Framework for Assessment for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes 2021-2022

BACKGROUND

1. On 18 March 2020, and in response to UK Government policy, the Vice-Chancellor announced that students should return home and advised students that face-to-face teaching would move online and that alternative arrangements for examinations would follow since none would take place in Cambridge in Easter Term 2020.

2. The published Assessment Principles and Policies (Easter Term 2020) detailed those alternative arrangements.

3. In Michaelmas Term 2020, having reflected on the changes to assessment in Easter Term 2020 and in recognition that COVID-19 persists meaning that the University would again be operating in an emergency year, the General Board's Education Committee (GBEC) approved the Framework for Assessment for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught programmes in the Academic Year 2020-21.

4. In response to a further national 'lockdown' in January, in February 2021, the General Board's Education Committee (GBEC) approved some revisions to this Framework, to allow for new package of mitigations and to provide for students who might not be in Cambridge. This was communicated via the Key Issues Bulletin.

5. In February 2021, GBEC approved the use of ProctorExam for remote proctoring as necessary to allow certain subjects to move assessments online in the event that they could not run in-person exams as planned, and for candidates who are not in Cambridge or otherwise unable to sit exams in-person. Approval was given for 2020-21 only.

6. Pre-COVID, examinations followed the Regulations laid down in Statutes and Ordinances; predominantly in:

   a) Ordinances, Chapter III Examinations, which over 14 pages details: eligibility for Honours Examinations; Allowances to Candidates; Entries and Lists of Candidates; Dates of Examinations and Publication of Class-Lists; Form and Conduct of Examinations; Publication of Lists of Successful Candidates in Examinations; Disclosure of Examination Marks; General Regulations for Examiners and Assessors; Payment to Examiners and Assessors.

   b) Ordinances, Chapter IV Preliminary Examinations and Tripos. Chapter IV spans 183 pages.

7. The *Reporter* records the steps taken to set aside Regulations including:

   a) A Notice of University governance during the COVID-19 pandemic (16 April 2020).
   b) A statement on key principles for the delivery of education and summary of decisions taken in response to the COVID-19 outbreak on student-related matters (17 June 2020).
   c) A Notice seeking approval of Graces to give the General Board (acting through its Education Committee) the discretion to suspend certain requirements set out in Ordinance and General Board Regulations during that period (29 July 2020).

d) A Notice stating the General Board expects to exercise the authority granted by temporary regulations approved by Graces 20–25 of 29 July 2020 in relation to assessments taking place over the 2020–21 academic year (28 September 2020).

e) That Notice also conveyed that 'the General Board, acting through its Education Committee's Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee, plans to publish Notices about temporary changes to examination regulations that will take effect for the duration of this academic year, together with Notices concerning permanent changes to examination regulations with effect from 1 October 2020, the publication of which was delayed by the disruption caused by the pandemic.'

f) From 21 October those Notices appeared.

FUTURE OF ASSESSMENT

8. The rapid change to assessment in Easter Term 2020 led to a desire amongst some Faculties and Departments to move away from the traditional 3-hour written examination; this is something that the Examination Review had recommended in its concluding report in 2017.

9. The Framework for Assessment for the academic year 2020-21 enabled a mixed model of assessment that allowed some continuation of the changes to assessment within the restrictions placed by COVID-19.

10. The Framework for Assessment 2021-22 will no longer represent emergency measures required to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, but will be the first transition year to a more inclusive approach to assessment.

11. This transition year will allow:

a) Faculties and Departments time to continue using some of the new modes and methods of assessment[1] while they prepare proposals for any permanent changes that they wish to make to assessment within their programme Ordinances, and subject to the normal approval routes.

b) Analysis of student outcomes to ensure that there is no negative affect on closing the awarding gaps and that the modes and methods of assessment adopted do not disadvantage any student.

c) Fuller consideration of the assessment infrastructure (e.g. the service, resource and financial model) required to deliver assessment.

d) Time to undertake a significant review of Regulations (especially Chapters III & IV) and to make necessary changes to provide the statutory framework needed to support future modes of assessment.

12. Since a significant review of Regulations will take some time, the Education Committee recommends continued emergency powers to allow Regulations to be set aside so that Faculties and Departments which so choose can continue to offer assessments in a format other than those prescribed by Ordinances. A Notice and grace is being prepared for approval by the Council.

