

# Northumbria Research Link

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Stymied before they get off the plane:

*An exploration into creating a level  
playing field for assessing overseas  
students*

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# Background to study

- Massification
- Internationalisation
- Lack of research into international student performance across modes of assessment
- Cultural fairness
- Cultural equivalence

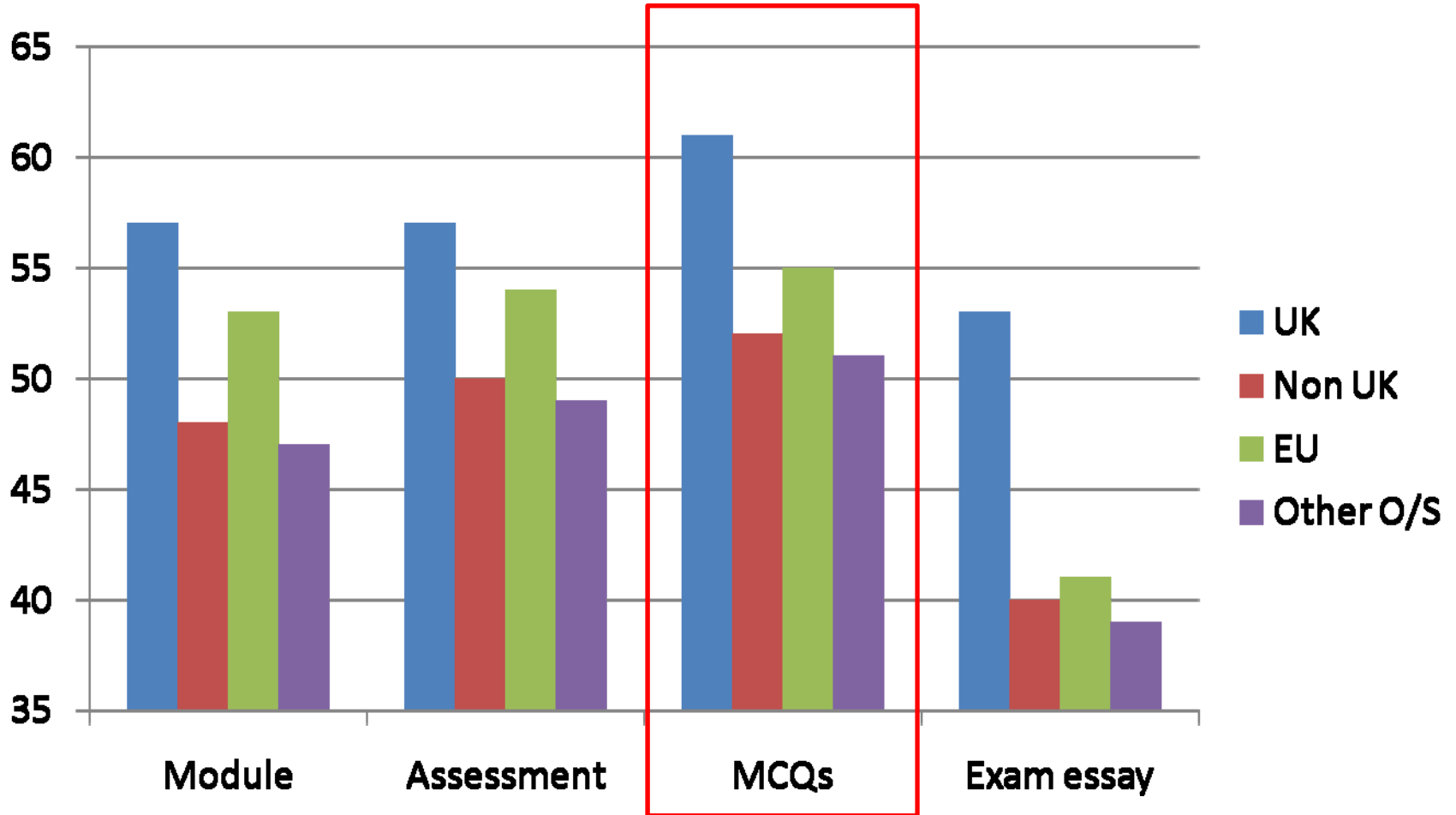
# In house study

- 2<sup>nd</sup> yr Marketing module
- Two modes of assessment
  - Practical case assignment (50%)
  - 2 hour exam (50%)
    - **70 Multiple-choice questions (70%)**
    - Choice of essay question (30%)
- 2008/2009 changed to practical case assignment only
- Question: were students disadvantaged in any way by the change in assessment?

# Research questions

- Is there a difference in the performance of overseas student cohorts as compared to UK students on different modes of assessment?
- If so why might this be?
- What, if anything, could we, or should we, do to attempt to achieve cultural fairness in assessment?

# 2006/2007 results



# Findings – 2006/7

- **Module Overall**
  - Non UK students performed 8% marks below ave.UK students (EU 3% less, other O/S 9%) on module
- **Assessment**
  - Non UK students performed 7% below UK students (EU 3% less, Other O/S 8%)
- **MCQs**
  - **Non UK students performed 9% below UK students (EU 6% less, Other O/S 10%)**
- **Exam essay Q**
  - Non UK students performed 13% below UK students (EU 7% less, Other O/S 11%)

# Why the poorer performance?

- Exam Essay
  - (Smith 2009) suggests
    - Time pressure
    - Lack of English language skills
    - Inability to express themselves in a second language
    - Write slower in a second language.
- MCQs
  - (De Vita 2002) suggests cross-cultural issues
    - Only 1 correct answer
    - Improper to guess
    - Time constraints
- Intrinsic nature of MCQs
  - Subtlety of language
  - Similarity of answers
  - Precision of understanding
- Do International students perform less well than home students?



# Questionnaires

- 74 Overseas students on ASK (Academic Skills international) [57 non EU]
- Questions
  - Preferred assessments
  - Assessments where they felt they did better
  - Whether taken MCQs test in UK
  - Harder or not
    - Reasons why it might be more difficult

# Results from Questionnaire

- 37 had a preference for MCQs but half of these thought they were more difficult at Northumbria
- Why?
  - Lack of understanding of vocabulary (13)
  - Lack of understanding of sentence structure (8)
  - Lack of time (2)

# Creating the MCQ level playing field – is it possible?

- Use for formative assessment only
- ‘Open book’
- E-learning without time constraints and allowing several attempts
- Review vocabulary
- Review sentence structure