

TAKE-HOME EXAMINATIONS

GUIDANCE FOR ACADEMIC STAFF

July 2023

From 2022-23, formal examinations which are usually organised centrally by Planning and Academic Administration on campus can be done in two ways:

- **On-site** in the normal way
- **Take-home** exam for a duration of 24 hours, completed by students in the environment of their choice.

This applies to courses delivered on CCCU campuses but also to courses delivered by Collaborative Partners. For collaborative partners, the use of either type of exam will be decided on a case-by-case basis in discussion with the partners, academic link tutors and UK Partnerships/IPaD.

This guidance helps you get a better understanding, from a learning and teaching perspective, of what “Take-Home Open-Book Online Exams” (“take-home exams” in short) are, how to best prepare your students for them, and how to mark and provide feedback on submitted scripts.

Should access to campuses be suddenly restricted, and on-site exams become impossible to organise, these would need to be redesigned for take-home exams.

Guidance related to the administrative processes associated with take-home exams such as the schedule of exams, Blackboard and Turnitin set-up, exam paper upload, and where to submit your marks has been issued separately.

1. What is a Take-Home Examination?

A Take-Home Open-Book Online Examination has the following characteristics:

- **Take-Home:** students complete the exam at home or in a place of their choice, which can be a pre-booked space on one of CCCU campuses (Medway or Canterbury). More information on how students can book this space in advance of their exam can be found on the current students’ pages relating to [Exams and Coursework](#). They submit their exams via Turnitin submission points set up for this purpose. Students do NOT take their examination in an exam hall with invigilators on campus.
- **Online:** students complete the examination on a device of their choice (e.g., personal computer), and submit it via Blackboard Turnitin submission points. Students should not be required to use specific equipment (printer, scanner, specific software, etc.) other than a computer and internet access.
- **Open-Book:** because students complete the exam with no invigilation, there is no way of checking what information they have access to. It is therefore assumed that they have access to the internet, the learning material and information provided by the module team, books, articles, etc. They can also contact their classmates or other people (even if told not to). In some instances, you may recommend that they have certain sources at hand (see section 2).

- **Examination:** the assessment remains an examination in the sense that it is **time-constrained**, and students have a clear **published length of time** to complete it. This period of time is what you tell them it should be, and what you prepare them for. It should normally be 2 to 4 hours, not counting breaks, IT/computer issues or other unexpected disruption. Students are expected to work on their exam for the duration you have stated on the coversheet. You should design the exam question/brief to be completed within this timeframe and explain to students that they are not expected to spend longer than the duration published.
- **24-hour completion time:** unlike the on-campus exam, by default, students are given 24 hours to complete their take-home exam, starting at 11 am on a specific day and ending at 10.59 am the following day. This factors in the risks of technical problems (IT, broadband) or short emergency issues (e.g., having to look after relatives) resulting from the environment they are in. Students can also choose to start their exam at a later time than 11 am if they have an emergency, but they should not be encouraged to do so. How students use their 24 hours is their responsibility, but impaired performance will only apply to them if they can prove that they couldn't engage with their work at all during the 24 hours allocated (except nighttime). The 24-hour period also incorporates the additional time that students on some LSPs would be given for on-site exams.
There is NO option of setting up a centrally organised take-home exam for a duration of more or less than 24 hours (the Exam schedule being organised centrally).

2. Take-Home or On-Site Exam?

An evaluation of the use of take-home exams at CCCU was conducted in 2020/21 and concluded that take-home exams were an effective form of assessment that allowed students to demonstrate their academic abilities (especially skills that are not based on memory) whilst relieving them of the stress and anxieties usually associated with exams. The survey also highlighted risk of academic misconduct.

If you are unsure about the type of examination that is best suited to your module or course, the suggestions below can help:

1) Take-home exams are best suited if:

- You want students to demonstrate achievement of “higher” skills which go beyond knowledge acquisition, such as constructing their own arguments with sources available, applying, interpreting, and analysing known or available rules/systems to a specific case study of their choice (see section 3), reflect on a problem, etc.
- You do not have a learning outcome relating to working in a time-constrained and stressful environment or similar transferable skill.
- You expect your students to provide very personalised answers, and there is therefore a lower risk of academic misconduct.
- Your students have only had take-home exams in the past and are familiar with this process for which they have been well prepared (this can be alleviated by preparing students well with the new type of examination they will have).

2) On-site exams are best suited if:

- You want students to demonstrate achievement of specific elements of subject knowledge and understanding that they need to have memorised and must apply to solve problems that will be identical across the cohort.
- Answers provided by students are expected to be very identical given the nature of the questions/brief.
- Because of the nature of the expected answers to the questions/brief, the risk of academic misconduct (such as collusion, plagiarism, and contract cheating) is high if the exam is “open-book” and not invigilated.
- You have a learning outcome relating to working in a time-constrained and stressful environment or similar transferable skill.
- Your students have only done on-site exams in the past and are familiar with this process for which they have been well prepared (this can be alleviated by preparing students well with the new type of examination they will have).

