Online/Remote Examination and Assessment (OREA) group

A task group of Senate Education Committee
working with the UoE ART* – Student – Curriculum Resilience group

Report update 1 Dec 2020

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* ART: Adaptation and Renewal Team in response to Covid.
https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/ART/
Summary

The group met through August 2020, and considered a wide variety of written and spoken evidence. The level of interest from all groups was high. There was concern from staff, but notably also considerable student concern, about the potential for unfairness and misconduct arising from the move to online assessments and examinations.

Feedback from Semester 2 of 2019/20 confirmed local concerns, but it was reported that academic misconduct pathways had identified more confusion and poor academic scholarship than actual misconduct. As previously, most examples were identified in students under pressure and stress.

There was, however, concern at our limited ability to recognise or act on misconduct other than plagiarism. A key question was how to be certain that work returned came from the unaided named student (while appreciating that that is not the intention of every assessment).

Recommendations cover assessment design, information and training for staff and students, and particularly focus as requested on online proctoring, and on interviewing for affirmation of student knowledge (‘vivas’). Consensus was reached on all the recommendations with on each issue agreement across the professional and student groups represented.

Some recommendations will require urgent regulatory approval so that they can be implemented in 2020/21, and these are highlighted. Some will need to be handed on to Academic Services or existing or new groups for completion or integration.

We elected to report concisely, giving brief background to recommendations, but referring to more detail and notes from meetings.

Key recommendations are around the use of an affirmation process, usually based on a viva, as a preliminary step where academic misconduct or irregularity in exam process is suspected; and around online proctoring. Some recommendations around on-campus provision have space or timetabling implications.

v1.1 update of the report, December 2020

The OREA recommendations were submitted in September 2020 and discussed at the ART-curriculum group and Senate Education Committee. Some details were additionally resolved, and policy changes discussed and approved. Resulting actions and policy are reflected in this v1.1 report.

A number of appendices in the September report have been omitted from this version. They described evidence or proposals that have subsequently been consolidated or amended.

For links to further information and subsequent policy and guidance, as well as to some of the earlier and background papers, please see the task group webpage, linked from www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/committees/education/task-groups
Recommendations

Recommendations are clustered into related groups with an indication of urgency, and who is taking forward

Key:

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Action: Due soon / Completed</th>
<th>Name/group taking forward</th>
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Monitoring of assessment outcomes

1 The outcome of future online assessments should be prospectively mapped to a variety of student characteristics, to understand whether there is any change in systematic advantage or disadvantage of particular student groups. This should be reported through standard data dashboards and Schools asked to reflect on the data and outcomes in annual QA reports.

1 Report on Sem 1 when poss; ongoing on reporting Senate QA Committee

Staff should expect

2 Guidance, training, and easy to follow resources which provide:
   - Approaches to course and assessment design in an era of mainly-online examinations and assessment.
   - Pros and cons of each assessment type. Implications of each, including impact on library resources and timetabling.
   - How to identify academic misconduct of all types, given the evidence that awareness greatly increases detection.
   - Pathways to follow should academic misconduct be suspected.
   - Course organisers should be made aware of routes to make, and seek approval for, late changes to assessment, in discussion with students, where this could improve assessment acceptability, quality and security during 2020/21.

2 December – draft guide (will need continuing upkeep) Neil Lent, Neil Turner; IAD

Students should expect

3 Pointers to coherent, simply expressed reasons for guidance and expectations, with strong advice on benefits of good academic practice, and risks of misconduct. With an expectation that they will have read and understood this.

4 Clear information about what is permitted and expected for each assessment, including time commitment, whether conferring with peers or other individuals is recommended or permitted, and any specific advice around resources to use.

5 For online examinations, opportunities to practise submitting work in the manner required, if this is new to them. Wherever possible, the opportunity to practise the type of time pressure and questions that will be experienced in an examination.

6 That the University has fair and robust mechanisms to discourage and prevent cheating. Staff guidance should be openly accessible for those who want to read it, and to keep student guidance aligned.

7 A clear route to raise concerns about assessment and examination issues, and that these will be taken seriously. (See also recommendation 19)
9 A sympathetic and understanding response from staff, including specific responses to expressed concerns.