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[1] This document refers to 'modes of assessment' (i.e., exams, essays, vivas – the term used by UK QAA) and 'methods' of assessment' (i.e., online, open book, invigilated, proctored).

13. The Examinations and Assessment Committee (EAC - a sub-committee of GBEC) supports the suggestion that 2020-21 should be the first transition year whilst the EAC concentrates on its aims of:

   a) Working with Faculties and Departments to close the awarding gaps for Black British students and those with declared mental health disabilities, as committed to the Office for Students (OfS) in the University's Access and Participation Plan. This will involve, in part, a move towards more inclusive assessment practices which may involve some strategic diversification of modes and methods of assessment; and

   b) Defining the assessment infrastructure needed to deliver assessment in the coming year and in future years.

ASSUMPTIONS

14. Examinations and assessments will occur throughout the academic year, within the established Term dates (except for those whose assessment that have traditionally fallen outside of Term).

15. The examination enrolment period will open on 1 October and close on 2 November 2021.

16. The Examinations Team in the Student Registry will schedule and oversee all in-person and online examinations.

17. Moodle will remain the standard platform for submission of online assessments.

18. All students will be in residence and therefore taking examinations and assessments in Cambridge. Contingency plans are, however, required in the event of continued restrictions because of COVID-19 under which some students may not be able to return to Cambridge (see para 32).

THE FRAMEWORK 2021-2022

19. Putting aside any possible constraints imposed by the COVID pandemic, the framework:

   a) allows reversion to usual modes of examinations (e.g., written in-person exams in an invigilated exam hall) and supports those Faculties and Departments that do not wish to return to their established modes and methods of assessment, preferring to continue with the transition to more diverse and permanent changes where appropriate; and

   b) generally, re-provides what was offered in 2020-21, the only exception being removal of the 6-hour window (para 22 and Appendix A), for reasons GBEC discussed on 18 November 2020 (Paper E6299); and

   c) provides options that are deliverable within the systems and infrastructures currently available to and supported by the University. (Whilst work is underway to consider what other systems and infrastructure are required to support future diversification of assessment, this will take time, as the work needs to be better informed about what assessment looks like in the future.)

20. Having considered the matters above (para 19), GBEC has approved a list of modes and methods of assessment at Cambridge, which form the framework for 2021-2022 (para 22).

21. Faculties and Departments that adopt any of these approved modes and methods of assessment are not required to seek permission from GBEC for changes, but will need to provide details of their

planned assessments for 2021-2022 through the annual course information exercise run by the Examinations Team (detailed in paras 34-39). If Faculties and Departments wish to deviate from the framework, either in terms of assessment format or in terms of operational delivery, they must liaise with their Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO) Liaison Officer in the first instance to determine if this is possible, not least within the systems and infrastructures available and supported by the University.

22. The approved framework for 2021-2022.

   a) **Coursework**

   - For these purposes, coursework is defined as a set assignment of work that is undertaken over a period of time of longer than 24 hours.

   - Parameters for coursework include a fixed date for submission (with a possibility of extension on a case-by-case basis) and/or a fixed word limit.

   - Coursework could be a portfolio of essays or assignments, or a single piece of work.

   b) **Dissertation**

   - Submission of a defined piece of work.

   - Parameters for dissertation include a fixed date for submission (with a possibility of extension on a case-by-case basis) and/or a fixed word limit.

   c) **Examinations**

   i) **In-person exams**

   The assumption is that in-person examinations will revert to same format as pre-COVID, i.e., hand-written, invigilated in an exam hall.

   This option does not include the provision for candidates to sit in an exam hall, with or without invigilation, and to type their exams.

   ii) **In-person, invigilated, typed exams**

   Whilst noting that the University does not generally have the systems or infrastructure to provide for in-person, invigilated, typed exams, GBEC has exceptionally approved this method of assessment for:

   - the School of Biological Sciences to use for the Vet Clinical course and the pre-clinical courses (Vets & Meds)[2]

   - the School of Clinical Medicine to use in their clinical medicine examinations (written and clinical).

   Noting that this method of assessment was, in part, to meet a regulatory body requirement and recognising the financial investment in such methods, this option remains available only to those for whom permission was granted in 2020-21.

