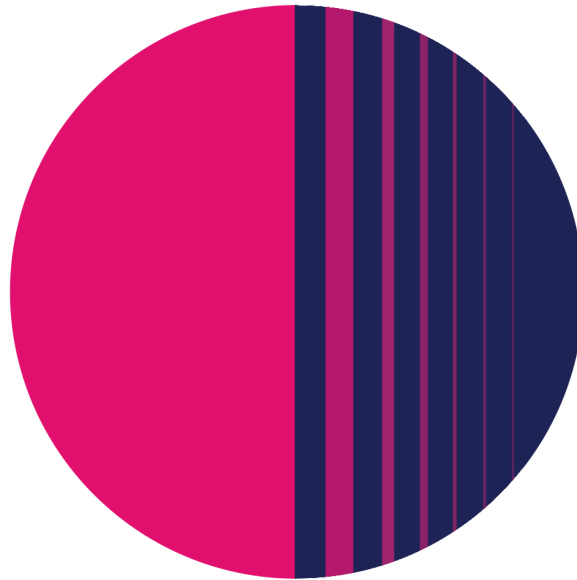




STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS

A Learning & Teaching Research Collaboration

***Engaging Your Core:
Strategies for Strengthening Students' Learning***

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Academic Year 2021-2022

1. Executive Summary

This *Students as Co-Creators* project collected, collated and evaluated student responses to a re-designed Level 4 Tort Law module. The project was initiated by a focus group led by the two module leaders (Pamela Abrams and Avis Whyte) in which the aims of the module's review and general attitudes towards the new teaching methods were discussed. From these conversations, a survey was created and administered to the wider student population. The survey results were analysed for quantitative and qualitative feedback, the latter from the survey form's longer written responses from which co-creators sought to identify recurring themes.

The results of the survey:

- Demonstrated that the innovative "knowledge nuggets" were identified as the most useful teaching method, with 37.9% of the students choosing this option and over 50% of all students ranking them a five, on a one to five scale of usefulness (five being the most useful).
- Indicated that students found the nuggets useful at all stages of their learning; they provided a good introduction to content before the more detailed discussions and activities in the lectures and tutorials and were also an aid to revision at the end of the module.
- Revealed that tutorials also proved popular, with students referencing how engaging and interactive they were, indicating that the additional activities, problem scenarios and less traditional methods of consolidating knowledge were appreciated.
- Revealed that no students gave any critical feedback on either the knowledge nuggets or tutorials, but lectures were mentioned as sometimes over-long and flat in comparison.
- Indicated that students considered the best delivery of the module was one that combined all the teaching methods in some form, despite the occasional repetition in substantive content between the different methods.
- Demonstrated that students were positive in their feedback on the practice multiple choice questions (MCQs) as a useful revision tool. These were designed to prepare students for the new format of the examination and enable them to put their knowledge into practice. It was encouraging to see that students seemed to recognise this and appreciated the additional support.

Overall, the survey feedback was positive, with most students indicating that they would not have changed anything in the delivery of the module. The students who did indicate there was room for improvement focused on increasing time for discussion and practice MCQs rather than the new teaching methods, so this indicates an overall positive consensus on how engaging the key re-designed elements were.

The positive impact of the module's redesign was furthermore clearly reflected in the attendance reports and final examination results of the students. Indeed, for 'Covid' academic year 2020/21, when the module was delivered online only, evaluation of the module's Blackboard learner analytics showed improved student attendance at synchronous lectures (72% of students attended over 70% of the lectures), and there was an almost 100% increase in first class marks, a 100% increase in 2.1 marks and over a third reduction in the failure rate for the module's summative exam .

2. Background and Aims

The subject of this study was the Level 4 Tort Law module, which for 2020/21 delivery, was completely re-designed by the two module leaders to be more suitable for online learning and to incorporate [Horton's \(2011\)](#) “absorb, do, connect” approach. The major features of this module were pre-recorded bitesize presentations named, “knowledge nuggets”, issued to students ahead of their synchronous lectures, and an emphasis on “discovery activities” during the lectures themselves (see Appendix One). These features aimed to improve levels of engagement and interactivity and to provide a thorough foundation for more detailed discussion and consolidation activities in the tutorials.