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**Online proctoring**

10 The use of online proctoring should not be mainstreamed. However, the option of online proctoring should be retained for use where there is a clearly defined need.

11 Guidance should be provided about which circumstances are suitable for its use. Use cases should be developed to help illustrate this.

12 There should be an approval process to ensure consistent decision-making. This should utilise and align with existing University processes and structures (e.g. School and College Education/Learning and Teaching Committees, APRC, SEC etc).

13 Centrally-supported or centrally-facilitated platforms for proctoring should be provided. Work to identify options should include consideration of adapting existing IT tools for proctoring purposes, as well as commercial offerings.

14 For December 2020 exams, use of online proctoring should be limited to those courses that are already using it.

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**Vivas for affirmation**

15 The University should implement a selective process, usually a viva, to evaluate the extent to which a student holds the knowledge that was presented in a remote assessment. It would create an ‘affirmation process’ by which the mark previously awarded is confirmed. An alternative outcome would be to move to an academic misconduct route. A third possible outcome, of requiring further assessment, was not favoured at this stage.

The affirmation process might be triggered by examiners having reasonable doubt about an irregularity in the assessment or a suspicion of possibility of misconduct, or occasionally in response to specific allegations of misconduct.

Students would be made aware of the reasons for the viva. It would focus on a particular piece of submitted work. It should usually take place soon after the assessment process. More detailed guidance will be needed. Suggestions for the process are in the full report and in notes from Subgroup 3.

16 We do not recommend the use of random vivas to test students understanding of previously submitted work.

17 The use of ‘vivas for all’, which could explicitly test either new or previously submitted work, or both, and carry a summative mark as part of course or programme assessment, should be actively encouraged.

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**Schools and the University should provide**
On-campus facilities should be provided by schools for a limited number of students to take assessments or examinations where there is no feasible way to provide them with an adequate experience or suitable alternative assessment remotely. For example:
  - home circumstances (connectivity, environment) prevent effective study or work
  - disability requirements cannot be adequately fulfilled

Assessments would usually be the same online assessment, at the same time, as for students undertaking them remotely.

Clearly signposted pathways for student enquiries and concerns about assessment. Some further work may need to be undertaken to agree guidance around this.

The University should be ready to provide on-campus invigilated examinations for some selected whole cohorts of students undertaking computer-based high-stakes examinations in Semester 2 of 2020/21. Online invigilation would be recommended for students unable to attend in person.

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<td>Plan for on-campus invigilated online exams</td>
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Other issues

22 It was felt that current misconduct processes are adequate to cope with these new routes of referral, but that is should be kept under review.

23 Late submissions – consideration should be given to allowing variation of the additional time allowed for submission of short-duration assessments depending on the nature and duration of the assessment, e.g. whether an upload is required at the end, 30% time rather than a fixed duration of 1 hour. Subsequently, policy agreed and circulated

24 Timezones – we recommend continuing the guidance that 1300 GMT is usually the least-bad start time for exams. Where this causes difficulty, Schools are encouraged to give sympathetic consideration to alternatives where feasible.

25 Essay mills – we do not propose stringent efforts to block essay mill websites from the University network, but request that IS investigate the feasibility of auto-diverting requests for some common sites to an advice page.

26 Strategic lead role (QAA recommendation) – we ask that this be reviewed at a senior level.

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Background

Although online remote assessment was announced as the major element for Semester 1 of 2020/21, it became clear that it was likely to be a substantial element of assessment further into the future. There could be significant risks from that, bearing in mind:

- We want it to be fair to students in different circumstances.
- Where summative, we need assessment to be robust so that we can give a confident mark without no-detriment policies.
- We want it to withstand external scrutiny (employers, press, professional bodies, others).
- Reputational risk to the University and our graduates if students were found to have cheated.

‘Fair’ includes ensuring that new formats do not unfairly disadvantage students, as well as minimising the risk of cheating.

Surveys and conversations with students, locally and more widely, suggested that anxiety that peers may be cheating is a widespread concern. There are suggestions that where times for submission of remote exams are extended, conferring with peers and others is very common, probably usually at low level, but to varying degrees.

Some course organisers and academic misconduct officers have expressed concerns that our ability to detect cheating other than plagiarism is limited.

