

## Contingency planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face-to-face assessment

Sally Brown and Kay Sambell

### What's the problem?

The current Coronavirus is requiring universities to find rapid but reasonable alternatives to face-to-face assessments in situations when staff or students cannot attend in person. This Quick Guide aims to offer some suggestions on in-session adjustments that might be made to assure the standards of students' achievements. However, it needs to be recognised that, in ideal circumstances, none of these would be quick fixes but are likely to need considerable planning, training and activity on behalf of the university to ensure they are viable for staff and students. Any alternatives should endeavour to "be as close as possible to the current unit running in face-to-face mode" (University of Sydney\*) and should maintain the balance of formative and summative assessment, as well as being inclusive (Jisc advice\*), accessible, valid and reliable.

Experts advise in these difficult times it's easier to stick to low-tech and text-based systems: and recommend the simpler the better. It is also important to recognise that university staff, including learning support staff and administrators, may themselves be affected by illness, or by disruptions in childcare or other family support. It is important that any changes to assessment are communicated and explained to both students and all those involved in assessment of learning outcomes.

### Why is it important to explore alternatives?

The current outbreak is likely to impact on students as we approach second trimester final assessments and beyond, so we need to aim to alleviate the inevitable disruption of study and consequent awarding of marks and degrees that are likely to be caused by university campus closures. Most universities therefore may wish to make strenuous but reasonable efforts to mitigate subsequent disadvantages students might experience.

### What can we reasonably do?

**In our view there are five basic strategies programme teams might adopt:**

- 1. Defer or re-schedule deadlines:** allowing students more time to complete work, particularly if they themselves are ill. Deadlines for return of assessed work with feedback may also need to be relaxed beyond the normal 21 working days where assessors are affected. This might also mean that announced dates for awards may be delayed by weeks or months.
- 2. Assess only what has been taught *before* the time of the campus-based restrictions.** If it is difficult to reschedule some teaching for the remainder of the teaching period with activities that are not possible to move online, it may be possible to adjust assessment so that you assess students only on material that has been delivered to date, so long as the course doesn't include exams that are required by professional bodies as exemptions for professional exams.

3. **Consider how much assessment is still outstanding and decide whether you can waive further assessment.** We might review what assessment has already taken place and, having considered whether it is essential that further assessments be undertaken, we could achieve a mark by averaging grades for work already submitted, rather than requiring the outstanding pieces to be completed. This is not likely to be possible in professional courses where there are requirements for all learning outcomes to be demonstrably met, but might be possible on some programmes.
4. **Change the mode of submission:** work that was formerly submitted in hard copy could now be submitted electronically, ideally through established university e-submission systems but also, in the final resort, via email to a named contact. Many of you are already using e-submission processes for coursework, including narrated PowerPoints or similar for submitting student presentations. Where students can make video recordings, these can be submitted electronically, however, some work, such as artefacts, will still be problematic.
5. **Offer alternative assessment formats:** the table below provides some manageable alternatives to consider, together with some important considerations. What are suggested here are some reasonable adjustments to be used in times of crisis, which will not exactly replicate the original assessments, but may offer your students some manageable alternatives in challenging times. Below the table we have included some links to resources\* that you may find useful.

If you currently use....	You could instead consider using ....	To assure standards you might need to consider...
<p><b>Time-constrained unseen exams</b> in invigilated exam rooms or <b>in-class tests</b></p>	<p><b>“Take-away” exams</b>, in which you set the questions or tasks virtually and ask the students to submit their responses electronically within a set period of time (see detailed advice leaflets from LSE* and Manchester Met below*).</p>	<p>As with normal take-away papers, because students have access to materials, the design of questions may need to be reframed to move away from recall-based tasks to questions that require students to demonstrate how they <i>use</i> information rather than reiterate what they have learned. It will be important, therefore, to provide guidance for students in the change in orientation of the task. It is also good practice to re-run any changes to question formats through the usual moderation processes.</p>

	<p><b>Remote proctoring</b> often relies on students being able to use technology which can be problematic for home use, so is not a straightforward option. You may hear a lot about other forms of digital invigilation as used by universities working with UniWise* and others, and while these can be used as a long-term solution, please note that this not a quick fix. Google Educator exams link to your computer when sitting them and take photos every few seconds to check your identity</p> <p><b>Moodle can support the timed release of examination papers</b> and corresponding submission facilities that can help support time-constrained exams. The Learning Technology experts advise though, that it's not a good idea for students to be submitting long-form (essay length) questions into a Moodle quiz as if there is an internet interruption, their work would be lost. An alternative exam format would be to time the release of the exam paper on Moodle using Turnitin with a timeframe in which to complete the submission in the form of a document. For example, Turnitin dropbox with exam paper available at noon, with cut-off for submissions of a Word doc by 4pm.</p>	<p>It is unlikely you will be able to put this in place for scalable numbers unless you already have systems in place, although various vendors are working hard to meet urgent demand.</p> <p>To deter cheating you could advise students that you will run 'spot checks' or mini-vivas with a sample of the student population, where you will discuss their reasoning for the answers they've provided.</p>
<p><b>In-class presentations</b> where students speak to an</p>	<p>Ask students (individually or in groups) to submit a</p>	<p>You will need to take account of the fact that, given the recorded</p>