Tort tutorials were focused on the “absorb” and “do” elements of the approach and were designed both to improve understanding using case studies and problem scenarios and to encourage students to apply Horton's “connect” phase to identify common themes and policy considerations between the different parts of the curriculum.

The end of term examination was also completely re-designed from the traditional problem and essay questions to an MCQ exam. Alongside the standard MCQs, where student chose one of four options as correct, the new exam gave students the opportunity to demonstrate their increased knowledge by providing additional explanations for their answer choices, these higher order MCQs were known as a “Wait but Why?” questions.

The aim of this review was to collect and evaluate student feedback on these methods of teaching and examination, with a particular focus on the students' perceptions of their own levels of engagement. As the new format of the module had a positive impact on both student attendance and results, the project aimed to gather qualitative data on which methods students felt were most beneficial and, as a result, improved their engagement with the content of the module and their skills in critical analysis of Tort Law concepts. This in turn would provide valuable information for the future delivery of the module.

3. Methods

At the beginning of the project, a focus group meeting was hosted by the module leaders with student co-creators and a small number of additional students identified by the Academic Partners. In the focus group students discussed their thoughts and experiences in relation to the module and decided what questions would be most useful to ask the wider student body via an online questionnaire.

The group developed the survey of questions online, with each member of the group contributing questions. Following a group meeting the survey was reduced to sixteen questions, additionally our survey mascot “Happy Snail” was welcomed to the survey.



The survey was first sent out to students in **XX** and was followed by regular requests and reminders for completion. The survey closed on **XX**. Students were encouraged to complete the survey by variety of means, including:

- Distributing the survey via the Blackboard sites for
 - Tort Law—to LLB (Hons) Law Degree and Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) students studying the module at levels 4 and 5, for academic year 2021/22, when the module returned to face-to-face teaching
 - Equity and Trusts to access students who studied the module at levels 4 and 5, for academic year 2020/21, when the module was first redesigned and delivered online only.
- Members of staff requesting its completion in lectures and tutorials.
- Distributing the survey through co-creators' connections with university societies.
- Offering an incentive of £25.00 to the first 12 students to complete the survey with detailed responses to the qualitative questions. However, students could choose not to include their email addresses for a chance to win a voucher and instead complete it anonymously.

The survey population was approximately 600 students, ranging from LLB level 4, LLB level 5 and GDL both part time and full time. In total the survey collected 66 responses, so had a response rate of approximately 10%. While this is low and has a non-response bias of 90% (see [Fincham 2008](#)) it is within the range of the typical of response rates for these types of surveys (see [CustomerThermometer.Com](#)). Of students who completed the survey 51.5% were studying at level four. 37.9% were studying at level five, with the remaining 10.6% being GDL students.

Once the survey closed, each member of the project team chose a question from the survey to analyse and to discuss their findings with other members of the project. The survey findings allowed co-creators to cross check for recurring comments and themes.

The survey data from both the closed and open questions were rigorously analysed and used to create this report. The next section discusses these results.

4. Results and Discussion

Of the 16 questions asked by the survey, one gathered information on the student's level of study (LLB or GDL), nine were quantitative and six were qualitative aimed at ascertaining reasons behind quantitative responses (see Appendix Two).

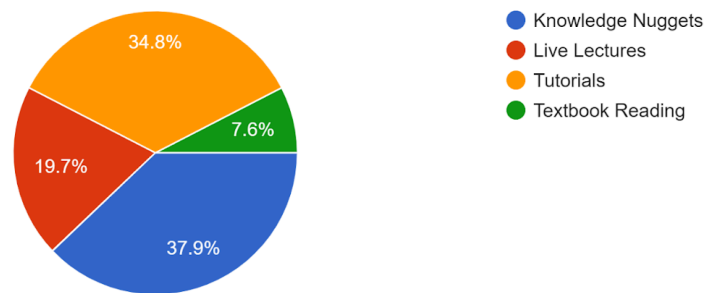
4.1 Learning Methods

Students were asked to identify their favourite learning method on the Tort Law module and explain their reasons for that preference. The most popular choice was the knowledge nuggets, gaining 37.9% of the vote (see Chart 1). The most common positive feedback was that the nuggets were particularly beneficial for revision and for catching up on any missed lectures. Students also identified that they helped individual learning and that it was useful and "convenient" to have pre-recorded content to learn at their own pace, particularly in comparison to lectures, which a few students mentioned were sometimes difficult to absorb. The findings also suggested that students were using the knowledge nuggets at all stages of their learning, both for revision and catch up as discussed above, but also for preparation before lectures, as intended. Feedback was that they encouraged a good introduction to the topics and enabled the students to contribute more to the lectures and tutorials as a result.