The College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM) submitted a discussion document to Senate Education Committee in June 2020, and it was agreed that this work should be taken forward by the ART-student-curriculum resilience group.

Remit

The remit for OREA was further developed into a series of background issues and objectives for three subgroups to consider. Each addressed particular areas:

1. Assessment type, resources, training (led by Lisa Kendall and Neil Turner)
2. Online proctoring (led by Judy Hardy)
3. ‘Vivas’ as a mechanism for assessing or checking a student’s understanding (led by Richard Blythe)

The questions each subgroup was asked to address are listed in Appendix 1, as part of the detailed remit for the OREA group.

Meetings

The main group met at the start, mid-point, and end of the one-month project. The first meeting agreed the detailed questions and allocation to subgroups. The second heard progress reports, agreed what was feasible within the time available, and what might need to be continued later. The third meeting heard conclusions and updates from each subgroup, agreed the framework and outline of content for the final report, and was prompted to feed back on the forthcoming draft report.

The steering group advised on a first draft of the final report, which was then revised and circulated to all group members for further electronic comment.
Group Membership

Name (subgroup)

Steering group
Neil Turner (1) CMVM Dean UG Learning & Teaching CMVM (Medical School)
Sabine Rolle (3) CAHSS UG Teaching Dean (School of LLC)
Lisa Kendall (1) CAHSS Director of Academic and Student Administration
Judy Hardy (2) CSE Dean of Learning & Teaching (Physics & Astronomy)
Alex Laidlaw (2) CSE Head of Academic Affairs
Fizzy Abou Jawad (1) EUSA (VP Education, prev. CSE student)
Roshni Hume (1) Academic Services

Full group members
Steering group as above, plus

Leah Sinclair (1) Timetabling and Examinations
Rena Gertz (1) Data Protection Officer
Neil Lent (1) Institute for Academic Development (IAD)
Victoria Buchanan Student Disability Service Asst Dir (or Paddy Corscadden)
Karen Howie (1) ISG Head of Digital Learning Applications and Media, ISG
Paul De’Ath (1) ISG Project Manager e-exams (replacing QMP)
Myles Blaney (2) ISG (scoping proctoring solutions)
Marshall Dozier (1) ISG Library resources (or Fiona Brown)
Gemma Riddell (1) EUSA (Senior Academic Adviser, the Advice Place)
Julian Mashingaidze (2) EUSA (UG Veterinary Studies Rep)
Ameer Ibrahim (3) EUSA (PGT rep)
Esther Mijers (1) CAHSS Director UG Studies in HCA
Emily Taylor (3) CAHSS Director of Teaching HiSS
Jon Beer (2) CAHSS Teaching and Student Services Manager, Economics
Dave Saunders (2) CAHSS CAMO (Moray House)
Richard Blythe (3) CSE CAMO (also School of Physics & Astronomy)
Patrick Walsh (1) CSE Director of Teaching, School of Biological Sciences
Gillian Bell (3) CSE Head of Teaching Org (Informatics)
Alan Jaap (2) CMVM Head of Assessment MBChB
Lesley Forrester (3) CMVM CAMO
Lindsay Dalziel (3) CMVM Manager Vet Teaching Organisation
1. Feedback from Semester 2 in 2019/20 and elsewhere

Led by Lisa Kendall

We received reports relating to all aspects of the exam diet in Semester 2 of the previous academic year, including from schools, Timetabling, Library resources, Academic misconduct, and reports on the performance of students with disability profiles and other characteristics. Evidence from these have been included in discussions and recommendations.

2. Staff resources and requirements

Led by Neil Lent

It was seen as important to provide pragmatic advice to course organisers and designers. In reviewing assessment for online, the opportunity to make changes that would better align outcomes, and make other academically desirable changes, should not be missed.

Content and presentation of this advice was discussed, under the headings:

- Principles and general features of assessment design
- Assessment design to support trusting relationships
- Factors that may increase the risk of third party cheating
- Misconduct risk factors
- How to spot misconduct
- Assessment methods pros and cons one by one

The aim is to have a strategy agreed by mid-September, with a commitment to publishing shortly after, and improvement and continued updating thereafter.

