**Guidelines for alternative assessment**

Staff across the University are being asked to consider the viability of current assessment practices and timetables in light of disruption caused by Coronavirus. Alternative forms of assessment will be necessary to ensure that students can continue to engage with their learning remotely. The key to this process is **flexibility**. There is no single approach or solution that will fit all modules, programmes of study, or Colleges, and ultimately solutions will need to be found at College-level. This applies to assessments, deadlines, marking, and feedback. Nevertheless, as far as possible staff should be guided by the following principles.

**Overall principles**

1. Whatever is put in place for the main assessment period must also apply during the resit period.
2. Priority should be given to arrangements for Level 6/Final Year Undergraduate students and others for whom this is the final assessment period of their programme of study.
3. Where appropriate, advice and guidance should be sought from accrediting bodies regarding which alternative forms of assessment they will accept. Colleges will need to check this.

**Guiding principles for alternative assessment**

1. **Alternative assessments should still meet the learning outcomes and competence standards of a module.**

For example, if the learning outcomes require students to demonstrate their presentation skills and the module usually requires them to give a presentation in front of their peers, they could instead submit a recording, a script, or a narrated Powerpoint, or they could give a remote presentation via Zoom (etc).

1. **As far as possible, alternative assessments should meet student expectations of assessment.**

For example, if students have been expecting to be assessed by exam, and have been preparing for this, ideally the alternative assessment should be a revised version of that exam that can be done at home and submitted via Turnitin (‘take-home’ exam). It may be appropriate to rebalance the weightings of assessments in a module, particularly where a significant proportion of the assessment has already been completed.

1. **Alternative assessments should be robust and viable**

Staff need to make sure that students have covered enough of a module’s syllabus to be able to do the assessment. With the suspension of face-to-face teaching, this may mean making recorded lectures available to students or providing additional learning resources on the VLE.

Alternative assessment should be realistic in its expectations and aim for equivalence in overall student effort. The alternative assessment should not increase the overall time burden to students. So while a student may spend more time writing an open-book take-home exam, this time would be expected to offset some of the time spent preparing for a closed-book invigilated examination.

1. **Alternative assessments should be accessible to all students.**

We need to be flexible when designing alternative assessments. Students may not be able to access some physical resources in the libraries if the University closes. We need to make sure that they can do the alternative assessment, for example by providing resources now (e.g. by using the Document Supply service in the library), or by designing assessments that students can complete using resources and information already covered. This may mean that our expectations of what students can achieve at home may be different from what we would expect under normal circumstances.

As usual, staff should consider students with protected characteristics who are already entitled to reasonable adjustments for assessment.

1. **As far as possible, alternative assessments should be submitted electronically.**

If students have reliable access to the internet, they should submit their alternative assessments via the VLE, Turnitin, or other College-approved software (for example, MyMathsLab) rather than emailing submissions to Module Co-ordinators. If they don’t have reliable internet access, Colleges should consider allowing students to post a hard copy, depending on the type of assessment; otherwise students will need to apply for extenuating circumstances. Students must be advised to use recorded delivery and make a copy of the assessment. Student submission via email is discouraged.

1. **There should be clear communication about alternative assessments.**

Students need to understand exactly how an assessment has changed. Staff will need to provide clear instructions, including an explanation of how the alternative assessment tests the learning outcomes and competency standards of the module, how the assessment should be submitted, and what the new deadlines are. It is important that VLE resources are up-to-date. In addition, there should be clarity about expectations. For example, if the alternative to an exam is to allow students to do a take-home exam, instructions must be clear about expected format, word count, and use (or not) of citations and references. Ideally, staff should be available (e.g. via a discussion board on the VLE) to answer student questions about the alternative assessment.

1. **Where possible, alternative assessments should be individual pieces of work, not group work.**

It may be difficult for students to collaborate on group projects if there are internet issues, or if a member of a group falls ill. This means that alternative assessment might need to be individual pieces of work and staff may need to rethink the format and submission of work. If group assessment is an integral part of the assessment (for example, if a group project has been on-going all year or is needed for accreditation learning outcomes), Module Co-ordinators will need to identify those students who are unable to collaborate with their peers and make alternative provision for them.

1. **We trust our students**

Fundamentally, we have no way of preventing students doing alternative assessments at home from colluding or cheating, beyond requiring students to submit via Turnitin. Students need to be reminded that the University policy on academic integrity still applies, and alternative assessments should be designed to discourage academic misconduct. However, we believe that the vast majority will not violate this policy and therefore we accept that submitted work is a student’s best effort under difficult circumstances.

**Forms of Alternative Assessment**

**Exams:**

Ideally, essay-based exams will become take-home exams that can be submitted via Turnitin. There should be clear instructions to students about word-limits and format of answers. For essay-based exams, staff may want to consider shortening the number of essay questions required of students (since students will undoubtedly write more at home than they would under exam conditions). Maths-based exams can also be take-home exams: hand-written answers can be scanned or photographed and submitted via the VLE. In both cases, students may be allowed to post hard-copies if they don’t have internet access.

Some Colleges already use take-home exams with short deadlines. In these cases, students may need to be given more time than usual to complete the exams. Decisions will be made at College-level.

