

# Facing the Screen: an investigation of electronic assessment practice

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# Excellence in assessment: it's a goal at UCL

How can we characterise excellence?  
What form does that take in assessment?

Just what is our problem?

# Electronic assessment

## What we know:

1. It's still in the early days of development
2. The system is imperfect (as is all assessment)
3. It has been introduced at all HEIs in the UK – and usually it's done via *Moodle* (or a similar VLE) using *Turnitin* software

## What we don't know:

1. How markers work in these environments
2. How electronic environments affect markers
3. Whether paper and computer assessment is comparable

## Why does this matter to students?

UCL IOE is world leading in education and we want to ensure that all our working practice reflects that title.

We really don't know if assessing on screen is comparable to assessing on paper – there may be discrepancies.

We don't know if staff are working with adequate equipment, knowledge of the software, H&S knowledge and so on.

If there are broad issues with attitude (negative) and lack of training, this WILL impact the validity of the assessment process.

Certificate of Education (GCE) Normal (N) Level Examination for the English Language (EL) subject taken by the students in Singapore. This is required by all students enrolled in the Normal (Technical) course in Singapore for four years in secondary school and is deemed as a high-level examination. The background of the assessment will be provided before the assessment.

The terms 'assessment', 'test' and 'examination' may be used interchangeably for the purpose of this paper though scholars have distinguished the definitions.

**BACKGROUND OF NORMAL (TECHNICAL) COURSE**

Students who achieve the lowest score in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), a standardized examination taken at the end of primary school, are streamed to the N(T) course and every year approximately 15% of the cohort are

Good to set out your terminology, but beware! If you state something such as "scholars have..." technically, we'd expect you to reference those scholars. You can get around this by simply saying that you are using the terms interchangeably! My advice is always to keep it simple.

Convert to QuickMark

### QuickMarks

MA Educational Assessment

11

Awk. Biased? C/S CAPS

Citation Format Citation Needed

Citation Required

Commonly Confused Del.

Evidence needed Formatting error

- integrate theory and practice through their understanding of critical concepts and the discriminating use of specialist terminology

(AQA 2014, p29)

As one can see, all four aims of this course are very much open-ended and do not have any obvious 'academic' slant and instead seem to primarily focus on fostering creativity and theatrical skills, all of which normally fall under the category of vocational skills. Thus, when comparing the aims of the course to what AQA themselves say about the course, it is quite intriguing to note that whilst the units of the course are weighted 60% towards the written examination, the aims seem more suited to the practical units of the assessment that only account for 40% of the assessment.

Due to this paradox of having the aims seemingly not correlate with the content of

Mary 3/6/2015 10:10

**Comment [2]:** This seems like a strongly academic focus? It depends on how these descriptors are interpreted? Maybe that is at the heart of the issue?

Mary 3/6/2015 10:11

**Comment [3]:** I think it would help you to define what you mean by academic

# The problem?

- We know that students like the convenience of posting work online and receiving online feedback
- We know that administratively, it's more convenient
- But neither of these things relate to **effective practice** – they are confined to preference and financial decisions

# The study

- (a) There is research into student perceptions of online assessment, but nothing on academic's perceptions and nothing on their practice.
- (b) Our study focuses on the academic's experience.
- (c) It is beginning now and comprises a survey of staff (within UCL IOE) and will be followed up with a focus group intervention and then creation of guidance for assessing electronic environments.



## Key findings (in progress!)

When asked about just how they assess online, academics revealed that they commonly download work, then mark it up either on screen, *or on paper* before uploading it again.

### Potential outcomes

- Demonstrates the challenge of changing established practice (remember we've been marking on paper for hundreds of years!)
- Workload implication – some of the ways academics work is increasing their workload

## Key findings (in progress!)

When asked about just how long it takes them to mark an average essay (4000-5000 words)

- Range was 45 minutes to 3 hours

## Potential outcomes

- Workload implication – some of the ways academics work is increasing their workload
- This may reduce over time, but the practice of working on screen is very different

## Key findings (in progress!)

### Attitudes to assessment in electronic environments

- Some respondents were openly hostile whilst others saw this as a new way of working and were more open to change
- The practice has been implemented with no proper consultation with staff

### Potential outcomes

- Managing change needs to be acknowledged so that staff are feeling supported in times of change
- There are potential Health and Safety issues – screen time, anxiety, stress etc. all of which are known to relate to lots of time spent working on screens.

Going forward: steps 1-3 are in IOE

Survey analysis (March 2017)



Funded study with Focus Groups (May 2017)



Workshops with senior management to influence regulatory practice (July 2017)



Roll out survey further across UCL departments  
– work on formal training in electronic assessment practice (2018)



*“It is not only what we do,  
but also what we do not do,  
for which we are  
accountable”.*

*Moliere (1622-1673)*