

COVID-19: Remote assessment: student concerns and expectations

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Imperial College students recognise that we are in unprecedented times with the global COVID-19 pandemic. With social distancing being the best approach we can take to mitigate the damage of the pandemic, we appreciate and fully support the decision to cancel in-person teaching and assessment and deliver these remotely instead.

That being said, many of us are anxious about the implications these decisions have on our degree progression/completion as well as the toll of uncertainty and anxiety in these times on our wellbeing.

Many of us share the following key concerns about the current intent to deliver remote, timed exams:

- Under the current circumstances, there are many reasons why an individual may struggle/be unable to adequately prepare for and/or take an exam e.g. ill with COVID-19, looking after an ill family member, necessity to take on childcare responsibilities (due to school closures), poor mental wellbeing due to extended periods of social distancing;
- Remote timed assessment will rely on technical solutions that students are currently unfamiliar with which is increasing nervousness due to the unfamiliarity and the potential for technical issues during an exam. Furthermore, there are potential issues around the availability of the required technology that students remotely have access to;
- The remote nature of the exams raises questions about the ability to ensure academic integrity. Given the impossibility to invigilate as in an exam hall, students are being forced into feeling that they need to 'cheat' (consult notes, collude etc) in order to not feel disadvantaged against their peers;
- Certain (groups of) students may be particularly disadvantaged by timed remote assessment. Examples include those with certain special exam arrangements (e.g. a scribe); those who live in an environment without access to a quiet working space; those with pre-existing mental health difficulties.

Given these concerns, the following are seen as reasonable and necessary expectations to enable remote, timed assessments to be delivered in as fair and kind a way as possible, while maintaining academic standards, **should** this be the chosen approach. The underlying principle is that *no student should be disadvantaged in their assessment by the current extraordinary circumstances we all find ourselves in.*

- Mitigating circumstances should be applied generously and giving the benefit of the doubt. The burden of proof on the student should be relaxed to recognise that evidence may not be acquirable in these circumstances;
- Every student should have an opportunity to trial-run the new format of assessment before an assessment that counts for credit;
- Departments should liaise with their departmental student representatives to determine if there are assessments where additional time should be allotted to allow for the new form of submission and to adjust to the new exam format;
- As soon as possible, personal tutors should proactively reach out to each personal tutee and invite them to discuss any personal circumstances that may affect the tutees ability to study for and/or take remote timed exams, as well as any concerns the student might otherwise have in line with normal personal tutor meetings;
- Well in advance of the exam session commencing, each department should decide on and clearly communicate any measures that will be taken or changes to the structure of the assessment (including those to prevent/mitigate the effects cheating). Where changes to the structure are significant, a mock assessment should be provided;
- Considering that students are now geographically scattered around the world, pre-set times for exams should be reconsidered to maximise the number of students who can take a given exam at a reasonable hour;
- Well in advance of the beginning of an exam session, any student that requests it should receive clarity and reassurance about any personal circumstance that may disadvantage them with this type of assessment;
- In acknowledgement that these exam arrangements and the increased potential for cheating by a small number of students may skew mark distributions in assessments, departments should refrain from applying scaling algorithms that would lead to a decrease in marks for all students;
- When awarding degree classifications, if a student has dropped to a class below due to COVID-19 affected assessments, then appropriate consideration to the current extraordinary circumstance should be made. Departments should be proactively transparent and clear about the process of considering boundary cases, and provide answers to related questions from students.