3. Student resources and requirements

Led by Fizzy Abou Jawad

Experience from CAMOs and from EUSA representatives and the Students' Association Advice Place is that many instances of academic misconduct occur when students are under pressure and lack understanding of what they are being asked of in an assessment. Many student concerns around the last exam diet were reported to be due to misunderstanding the referencing requirements of their assessment, or what resources they were permitted to utilise. Students need clear guidance on what is expected of them in an assessment.

As the hybrid environment will be new for both staff and students, students may initially be more confused as to what constitutes as academic misconduct. Clear information surrounding format of assessment and expectations of students should help to reduce the likelihood of academic misconduct as highlighted in the staff guidance document. Including students in conversations regarding expectations should also encourage them to feel a greater sense of community with their staff.

As highlighted in the QAA report, some students engage in academic misconduct due to lack “of essay writing skills; feeling unable to seek support from their providers; lack of confidence”. To mitigate this, students should be directed to central resources that could help improve their skills and thus their confidence throughout their academic journey.

Further work on student information and support will be coordinated with work on information for staff described in the previous section.

4. Measures for particular student circumstances
As we discussed issues experienced by students with particular home circumstances, or disability profiles, it was clear that inequalities for a limited number could not be eradicated remotely. We recommend that schools offer on-campus facilities for assessments where necessary. With the exception of any modifications for disability profiles, these would usually be the same assessments, at the same time, as for other students.

5. Student queries and reporting

There was unanimity on the importance of a dominantly supportive approach to student issues around assessment. Pathways for student enquiries and concerns about assessment should be established and made clear to students. There may be a need for University guidance on handling this. Likely enquiries will be around expectations and specifics around assessments, concerns of the possibility of anonymous academic misconduct rather than specific allegations, and discomfort rather than formal complaint.

Most favoured that the process should be routed initially through schools, with a common policy to ensure consistency, but there was an alternative view for issues around exam misconduct. Further consultation led to agreement that the major route should be via schools.

In the case of allegations about named individuals, it should be made clear that usually only non-anonymous reports can be taken forward (though identities of complainants will be kept confidential), and that frivolous or unjust allegations are serious disciplinary offences.

6. Online proctoring

Subgroup 2, led by Judy Hardy

Online proctoring is essentially an attempt to translate exam hall invigilation to an online assessment. Most commercial online proctoring tools utilise a combination of student device functions - cameras, microphones and desktop recording (e.g. keystrokes) - to identify particular behaviours/triggers which then generate a report. Reports often include video clips, timelines and flagging of triggers for further consideration by course teams, who will be best placed to determine whether flagged incidents require further investigation.

In general, there are three models for online proctoring, with cost being the major differentiation:

- Automated – AI-based
- Semi-automated – ‘record and review’
- Live proctoring – human proctor provided by vendor or based at institution observing exam via video – for individual student, or for many students simultaneously

ISG have recently reviewed some commercial proctoring solutions, the market, costs, and benefits/challenges of online proctoring.

Use of online proctoring at Edinburgh

Online proctoring tools are not currently supported by ISG, but some form of online proctoring has been used at Edinburgh in a small number of courses, including

- The Distance Learning at Scale (DLAS) initiative using RPNow
- The DSTI programme in Informatics using ProctorU to proctor 10-40 distance students who sit exams at the same time as up to ~400 on-campus students.
- The MBChB programme used existing technology (MS Teams) and internal staff to proctor small numbers of students undertaking resits. This seemed to work well from a practical and pedagogical perspective, and was well-received by students, who did
not appear to find it too intrusive. It seems difficult to scale, but reports are emerging from other medical schools of adapting similar approaches to large cohorts.

**Pros and Cons of Online Proctoring**

**Potential benefits:**
- Students can sit their exams from a location of their choice. But this is also a challenge; Students may not have access to a quiet space, or a good internet connection.
- The University is not dependent on the physical space available for an exam.
- The security of online assessment is improved – it is more difficult (although not impossible) for a student to cheat during an online exam that is proctored.

**Potential challenges:**
- Large class sizes may be an issue for some suppliers (particularly for human rather than AI proctoring).
- Technical problems with proctoring are not uncommon. We need to ensure we have an alternative plan for students who have technical issues. Technical problems will also likely cause a great deal of anxiety for students impacted.
- These tools can raise privacy issues collecting biometric data, showing students personal spaces, information about applications running on their computers. One potential commercial supplier for DLAS failed a data protection impact assessment.
- Most external services are costly.
- Some exam types may be complicated to proctor, in particular handwritten examinations which are digitised and then submitted.

