

Evaluating pre- and post-pandemic reforms in assessment practices in University of London Distance Education programmes

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Summary

The University of London has aimed to reform assessment practices for its international distance education programmes to shift away from relying solely on end of course examinations towards assessment that helps students learn. The project explored the extent to which programme directors have changed their assessments and the timing of the pandemic resulted in the study being mostly focused on a rapid shift from in-person invigilated to online exams. Evidence suggests that this crisis produced new thinking about the role of examinations including use of open book exams that require application of knowledge rather than knowledge recall, allowing more time for reflection during exams and even shifting away from exams altogether towards coursework and consideration of other assessment approaches. There were concerns about examination misconduct and workload generated by changing assessments and the report recommends that such new approaches to assessment should be encouraged through design support for assessment questions and methods that discourage plagiarism and that promote deeper learning.

Introduction

This Teaching and Research Award project was approved primarily in order to review innovation in assessment practice in University of London and member institution distance programmes over the last 2 years, and to disseminate the results to Programme Teams in order to support reform of assessment practice, and in particular to support the move to include assessment for learning as well as judgement of performance. The core research was based on 14 interviews with selected Programme Directors (interview schedule is included as Appendix 1) and sought to ascertain their understanding of the purposes and practice of assessment and how this has changed in recent years.

The University of London has traditionally been an examining body, ensuring that external students working independently or supported by independent Teaching Centres meet the academic standards embodied in final written unseen examinations and gaining the appropriate academic award. Over the last 30 years or more in the UK however assessment practice in HE has changed substantially to include new purposes and new practices, and these are often present in the assessment strategies of on-campus programmes of independent member institutions. These include the understanding that assessment can support learning as well as judge performance; that it should be designed to assess the learning outcomes specified for the course or programme; that to deliver on these goals assessment needs to be at various points during the course as well as at the end, i.e. continuous as well as final; that it should include formative as well as summative elements; that it can include project work in place of examinations, and indeed increasingly projects of different kinds have done just that at undergraduate as well as post-graduate levels; that peer team-produced assessed work as well as peer assessment can valuably support learning; and that other media than text can be included, such as video, creative work, and performance. For the University of London distance programmes, there has been a relatively slow take up of different approaches to assessment, with the 'external examination' character of the last 150 years or more being retained. The increasing divide between assessment strategies for campus based programmes and those for the same programmes available at a distance relates a complex interplay between in-country regulator and professional body requirements and a desire to move forward with a wider assessment strategy. Staff who work on both on-campus provision at the Member Institutions and on the distance programmes, through the University of London, face competing priorities, and often have to prioritize their on campus commitments;; the significant challenge of rethinking not only assessment strategies but also in-course teaching strategies to support continuous assessment; restricted academic and professional resource; subject differences; and the financial model for distance programmes if revised assessment strategies increase cost.

This introduction so far provides the background for the project as approved. However the impact of the closedown of campuses in March 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, and the concomitant move of all University of London and member institution international examinations in 2020 to online formats, led to a separate evaluation of that event, now completed and reported to the University of London Senior Management Team and relevant bodies in the governance structure. This review, which has worked closely with the Evaluation of the 2020 move to online examinations, and indeed shared one team member, thus found its interviews with Programme Directors substantially overtaken by concerns raised by the move to online assessment and the acceleration of rethinking assessment what this occasioned. This report concerns itself with the broader issues of Programme Director understanding of the purposes of assessment, in particular assessment to

promote learning and how it is in a process of change, rather than the specifics of the impact of the Covid pandemic on assessment practice in 2020 which are covered in the overall UoL Evaluation.

Literature on assessment for learning

This literature review is in two parts. Firstly, we consider assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning: an important distinction that has now become part of the lexicon of assessment. Secondly, since the shift to online learning and assessment in response to the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the participants in this study, we will summarise some of the key changes that have taken place while recognising that the challenges here are by no means resolved and the future of assessment post-Covid is very uncertain.