Chart 1: *Preferred Learning Method*

Q2: What was your favourite learning method from the Tort law module? Choose ONE option:

66 responses

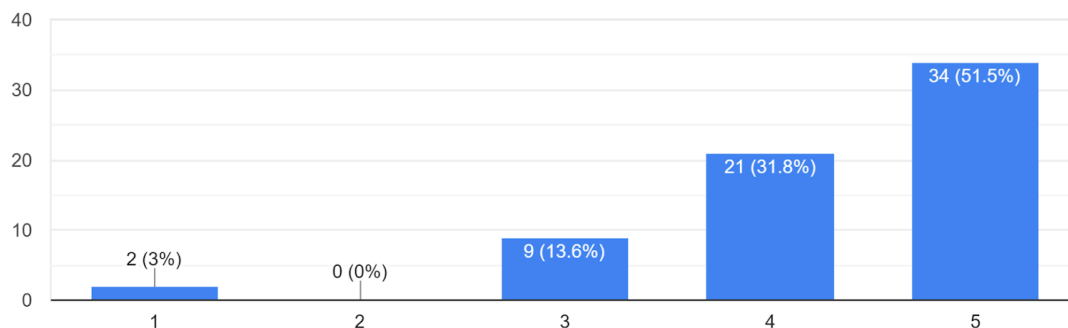


Students stated that the knowledge nuggets were informative, detailed and specific, but also that they were easy to follow. Furthermore, on a Likert scale of one to five (with one being not useful and five being extremely useful) 51.5% of students found the nuggets extremely useful in helping them to understand Tort Law (see Graph 1). These findings would imply that the content and length was pitched appropriately to give students a thorough but concise introduction to the topics discussed. No students gave any feedback that nuggets were either too detailed or too brief.

Graph 1: *Usefulness of Knowledge Nuggets in Understanding Tort*

Q7: How useful were the knowledge nuggets for your understanding of the Tort Law module?

66 responses



Tutorials were the second most popular choice with 34.8% of the vote (see Chart 1). These were very narrowly behind the knowledge nuggets and a few students mentioned that both learning methods were useful, suggesting they complimented each other well. The most popular positive feedback on tutorials was that they enabled interaction, demonstrating that students feel like learning in real time is still highly important and cannot be entirely replaced by pre-recorded content. Students mentioned that they found themselves learning from both the tutors and other students, indicating the importance of peer-on-peer discussion as well as contact with staff, and a few students said that they directly benefited from smaller group interactions in comparison to lectures.

Similarly, the ability to ask questions and directly learn from mistakes was also flagged as a positive to tutorials, again demonstrating that students really value direct interaction and exchanges and consider that this contributes to effective learning. A few answers implied that some participants felt more comfortable

asking questions in tutorials due to the smaller group size and the direct nature of the exchanges and it is important to ensure that these students feel as equally supported as those who are more assertive.

Live lectures were ranked third as students preferred learning method and at 19.7% (see chart one) were approximately 17% less popular than nuggets and tutorials. Despite this the feedback was mostly positive. Students found lectures lively and engaging, and these comments were often made in conjunction with feedback on the tutorials, which suggests that some students thought of them (or at least chose to treat them) as one combined learning method. Negative feedback on live lectures was given normally given in comparison to tutorials. For example, one student said lectures were sometimes hard to follow or not as easy to absorb in comparison to the nuggets, which was more concise. However, another student said that they did not find the lectures detailed enough, so there was quite a wide variety of opinions.

