

Times Higher Education

Made to measure

3 January 2013

Regarding "The week in higher education" on 29 November. One entry stated: "Universities have largely abandoned examinations in favour of 'spoon-fed' coursework, according to an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 25 November. Hundreds of courses are now 90 to 100 per cent coursework, with first- and second-year exams abolished for most subjects, while many universities still using exams have scaled them back to only 20 or 30 per cent of assessment, the newspaper reported."

When it comes to engineering courses, the *Telegraph* report is so far from the truth that it cannot go unchallenged. The process of accreditation conducted by the professional bodies on behalf of the Engineering Council ensures that all accredited engineering courses are fit for purpose, and this includes exploring the exam structures as well as reviewing recent examination papers. It is simply out of the question that bachelor's or master's courses in the discipline contain no (or even very few) first- and second-year unseen written examinations.

Coursework is, of course, valuable in demonstrating students' ability to apply theory to practical situations, often over an extended period of time in project work. However, in a subject such as engineering, unseen exams remain essential to demonstrating that the theory is properly understood and to confirm the competence of the individual under controlled conditions.

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