

# Benefits of Summative Online Exams

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## What can be done online?

### Standard Blackboard questions

Most online exams that have run in Manchester to date have used the Blackboard test engine. This provides a variety of question types, *e.g.*, multiple choice, fill in the blanks, short answers, essays *etc.*

### Multimedia

Online exams can be accompanied with multimedia, including audio and video.

### Essays

Essay exams can be conducted using standard word processors with work submitted to Blackboard / Turnitin. Marking can then also be done online if desired.

### Working with software packages

The University has run a number of exams where candidates complete a task using software packages such as Excel, Mathematica, SPSS. Any program that is available on the Student Desktop can be used in exams.

### Open book exams

Open book resources can be made available online as part of the desktop setup for exams.

### Secure environment

The University's eAssessment Desktop provides a secure environment that controls access to websites and programs.

### Cohort size

We regularly run exams in multiple clusters to accommodate large cohorts. Currently, the largest simultaneous cohort

we can reasonably host is around 500 candidates across 4 PC clusters.

## Support

Support for academics developing online exams can be provided by Faculty eLearning teams.

## Benefits for staff

### Marking and feedback

#### Automated marking

The most obvious benefit of running online exams is automated marking. This is available for a number of different question types in the Blackboard Test engine.

#### Legible, structured essays

Marking essays becomes faster as the work is not handwritten and candidates can use cut & paste to help ensure that the text is ordered correctly.

#### Standardised and automated feedback

When feeding back on essays, all the standard feedback tools from Turnitin and Blackboard Assignments can be used. This allows unique feedback and reusable feedback items to be included.

The Blackboard Tests engine also allows standard automated feedback to be provided.

#### Online and offline marking

Depending on the exam submission method, there are opportunities to conduct marking both online *and* offline according to the marker's preference.

#### Faster manual marking

By using tools that assist the marking process, experience at the University has shown that manually marking online can

be up to 4 times faster than marking on paper.

### **More authentic assessment**

Use of software packages can allow the assessment of complex, higher order tasks which can provide a more relevant assessment than could be achieved on paper.

### **Reusable questions**

Longer-term use of online exams, will allow questions to be built up into a reusable question bank, reducing the time to author future exams.

### **Administration**

All the paper handling, mark handling, return of work with feedback *etc.* is handled automatically.

### **External examiners**

Offsite access is possible for external examiners, allowing external review of exams to take place online.

## **Benefits for students**

### **Familiarity**

For many students, interaction through a computer is not just natural but generally expected.

When given the choice, roughly three quarters of MBS Worldwide students opted to take essay exams online rather than on paper.

### **More authentic assessment**

Using an assessment method that more closely reflects the kind of tasks that a student will undertake once in employment could produce a more meaningful mark.

For example, asking an engineer to work through a series of calculations and simulations to properly assess the

strength of a structure could be more meaningful to the student and future employers than writing an essay based purely on theory.

### **No handwriting**

Handwriting an essay under exam conditions is becoming an unusual task. It will be increasingly questioned as to how much a hand written essay tests the students' knowledge and understanding, and how much it tests their stamina.

### **Planning and editing**

Research into essay writing has shown a distinct split into people who plan before writing and people who write and then edit. Writing online can accommodate both styles of writing.

### **Faster feedback and marks**

Use of online systems can speed up the marking and feedback processes. Students have consistently expressed a desire for more feedback and more timely feedback.