

Using the disruption of the pandemic to enhance assessment design in distance learning programmes

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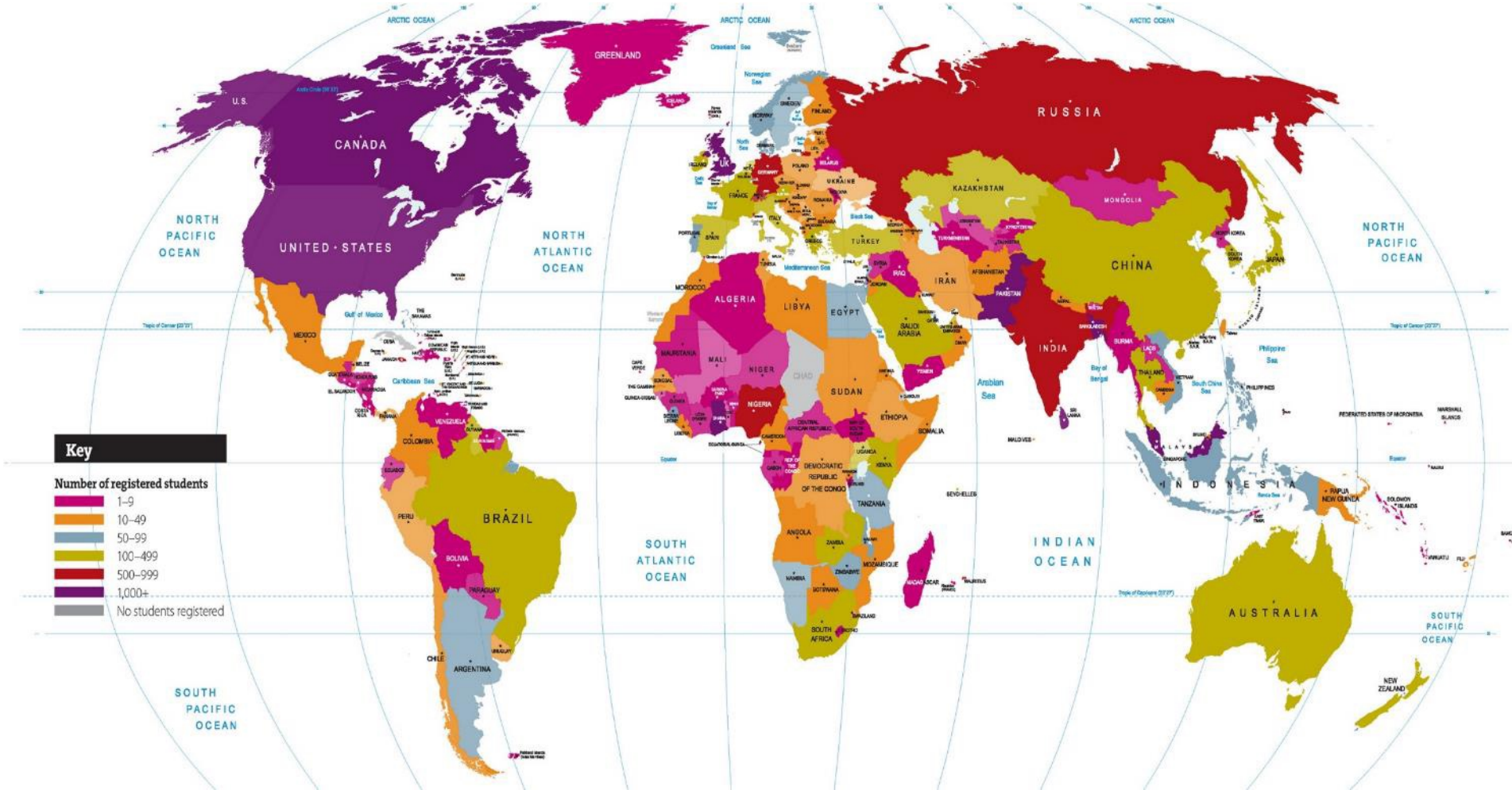
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**UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON**

**CENTRE FOR ONLINE &
DISTANCE EDUCATION**

120,000 students in London, across the Federation
 Online – 50,000 active learners in 200 countries



University of London
Examinations since 1858
30,000 UG
20,000 PG

Variety of assessment
approaches:
coursework, presentations
Exams (pen/paper) in 600+
local centres across the
Globe

Covid Challenge 2020 and 2021

- 35,000 students booked for exams in centres
- 100,000 + exams
- 20+ time zones

1858 – Exams start 2015 diversification of assessment approaches 2020 and 2021
Covid

The aspiration: to modernise assessment, for learning as well as judging performance

Programme Director interviews



- Interviewed 13 PDs online
- Range of disciplines
- Undergraduate, postgraduate and pre-university courses

Asked about:

changes to assessment in past three years

changes to exams since Covid

Open book exams

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.