There have been numerous projects aiming to enhance assessment in the UK over the past decade. These include the Re-engineering Assessment Practices in Higher Education project (REAP, 2010) Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA, 2012) and assessment guides for teachers (such as McConlogue, 2020). All of these emphasise a need to move away from excessive summative assessment and introduce more formative assessment, longitudinal and ipsative approaches to assessment design and better feedback for students. There is a substantial literature that extends the purpose of assessment beyond examinations and testing to promote assessment for learning as an additionally important, if not more important, purpose for assessment.

Assessment of learning (AoL) refers to a process whereby student learning (often couched in the terms of learning outcomes) is measured at various stages of a degree programme leading to a final outcome or award. This measurement is often at the end of a module and is termed a summative assessment. Focus is on the academic integrity of the assessment to prevent cheating in any form and the reliability and validity of marking processes, and the outcomes are usually competitive in that students are graded and high grades are restricted (Hughes, 2014).

By contrast assessment for learning (AfL) focuses on the aspects of assessment that encourage students to learn from the assessment experience. This includes formative assessment which enables students to engage with feedback and improve their work in future including self and peer assessment (McDowell et al., 2011; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). For AfL to succeed, summative assessment tasks must align with teaching (Biggs and Tang, 2011). Formative assessment can be motivating for learners and builds rather than destroys self-esteem providing that feedback is carefully, productively, and sensitively handled (Hughes, 2014) and students are supported in developing feedback literacy (Molloy, Boud & Henderson, 2019).

Peer review, as opposed to peer marking, is strongly associated with assessment for learning and Nicol, Thompson & Breslin (2014) argue that students can learn more from reading and reviewing the work of peers than from receiving feedback. Structured and guided peer review may be particularly valuable for students learning at a distance. A study of distance learning students by Hughes (2018) indicated a strong association between engaging in peer review and successful outcomes. Meanwhile participating in discussion forum activity did not predict success and student engagement was wide-ranging. Distance learners may not always have the opportunity to interact with peers because of life pressures or time-zone differences but developing the ability to self-

assessment is important. Feedback dialogue, whether with tutors or peers, helps learners to develop self-regulation skills (Boud, 1995; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Molloy & Boud, 2013).

Building on projects in the UK over the past decade that have promoted the practice of assessment for learning, the UoL has produced an Assessment Toolkit (Gordon, Hughes & McKenna, 2015). However, success in implementing larger scale shifts from summative to formative assessment is not well documented and this project contributes to case studies of change in assessment design by exploring the online distance learning context.

Assessment reform has been slow, but the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 resulting in a rapid switch to online teaching and assessment across the globe provides opportunities to speed up change and expand use of blended learning (JISC, 2020; Maguire et al. 2020). There are concerns that online assessment, particularly online exams, increase the likelihood of plagiarism and cheating and technological solutions such as proctoring to monitor students via video at a distance are proposed (OECD, 2020). While immediate responses to the pandemic may seem very technology driven, such a dramatic and rapid change to practice seems likely to prompt thinking about longer term change in assessment. For example, concerns about plagiarism in online exams has prompted thinking about how to redesign assessments to be more authentic where students demonstrate their understanding and application of knowledge such as by including some kind of viva activity (Mckie, 2021). While the future of assessment is very uncertain, the needs and desires of students are very much on the agenda and evaluations such as the recent UoL report on online exams include the student voice. The Centre for Distance Education has organised many webinars with presentations and discussions about the implications for the pandemic long and short term and discussion continues providing an unprecedented scrutiny of assessment practice in distance learning. Thus, this project to explore Programme Directors' assessment innovation in depth is very timely.

