

(Alternative) assessment



COVID-19 poses a challenge to higher education. The corona crisis has a huge impact on lectures, seminars, internships, on-the-job training, continuous assessment, exam planning, and international mobilities. The universities of applied sciences and universities have switched quickly to distance learning and are flexible. The current challenge is the upcoming exam period. In this contribution, SIHO formulates some tips on alternative assessment, with a specific focus on guaranteeing reasonable adjustments for students with a disability.

1. Flemish emergency decree regarding education and assessment activities

In the wake of the corona crisis, a Flemish emergency decree for higher education, ratified on April 15, 2020, gives higher education institutions the opportunity to extend the academic year and adjust agreements with the students. This gives students the assurance that they can graduate this academic year and protects universities of applied sciences and universities against legal proceedings. The ultimate goal always remains that, despite the perceived obstacles and challenges, students can participate in the educational learning process and the associated assessment activities in the best possible way. These government measures apply to all forms of education and assessment. In the first place for on-the-job training, internships, practical subjects, seminars and forms of permanent assessment. However, modified forms of assessment can also be used for lectures to guarantee the reliability and validity of the exams. Flexibility, understanding and support, without compromising the integrity of the assessment process, are central here. For the majority of the planned exams, alternative assessment methods can be used, or on-campus

assessments can continue under the condition that a safe on-campus assessment environment is created.

The right to reasonable adjustments is also guaranteed in this situation. Pursuant to Article II.276, §3, every student with a disability who is enrolled in a university of applied sciences or university is entitled to reasonable accommodations.

2. On-campus assessment

2.1 Flexibility and on-campus assessment

Various higher education institutions continue to focus on the organization of on-campus assessment activities. Compliance with the safety and hygiene regulations is a crucial condition and challenge. Flexibility and adjustments to normal on-campus assessment are required. Higher education institutions are taking various measures that can guarantee safe on-campus assessment activities.

Some examples of adjustments / measures that institutions take are:

- **Duration and organization of the examination period** | The Flemish emergency decree allows for a longer and / or modified examination period. Various institutions have extended the examination period, organize exams on Sundays and schedule exams multiple times a day. As a result, exams usually take place in smaller groups of students, so that the necessary distance between students is maintained and hygiene can be monitored.
- **More and alternative locations** | Institutions also allow exams to take place in several different and alternative, spacious, open locations with sufficient ventilation. These spaces make it possible to maintain the necessary distance and to monitor hygiene. Think of spacious auditoriums, but also exhibition halls, multifunctional rooms, sports halls, event locations, etc.
- **Hygiene measures** | Institutions are strongly committed to hygiene measures such as washing hands regularly, disinfecting materials and spaces, wearing masks and not

sharing materials. They also provide for monitoring of compliance by all those present before, during and after the exam.

2.2 Reasonable adjustments and on-campus assessment

Even in these exceptional times, students reserve the right to reasonable adjustments. Which reasonable adjustments students can obtain differs within higher education institutions. Some institutions choose to make certain reasonable adjustments inclusive for all students.

Common reasonable adjustments are:

- More time** | More time to complete an exam and/or more time during the preparation of oral exams.
- Exam location** | Some students take the exam in the facility room or are given a specific place in the usual exam room.
- A modified exam copy** | In terms of format, font size and font.
- Clarification of questions** | Clarification of questions or having questions read aloud by the lecturer/supervisor.
- Laptop and assistive software** | Use of laptop and assistive software during exams.
- Use of a calculator, dictionary and/or formulary** | during the exam.
- Oral explanation** | of exam answers after the written exam by the student.
- Language and spelling** | Not being judged on language and spelling mistakes.
- Interpreter support** | For students with a hearing impairment (Flemish sign language interpreter (VGT) or a writing interpreter).
- Personal assistant** | For practical help during exams.

In general, when organizing on-campus assessment activities, these reasonable adjustments are still feasible as in usual circumstances. However, some adjustments / measures are required to comply with the safety and hygiene regulations.