Overall, the participants were extremely positive about both knowledge nuggets and tutorials, and this is reflected in the results. Both sets of students used similar words to describe the benefits: “interaction”, “active”, “engaging”, “consolidate” and “informative” were some of the most frequently used words. This indicates that interactivity and imparting information in a concise way is important to retain students’ attention, regardless of whether this takes place in a tutorial environment or when students are engaging with any pre-recorded information in preparation for the live environment classes.

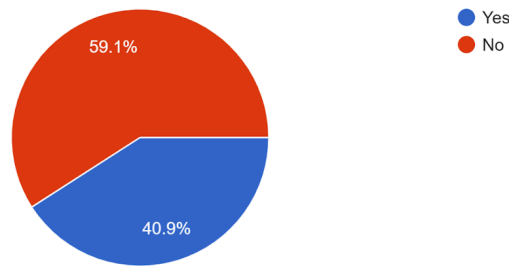
4.2 Module Delivery Methods

Next, students were asked to consider whether the module would be better delivered using a seminar-based approach, explained as similar to a larger scale tutorial, instead of live lectures. The answers to this question differed between students studying the module at different levels. However, at 59.1% (see Chart 2) most students, were against a seminar-based approach. They favoured the combination of lectures knowledge nuggets and tutorials, feeling these three methods combined were most productive in aiding their studies.

Chart 2: *Seminars as the Best Delivery Method*

Q5: Would Tort law be better delivered using a seminar based approach (so no lectures, instead slightly longer large group tutorials)?

66 responses



This question further illustrated the consensus among the students that the knowledge nuggets the tutorials and lectures were building blocks to aid their understanding. The most common feedback was very positive about all three being combined. Students found that interaction in the lectures and in the tutorials, complimented by the knowledge nuggets improved their understanding and helped with revision. Therefore, the overwhelming feedback was that all three together are much better than a seminar-based approach and the best method for learning.

Another commonality from the responses was a perception of repetition between the lectures, knowledge nuggets and recommended reading. Many students viewed the recommended reading and the knowledge nuggets as very similar, with some students suggesting that they could be exchanged for one another. Some other students felt that the lectures were a repeat of the knowledge nuggets, and therefore occasionally felt 'bored' in the lectures. And though students appreciated the levels of interaction within lectures a few pointed out that live face-to-face lectures could sometimes be very loud and hard to follow. Moreover, some students stated they simply did not like the lectures because of the group interaction, and they felt they could not learn in that way.

There was an interesting divergence between L4 and L5 students on this question of seminar-based learning. Most students at L4 felt that a seminar-based approach would be less desirable than the combination of tutorials lectures and knowledge nuggets together. However, a high proportion of L5 students commented that they would prefer a seminar-based approach, highlighting that it would give more freedom to ask questions, be more interactive and less repetitive. This may indicate that L5 students feel more confident with small group interaction than those at L4.

To conclude, the responses to this question demonstrate that the majority of students prefer the combination of tutorials, lectures and knowledge nuggets as opposed to a seminar-based way of teaching.

4.3 Knowledge Nuggets as a Replacement for Textbook Reading

The survey explored whether students viewed the knowledge nuggets as a replacement to reading the set materials. Of the 64 responses to this question, 47% of students stated that knowledge nuggets could not replace the required reading, whereas 40% felt that they could. A further 13% of students were undecided.

The consensus among most students was that the recommended reading, and knowledge nuggets worked together to build a strong foundation of legal knowledge and aided in their understanding of the module content. A common area for feedback was around introductions to topics. Most students felt that the required reading was necessary to understand how topics work in the law and add the finer detail in which the textbook discusses topics.

Throughout the responses to this question, a common theme was that of repetition. Of the 40% of students favouring replacement of knowledge nuggets for reading, the majority felt that the nuggets were a repeat of what they had read in the textbook. Many students throughout the responses identified a level of repetition between the recommended reading and knowledge nuggets. Some students found this level of repetition to be beneficial in aiding their understanding of the module and supporting them, others felt that the level of repetition was not useful. Academic literature supports “Repetition [as] the First Principle of all Learning” (see, [Bruner 2001](#)), so there is positivity in these more negative comments.