Methodology

The project initially aimed to gain a detailed account of changes made by a sample of Programme Directors to their assessment over the past three years and their thinking behind the change and future plans. Ethics approval was obtained from UoL and interviews were planned for Summer 2020. With the pandemic in March 2020 the researchers agreed that the pivot to online exams could not be ignored and could potentially have a significant impact so a research question about the response to the crisis was included. The large institutional evaluation of the pivot to online exams in which one of this project researchers was involved was commissioned in response to the pandemic. This work also included interviews with a sample of Programme Directors (PDs), and as there was considerable overlap a decision was made to share these interviews between the two projects and delay the interviews until Autumn 2020.

The Covid-10 pandemic also required interviews to be conducted online and Zoom and Skype were used both of which allowed a recording and automated transcript of the interviews. A list of PDs was obtained from UoL and email requests for taking part in an interview were sent to all with follow up emails if there was no initial reply. They were informed that neither the programmes nor the interviewees would be named in any reporting. All recordings were kept securely in a UoL storage space and only made available to the researchers. The sample of 14 volunteers was representative of the UoL distance learning programmes including 3 programmes at undergraduate level, 9

programmes at Masters level and 2 pre-university foundation programmes. A range of disciplines were represented, again typical of the UoL offer of mainly professionally orientated programmes including, Legal studies, a clinical programme, education and accountancy. Interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and interviewees were given the opportunity to add any additional comments at the end.

12 interviews were successfully recorded and transcribed and notes from the other programmes were included. These were analysed for details of the changes made to assessment in response to the pandemic, plans for the future, references to assessment for learning and use of the UoL assessment toolkit.

Findings and discussion

There are three key findings for this research which address the project's aims. Firstly, the purpose of assessment in terms of a balance between AoL and AfL is discussed. Secondly, because plagiarism and concern about cheating emerged as a significant theme this is discussed next, and finally, the role of the UoL assessment toolkit in relation to the findings is explored.

Purposes of assessment

Transcripts of interviews with 12 programme directors were systematically reviewed for indications of AoL and AfL conceptions and practice. The majority of these (10) changed their exams to an online exam, 1 brought forward a change to coursework assessment only and another already had 100% coursework pre-pandemic and so was not affected by the pivot to online. All but one of the exams were unseen pre-pandemic. Of those who moved their exam online, practices varied from changing to open book exams, reducing the number of exam questions, extending the time of the examination by a short time to allow for uploading answers, extending the exam over a 24 or 48 hour period and rewriting exam questions to avoid possible plagiarism and cheating. Submission was mostly using the existing VLE. Some students were initially examined via a third party examination platform that included proctoring, but this was cancelled when difficulties occurred with the systems. Only one large undergraduate programme used proctoring software. The responses from these programme directors mostly demonstrated an understanding of both assessment of learning and assessment for learning and those using examinations only were not surprisingly putting more emphasis on assessment of learning in the interviews.

However, the changes made during the pivot to online indicate that many of them were starting to be more inclusive of assessment for learning. While some described changes to their programme to enable assessment for learning as occurring in the three years before the pandemic, it seems that some rethinking of practice was triggered by the online pivot. It is difficult to separate conceptual understanding of assessment for learning from instigating assessment for learning practice in the interviews and we cannot assume that holding a conception of assessment for learning leads to a change in practice. In a large-scale distance learning undertaking there are many institutional restrictions and limitations on time to make changes, particularly in this time of crisis. Thus, a wish to promote assessment for learning does not necessarily mean the opportunity is there to develop practice and conversely a change in practice brought about by some external pressure may unpredictably trigger greater awareness of assessment for learning: any change in behaviour might be temporary and not signify change in conceptions of assessment. We have identified 6 broad categories of programme director behaviours during the pandemic that explore this complexity further.