3) Other options are also available:

- Blackboard Test Tools for exams: they are done online, and they require simple answers from students, such as MCQs, etc. Information related to Computer Assisted Assessment (CAA) can be found on the [TEL Knowledgebase for Staff](#) or from your [Digital Academic Developer](#). Using this tool will minimise the risk of collusion to an extent, as a bank of questions can be used, which will be randomised, and students will be given different sets of questions. It will also minimise the marking load of the module academic team. However, it does take time to set up and can only achieve certain outcomes.
- Locally organised exams (sometimes called Time Constrained Exams, or TCA): these are set-up by the course team who take full responsibility for their organisation, their length, whether they are done on-site in a room booked by the team or online.

3. How Do I Design the Take-Home Examination?

3.1 Considerations when designing the exam question/brief:

- This is **open-book**: you must assume that students will have access to their module material, notes, the internet, their classmates/other people and design the questions accordingly.
- Questions are designed to ensure students can **answer them in the time imparted**, e.g., 3 hours, and NOT the whole 24 hours. So, you **cannot expect students to spend time doing extensive research** (other than the odd quote they may remember from their readings, or other learning activities) or other activity normally expected from coursework. Their time will be spent:
 - 1) Reading the exam question/brief (and which questions to choose if there are options).
 - 2) Thinking about their answer/s and how to structure it/them.

- 3) Writing their answers, with the odd look up for an appropriate reference to a source.
 - 4) Proof-reading and doing last checks before submission.
- Bear in mind that they won't write by hand their answers by hand, but instead use a computer to **type up** and edit them, using Word processing or equivalent. This will have an impact on how fast they can provide their answers.
 - Questions are devised to allow students to demonstrate that they have met the **learning outcomes of the module** (or some of the learning outcomes if there is more than one assessment per module). The connection between the assessment and the learning outcomes must be clear and is often referred to as constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003).
 - Questions should allow for all the learning outcomes of the assessment to be met (but only these outcomes, to avoid the pitfall of over-assessing), and the **marking criteria** should allow for academic judgement on all these outcomes and nothing more.
 - Questions allow not just the confirmation of students' acquisition of knowledge and understanding, but also probe them to **demonstrate higher learning skills** such as application of knowledge, comparative, reflective, critical, and analytical skills, problem-solving, etc.
 - A certain degree of **complexity and uniqueness** is expected in the students' answers, and their work will therefore be **personalised**, which will help avoid the risks of academic misconduct. Exams which require students' engagement with higher learning skills, and allow students to demonstrate that they can carefully construct reasoned arguments, reflect on case studies or problems, use a variety of examples and comparisons, critique others/theories, etc.
 - One way to partly prevent cheating is by **providing choice** in the instructions: you can ask students to choose within a set number of questions or phrase the task to give them some choice on how they answer it. For example, a task could be "using two contemporary examples of your choice, reflect on the claim that 'politics should be left to trained experts'". Giving some choice allows students to play to their strengths (whilst still demonstrating that they meet the learning outcomes) and provide more reflective and creative answers.
 - Send your proposed examination questions to your External Examiner for comments and feedback.
 - Design the task to ensure that students will submit their work in a format that is manageable for Turnitin, e.g., Word document, PDF file. Please check with your [Digital Academic Developer](#) in advance of setting the exam if you wish to use a specific type of file.

3.2 The Take-Home Exam coversheet

The exam cover sheet published to students on the day of the exam should contain elements listed below. Please use the take-home exam cover sheet template provided.

- **Task/s** and/or exam questions: these are phrased in a clear and simple manner, but discipline-specific terminology is used if deemed acquired at that level of study. Instructions should be very clear, especially if students are given choice. The document should be proof-read too.
- **Time** students should spend in “real time” on completing the exam (e.g., 2 hours without interruption).
- If applicable, which **resources** students may want to have at hand to facilitate the completion of their answers, e.g., a specific book or source, lecture notes, etc.
- Assessment **marking criteria**.
- The **format of the file** they need to submit (either Word document or PDF file to avoid issues with changes to layout).
- **Wordcount**: this may be needed as students are usually (though not always) able to type faster than what they would be expected to write by hand (a rough indication is 30 words per minute). They may also be tempted to provide unnecessary detailed answers. You need to decide how long you expect their answers to be, which will then be reflected in how you mark their scripts afterwards. If you state the wordcount, please indicate the upper limit clearly, i.e., “between 2,500 and 3,000 words”, “2,500 words -/+ 10%”.
- **Other instructions** specific to the assessment (some may allow the use of charts, etc.)
- **“Authenticity Statement”** that students need to write to confirm that the work is their own.
- Where they should submit their file, and the date and the time for the submission deadline (e.g., Thursday 14th May, 10:59 am). This date and time should be exactly 24 hours after the exam was published.