   In allowing this provision, the School of Clinical Medicine should report progress of development of the technology deployed, including an AI method to mark short answer

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[2] Whilst approved, the School only used this method for Clinical Vet exams in 2020-21.

question papers and improvements to the system following reported concerns in delivery in 2020-21.

iii) **Online exams**

▪ These assume the use of a common tool (such as Moodle), where candidates are not required to be invigilated/in an exam hall but instead to submit their work remotely at the conclusion of the exam period.

▪ All candidates have the same start and end time (exceptions being those candidates with approved additional time). For those students who are not in Cambridge (see para 18) and are sitting assessments outside this time zone, such assessments should be sat during the hours of 0800 – 2200 in their own local time zone where possible, but with the option of extending to 0700 – 2300 if necessary.

▪ These examinations may have a fixed window for completion from the following options.

  ▫ 90-minutes;
  ▫ 2-hours;
  ▫ 3-hour window;
  ▫ 24-hour window.

  For students with approved exam adjustments, the time limited window of less than 24 hours would be extended to meet the additional time awarded (which might include additional time or rest breaks or both).

  Remote invigilation may be possible for timed assessments of 90-minutes, 2-hours or 3-hours.

▪ Most online examinations are open book, with or without remote proctoring. Open book allows candidates to access their own textbooks, notes and other resources whilst sitting the exam. Clear instructions about referencing/citing expectations should be provided to students.

▪ Clear marking criteria should continue to be published to students and will require review and adjustment for open book compared to closed book exams.

▪ Where there is no remote proctoring, the Examinations Team will continue to monitor time spent on those held within the 3-hour window and report any perceived anomalies first to the student's College (who might confirm legitimate reasons, such as technology failures) and then to the Chair of Examiners.

▪ Whilst there is no restriction on the time students spend on their 24-hour assessments, the University's guidance is clear that time spent should not be any longer than the usual length of a standard Cambridge examination. The 24-hour window provides for students granted extra time and/or rest breaks, offers flexibility if technical difficulties are experienced, and flexibility for those who are outside the UK/GMT time zone.

▪ Indicative word counts should apply to all exams with predominantly essay format answers.

- Word counts for 24-hour examinations are normally required, to encourage students not to think they need to produce more material or longer scripts and so not work for longer than they would in an in-person 3-hour exam.

- Word counts in 3-hour exams are not advised as they are unlikely to act effectively as proxy time limits for disabled students as, rather than limiting the amount of time spent writing, for many disabled students the addition of a word count in the exam confers an additional time cost.

- Faculties and Departments should communicate these word counts to students and advise that whilst punitive measures for exceeding them would not normally apply, Examiners will stop reading after the word count has been reached. Punitive measures might apply where the specified word count is clearly stated as a competency (i.e. that is what the assessment is seeking to measure).

- In imposing word counts, Faculties and Departments should be mindful that, for disabled students, this adds another cognitive task (e.g. editing and revising down), which might disadvantage disabled students with processing or working memory issues. Therefore, the consideration of the use of any word count should consider the difficulties that disabled students experience with written expression, literacy skills and editing by being generous enough not to add an additional cognitive burden or time cost. Faculties and Departments should not assume that additional time would counter this disadvantage.

d) **Practical work (organised within a Faculty/Department)**

e) **Presentations** might include individual and group (where group, clear advice about marking practices should be shared with students), online or in-person, recorded or live.

f) **Project work (which might be individual or group based)**

g) **Recital/performance**

h) **Oral exams**

CHANGES FROM FRAMEWORK 2020-2021

23. The previous framework allowed for a 6-hour window for exams that would normally be up to and including 3-hours. However, this is no longer an option because it did not adequately accommodate the examination access arrangements for some disabled students, which consequently required bespoke adjustments in 2020/21. (This is detailed in Appendix A.)

24. It is assumed that the exceptional mitigating measures adopted for Easter Term 2021 will not apply in 2021-22, although this will be kept under review.

25. The arrangement with ProctorExam, which was adopted for the emergency year 2020-21, ceased at the end of ET 2021, although the future use of this or an equivalent system will be kept under review.

IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

26. Faculties and departments can continue to borrow papers but must communicate with other parties in the 'parent' and 'child' arrangement. Faculties that have students that rely on 'child' papers need to be assured that the papers are running and that they are satisfied that their students should sit them.

27. The University will use standard processes for managing applications for coursework and dissertation extensions.

28. The Examination Access and Mitigation Committee (EAMC) will continue to approve examination adjustments that would apply to all the assessment methods listed in para 22, and the Examinations Team in the Student Registry will manage these.

29. Turnitin is recommended for use for assessments where a student may have accessed other sources of information, to check the academic integrity of the work. Turnitin can be used as the point of submission for coursework as normal. It is however, not currently considered stable enough to be used as the point of submissions for exams. At peak times, there is a risk that if it struggles to cope with volume, students work will not be saved and students will receive error messages causing them anxiety, and will also have a knock on impact on Moodle load.

30. Alternative provision for disabled students, requiring use of a PC and extra written time within an invigilated setting, will be provided but will not be the in-house solution (DS-Exams) provided until Easter Term 2019, as this is no longer in service. Remote invigilation is likely to be an appropriate alternative.

EMERGENCY MEASURES

31. Whilst we might expect that assessments and examinations to comply with this Framework, it would be prudent to be prepared to move online should Covid restrictions be such that in-person delivery is not possible across 2021-22, keeping in mind that assessment and examinations run throughout the year, and not just in Easter Term.

32. Faculties and Departments who choose in-person examinations should also propose a contingency plan. If that plan requires online proctoring, then the University will carry out a tender exercise to provide such services for this year and beyond.

33. The General Board's Education Committee might be required to use emergency measures if a public health emergency requires, in addition to use of usual mechanisms to approve changes and so set aside Regulations.

ACTION ON FACULTIES AND DEPARTMENTS

34. Paragraph 22 in the Framework lists the approved modes and methods of assessment at Cambridge. Faculties and Departments will need to determine which of the options listed they wish to adopt for each Paper.

35. Teaching may need to be adapted to ensure that students are adequately prepared for any new modes and methods of assessment chosen.

36. Faculties and Departments who draw from the approved modes and methods of assessment are not required to apply for changes.

37. Faculties and Departments who wish to deviate from the framework, either in terms of assessment format or in terms of operational delivery, must liaise with their Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO) Liaison Officer in the first instance to determine if this is possible, not least within the systems and infrastructures available and supported by the University.

38. All Faculties and Departments are required to provide details of their planned assessments for 2021-2022 through the annual course information exercise run by the Exams Office, which is open throughout July–August 2021.

39. If desired and prior to submitting these details, Faculties and Departments can direct queries to their EQPO Liaison Officer, contact details linked here:
https://www.educationalpolicy.admin.cam.ac.uk/contact-us/who-contact-institutions-and-projects

Summary of steps and timeframe for action

w/c 3 May 2021	Framework for Assessment 2021-2022 issued to Faculties and Departments, with cover note.
From May – point submit assessment plans (deadline: 31 August 2021)	1. Faculties and Departments determine the assessment modes and methods of assessment for 2021-22 (including contingency plans). 2. Faculties and Departments might choose to liaise with their EQPO Liaison Officer. 3. Those which draw from the approved the modes and methods of assessment, are not required to apply for changes. 4. Those who wish to deviate from the framework, either in terms of assessment format or in terms of operational delivery, must liaise with their EQPO Liaison Officer in the first instance to determine if this is possible, not least within the systems and infrastructures available and supported by the University. This step is also required for contingency plans that deviate from the framework. 5. Any deviation will need GBEC approval. Faculties and Departments must build this into their timetable for decisions to meet the deadlines stated below.
From 05 July-31 August 2021	During this window, Faculties and Departments submit assessment plans via annual course information exercise.
By 30 September 2021	Faculties and Departments to submit to their EQPO Liaison Officer final contingency plans where such plans have deviated from the framework.