Rewriting exam questions to avoid plagiarism

...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

Extra time for exam meant students could self-correct

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 put it right, they wouldn't have time for (previously).

Include more coursework

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 waymixing up the way of assessment for me was a no-brainer changes we'll have a mixture of essays and exams.

Programme Directors' views 2020

- Exam content: moving to open book exams, and redesigning questions to discourage plagiarism- proctoring software not popular
- Some rethinking of end of module assessment pedagogy: adoption of alternative forms, broadly coursework to complement or to replace the exam
- Staff shifting from viewing exams as mainly a measurement of learning to seeing the potential of assessment for learning
- Most did not want to return to 'gold standard' exams and planned transformation of assessment in line with the sector (McKie, 2021)
- Workload and support concerns when changing assessment



Programme Director interviews 2021



- Interviewed 8 PDs online
- Range of disciplines
- Undergraduate, postgraduate and pre-university courses

Asked about:

changes to assessment in past three years

changes to exams since Covid

Interviews with a selection of Programme Directors (8)

Number: 8

Gender: *Male – 4, Female – 4*

UG Programmes: 5, PG programmes: 3

The team had started to review the programme assessment strategy for students at a distance even before Covid, and Covid had acted as an accelerant rather than a cause in itself. Their review was leading to plan to abandon the examination format altogether and replace it with a range of more varied continuous and final assessment tasks which allowed to test higher order and more analytic skills...the move to home based assessment made it much easier for students with special needs to study.

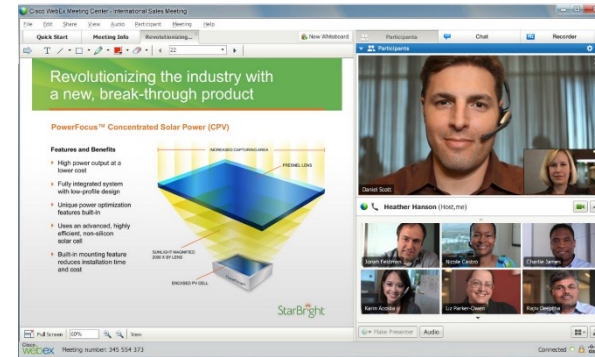
We are a distance learning provider and should be able to provide our exams online'

Programme Directors' views 2021

- All Programme Directors reported a greater sense of preparedness in 2021 as against the emergency response on their and the University of London part in 2020.
- Seven out of eight Programme Directors were clear that the impetus for change in 2021 as with 2020 was the restrictions caused by Covid and lockdown.
- All Programme Directors reported broad student satisfaction with arrangements in 2021, firstly because the systems were more firmly established and secondly because the shock of moving online had very substantially dissipated.
- There was overall agreement that online assessment should be retained in the future, although there was a division of view whether this should be home based given the threat to academic integrity or based in a managed examination centre.
- In summary, there is greater confidence in 2021 that online assessment represents the future and no declared desire to return to the classic model of examination centres with handwritten examination scripts.
- The need to redesign assessment to address pedagogical as well as academic integrity issues was widely, but not universally expressed. It is clear however that there is a process of change in assessment strategies underway with more questions to be answered about design than Programme Directors have answers for at present.

Rethink 1 strengthen formative assessment

- Move away from exams towards 'alternative assessments' that provide more opportunities for learning e.g. online student presentations.



- Ensure all summative assessments have a formative component e.g. practice assessment, preparation, peer feedback on drafts etc.
- Opportunities to use feedback from an assignment or exam to improve future work.

JISC, 2020

Rethink 2:
Abandon 100%
detection of
cheating and
plagiarism and
move to design
for prevention

Admit that it is unrealistic to detect
and punish all cheating

Assessment can be designed to
reduce cheating

- Educate students on academic integrity through formative assessment
- Design open book assessments that require application, evaluation and synthesis of information not recall
- Require students to use plagiarism detection software themselves and take action if needed before submitting coursework

Rethink 3: Invest in online assessment as much as for learning materials

- Course content has always had priority
- Support needed for Programme Directors in assessment redesign
- Revisit need for continuous assessment as well as final exam or project
- Design for academic integrity



References

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JISC (2020) The future of assessment: five principles, five targets for 2025.
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McKie, A. (2021) Death of three-hour exam looms as pandemic reshapes assessment
Times Higher Education June 23.