It would be useful to have guidance in place for those limited times that online proctoring is required.

**7. Vivas**

*Subgroup 3, led by Richard Blythe*

The subgroup considered the possibility of the selective use of vivas to test knowledge and understanding following a non-invigilated assessment.

It was concluded that this process could reassure that marks are reliable, and that it may also serve as deterrent against assessment misconduct.

The specific term *affirmation* is recommended to describe the process, to describe its purpose, and to distinguish it from standard assessments (particularly oral assessments that may overlap in style).

Affirmation should only be used only in exceptional cases where there is reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of a student’s submission, but insufficient evidence to establish a prima facie case of Academic Misconduct. Where many affirmations are considered for a single assessment, this likely points to poor assessment design and should be addressed by other means.

If a Course Organiser or School wishes to achieve the goals of affirmation at the whole-class level, this should be built into the course or programme assessment structure from the outset and not tacked on at the end.

Oversight, likely at the School level, will be needed to monitor affirmation rates between courses, and to ensure that no student is unnecessarily subjected to a repeated process.

Affirmation may be applied to any piece of non-invigilated assessment: it is not restricted to centrally-timetabled examinations.
Policy and guidance around this recommendation was subsequently agreed and approved. A link is available from the OREA task group webpage.

8. Other issues

We were asked to consider some other specific issues, and have added some others that did not clearly fit other headings, and have added here some others that did not fit other headings.

**Late submissions**

It was confirmed that there had been variation in practice, but it seemed that understanding and latitude had been extended in most circumstances. There was some concern about the potential for abuse if it became standard to accept all delays.

Consideration should be given to altering additional time for submission to be a proportion of the exam time (e.g. 30%) rather than a set +1h. Where the exam delivery system does not require a substantial upload at the end of the exam, it may be reasonable to keep the exam at its usual (in exam hall) duration, without any supplement.

**Timezones**

This is only relevant when scheduling short-duration (<24h) exams. At the recommended hour for short duration exams, the major disadvantaged group would be in the West of the Americas. This does not seem to have caused major issues in the last exam diet. We recommend that the 1pm exam time continues to be the preferred time for short-duration exams, but schools who have students in the Americas, in particular, should consider what alternatives are possible.

**Essay mills**

Essay mills, websites offering to write assessments for you, have become an endemic problem, particularly in some institutions, and perhaps differentially in different regions of the world. Some institutions have gone to significant lengths to block access to essay mill websites. We felt that this would have diminished impact in an era of home-study, as the institution can have no impact on what is available from home networks.

However there may be benefit from signalling awareness, and taking the opportunity to point to guidance, by redirecting requests to at least some prominent contract cheating websites from the University network. We considered the feasibility, cost and value of doing this, and decided against redirections.

**Student reporting of concerns**

This is the subject of recommendations 7, 19. Subgroup 3 considered processes for this in some detail, and leant towards a university-level approach, possibly via a web form. The wider group felt that clear pathways were necessary, but that a local, school-based approach was agreed following later consultation after the OREA group’s report.
Academic leadership
The QAA’s second edition of ‘Contracting to Cheat in Higher Education’ included a recommendation that institutions should identify a named senior member of staff with responsibility for ensuring assessment integrity. We viewed this as an important function, but did not take a view on where it should sit. Subsequently it was noted that academic misconduct is overseen through existing Quality Assurance structures, and that leadership of this strand should sit with the convener of the University Quality Assurance and Enhancement committee, Assistant Principal Academic Standards and QA, Prof Tina Harrison.
APPENDIX 1

REMIT

Formal remit from the ART – Student – Curriculum Resilience Group

The work group is expected to identify lessons learned from the May 2020 diet of exams, and report back at the end of August. This should include:

- The development of an understanding of the full impact of the May 2020 diet including investigation of the following specific issues:
  - The need to ensure that exams are fair for all students, remaining mindful of the fact that not all students have access to the same technology and networks.
  - Whether the repurposing of closed book exams as open book exams for the May 2020 exam diet had inadvertently encouraged poor scholarship.
  - Possibilities around online proctoring, although in general, many schools would prefer to find alternative ways of ensuring that assessments are secure.
  - Ways in which poor scholarship and plagiarism might be designed out.
  - Concerns over consistency of approach to late submission of online exams.
  - The potential to make greater use of vivas, while addressing issues in relation to equity (in both directions).

