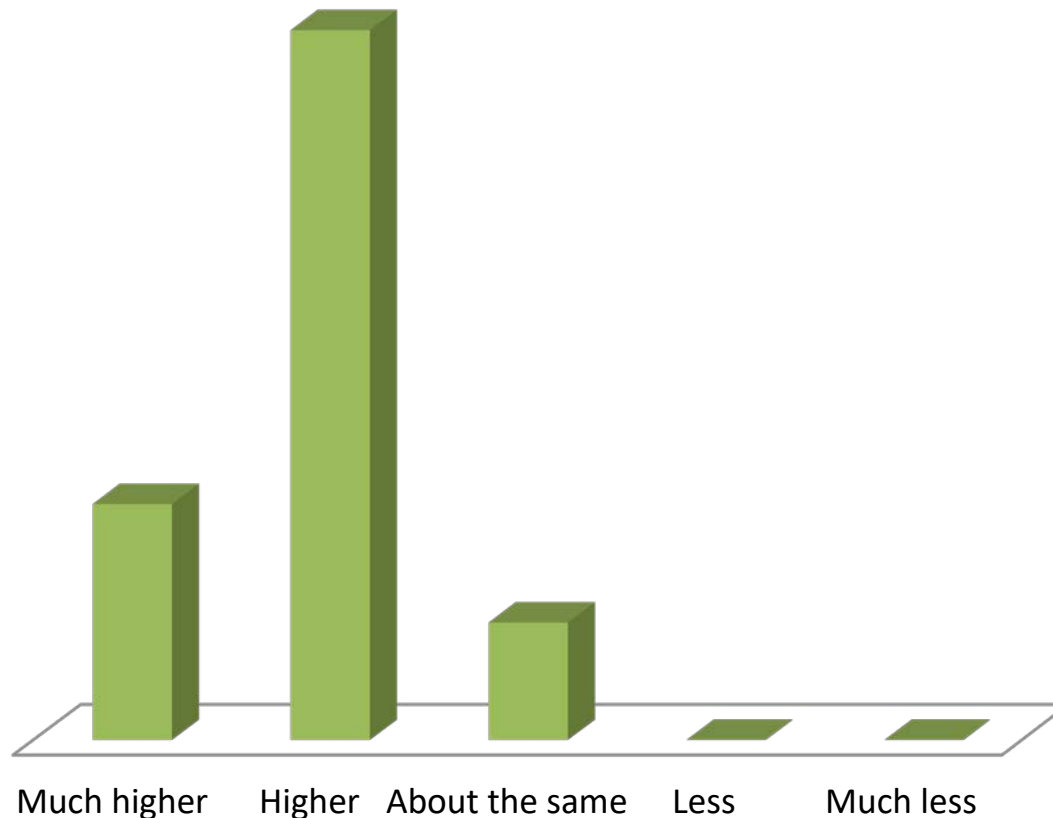
### Social development

The idea that PES positively affects young people's social development and prosocial behaviour goes back many years. PES settings are considered an appealing context because both natural and contrived social interactions frequently emerge and because the public nature of participation usually makes both socially appropriate and inappropriate behaviours evident (Miller et al, 1997).

The research literature on the relationship between PES and social development is equivocal. It does not seem to be the case that prosocial behaviour necessarily improves as a result of engagement, and there is evidence that in some circumstances behaviour actually worsens (Beller and Stoll, 1999). However, numerous studies have demonstrated that appropriately structured and presented activities can contribute to the development of prosocial behaviour and can even combat antisocial and criminal behaviour in youth.

# Washback on test takers' learning behaviour: Student motivation in class

*How does the OBE compare to the take-home essay in terms of student motivation in class?*



# Washback on test takers' learning behaviour: Student motivation in class

*“Students were generally more engaged in class. Most seemed acutely aware that the writing and reading skills sessions would directly impact their performance in the exam”*

(Tutor)