Examples of adjustments / measures that institutions are taking during this period are:

- **Hygiene** | Institutions regularly disinfect all items such as exam laptops, pens, supporting materials, etc.
- **Distance** | Institutions ensure that the necessary distance can be kept, e.g. also when clarifying / asking questions, etc.
- **Separate room** | If desired and / or necessary, institutions provide a separate assessment room for certain students, e.g. for students at risk.
- **Alternative forms of assessment** | Institutions, in consultation with the student, sometimes opt for an alternative form of assessment that is better suited for the student if the allocation of the necessary reasonable adjustments is not possible within the context of the hygiene and safety regulations for the proposed form of assessment.

3 Online assessment

Due to the current situation, alternative methods of assessment are sometimes required. The Flemish emergency decree allows higher education institutions to make adjustments to teaching and assessment methods. The ECTS sheets (European Credit Transfer System) of course units contain the possible exam forms for a course unit. Variations or adjustments are possible without affecting the learning objectives of a course.

If on-campus assessment is not possible or is not preferred, higher education institutions will look at alternative forms of assessment, such as online assessment. More and more assessment activities are taking place in the light of the current corona crisis online, for example defending master's theses or group presentations. Below we discuss some examples of possible alternative online assessment methods. Combinations of these forms of assessment are also possible.

3.1 Alternative online forms of assessment

3.1.1 Alternative forms of assessment for on-campus oral exams

- ❑ **Knowledge questions** | Institutions allow students to contact lecturers online; the student answers the questions immediately and one by one. The conversation is recorded.
- ❑ **Insight questions** | Institutions allow the student to answer a number of questions open-book and in front of the camera, within a specified time limit.

3.1.2 Alternative forms of assessment for on-campus written exams

- ❑ **Oral exam** | Institutions replace the written exam, if possible (e.g. for a limited group of students) by an online oral exam.
- ❑ **Open book exam** | Institutions organize an open book exam in which students have to substantiate arguments based on personal examples, their own words, etc. or have students solve a case study with associated questions in a specific time.
- ❑ **Report/paper** | Institutions allow students to link the course to a topic (of their own choice) in a report / paper, which is uploaded online.
- ❑ **Video clip** | Institutions have students record a video clip in which they have to link the course to a general problem, the video clip is uploaded online.
- ❑ **Take-home exam** | Institutions allow students to complete an open-book exam at home (or at a place of their choice). Students can often get more time for this (up to a few days). With a take-home you also give students more space to solve technical problems.

3.1.3 Alternative forms of assessment for reports/papers

- ❑ **Online** | Institutions allow students to submit the paper / report online via the secure digital learning environment instead of on paper.
- ❑ **Video clip** | Institutions allow students to show, explain and motivate the paper / report online via a video clip, which students then upload via the secure digital learning environment.

- **PowerPoint Presentation** | Institutions allow students to explain a paper / report in a PowerPoint Presentation (optional with audio) and / or present via an online platform. Questions from the lecturer or jury can be answered online.

3.1.4 Alternative forms of assessment for observations

- **Video clip** | Institutions allow students to make a video clip in which the students demonstrates certain requested skills. The video clip is uploaded to the secure digital learning environment.
- **Online demonstration** | Institutions allow students to show how they perform certain actions via an online platform (e.g. Skype, Teams, etc.). A list of possible actions to be shown can be discussed in advance, the action is included.

3.1.5 Alternative forms of assessment for groupwork

- **Individual work** | Institutions replace group work with individual work if cooperation skills are not a priority goal.
- **Online groupwork** | If collaboration skills are a priority goal, institutions allow students to collaborate online. Online meetings are included to evaluate collaboration skills. Students give each other feedback via peer assessment. The product of the group work is charged via the secure digital learning environment.

3.1.6 Alternative forms of assessment for the defense of theses

- **Online presentation** | In various institutions students can complete the defense of their bachelor's or master's thesis online via an online meeting, which can be recorded.
- **Online jury** | Institutions let students answer questions regarding their bachelor's or master's thesis from the jury through an online meeting. This meeting can be recorded.

3.2 Alternative forms of assessment and fraud

Fraud during online/alternative forms of assessment, especially for a written closed-book exam, is something that many lecturers are concerned about. This problem can be met, for example, by adjusting the question and / or the test organization.

3.2.1 Adjusting the manner of questioning

In the first instance, check whether another form of assessment or manner of questioning is possible, depending on the learning objectives to be achieved and the feasibility. By e.g. personalizing the question, you reduce the risk of fraud.