- Identification of proposals to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the assessment diet in December 2020; including the provision of guidance and support resources for staff/students. Note: the project to replace QMP will not deliver in Semester 1 and therefore no substantive change to available tools is currently anticipated.
  - Consistent with cultivating an atmosphere of trust and a compassionate approach, this is likely to focus on encouraging good scholarship as well as considering proctoring/plagiarism detection tools.

- Consider the recommendations of QAA reports on ‘Contracting to cheat in higher education’ (https://bit.ly/30X4OgH) and their implications for the University.

Minute from Senate Education Committee June 2020

1.1 Online Assessment 2020-21 – Discussion Paper from CMVM

The Committee noted the concerns that exist around ensuring that assessed work undertaken by students online is both robust and secure. Members discussed:

- the value of ongoing dialogue with students, which makes it easier to identify anomalous performance;
- the possibilities around online proctoring, although in general, Schools would prefer to find alternative ways of ensuring that assessments are secure;
- essay mills - the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance advised the Committee that student-led guidance highlighting the dangers for students of using essay mills was planned;
- whether the repurposing of closed book exams as open book exams for the May 2020 exam diet had inadvertently encouraged poor scholarship;
- the need to understand the full impact of the May 2020 exam diet;
- ways in which poor scholarship and plagiarism might be designed out;
- the potential to make greater use of vivas, although the Committee recognised that undertaking selective vivas raises concerns around equity, particularly for students with disabilities;
- the need to ensure that exams were fair for all students, remaining mindful of the fact that not all students have access to the same technology and networks;
• the value of undertaking benchmarking against other institutions;
• the need to ensure that any required policy and regulatory changes are made as quickly as possible;
• and overall, the importance of cultivating an atmosphere of trust and a compassionate approach. It was agreed that the University should be relying more on ongoing dialogue and encouraging good scholarship than on proctoring and plagiarism detection tools.

Members agreed that a task force should be set up within the Curriculum Resilience stream of the ART programme to give further consideration to issues around online assessment.

Adopted final remit

It was agreed to break into three subgroups to consider 3 key areas. For each, some background issues are summarised, then objectives for each group are listed. These have been checked back against the recommendations made.

1. Assessment type, resources, training

The remit for this group is the most wide-ranging. It will be important to major on recommendations that require early action. It may be possible to propose further work on topics that require longer and are less pressing.

Background

• Students with poor facilities at home: poor study environment, poor connectivity or IT equipment, are less able to access resources for ‘open book’ exams, or submit on time.
• Remote assessment is more than usually vulnerable to academic misconduct. The recent QAA report (see Appendix) and others have concluded that no form of assessment makes it possible to completely design out misconduct.
• Extended time assessments (e.g. 24h or days) incur risks from helpful family members and friends, WhatsApp groups. Vulnerability to essay mills may be increased rather than reduced by short timelines.
• Restricted-time (e.g. 2-3h) exams provide less time for conferring, but are not immune to malpractice. None of the available countermeasures can fully circumvent ‘helpful assistants’. Questions that are time-consuming to create may be recorded.
• Examinations & Timetabling are collecting data on broad types of assessment currently being planned by schools.
• We will seek feedback from the online assessment conducted in Spring 2020.

Key recommendations required

• Considering fairness, risk of misconduct, professional constraints, and other issues, should we be recommending particular types of assessment?
• Do we need to raise staff awareness of the possibility of misconduct? Do we need a senior appointment around this, as suggested by QAA?
• Are there other student or staff interventions that we should consider?
• Are there comprehensive good resources we can point to? If not adequate, what is needed to provide this info?
• What cautions should we apply to each major type of assessment? To include staff time for exam setting or marking, library resource requirements (e.g. limited number of simultaneous users of key books).
• What would be the appropriate response to suspected misconduct? Noting the topics of subgroups 2 and 3, could these help?
• Students lack of familiarity with exam format: should we make a recommendation around formative assessments in the same format?
• Do we need greater consistency in managing assessments in different timezones.
• Late submissions. It appears that there has been wide variation in practice on this across Schools. We have been asked to make recommendations.
• Are there other additional specific measures to recommend?