1. AoL with focus on unseen invigilated exams. Strong adherence to AoL during the emergency response and changes to assessment seen as temporary and with an intention to return post-pandemic to face to face exams in examination centres or proctored online exams if this is secure.
2. AfL awareness pre-pandemic. High awareness of AfL pre-pandemic e.g. formative assessment that links with summative, feedback, or use of coursework as a learning opportunity with 100% coursework or a mix of coursework and exams. Little change to practice after the pivot.
3. AfL awareness through exam question redesign. Increased AfL conceptions and practice through amending examination questions to prevent plagiarism *and* encourage more sophisticated learning
4. AfL awareness through extended exam question preparation time for open book exams. Seen exams sent in advance with time for students to prepare with a 24-48-hour exam completion time.
5. AfL awareness through more question answering time. Allowing students more time (minutes to an hour) to complete the exam ostensibly for uploading and reading but that also enables error correction.
6. AfL awareness through alternative assessment. Alternative assessment to traditional unseen exams implementation or plans that demonstrate AfL conceptions. e.g. open book as a choice to enhance learning (not just open book by default in the switch to online), to continue or include more coursework (for learning not only for testing), formal formative assessment such as presentations and portfolios. Much of this was building on pre-pandemic ideas.

Examples of behaviours are presented in the table below.

Table 1 Changes in assessment for learning practice during the online pivot

Behaviour in response to the online pivot	Number of programmes	Illustrative quotation(s)
AoL with focus on unseen invigilated exams	2 (Both large undergraduate programmes).	<p>While 2021 exams will probably go online thereafter hopefully the world would be appropriate place to go back to written examinations and I think we need those proctored examination Hall conditions long term and I think a move to online exams long term is not feasible to maintain academic integrity and rigour.</p> <p>We offer a formative assessment not in every module, but it doesn't count at all it's just a practice. Traditionally it hasn't had a very big take up.</p>

<p>AfL awareness pre-pandemic</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>So we listened to the students. They wanted you know slightly more examples of best or good practice. so we were. I know that there's this whole thing of the debate of whether you should release a sample piece of work. With that tension between our world they're just going to copy it or they're going to think that this is the only way to do this. So We 'umed' and 'ahed' for a bit, but they were quite adamant.</p> <p>I wanted to change that (predominantly exams) because with that process the students wouldn't get any feedback at all during the year and their progress and mixing up the way in which pedagogically makes mixing up the way of assessment for me was a no-brainer so whilst we hadn't and we certainly have plans in place to do so but because of the times it takes to get these changes into the frameworks we'll have a mixture of essays and exams okay ... it won't be an open book exams when we get back to exams I can understand that when we if we do get back to having exams there will be proper exams proper in those tech terms but the essays will be an opportunity for us to provide feedback.</p> <p>.. feeding forward particularly in higher education is an important process within our even in our summative assessments.</p>
<p>AfL awareness through exam question redesign</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>the question that requires the student to synthesise across many different areas so it's more a personal reflection if you will then so we didn't feel that there were big issues with fraud as the students voice is very strong in those things.</p> <p>(A) change we made was to the language papers involving just translation because they could simply copy it out of book otherwise. So we ask them to give the rationale for their translation.</p>

AfL awareness through exam question preparation time	2	<p>And I think the main thing is that it (open book exams) gives you the possibility of have more exploration more time, more thing more looking at other references, not to check references, but to read and understand things. But it also has the danger that they see what is on their assessed assignment, only they've got it ages in advance, and then they only think about that bit of the other study materials, whereas if it's an (unseen) exam they really have to have revised everything.</p> <p>(We delayed the exam date) because students were submitting (coursework) three weeks later the deadline for markers to get their feedback back to students was three weeks later which did impact on the exam.</p>
AfL awareness through more question answering time	2	<p>I notice bit more crossing out It's sort of showing evidence of learning, isn't it, that really I think they made a mistake and then putting it right they wouldn't have time for (previously).</p> <p>They have the time to go back and delete. And redo the text.</p>
AfL awareness through alternative assessment	7	<p>... if we're going to introduce a formative assignment (e.g. a presentation or peer assessment) then we need to reduce the amount of study material that students perhaps have to engage with so that takes quite a lot planning from a module team.</p> <p>In some ways Covid opened our worlds to online connectivity every seminar has a formative kind of support formative assessment.</p> <p>(We have) short online activities throughout each module which helped build students skills in information retrieval and critical analysis</p>

