Assessing the Value: Maths Workshop

This study attempts to measure some of the benefits of the workshop for Access Numeracy Students. Level 0 numeracy is a module where students are heavy users of the workshop. Students attending the maths workshop made up 53.4% of the 266 full time Access students but 62.5% of the students who complete all the assignments (see table below).

Table 1: Attendance at the workshop and % of students completing all tasks.

Workshop attendance	**No's of students**	**% of students who turned in all tasks**
Never went	125 (46.6%)	53%
At least 1 visit	141 (53.4%)	78%
At least 5 visits	33 (13.2%)	100%

The workshop was clearly successful in enabling students to complete their assignments. This 9% improvement in the proportion of students who stay to complete the course module amounts to 13 students (0.09 × 141). Sheffield Hallam University calculates a retained student to be worth between 2 and 3 new students, so the workshop saves the University an amount equivalent to the value of 26 to 39 new students, just from the Access programme alone.

Table 2: Student performance in terms of modular points (higher is better).

Workshop attendance	**Task 1**	**Task 2**	**Task 3**	**Task 4**	**Result**
Never went	8.3	9.5	9.0	9.0	10.0
At least 1 visit	7.8	9.1	9.7	7.4	8.9
At least 5 visits	6.5	9.8	9.3	5.3	7.7

While the workshop helps students to complete their assignments, it may not be teaching them to be independent learners of maths. There were 4 assignments in the Access numeracy module. Students attending the workshop did better in assignments 2 and 3, which were take-home projects. They did significantly worse in assignment 4, the traditional in-class exam, than students who worked independently or who got help elsewhere. The worry is that the workshop creates and feeds a dependent population of Access students who are not well served to be successful in more traditionally run modules.

The 120 students who never went to the workshop appear to have a final grade which is higher than any of the component assignments. However, students doing badly dropped out, especially from this group, and the remainder were the cream of this crop. High drop-out rates will always produce better final averages. 50 Access students dropped out after their first task and 70 dropped after the second task. No students dropped out after tasks 3 or 4.

The success of the workshop in retaining students is reflected in significantly lower drop-out rates. The consequence of this is that it kept enrolled a group of students whose final assignment performance was much lower than that of the unsupported students. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the workshop is a remedial support that targets students who are initially weak (see assignment 1 grades). The workshops remedial image discourages many students from seeking help in the drop-in workshop. Those coming to the workshop regularly did not improve their test taking abilities, despite much individual assistance.

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