2. Online proctoring

Online proctoring has been implemented in some UoE examinations already, including in our Distance Learning at Scale venture. We should hear reports from this, and hopefully of experiences elsewhere. Edinburgh University does not so far have formal policy around this.

Background

• Proctoring in some form has become widely regarded as essential for some high-stakes time-limited online assessments.
• Some professional exams in Edinburgh have been run at usual duration but open-book (versus University default of usual time plus 1h), and are considering proctoring.
• Work to scope some commercially offered solutions has been undertaken in ISG, and it is anticipated their report should be available at the end of July.
• Some institutions have used existing supported technology such as Collaborate, Teams, or Zoom, to conduct remote proctoring. These do not have some of the frills of commercial systems. There would be clear capital cost advantages, possibly to be balanced against effectiveness, staff time.
• It has been suggested that the need for online proctoring can be reduced by countermeasures*.

Key recommendations required

• Should the University offer online proctoring for its examinations?
• If yes, should we offer guidance about when?
• How: should we be recommending any particular approaches?
• How do available or proposed solutions scale to large programmes of 200, 300+ Undergraduate students sitting an examination simultaneously?
• Are there significant new ethical or data protection issues; can we make a statement on this?
• Is formal policy, regulation, or guidance essential or desirable?
• What do you do if student reports bandwidth too poor or connection has failed and proctoring connection drops?
• What do you do if you suspect misconduct but cannot prove it remotely?
• Online proctoring isn’t a magic bullet. What other measures might be valuable?

* Counter-measures beyond time limit include randomize order of questions, and preventing going back to previous questions. These reduce conferring between candidates. Different questions for different candidates raise issues of fairness or exam reliability. Short answers
might replace MCQs, perhaps in the future with ability to compare phrasing of answers in a systematic manner.

3. Vivas

At present our regulations prevent use of vivas selectively, for example pass/fail for borderline or distinction level performance. However one possible approach if there is a lack of confidence in results, is to test understanding in a viva (usually online).

The CMVM document considered by Senate Education Committee suggested these would almost never directly change a mark. The outcome could be either to endorse a mark, or lead to a judgement that additional assessment was required to achieve greater certainty about a mark. That could keep vivas short. However in some circumstances further assessment may need to be physically proctored, and therefore possibly delayed.

Background

- The purpose would be to test marks that are out of kilter with previous performance (up or down). Examples might include: scores very variable, performance in one element or type of activity or assessment unusually different from another, missing significant items of assessment, or other constraints related to circumstances of remote/hybrid teaching or Coronavirus.
- To verify a mark if there were any irregularities about the exam process (including connectivity difficulties during it), its oversight or (online) proctoring, or suspicions that the work may not be solely that of the student.
- Random vivas have also been implemented in some Universities, a policy that is felt to be a significant disincentive to serious misconduct.

Key recommendations required

- Should the University implement selective vivas in this way?
- Should random vivas be included as an option, as part of our measures to discourage cheating?
- Management of the viva process. Including what should the staff member(s) participating and the student be told about the reason for the viva.
- Do we need new policy and regulations around this; if so, what principles?
- Include recommendations around record-keeping. Offer recording of interviews?
- Would this raise any new equality/disability issues? How could these be taken into account or dealt with?
- Action to be taken if the viva suggests mark does not accurately reflect understanding. Does the exam board determine the format of further assessment?
- What if academic misconduct is suspected?
- What if the process delays progression?

Note on vivas as a standard part of assessment

Probably the most powerful way of detecting misconduct, or of underperformance caused by a problem or crisis, is knowing your students. That means that out-of-character performance or style is more readily recognised.

There are good reasons to consider vivas for all students as a replacement for some other form of individually marked assessment. For remote students, a live academic discussion with
a tutor is a valuable experience. Vivas as a form of assessment are permitted by current regulations, may not take more time than marking an essay, and perhaps could be encouraged.