Possible options to do this are:

- Personalize the questions using a case study.
- Personalize the questions by asking students to apply them to actual/current events within the professional field.
- Ask students to formulate their own opinion.
- Have students reflect on a particular case study and have them link it to a theoretical concept that needs to be made clear.
- Have students explain concepts or theories in their own words.

3.2.2 Adjusting the test organization

Also check whether there are elements in the test organization that you can (additionally) adjust. Examples are setting a time limit or randomizing multiple choice questions. Be vigilant that these don't influence students' anxiety and stress feelings.

If alternative forms of assessment are not possible, on-campus assessment is difficult and the above adjustments cannot be made, the written exam must take place in the original form, but from a distance. In many cases this can be done via the institution's digital learning environment.

It is possible to opt for online supervision (proctoring). In all cases, it is always recommended to consider alternative options before moving to organizing online exams using e.g. Respondus Lockdown Browser.

3.3 Proctoring

By 'proctoring' we mean all forms of online supervision in the light of fraud. Remote assessments are carried out online in a secure environment via a proctoring system. Proctoring exams are often carried out using Respondus LockDown Browser and Respondus Monitor.

3.3.1 Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor

Via **Respondus LockDown Browser (RLB)** a test can be set up so that students can only take that test via a special browser. That browser provides a "safe" environment, which means that students cannot leave the test until the test has been completed, cannot consult other websites (except the ones you have allowed yourself) and cannot open other applications. The browser can also be installed on your own device.

Respondus Monitor is an additional piece of software to Respondus Lockdown Browser. Because the security of LockDown Browser can easily be circumvented during a remote exam, this can be supplemented with Respondus Monitor.

For example, via Respondus Monitor you can:

- Film students while taking their exam via a webcam.
- Check via webcam whether the student remains in the picture all the time during the exam.
- Ask students to have a photo taken of themselves and / or their student card via webcam.

- Ask students to film their surroundings with the webcam before the start of the exam.

Learn more about [the use of Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor](#).

3.3.2 Thresholds of proctoring

It is important to note that the use of proctoring comes with different thresholds and points of attention and is therefore seen as a last resort by different institutions. In addition to legal thresholds and privacy issues, proctoring mainly involves technical complexity, which increases the chance of technical failure. This can also cause extra stress for students.

Examples of possible technical thresholds are:

- **Hardware** | Not all students from the institutions have a laptop / computer, webcam and microphone that are suitable / powerful enough.
- **Software** | Not all students from the institutions have a laptop / computer with recent software and installing the software for Lockdown Browser is not easy for every student.
- **Network problems** | Not all students of the institutions have a broadband stable internet connection.
- **Lecturers** | Not all lecturers from the institutions are sufficiently familiar with the system to be able to deal with the sometimes-complicated questions of students.

3.3.3 Accessibility and proctoring

Proctoring can also pose challenges in the context of accessibility. Try to overcome thresholds as best as possible if no alternative other than proctoring is possible:

- **Mock exam** | Institutions provide a mock exam for students. This way they can test in advance whether everything works.
- **Helplines** | Institutions provide one or more helplines during the exam and provide clear documentation. For example, students can start a live chat when using Respondus Monitor. Response time is not guaranteed.

- ❑ **Digital skills** | Institutions indicate that they take into account the required digital skills of the student. Not everything is self-evident for everyone.
- ❑ **Hardware and software** | Institutions try to gain insight into the availability of hardware and software among students.
- ❑ **Writing space** | Institutions provide additional writing space in the online exam that can serve as a "scratch sheet". This can be used by the student but does not count in the assessment.
- ❑ **Extend exam time** | Institutions make use of the option to extend the exam time during the online exam (e.g. due to technical problems or for students who are given extra time as a reasonable adjustment).

Read more [about accessibility in Respondus Lockdown Browser](#).