The 47% of students who were against exchanging the required reading with knowledge nuggets, emphasised their views on the importance of the recommended reading for them. A few students felt that the reading not only supported their understanding of the module but also prepared them for further reading in their other modules and career paths.

Overall, the majority of students felt that the recommended reading could not be replaced by knowledge nuggets, so were in favour of keeping both. Even students in the 13% who were undecided, highlighted the importance and benefits that both the knowledge nuggets and reading provided.

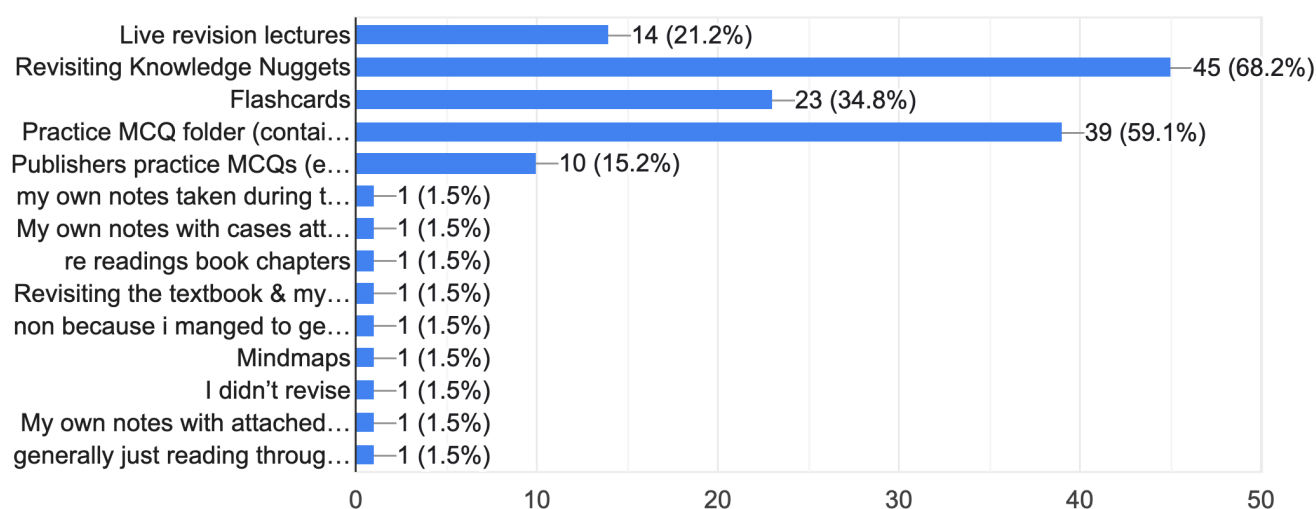
4.4 Usefulness of Revision Resources

Students were next asked how which revision resources they found the most useful and why. As illustrated by Graph 2 below, the majority of students (68.2%) found that revisiting the knowledge nuggets were the most useful revision tool. This was followed by 59.1% of students who indicated that the bespoke practice MCQ’s were the best revision method (overshadowing the 15.2% who found the MCQs made available by academic publishers useful). This is arguably a natural consequence as the nuggets allow for a conceptual/theoretical revision base, whilst the MCQ’s allow for that knowledge to be applied practically.

Graph 2: *Most Useful Revision Resources*

Q12: For the 'real' exam, which TWO resources did you find the most useful?

66 responses



Third in line of preference, at 34.8% were the [flashcards](#). These were created by the module leaders to test student knowledge and understanding of the key Tort Law cases and the principles they established. The

other significant revision resource were the live revision lectures (21.2%). Interestingly the revision options than say students relying on their own resources were far less favoured. For example, only 1.5% of students reported using their own notes and materials created during the teaching period.

4.5 Improving the Module

The survey asked students what they would change to improve their learning experience on the module. Approximately 50%, were satisfied with how the module was currently organised and taught, feeling that it was probably the easiest in terms of learning.

There was consensus between the students regarding the teaching methods, particularly L5 student who were taught solely online due to the Covid 19 pandemic, was one of “happiness”. In particular students found the MCQs and knowledge nuggets of great help for tutorial preparation and for the final assessment.