Many of the changes made to assessment before and after the pandemic were about improving the student experience of testing, communicating new processes and/or improving the reliability of the testing process. However, there are clear examples here that many of these programme directors also understand how changes to assessment can enhance the learning of their students through helping them engage deeply and become more self-regulating. In these examples over half of directors are aware of the importance of assessment for learning and there were 8 reports of specific examples of AfL underpinning changes made when putting exams online. There is recognition that variations of the traditional unseen, timed and invigilated format such as open book can have benefits for student learning through encouraging deeper engagement and application of knowledge and allowing students more time and flexibility of sources in demonstrating their learning and even the chance to reflect and correct mistakes.

However, there was concern that changing assessment, even in a minor way, is time consuming:

“it was taking us several months to even produce a single set of exam papers so the prospect of changing them all just before the exam was very small”.

This effect may be compounded by zonal papers in some programmes which means that several versions of an exam paper to assess the same module have to be developed for release at different times. In the larger programmes there are hundreds of exams and therefore very large numbers of zonal papers have to be created.

Some AfL occurs through formative assessment but feedback to students from tutors, but peer review was only mentioned in passing by 1 respondent and given the evidence of the benefits of peer review this is one area in which assessment designers could be supported and encouraged.

Coursework can also be used as AfL. While many programmes have some combination of coursework and exams, two (small social sciences) programmes were 100% coursework and some of the justification of this is that coursework motivates students and enables them to demonstrate a range of learning (rather than memorising).

However, most PDs are constrained by the dominance of assessment of learning, especially examinations and the requirements for rigour and academic integrity and the concerns about plagiarism which are discussed below. Most of those who had introduced coursework elements wish to continue with online open book exams, but some wanted to return to, as one respondent put it, “proper exams”. Testing knowledge of all course content is seen as the only way to ensure that students study because coursework is assumed to address only parts of the material:

“Now we've got a coursework essay and an exam some of the people who wrote the materials basically wanted to have the exam on the whole course otherwise they write an exam answer on the same subject of coursework so then they would have only covered two topics in the whole module, they might not even have read the rest for all we know.”

But assessment can be designed for breadth as well as depth if it is intertwined with the learning materials (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). However, it appears here that a programme is designed, and assessment is added on afterwards: assessments can be tweaked, or exams changed to coursework, and the pandemic has accelerated some improvements, but the change is hardly radical. The programmes could benefit from ‘reverse design’ (McConlogue, 2020) where the assessment is designed first and then the teaching is developed so that students can succeed in that assessment. The quote above about reducing study material to make way for assessment does imply a more radical and reverse design approach.

Plagiarism and cheating

All respondents and especially those who used online examinations expressed a great concern about plagiarism and for some this was a new problem with the online pivot. While use of software for plagiarism detection (Turnitin) was considered an option, this could be time consuming to monitor. Previously, with unseen invigilated exams, a need for plagiarism had not been considered but as one respondent realised that did not mean that students could not plagiarise:

“ we put all the exam scripts through Turnitin which has pulled up a number of issues which I think I think we didn't really anticipate so one of them is students who were coming up with self-plagiarism so I think what has happened is students have used their assignment

essays to revise and then they have then reproduced extracts from their assignments in their exam questions. “

In another solution for plagiarism in tension with AfL and giving students more time, one programme director was in favour of very short exams to prevent plagiarism because:

“We felt that within 45 minutes the opportunity to venture elsewhere and complete the exam is not quite there.”

Others were aware of institutional solutions to plagiarism and cheating in online exams using proctoring software to monitor students and/or an examination platform which locks down their device and prevents students importing external material during the exam.