4 Accessible online assessment and reasonable adjustments

4.1 Accessible online assessment

For other alternative and / or online forms of assessment, attention for accessibility is also important. Some aspects to take into account include:

- ❑ **Text and screen** | Make sure text is editable (e.g. point size, background and text color and contrast, font).
- ❑ **Video** | If videos are part of the online assessment, provide transcripts, subtitles and / or audio description.
- ❑ **Time** | Provide sufficient (and possibly extra) time if working under time pressure is not an assessment criterion, online assessments also require an adjustment of the student.
- ❑ **Instructions** | Provide clear and unambiguous instructions.
- ❑ **Variation** | Present information in different ways through different media.
- ❑ **Language** | Use simple and clearly understandable language.
- ❑ **Guidelines** | Provide clear guidelines on the length and duration of the assessment (e.g. maximum number of words, estimated time to take the exam, etc.).

- ❑ **Practice moment** | Offer students the opportunity to get to know the online platform or the alternative form of assessment beforehand.
- ❑ **Lay-out** | Ensure that the layout of online material is clear and well-organized.
- ❑ **Online discussion** | Taking the floor online in a group discussion is not self-evident for every student, be vigilant for this.
- ❑ **Video clips** | If recording a video clip is not possible, provide alternatives where possible, e.g. a PowerPoint presentation with audio commentary.
- ❑ **Disability** | Consider the possible impact of forms of assessment on students with a disability.
- ❑ **Reasonable adjustments** | Make sure that students with a right to reasonable adjustments can still use them within the chosen alternative form of assessment.
- ❑ **Navigation** | Make navigating the online platform easy and possible in several ways (e.g. via mouse, keyboard, etc.).
- ❑ **Software compatibility** | Make sure that online platforms are as compatible as possible with assistive software used by students (e.g. reading software).

4.2 Reasonable adjustments and online assessment

Students retain the right to the reasonable adjustments approved for them. It is therefore important to pay attention to ways to ensure the use of reasonable adjustments within alternative and / or online forms of assessment.

Most of the reasonable adjustments can also be applied during alternative and / or online forms of assessment. In general, we can say that all parties involved are asked to be as flexible as possible and to pay attention to the right to reasonable adjustments of certain students. Institutions, in consultation with the student, sometimes opt for an alternative form of assessment that is better suited for the student if the allocation of the necessary reasonable adjustments is not possible within the context of the hygiene and safety regulations for the proposed form of assessment. Institutions enable the application of

reasonable adjustments in various ways when evaluating online:

- **More time** | During online assessment it is also possible to allocate more time to students who are entitled to this. For example, institutions give students more time to complete the alternative assignment or, in different programs and digital learning environments, allocate extra time to specific students.
- **Clarifying the question or have it read aloud** | Clarifying questions can be done in several ways. Institutions add extra interpretation to exam questions, for example by having the teacher give a general explanation online before the start of the exam or by adding an audio clip where the questions are read by the teacher. Reading software can also be used. Certain institutions provide extra writing space in the online exam that can serve as a "scratch sheet". This can be used by the student to clarify additional matters.
- **Use of assistive software** | In many institutions, assistive software is mainly used for the reading function.
 - **Blackboard** | For the best experience with a screen reader, Blackboard recommends JAWS (via Firefox) for Windows and VoiceOver (via Safari) for Mac.
 - **Canvas** | For the best experience with a screen reader, Canvas recommends JAWS and NVDA (via Firefox) for Windows, and VoiceOver (via Safari) for Mac.
 - **Compatibility of assistive software** | Various digital learning and assessment environments, such as Blackboard and Canvas, but also Respondus Lockdown Browser and Monitor still have compatibility problems with reading software such often used in Flanders. Testing scenarios are currently being carried out by the producers of the reading software and SIHO.
- **Use of calculator, dictionary and/or formulary** | Institutions indicate that it is also possible within alternative forms of online assessment for students to use a pocket calculator, dictionary and / or formulary according to the rules as they normally apply. Sometimes the student has to prove through proctoring that no other, unauthorized, tools/aids are present in the room.

- **Oral explanation of exam answers** | Institutions organize the oral explanation of exam answers, for example by organizing a video conversation between the student and the lecturer or by recording the explanation of the exam answers by the student immediately after submitting the exam.
- **Language and spelling** | Within alternative online assessment methods, institutions also apply an understanding of language and spelling errors or incorrect sentence constructions according to the rules as they normally apply. In addition, institutions allow students who are allowed to use reading software to use it for alternative and / or online forms of assessment as well.

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