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MAKING DIGITAL ASSESSMENT ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL – DURING COVID AND BEYOND



Dave Kenworthy, Director of Digital Services at [CoSector](https://cosector.com/) - University of London

[<https://cosector.com/>], and Wayne Houlden, Founder of [Janison](https://janison.com/) [[https://janison.com/?](https://janison.com/?utm_source=janison-cosector-digital-assessment-opinion-piece&utm_medium=partner&utm_campaign=janison-assessment)

[utm_source=janison-cosector-digital-assessment-opinion-](https://janison.com/?utm_source=janison-cosector-digital-assessment-opinion-piece&utm_medium=partner&utm_campaign=janison-assessment)

[piece&utm_medium=partner&utm_campaign=janison-assessment](https://janison.com/?utm_source=janison-cosector-digital-assessment-opinion-piece&utm_medium=partner&utm_campaign=janison-assessment)], discuss how HE can offer accessible digital assessments to all students, ensuring that nobody gets left behind, both during and after the pandemic.

It is highly unlikely that universities will be able to offer face-to-face invigilated exams this academic

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Challenging traditional testing methods

Digital assessment is inherently more flexible at supporting accessibility than traditional methods of testing knowledge. Students can complete their assessment on a variety of devices and the digital format means that cheating and plagiarism are actually easier to detect. Invigilators can see an audit log of a candidate's test attempt at any time, in real-time.

Many assessment platforms also offer dashboards that can pinpoint areas for improvement, making it possible to tailor a learning plan to the individual. The platforms are designed to be resilient against data security breaches, ID falsification, tampering, theft, loss of student responses and human error. And crucially, tests can be run in a locked-down environment. The technology that enables remote invigilation (also known as proctoring) is certainly complex, but secure end-to-end exam management services are out there.

Online proctoring providers have thought of everything to ensure that the rules of the 'virtual exam room' are followed. Just like invigilators and teachers in a physical classroom or exam hall, this modern technology can monitor and log incidents or activities.

Bridging the digital inequality gap

During the first UK lockdown, it became clear that poor internet access was exacerbating educational inequality. Students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, or those living in parts of the country with limited internet access, were at risk of being left behind, as higher education became more reliant on digital tools.

The ethos behind accessibility within online assessment is to ensure that no one gets left behind and to ensure equal opportunity to access education. Online assessment delivery can now surpass such barriers via technology that allows exams to run uninterrupted, even in parts of the world with an intermittent network supply.

Online assessment can also support those with disabilities. Platform features can be adjusted using a disability adjustment code to better suit students with visual impairments, hearing loss, mobility impairments, learning difficulties, mental health issues and disfigurements, making their test or exam

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By readily combining assistive technology with digital assessment, all learners could ultimately be supported with fair adjustments that allow them to access questions and evidence answers independently in exam scenarios. Compare, for instance, a blind student being able to sit the same exam as their peers thanks to a screen reader application and braille keyboard, as opposed to having to dictate their responses for someone else to write down.

Paving the way for online assessment

Now more than ever before, universities are tasked with providing digital learning platforms that are flexible and resilient so that students, no matter where they are or what their learning ability might be, are given the best possible learning experience. It's crucial that we try to tackle digital poverty with the range of online tools now at our disposal.

As we prepare for the further challenges that the new year may bring, universities will be determined to get back on track and return to offering students the very best experience possible. Switching to, or at least beginning to pave the way for online assessment tools, could help the universities to deliver their aims.

Assessments are a critical element of the teaching and learning process. Going digital is the next logical step in replacing an outdated, cumbersome, paper-based process fraught with complications. We hope to see more universities embrace online exams in 2021.

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