However, there seems to be an assumption here that moving exams online generates more cheating and plagiarism while underplaying the evidence that plagiarism and use of essay writing websites could occur when students prepare for unseen examinations such as the example that plagiarised material could be memorised and repeated for an exam quoted above. The issue of possible collusion and cheating in examination centres that might have occurred previously was also not raised.

We suggest that the strong legacy of assessment of learning in distance learning and the related concerns about academic integrity is influencing most of these programme directors. The continued search for technical solutions to prevent cheating and in particular to reassure stakeholders of the robustness and reliability of examinations consumes huge resources and energy and there is little energy left for developing the assessment for learning side to assessment.

Replacing exams with coursework does not necessarily shift away from AoL and switching to online coursework assessment rather than online exams was thought by at least one director to help manage plagiarism “switching to an online coursework assessment would allow us to better assess those skills it also meant that we had greater control over any potential plagiarism concerns”. Here coursework is presented as a better way of testing rather than an opportunity for AfL.

But complete assessment redesign offers another solution to plagiarism. Using authentic assessment that draws directly on the student’s learning during the programme and taking a longitudinal approach so that all work builds towards a capstone or portfolio assessment (Hughes, 2014, Fung, 2019) means that cheating is much more difficult. Contract cheating or collusion with other students is of no use if assessment is embedded into teaching. In addition, since much plagiarism occurs because students do not have a full understanding of what is expected part of assessment for learning is teaching them assessment and plagiarism ‘literacy’. As one respondent stated:

“Plagiarism can be accidental, students cut and paste (plagiarised) notes.”

Thus, understanding of plagiarism also needs to be embedded in the course well before any summative assessment takes place.

Use of UoL Toolkit on Assessment

The university policy recognises Assessment for learning and for example has an academic standard: “Assessment is designed to stimulate and reinforce learning, as well as to measure it.” (University of London Worldwide 2020 Standard Academic Model, p 6.) It also recognises that coursework can be combined with exams and that programmes can use coursework only assessment.

But, policy does not equal practice and interpretation of policy may vary widely. In recognition of a need to support staff in developing assessment practice, a toolkit to support assessment (Gordon, Hughes & McKenna, 2015) was commissioned and circulated widely in 2016. The toolkit included a section on assessment for learning as well as assessment design and a range of assessment methods other than examinations such as essays, policy papers, portfolios and presentations. A more detailed toolkit II on examination design with sections on prevention of rote learning and academic misconduct was added two years later (Gordon, Hughes & McKenna, 2017). Two people aside, the Programme Directors interviewed were aware of at least the first toolkit, and one of these used other equivalent resources from her institution. For half of them awareness did not lead to making use of the resources or they could not remember what was useful, for example:

“I think at that right at that moment, I found it very useful and maybe inspiring. But to be honest, I probably then got distracted. And I haven’t picked it up since”.

“I am aware of them I've probably forgotten most of it”.

However, those who had already included coursework or who were shifting towards using more coursework had found the toolkit useful:

“I remember it well, but different sorts of options that there were I mean, they brought in multiple choice questions and that sort of thing and for us, I suppose, the key thing was that it was allowing us to not do only exams, we could do other things”.

While another was already using coursework several years ago and contributed to the toolkit:

“My programme was featured quite heavily in that as you know shining example of alternative assessment”

Only one mentioned the second toolkit on exams design. This person was clear that the first toolkit was more useful, but toolkit II helped them with changing to online open book exams:

“The toolkit one was really very helpful for giving our tutors ideas about formative assessment and different types of assessment and I think that was quite a drive..... toolkit two came into its own during the Covid pandemic. We were able to pass that onto our tutors so they could make sure that their exam questions were sort of suitable for open book.”

So, it seems that the assessment toolkits do not necessarily prompt change in assessment practices, but the awareness of alternative assessment, open book exams and formative assessment might have helped some of these staff when there was an imperative to change as with the pandemic situation.

