Advice for Choosing Alternative Assessments

DCU has issued a set of guiding principles to inform the development and approval of alternative assessments. We unpack these principles here and link them to a set of actions to guide the choice of alternative assessments in the immediate term. This document also adheres to DCU's Assessment and Feedback policy.

The overriding concern and key principle underpinning all tests and assessments is that the inferences based on students' performance are valid. Validity refers to the accuracy of the inferences and descriptions of performance (e.g. First Class Honours; Second Class Honours, Grade I; Second Class Honours, Grade II; Third Class Honours). Of course assessments must also be reliable. Reliability refers to the consistency of the information we are using to make decisions about our students. The extent to which different graders are applying the same criteria to judge a performance is an example. However, we need to remember that some assessments can be consistently inaccurate. In other words, an assessment can be reliable but lead to decisions with low validity.

There are different types of validity; arguably the most relevant in this case is consequential validity which relates to the implications for the student of the score or result s/he receives on an assessment that we set. The higher the stakes, the more important the decision we make about students' performance. The issue is complicated by the fact that there are no perfect tests, examinations or assignments. There is 'noise' or 'error' in play for all assessments. In reality, we can never be certain that the grade or score a student is awarded is truly accurate. In measurement theory this concept is expressed as an equation: the observed score = true score + error.

We need to remember that there are many sources of error. For example, in the current situation, an individual student's anxiety levels may be increased to a point where it impacts negatively on his/her ability to complete an assessment. Or it may be that all students are impacted by a poorly designed assignment, one that does not align well with the learning outcomes associated with the assessment it is intended to replace. As assessors, we have an obligation to ensure that our assessments are appropriate and provide us with information that allows us to make reliable and valid decisions about what our students know and can do.

All of us try to ensure, insofar as we can, that we are inclusive and respectful of the range of students' needs and that our assessments are fair. We develop scoring rubrics and checklists which we share with our students so that they know what the success criteria attached to each level of performance level look like. We use these tools formatively, to encourage self- and peer-assessment and regulation which provides us with feedback that we use to adjust teaching and learning in real-time and summatively to ensure consistency in marking and to support moderation within, and across, modules.

Normally all of these behaviours and practices are commonplace in universities like DCU and they are supported and enhanced by being in regular contact with students in lectures and tutorials, in labs and on placements and work-settings, which gives us all time to build relationships and identify and resolve challenges collaboratively as they arise. However, these are not normal times and additional problems may arise, complicating the crafting and marking of assessments. But the challenge is not insurmountable provided we take informed and justifiable actions. Responding to the following set of questions will help us to think about, and have confidence in, the assessment decisions we make over the next few months. Please note that in suggesting these questions, we are aware that many assessments have already

taken prior to COVID-19 University closure; these should remain intact and unchanged (i.e. weighting and grades).

1. Am I clear about the learning outcome(s) I am assessing?
2. Is there a good match between the learning outcomes I want to assess and the assessment method I am now planning to use? (See guidance below on alternative methods of assessment)
3. Is the effort required to complete the proposed assessment commensurate with the number of course credits and/or the pass/fail decision I need to make? Does the alternative assessment require a similar degree of challenge for the students?
4. Have I taken account of the implications for students of changes to the teaching and learning context of the module?
5. Have I written the assessment in a way that promotes academic integrity?
6. Am I confident that the mode of assessment is fair and inclusive to all students? Should I consider running a tutorial and/or a trial with them first?
7. Have my students been informed of any changes to the mode of assessment I am using and the steps involved in completing it? Are online supports available and have I highlighted these for my students?
8. Have the criteria for success been shared with my students in the form, for example, of rubrics, checklists and/or marking guides? Have these criteria been explained to other graders to ensure inter-rater reliability, if applicable?
9. Have I taken the required steps to ensure that, in the event of personal illness or unexpected circumstances beyond my control, support will continue to be provided to students?
10. Am I sure that the technology I'm planning to use will work? Do I have a contingency plan in place if things go wrong?