<p>audience of their peers/others and are assessed not only on the content but also their presentation techniques.</p>	<p><b>narrated presentation</b> in electronic form which can then be tutor-marked and peer-reviewed.</p> <p>If you use Panopto* this can be undertaken off-line if there is poor bandwidth and submitted when completed.</p> <p>PowerPoint is familiar to most students, and offers a slide-by-slide voice-narration recording facility</p> <p>Ask students to prepare a podcast on the topic to be submitted electronically.</p>	<p>presentation format, students can have multiple opportunities to prepare the item they are submitting, rather than having to cope with the one-off nature of a live presentation.</p>
<p><b>Portfolio, logbook or assessment notebook</b></p>	<p>It is likely that the best solution here is to move hard-copy portfolios to e-portfolios, for example in Moodle.</p>	<p>Where these have been partially completed already, assessors will have to use professional judgment to decide whether sufficient evidence of achievement of the Los has been achieved already by the time of university closure. For some students without ready internet access or lacking digital confidence the move to e-portfolios might be quite challenging, and they may need extra guidance.</p>
<p><b>Viva Voce exams</b>, e.g. for PhD examinations in person, or other forms of oral assessment (e.g in language learning).</p>	<p>These could readily be undertaken by Skype or other electronic remote means (as indeed they already are on occasions when Doctoral examinations are undertaken transnationally).</p>	<p>Students may need significant support in developing confidence to work virtually where they have no prior experience.</p>
<p><b>Assessed seminars, group discussions</b> and other similar activities.</p>	<p>It is likely these could be held in an online platform already used within your university such as WebEx or Microsoft Teams*.</p>	<p>Staff as well as students may need be supported to learn how to use this approach if it isn't currently part of their normal learning experiences.</p>

<p><b>Lab work</b></p>	<p>It may be possible to replicate some aspects of lab work through simulations in which students are presented with data sets and required to interpret them. Often this means focusing on <i>interpretation</i> of data rather than working in the lab to achieve the results personally</p> <p>Simulations can also be used remotely so students can 'see' data produced elsewhere and be asked to comment/interpret.</p>	<p>If students can be provided with <i>different</i> data sets for personal interpretation, this can mitigate the risk of 'over-sharing' or personation.</p>
<p><b>Posters</b></p>	<p>You can potentially use a digital infographic, mind map or other visuals which can be submitted via CourseWork tool in Moodle, for example, or posted in shared spaces, particularly if peer review is required.</p>	<p>To confirm authenticity of the submitter, you may wish to supplement this with a short online oral.</p>
<p><b>Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE) and other test requiring students to demonstrate a range of skills.</b></p>	<p>It may be possible for students to submit digital portfolios containing, for example, videos of themselves performing a range of practical tasks.</p>	<p>This may be problematic in professional disciplines where the achievement of specific capabilities is required at 100% eg Nursing, drugs calculations</p>
<p><b>Peer assessments and support.</b></p>	<p>Peers can email each other drafts for comments or use a virtual space within the university's VLE e.g. Moodle*.</p>	
<p><b>Theatre, dance and other performances</b></p>	<p>Individuals and groups can be asked to work off-site to prepare and submit <b>videos</b> of their work, alongside <b>reflective commentaries/accounts</b></p>	<p>Group performances may well be complex to organise off-site</p> <p>Videos cannot replicate the authentic live performance element but may suffice in crisis times</p>
<p><b>Face-to-face feedback.</b></p>	<p>Individual and generic group feedback can be delivered by tutors via audio or online means.</p>	

## Key takeaways

With hard work, imagination and co-operation by students, it can be the case that alternatives are established in a short space of time which can certainly equal and may even be improvements on the current methodology. However, it is crucially important that decisions are based on sound pedagogic considerations and that they match the scale and level of the learning outcomes to which the programme teams are committed by the course documentation. It is also important to remember that both staff and students may be working outside their comfort zones, and that support be provided for those struggling with new approaches. As with all forms of assessment, account will need to be taken of reasonable adjustments for all students with temporary or long-term health conditions, disabilities and additional needs.

## References and resources principally on assessment

Edinburgh Napier quick guides on assessment and feedback matters: see particularly **'Alternatives to traditional exams'** which has some useful ideas

<https://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/dlte/Pages/QuickGuides.aspx>

### Flipgrid

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLGsliAjEkY>

<http://blog.flipgrid.com/news/highered>

<https://padlet.com/Debbaff/Flipgrid>

**Jisc advice** in support of enforced absence (March2020) but regularly updated

<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/ensuring-continuity-of-learning-during-enforced-absence/assessment-and-feedback>

**\*London School of Economics (LSE) Toolkit advice on Take- Home Assessment**

<https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Eden-Centre/Assessment-Toolkit/Assessment-conditions/Take-home-assessment>

**\*Manchester Metropolitan University advice-leaflet**

[http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/assessment/design/tasks/takehome\\_exam.php](http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/assessment/design/tasks/takehome_exam.php)

**\*Microsoft office** advice (scroll down for assessment-specific guidance)

<https://support.office.com/en-gb/article/remote-teaching-and-learning-in-office-365-f651ccae-7b65-478b-8366-51bb884025c4>

**Moodle advice** on setting up assignments

[https://docs.moodle.org/38/en/Assignment\\_quick\\_guide](https://docs.moodle.org/38/en/Assignment_quick_guide)

**National Forum for Ireland:** 10 points to consider in choosing alternative assessment methods in the online environment

<https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/10-Points-to-Consider-in-Choosing-Alternative-Assessment-Methods.pdf>

**Phil Race's website has a useful table to help you consider the pros and cons of various forms of assessment**

<https://phil-race.co.uk/2020/02/a-draft-table-assessment-feedback-and-contract-cheating-in-perspective/>