4. How Do I Set up the Take-Home Examination in Blackboard?

Take-Home Exams are set up following the same process as other digital assessments. New Blackboard module sites (those that are not copies of previous modules) will include a Take-Home Exam Turnitin submission point within the Assessment area as set up by your course admin. Turnitin submission points will need to be configured by the course team as per the standard process for setting up any Turnitin assessment. Specific guidance on how to do this will be provided by the Exams Team when the Take-Home Exam is registered with them. The process will be supported by LTE in the same manner that they support all digital assessments, including training sessions on the setup and the differences with other assessment types.

When contacted, you should also provide the Exam and Graduation team two contact names for any on the day issues at the start, during and end of the exam.

Separate guidance document is provided (<https://telstaffkbcccu.co.uk/2023/06/02/how-to-set-up-a-turnitin-assignment-in-blackboard-ultra/>), giving you details of the Turnitin setup and what you will need to do.

5. How Do I Support Students in their Preparation for the Take-Home Examination?

The University provides student [guidance](#) on the practicalities of taking their assessment as Take-Home Exams; however, you should provide additional advice and support.

The following is recommended, and you may have additional ways of increasing your students' preparedness:

5.1 Discussion on the “real time” they should spend on the exam, e.g., 2 hours:

Explain to students that the additional time given (e.g., 22 hours) is only to be used if they face an unexpected technical or family problem. Explain that the questions are designed to be answered within this timeframe, and that full marks can be awarded to students who complete the exam within the “real time” allocated, as long as they engage fully with the instructions and marking criteria.

You may set a **word limit** to your exam to stop them from writing unnecessary lengthy answers. If doing so, remind students that they will face penalties (as they do for other forms of assessments) if they go over the limit.

5.2 Marking criteria activities:

Publish the marking criteria and set up learning activities which engage students with the criteria, so that they are clear about what is expected of them, and how to achieve the best possible mark.

5.3 Mock activities:

Provide mock exam questions/tasks, and, if possible, set a mock online exam to give students some “practice time”, so that they gain a clear sense of how to proceed, and receive formative feedback. You can also publish mock answers, as long as it does not increase the risk of academic misconduct.

5.4 Other guidance to avoid academic misconduct:

The guidance can be given in various formats, including via short videos that you can record on ReCap, FAQs, etc. It is recommended that:

- You warn students about the temptation to “copy and paste” and inform them that the Turnitin submissions will support the detection of academic misconduct.
- The instructions contained in the exam cover sheet (detailed in section 2) should also be discussed with them, including use of charts/tables/images, etc.

6. How Do I Mark the Take-Home Exams?

Take-Home Examinations should be marked anonymously if submitted to Turnitin and are not subject to approved exemption.

You should follow the usual good practice for marking and feedback agreed by your course team, which aligns to [University marking procedures](#), in terms of moderation and of provision of feedback. The marking criteria should be used to help you reach the final mark and provide the feedback using Turnitin Feedback Studio. The marking and feedback should be done within 15 working days.

If you have set a specific wordcount for the take-home exam, apply the usual penalties to those who have gone over the limit. You cannot apply penalties for lateness, as the “normal” rule for exam functions here: if the work is not submitted within 24 hours, it is considered a non-submission and should be awarded a mark of zero. Students who had legitimate grounds for not submitting should apply for [impaired](#) performance.

Given the increased risk of academic misconduct, it is recommended that markers do close checks of the Turnitin Similarity reports to help mitigate this risk.

7. Steps to Ensure the Integrity of Take-Home Examinations.

The following must be put in place to minimise the risks of academic misconduct during the completion of take-home examinations:

- a. As per section 3 in the preparation for the take-home exams, the teaching team clarifies to students what resources they can and cannot use during the exam, and warn them of the risks of academic misconduct. This clarification is provided using the relevant module Blackboard, in formats that the teaching teams deem most suitable, i.e., written guidance, recordings on ReCap, written FAQs, Q&A using the Blackboard discussion board, etc.
- b. Guidance and activities on how to develop good academic writing skills and how to avoid academic misconduct must be used as is usually done for coursework. For example, students should refer to the [Learning Skills Hub](#). Students can still get support from Learning Developers prior to their exam.
- c. Students must include, in the file they submit on Turnitin, a statement confirming that the work is their own (as per the cover sheet template). Staff should check that the statement has been included. If it has not, they should contact students and request the statement, exams should not be marked without a completed statement.
- d. The marking team is asked to pay specific attention to the authenticity of the students’ work. To do so, you need to check the Turnitin Originality Reports for all students and use your academic judgement when reading the scripts. If you suspect any form of academic misconduct, the usual [academic misconduct procedures](#) will be used to investigate each case.