# Washback on test takers' learning behaviour: Predicting the Q and organising the content

*Did you try and predict the question?*

**Yes: 91%**

**No: 9%**





# Washback on test takers' learning behaviour: Predicting the Q and organising the content

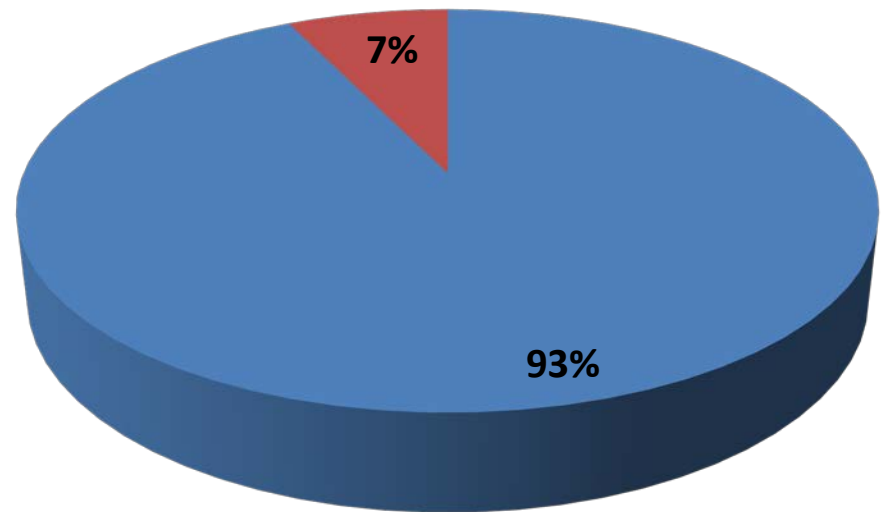
*Did you try and predict the question?*

**Yes: 91%**

**No: 9%**

Organised the contents of the text, according to predicted question(s)?

■ Yes ■ No





## Text 2: Evidence on physical education and sport in schools: key findings.

UK Government Department for Education (2013)

### Introduction

This summary reports domestic and international evidence on physical education (PE) and sport in primary and secondary schools. The majority of the statistics are taken from the most recent PE and Sport Survey (Quick et al., 2010), which was commissioned by the Department for Education (the then Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF), and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's Taking Part survey (DCMS, 2013).

### Key findings

#### Participation in PE and out of hours sport

- The most recent PE and Sport Survey found that across Years 1-13, 55% of pupils participated in at least three hours of PE and out of hours school sport.
- The percentage of pupils taking part in at least three hours of PE and out of hours school sport increased across primary school and decreased across secondary school.
- The Tellus4 survey found that 21% of pupils (in Years 6, 8 and 10) said they did something active every day during lesson time, whilst 74% said they were active some/most days, and 5% said they were never active during lesson time.
- The Taking Part Survey found that 82.5% of 5-10 year olds did sport outside school and 94.7% of 11-15 year olds did sport in or outside school over the previous four week period: these figures have remained steady since 2008/09 with no significant changes.
- Over the previous week, 76.0% of 5-10 year olds participated in sport outside school and 94.4% of 11-15 year olds did sport in or outside school: there has been no significant difference for 5-10 year olds since 2008/09, however there has been a significant increase in participation for 11-15 year olds.

#### Participation in PE and sport by pupil characteristics

The PE and Sport Survey found that:

- Schools where a high percentage of pupils took part in three or more hours of PE and out of hours school sport were more likely to be categorised as having low numbers of pupils on free school meals (FSM).
- Schools in deprived areas were over-represented amongst the lowest performing schools in terms of their participation in PE and out of hours school sport.
- Schools achieving the lowest levels of participation in three hours of PE and out of hours school sport tended to have a relatively high proportion of children from an ethnic minority background and pupils with special educational needs (SEN).

- Primary school pupils were more likely to take part in intra-school and inter-school sport competitions as they move up the school; however, secondary pupils were less likely to take part as they got older.
- Boys were more likely than girls to take part in intra-school and inter-school sports competitions regularly. The difference in boys' and girls' participation increased as they moved up the school.
- Almost all schools (99%) held at least one sports day or equivalent event during the academic year in 2009/10.