Examination Access Arrangements and methods of assessment 2020/21

Commentary from the DRC, supplied to GBEC November 2020 (in Paper E6299)

	Method of Assessment	Risk?	Assessment of reasonable accommodation of EAAs
1	6-hour window within which the examination must be completed for exams that would normally be up to and including 3-hours **With Non-Disabled students required to complete in 3 hours**	If non-disabled students have to complete within the standard time (e.g. for a 3-hour exam they would need to submit within 3 hours) this is not problematic	EAAs are accommodated appropriately and reasonably as disabled students who have extra time, rest or nutrition breaks (up to 100% of the standard time) can be managed within the 6-hour window, and non-disabled students (or students without EAAs) are expected to complete within the standard 3 hours (with some small leeway for uploading or technical issues).
2	6-hour window open book exam within which the examination must be completed for exams that would normally be up to and including 3-hours **With Word Limit but whole of window available**	If non-disabled students can use the whole 6-hour window, even with a word limit this **is problematic**	If non-disabled students can use the whole 6- hour window, even with a word limit this is problematic. For example, if the exam involves some degree of recalling factual information, then an open book exam allows a student more time to look up that information. For a student who processes slowly (due to SpLD, Chronic Fatigue, ADHD, etc), or who is using assistive technology, then they have less time to look up factual information and will be disadvantaged by comparison. The imposition of a word limit fails to offset this disadvantage, as simply writing longer scripts is not the only factor in play here - it's also about taking additional time to look information up and the ability to finesse the argument, edit responses and improve written expression. These additional aspects of improving the script are more available to the non-disabled student (who can do this more quickly) than is the case for the disabled student, if both groups have the same exam time. Thus the word limit fails to level the playing field, or compensate for the lack of extra time, in terms of ensuring that disabled students have the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers to look up information, finesse, edit and improve their essay.

	Method of Assessment	Risk?	Assessment of reasonable accommodation of EAAs
3	3-hour window within which the examination must be completed for exams that would normally be up to and including 1-hour **With Non-Disabled students required to complete in 1 hour**	If non-disabled students have to complete within the standard time (e.g., for a 3-hour exam they would need to submit within 3 hours) this is not problematic	EAAs are accommodated as disabled students who have extra time, rest or nutrition breaks (up to 100% of the standard time) can be managed within the 6-hour window and non-disabled students (or students without EAAs) are expected to complete within the standard 3 hours (with some small leeway for uploading or technical issues).
4	3-hour window open book exam within which the examination must be completed for exams that would normally be up to and including 1-hour **With Word Limit but whole of window available**	If non-disabled students can use the whole 3-hour window, even with a word limit this **is problematic**	If challenged this method of assessment is likely to be determined as actively disadvantaging disabled students. There is also a risk that we will be working against our APP targets to close the attainment gap between disabled students and their non-disabled peers. Rationale for disadvantage as in 2
5	Open book examination (24 hour). **With word limit but whole of window available**	Less problematic but still open to some challenge	It could be argued that the 24-hour, open book, exam is a more universally designed, inclusive, mode of assessment that has adjustments for disabled students 'baked in'. This is easier to argue where the exam relies less on recall of factual information and is more heavily focused on application of knowledge/understanding and critical thinking skills. Where the exam questions have a greater focus on recall of information the equity of a 24-hour exam for all (as an inclusive practice) could be challenged.

Notes

- Word limits in 6- or 3-hour exams are unlikely to act effectively as proxy time limits for disabled students as, rather than limiting the amount of time spent writing, for many disabled students the addition of a word limit in the exam confers an additional time cost. For example, students with SpLD have problems writing succinctly and so will need to write multiple drafts/re-drafts as part of the process of reducing the word count to the set limit– which takes them considerable time. They would therefore be disproportionately disadvantaged by the additional criteria of a word limit (as their non-disabled peers do not experience similar difficulties with concise written expression, literacy skills and slow editing skills). Trying to ensure that they are not exceeding a set word limit on an essay, while simultaneously writing the essay, will also disproportionately add a significant cognitive burden that is likely to further reduce their ability to show their potential in the exam. Any word limit should take into account the difficulties that disabled students experience with written expression, literacy skills and editing by being generous enough not to add an additional cognitive burden or time cost, or, instead, be set as a 'guide' rather than a restriction.
- Oxford University are allowing exam adjustments in addition to the open book exam by providing disabled students with an increased time 'window' and are using the process of allowing candidates with agreed EAA to go over the set exam time and advising them to ignore the 'alert' message that will be produced. https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/Open%20Book%20Exam%20Guide%20for%20Candidates.pdf