On the other hand, around 28% of students, that would have preferred a different style of teaching, more seminar based. Those students felt the need for more revision and more time spent on tutorials going through MCQs questions and how to answer them better.

By contrast, there was a small number of students, (5%), that felt that the reading materials provided was too large and would have preferred more precision as to what reading was needed in advance of the tutorials.

In addition, a small number (5%), would have preferred another method for the final assessment, whether it was an essay format, a mix of MCQs and essays or more time provided to answer the MCQ questions.

Lastly, 3% of those responding, considered that the behaviour of some students was disruptive and that the tutors could have done more to improve the experience for those who wanted to engage and learn.

However, from all the answers analysed, it is understood that there is a consensus on the preferred method, and that using knowledge nuggets and MCQ questions led many students to conclude that this module was the one with the best method of teaching of all the modules taught online. This comparison is considered further in the next section.

4.6 Comparing the Tort Module with Others

The final survey question asked how the learning methods in the Tort Law module compared with other modules being studied. The responses received indicated a strong consensus that the teaching of Tort compared to other modules was very positive. Students described it as “the best” and “better” or even “10x better” than others. Importantly students described being more “supported” by the teaching.

Comments indicated that students felt there was a good balance of content and recall and practice opportunities. The module was repeatedly described as both engaging and thought provoking. A number of students recognised the advantage of the tone/pitch of the teaching which was described as “fun” and “interactive” (both these adjectives were used repeatedly in responses). A number of students noted clarity of explanation as a strength of the teaching.

Students reported feeling confident by the end of the module about both the content itself and their readiness for the exam. Students also found the mix of knowledge nuggets and practice MCQ questions helpful. Particular recognition was given to the usefulness of the nuggets both in terms of course organisation and support for pre-learning and revision.

It was interesting to read that a number of students responded to this question with positive personal feedback about lecturers/tutors and a recognition that there had been significant effort in planning both the lectures and resources.

It would be helpful to further explore why a small number of students found aspects of the topic confusing (it is not clear from the responses whether this relates to the content itself or the methods of teaching).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Although students gave positive feedback on more than one method of learning, i.e., both the knowledge nuggets and the tutorials, the comments and reasoning behind their choices referenced the same sorts of benefits: interactivity, a closer engagement with teachers and fellow students and the ease and clarity with which the material can be broken down. These benefits were apparent at all stages of learning, particularly when revising. Students also frequently referenced that the combination of different methods helped them to consolidate their learning throughout the module, as the newer forms of information delivery were seen to complement, rather than directly replace, more traditional forms such as recommended reading and lectures.

The main difficulty students experienced with live face-to-face lectures was the disruptive behaviour of fellow students. Some evidence from the research survey suggested that students have sometimes had their learning interrupted and hindered by the behaviour of other students. This is beneficial to no-one including the inconvenienced students and lecturers. A consistent system for controlling poor student conduct is recommended.

In terms of recommendations for course and module leaders keen to adopt a similar teaching method:

- They should stress the positive findings of this study and specifically mention that the levels of engagement in the shorter form information led to increased positive results. This will help students appreciate the new methods of teaching, which may be unfamiliar to them at the outset.
- They should use the findings of this study to consider how different methods of teaching complement each other and led to a greater overall understanding, as this has been flagged as crucial to success by the students.
- They should re-examine their course content for any unnecessary repetition or for any points in which a complicated idea would be better delivered in “knowledge nugget” format for ease of learning.
- Given the module’s success of incorporating MCQ practice in teaching sessions, they could consider increasing the time for additional questions in lecture with a concomitant reduction in time for recap of the knowledge nuggets material.

Overall, the positive attributes, as identified by the students, led to strong performance in the end of module examinations, and an indication from many students that this was their preferred module in terms of the success of the teaching methods.

6. Dissemination

Our report findings and recommendations will be shared in an interactive workshop with Westminster colleagues, co-hosted with our student partners. We also hope to share our findings with the wider academic community by presenting at the Association of Law Teachers Conference 2023. Moreover, we will support students in cascading their reflections on the project and its outcomes to their peers.

NOTE

Research Team Reflection

Appendices

1 = KN PPT

2= Questionnaire

3 = Focus Group Topic Guide ?