#### Pupil attitudes to PE and sport

- In 2006, analysis of LSYPE showed that 24% of pupils in Year 9 named PE, games or sport as their favourite subject. This was the most popular subject ahead of art, which 16% of pupils said was their favourite subject. More recently, a survey of pupils in Years 7-11 conducted by researchers at the University of Manchester confirmed these findings, stating that pupils' favourite subject was PE (33%), followed by art (20%) and English (8%).
- Reasons cited by 6-11 year olds for not enjoying school sport or exercise included: beliefs that their physique was not suited to sport, embarrassment at not being good enough and letting the team down, frustration at not understanding the rules, and boredom.
- Bad weather and wanting to spend time doing other things such as seeing friends, playing computer games or watching television were common reasons for not taking part in physical activity after school.
- Fun and enjoyment have been reported as the main reasons that pupils take part in physical activity. Being with friends and the sense of belonging to a team and achieving also encourages pupils to take part.
- Gorely et al. (2011) highlighted that girls' participation in PE and sport declines over time. They identified suggestions for encouraging girls to be more active: having a genuine choice of activities, having girls-only sessions, including more friendly competition and fun, ensuring teachers are positive/encouraging, changing boys' attitudes to girls in sport, and increasing girls' confidence.
- SPEAR's (2011) evaluation of the Change 4 Life School Sports Club programme concluded that greater targeting of the programme at 'non sporty' pupils has the potential to more than double the reach of the impact of the programme.

#### Benefits of PE and sport

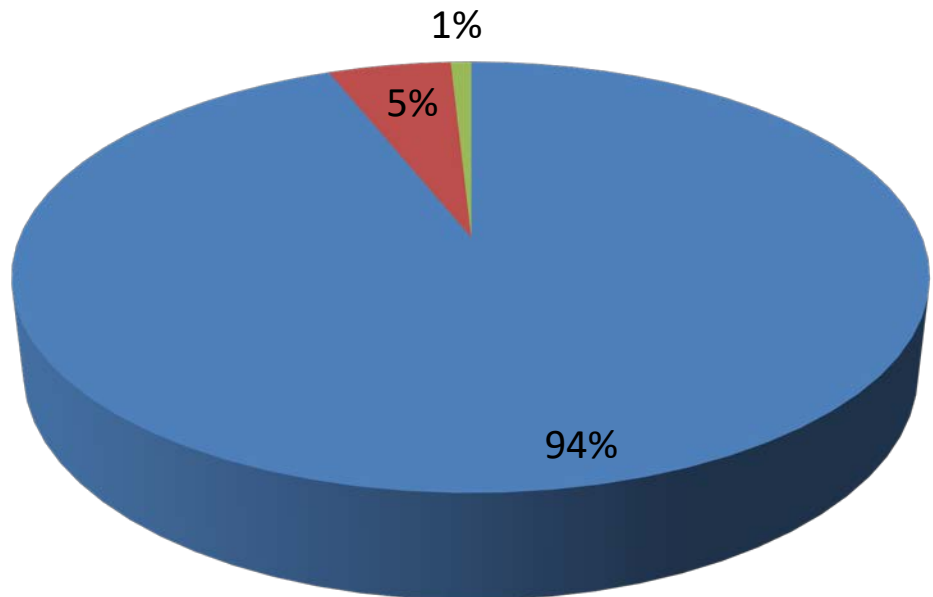
- Physical benefits of physical activity in childhood include greater bone strength and positive movement skill development. There is also evidence that physical activity is linked to better cognitive functioning.
- There is evidence that physical activity has a positive effect on mental health in children, including reducing anxiety and depression and improving mood. However, there is some evidence that for pupils who do not enjoy physical activity it can have a negative impact on self-esteem and mood.

- Therefore, students *are* reading for purpose...
- ...and the more they read, the better they will be at predicting the question(s)

# Features of task design: Phraseology - 'Exam Text Pack'

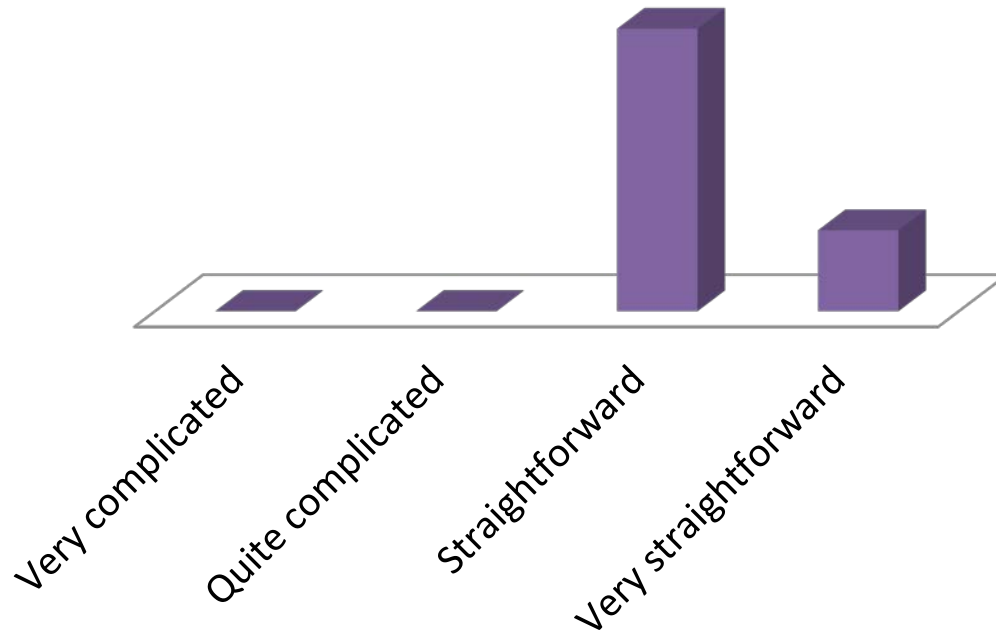
What effect did the title 'ETP' on the cover of the text booklet have on you?

