

Experience with online physics assessment at the University of York

by [Rex Godby](#)

abstract:

In a short period during which, I expect, many other universities have been following similar trajectories, we have had to move from a situation where most of our assessment is done through carefully prepared closed examinations of 1-3 hours duration to open examinations that students will sit remotely. The timescale involved has led us to adapt the already-prepared exam papers for use as open exams. I will try to draw some conclusions from the experience (which is in its early days at the time of writing).

participant's summary

How did the university of York deal with sudden online assessments?

Moving the lectures online was facilitated by the fact that all lectures have been recorded in the preceding 1-2 years. The LMS was already very much used. Pastoral and tutorial meetings happen spontaneously via Zoom etc.

Assessment was most strongly affected. 107 assessments were scheduled between March and summer (75% of all assessments of one year).

University-wide measure: all 1st year students pass automatically. That relieved some pressure.

40 closed exams need to be converted to an open 24-hour format.

42 other exams will happen as oral exams via video technology.

There is a 'safety net' : a mark for this year cannot be lower than the weighted average of the marks of the previous years.

How do these open exams work?

Exam questions need to be validated by peers, so they are laborious to make. Therefore take as much as possible from the existing databases.

Reproduction questions are avoided, problems on unseen issues are favoured.

Students write their answers by pen, scan it, and upload it to an anonymous submission point on the learning environment

The university imposed a 24h period (reasons: other time zones, and ample of time to solve technical issues).

Students are instructed not to interact with other people about that exam.

We hope to learn from this whether and how open exams can be used to assess advanced courses in physics and mathematics.

Another learning outcome: can zoom meetings be used for online oral exams?

Final note on the plans (changed back) of Durham university.

Q&A

Q. (Not on assessment) Are you considering putting your MAsters in Fusion online from the Autumn. I'm wondering if the current situation is opening up new possibilities.

A. Not yet clear.

Q: Are the “normal” assessments written on paper? It can be difficult to sketch and write equations.

A: Adobe Scan.

Q. why use zoom? can't professors use the webinar facility of blackboard?

MJV: we will do so, and have BBcollaborate at Liege, a bit for security and our IT people having access to intervene if needed. F.S. And also integration with the whole platform, I guess (for example recordings).

Q: What about students who don't have access to the technology?

A: They can delay the assessments until the campus re-opens.

Q: What about handicapped students?

A: The normal arrangements for extra time, support during the exam, etc, remain in place, provided remotely.

Q: Is it really possible to stop collusion in a 24 hour open exam? I don't think so. J.L.: Or ghostwriting!

subquestion: do you even try to?

Q: How can we measure the success of these approaches - particularly the reliability of the grading? We need more than reflective observations of success. We need evidence/data.

Comment: “[I]n samples from 2014 to present the percentage of students admitting to paying someone else to undertake their work was 15.7%[.]”

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2018.00067/full>

“Our analysis found that assessment tasks with no, some, or all of the five authenticity factors [i.e., real-world-like aspects] are routinely outsourced by students.”

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