Conclusion and recommendations for next two years

These findings indicate that a shift away from viewing assessment as measurement *of* learning using exams towards assessment *for* learning is already taking place amongst the programme directors and their teams, but with the range of institutions, cohort sizes and disciplines involved the picture is not surprisingly very mixed. However, this shift could be further promoted by assessment which

encourages students to engage with their course, both in terms of depth and breadth, which will ultimately influence student performance and retention. Some key recommendations are:

1. Redesign assessments to include more coursework, alternative assessments and formative assessments that align with the course materials.

While the shift to open book exams reported in this study is welcome and there is awareness of the benefits for learners in having preparation time and opportunities to draw on a range of material from the course in answering the questions, coursework takes this a step further by offering even more flexibility for learners in preparing their answers by removing time limits completely. There are concerns about collusion and plagiarism in coursework for some disciplines, but redesign of questions to deter plagiarism and raising student awareness are possible solutions. Resource for managing and marking coursework for large programmes also needs consideration. Other options for assessment such as presentations and portfolio type work are also possible in some disciplines and because these can link to student engagement with course materials and formative assessment activities, possible collusion can be addressed.

2. Let go of unrealistic goals of preventing cheating and focus more on plagiarism prevention.

Engaging students in discussion of academic referencing and of the penalties for cheating and collusion may help to reduce academic misconduct. Formative assessments can help identify students who need support with academic writing early on and prevent problems later. It is probably impossible to prevent cheating for a small minority of students, and effort is better put into prevention with clear penalties for those who deliberately ignore the rules. Work could be done to improve design of open book exams as these become more common and students may need extra support for taking open book exams so that they understand how best to use the more flexible format and are not stressed by having an extended exam window and feel they have to write long answers (see for example UCL, 2021).

3. Investing in distance learning assessment as much as has been done for course materials

There has been a significant investment in design of learning materials at UoL with technical and pedagogic support teams available to produce distance learning courses online. Investment in assessment design may need to expand to support the evolution of a more varied approach to assessment. Expertise in both open book exams and coursework alternatives needs to be accessible to those who write and design assessments. The assessment toolkits can be useful but are limited and PDs need more support with assessment redesign with a streamlined process as the study indicated that changing assessment even in a small way such as adapting exam questions is very time consuming. Help with aligning assessment with the course materials may also be useful as there is a danger that coursework can have limited coverage, especially where there is choice of assignment questions. In addition, it is not clear how far, if at all, 'reverse design' of assessment and course materials occurs, and this process could be encouraged when new modules or programmes are planned.

4. CDE Webinars and staff development on assessment design in UoL programmes

CDE workshops on assessment design for 2022 are proposed for Summer 2021 and the Supporting Student Success event in October 2021 provides an opportunity to look at the design of open book exams. This report indicates that staff perspectives on assessment vary and staff development needs could be further explored.

A recent report by Wonkhe (2021) suggests that shifting online is very time consuming for staff and this will need more consideration in future. All these recommendations require a rebalancing of investment in course materials and investment in assessment. Content reduction through a focus on more active learning is one realistic approach to achieving this without additional resources although Baume & Brown (2020) suggest that students may need some convincing.

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Appendix 1 Interview schedule

Assessment projects Interview questions for Programme Directors

1. What do you think are the main purposes of assessment?
2. What major changes have you made to the summative and formative assessment for your module/programme in the past three years?
3. What prompted these changes e.g. institutional requirement (including response to COVID - 19 crisis), programme team, student feedback professional development events, assessment guidance materials and resources.
4. How effective were the changes? What evidence do you have of success e.g. student evaluations, grades/marks?
5. What were the obstacles to implementation if any?
6. Do you have any plans to change your assessment in future? If so what will you change? Why?
7. Are there changes in your assessment you would like to make but do not feel are feasible?
8. Have you seen the UoL Assessment guide? If so in what ways did you find it useful if at all?