- It told me this was a writing exam & motivated me to study
- It made little or no difference to me
- I didn't particularly notice the title of the booklet



# Features of task design: Administration of the OBE

**Tutors' questionnaire:** How would you describe the administration procedure for the OBE?



# Features of task design:

## Understanding the instructions and procedure

- 98% of S respondents said they understood the instructions well, or that they understood the instructions following clarification from their tutor.
- Neither students nor tutors mentioned this as a problem during the interviews
- But...practice cycle helped here

# University of York: OBE on a Foundation programme

- 10 week module. 4 hrs input per week
- Same challenges as discussed, same motivations to re-design
- Both formative and summative cycle
- Qualitative data collected with students, tutors and coordinator
- Semi-structured interviews with 15 students

# UoY interview data: emerging themes



**Motivation**

**Independent study & time management**

**Benefits of integrative reading**

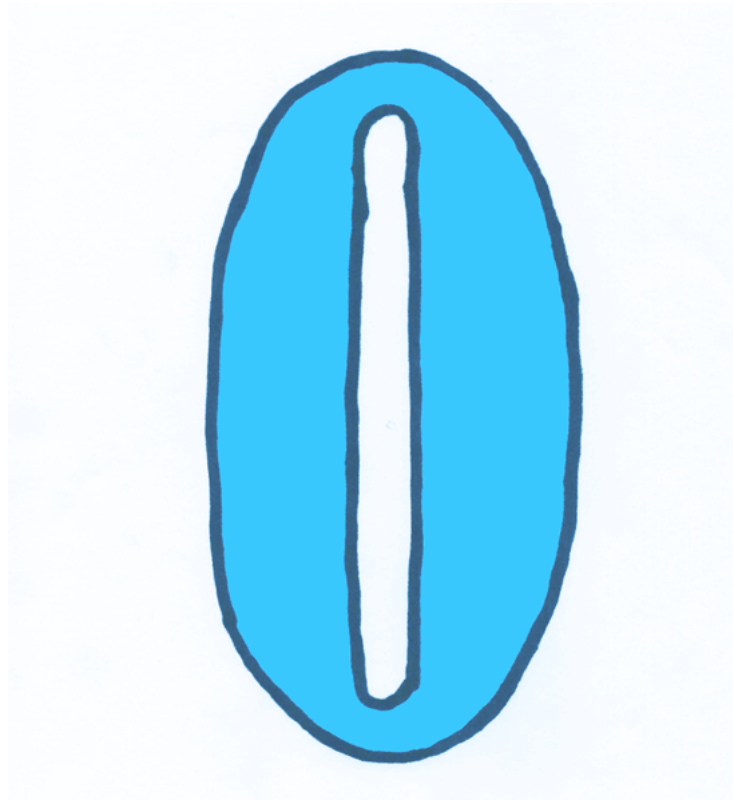
**Face validity of tackling outside assistance**

“So many students can buy essay or use translators...it’s really good they can’t in this exam”

“It totally stops students cheating which is good... but maybe someone could buy an essay and then remember it all?!”

# Cases of academic misconduct?

**zero**





# Limitations?

Generally, a success...

...but *some* teachers and students had minor reservations.

OBE versus other types of reading-into-writing assessments, in terms of:

- Loss of research skills?
- Loss of Turnitin?





# Thank you for listening

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