Please remember that even during normal testing times there is no such thing as a perfect assessment and these questions are not meant to overwhelm. All that is required of anyone is that we do our best. Please let your colleagues know about this document if you think it will be helpful to them. There are additional assessment related resources on the CARPE and NIDL websites you might like to consult. We hope everything goes really well for you and your students over the next few months.

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APPENDIX 1: ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS POSSIBILITIES

Introductory video - Alternative Assessment Possibilities [4 min video]

This document provides an overview of potential alternatives to existing assessment approaches.

Current Assessment Approach	Possible Alternative(s)	Rationale	Support Resources
Written exam	Loop Quiz	Online quizzes/tests (with well-designed questions that can be text-, audio- or video-based) can provide valid and reliable ways to assess students' factual recall, their ability to interpret, compare, apply and analyse. Questions can come in many forms, (e.g. multiple-response, short answer, select missing words, mathematical format). Measures should be taken to ensure academic integrity.	Quiz support resources on Loop
	Take-home exams	Take-home exams can offer authentic learning/assessment experiences for students Research shows there are pedagogical benefits for both high and low performing students, although the benefits are greater for the high performers. When exam questions are aligned to learning outcomes they can provide a valid assessment method.	Advice on Take-home Exams [4 min video] Loop setting up an assignment [2.5 min video guide](part of the 'promoting academic integrity' suite of video guides)

Presentations/Oral Exams	Students record video submission via Unicam video recording platform	With Unicam, students can record, re-record, and submit video assignments using their phone or other familiar devices thus creating an inclusive and fair method of submitting work in their own time. This facilitates practice and potentially peer and self-assessment. It can also be used to enhance inter-rater reliability via moderation/discussion with other assessors.	DCU Unicam - a video recording platform for students
	Live presentations via Zoom e.g. Live oral examination between student and lecturer	The live online classroom approach offers an alternative to an in-class presentation or oral. Students can demonstrate their proficiency online and respond to probing questions about their work from lecturers and peers. These recordings can be recorded for further transparency and moderation.	Zoom Guide for Staff Zoom Guide for Students
Essay/Case Study/Report	*Submit Assignments through Loop* - The Assignment tool in Loop can be used for individual and group assignment submissions such as essays/case studies/reports. These assessments can be submitted to Loop directly and scanned by plagiarism detection software (Urkund).	The assignment feature in Loop is central to online assessment on Loop and can support the digital submission of assignments through the platform.	Loop Assignment
	Loop Journal Activity - The Journal activity enables students to enter short and simple, text based reflections to Loop	The Journal is suitable for short, online written assignments. It supports reflective writing and through formative feedback, gives students an opportunity to revise their work and refine their understanding.	How to use the Journal activity to support academic integrity

	Loop Reflect eportfolio - The Reflect eportfolio is available to all staff and students. It provides an online space for students to record and share their skills and knowledge.	Eportfolios assist students in critical reflection and the integration of learning across concepts and programmes. Eportfolios can foster engagement and facilitate the showcasing of learners' achievements across many different modes thereby creating a more inclusive assessment approach.	Reflect Help Page Reflect Overview Video for students Reflect Overview Video for staff
Lab/Clinical examinations	Video submissions from students to demonstrate their skills	The lecturer can review the video with the student to provide feedback. The student can repeat the task if they are unhappy with their performance. Afterwards, the student can include the video in their eportfolio and share with potential employers.	DCU Case study on Video OSCEs See case study 3 of this report from U JRC (section 5.1.3, p46) for inspiration
	Simulations can be used remotely so students can 'see' data produced elsewhere and be asked to comment/interpret.	A combination of video based content and an online quizzes that assess student understanding and/or application of knowledge and skills e.g. using software. Loop supports the use of many question types e.g. open-ended questions, scenario-based learning, complex mathematical questions	Use of "Lessons" in Loop
Group assignments	Groups in Loop Group presentations in Zoom Collaborative Google Doc submission	Group work facilitates assessment as learning when students can critically self and peer review work against a set of clear criteria. It enables students to develop the collaborative problem solving skills often necessary for life and the workplace.	Use groups to allow students to make personalised submissions - Principle 10 See Exemplar 7 in OER on TEA