Take-home exams should be scheduled in a manner that avoids overlap in deadlines. The existing exam timetable can be used as a guide for deadlines but some modification may be necessary based upon the nature of the alternative assessment.

Exams that require special software may need to be deferred, unless that software is Open Source. In these cases, it may be better to find an alternative form of assessment (although learning outcomes will need to be considered). Possibilities include take-home exams or alternative coursework assessments.

**Class tests and MCQs:**

If electronic, these can be done normally but additional time may be necessary to accommodate poor internet connections. If paper tests, alternative formats will be needed; ideally this will mean moving the tests online. However, there may be students without internet access so different provision will be required. For the same reason, students may need to be given more time to complete MCQs.

**Coursework:**

There are unlikely to be problems with this, beyond the likelihood of many students applying for extenuating circumstances. As far as possible, submission should be online via Turnitin.

**Presentations:**

There are various alternatives, and potentially students could be allowed to choose: for example, recording the presentation (audio or video), sending in a script or narrated Powerpoint, or live presentation via Zoom.

**Viva Voce/oral exams (e.g. languages):**

A separate statement on PhD Viva Voce exams has been produced. There are some undergraduate modules (e.g. dissertation modules, language modules) that require brief viva voce or oral exams as part of their assessment. These could be conducted remotely via Zoom or phone, if both staff and students agree.

**OSCE/OSSEs:**

Due to staff illness in workplaces, and the expected pressures on staff in healthcare, these may need to be delayed.

**Field trips:**

Some field trips will need to be cancelled and alternative assessment used. In other cases, it may be appropriate or desirable to postpone Year 2 trips to Year 3. All assessment would need to be done during the trip to avoid overburdening students in their final year. In deciding this, the potential additional burden on academic staff should be considered.

**Year/Semester abroad students**

Alternative assessments will be arranged by individual Colleges.

**Work Placements:**

This is particularly challenging if work placements are a compulsory/core part of a degree scheme and will need to be resolved in consultation with each College’s Director of Learning and Teaching, and with the companies involved. The following issues need to be considered: what happens if placements are not completed? Could work placement students complete their placements later in the summer (which for 3rd years would mean they couldn’t graduate until December). Is there another option if they haven’t started their placement yet? Would the department be able to put on an alternative module that satisfies the learning outcomes? One possibility for 2nd years would be to enable this type of module to be delivered exceptionally in the following academic year.

**Labs**

Rather than writing up experiments they have performed, students could be required to write reports on the methodology they would have adopted for a particular experiment and the results they would have expected to see, or students could be provided with data sets or exhibits (images) via the VLE for analysis. Another alternative is to provide students with video footage that allows them to see the practical and assess the best experimental procedure. Alternatively, their final grade for the module could be based (pro-rata) solely on assessments/labs already completed before the University closed.

**Practicum:**

Some modules have a ‘practicum’ as a key component of assessment and this may not be possible. In these cases, staff are advised to consult the learning outcomes of the module to see if there is another way that students can be assessed. For example, a museum-handling session with the general public could become an essay or presentation on the factors that need to be considered when dealing with the general public in museum environments.

**Assessments involving members of the public:**

All assessments involving experiments on or interviews with members of the general public will need to be cancelled and alternative arrangements made, unless they can be achieved through online questionnaires or secondary data extraction.

**For information:**

**Deadlines**

Students should be informed (via multiple channels such as email, VLE announcements etc) about alternative assessments as soon as possible. Ideally, the assessments should be made available at least a week before the submission deadline, but this will vary according to degree scheme Existing deadlines could stand (e.g. the deadline for the alternative assessment for an exam could be the date that the exam was due to be sat). Programme Directors and Directors of Learning and Teaching will need oversight of deadlines to make sure that bunching doesn’t occur. Submission times also need to be staggered to avoid server overload.

**Feedback**

Students should still receive feedback on their assessments, but it may not be possible to provide this within the three-week turnaround period. The most important thing in this situation is to keep the students informed as to when they can expect feedback on their work.

**Postgraduate research:**

Many students on Masters degree programmes are expected to conduct primary research during the summer in order to submit a thesis in early Autumn. Access to necessary university equipment and library resources may become impossible due to closure or staff illness, which means that some research projects will become unviable over the coming months. In this case, alternative projects may be needed, or the thesis deadline may have to be extended. Some projects may be based around the collection of online data or the provision of a dataset for analysis.

**Extenuating circumstances**

Extenuating Circumstances applications will be dealt with by individual Colleges. It is likely that many students will need to apply for extenuating circumstances and won’t be able to submit alternative assessments to set deadlines. Following normal Extenuating Circumstances procedures will be difficult for both staff and students. There will be a high number of applications to process and students may not be able to get supporting documentation. There will be more information and guidance on this issue in due course.

**External examiners**

All alternative/modified assessments need to be recorded fully for review by External Examiners and accrediting bodies in line with the revised quality assurance processes. However, a change to External Examining procedures will be required. External Examiners should be notified of changes to assessments as soon as possible, but, unless required for accreditation purposes, their approval to make changes will not be required.

**Examination Boards and Progression and Awards Boards**

These may need to be delayed if students are struggling to submit their assessments and if staff are unable to mark within the three-week turnaround. If necessary, Boards can be held via Zoom providing that key members have access to the technology. It may not be possible for External Examiners to attend in person, but they could attend remotely.