

Cyprus Agency For Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
Final Examination in Emergency Situations due to Coronavirus: Quality
Standards and Guidelines for Alternative Methods of Assessment
(Document Translated by the University of Nicosia)

The Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education, within its assigned duties, supports institutions for offering alternative methods of final assessment; such methods should meet the European Standards and Guidelines for quality in education. The European Quality Assurance Agency (ENQA) has recently highlighted the role of the Quality Assurance Agencies:

“We believe that the guiding principle should be to best support higher education institutions to master the extraordinary challenges they are currently facing and to sustain quality of their education provision through these times. ENQA, the European representative association of quality assurance agencies, has highlighted the important role that agencies might play. We wish to draw your attention to a social media campaign launched by ENQA for agencies to share practices and experiences”.
(<https://www.eqar.eu/covid-19/>).

Based on the proposed framework, the institutions decide on the methods of final assessment, taking into account the particularities of the student population, the programmes of study, as well as the needs of each thematic area, as one policy and the same method of assessment for all subjects cannot be applied: different methods of final assessment are needed, for example in theoretical courses, laboratory courses, art courses and those course with practical experience as part of the programme and/or its completion.

Special care should also be provided for students with disabilities so that the help provided for final assessments will not hinder their responses.

In all cases, consultation with the students, as well as for the institution and faculty is necessary, to ensure that students have the necessary supporting equipment.

We want to emphasize that the training of faculty/examiners/supervisors in the use of the platform to be used, as well as in alternative methods of assessment, is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of these alternative methods.

A. Alternative Methods of Assessment

The Agency, as a rule, and wherever possible, urges universities, to complete the examinations within the current spring semester deadlines, using alternative methods of assessment:

1. Oral, Distance Learning Examination

The credibility and quality of such examination is ensured by recording all oral assessments, the quality of the questions asked (as defined in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) based on the level of the programme) and the minimum duration of the examination (30 minutes per examination).

Remote one-to-one examination is done with small audiences. Larger audiences can be split into smaller ones, with the help of colleagues and simultaneous examination.

2. Electronic Written Examination and Supervision

The reliability and quality assurance of such an exam, is ensured by record keeping, small audiences, fixed time not exceeding 2-3 hours, and simultaneous examination and proctoring of audiences, with the identification of students and specialized platform and appropriate equipment for the students. At the end of the continuous duration, the examination documents are all submitted simultaneously.

3. Open-book Assessment (open book examinations/ take-home examinations)

- 1) Open-book Examination is done either in examination rooms with physical presence or with take-home exams.
- 2) In all cases the examination is done at a predefined time. The take-home exam should set a specific time to return the test, leaving no room for assistance from third parties, calculating the time required by the average student to answer all questions: e.g. it is sent to their email address at 9am, with the obligation to submit the final paper to a specific email address at 12am.
- 3) The answer to each question cannot be found precisely as such, in a book or electronic source.
- 4) The examination script addresses the extent to which student understands concepts, information, theories, and processes that s/he does not need to memorize, but instead to use, apply, and generate new knowledge by applying problem-solving processes and critical thinking.
- 5) The problems are authentic and the student is required to solve them based on knowledge, concepts and theories, s/he has learned, but needs to select and apply them to a new context/content (e.g. it is not enough just to know the Laws of Energy, but instead to be able to choose under specific conditions which ones to use. Not to memorize for example how Kapodistrias' work, is assessed in manuscripts and history book but know under which parameters a governor's work is evaluated in a given period).
- 6) Methods may vary: Question papers and/or problem solving and/or scripts and/or projects that must be completed within a short period of time (up to 3 hours), and are not the same for all examinees. Multiple-choice questions are generally not to be used because it is difficult to include 3-4 answers for every question to require critical thinking and higher cognitive functions and not a ready-made answer.

Long-term assignments and projects, such as those assigned as part of the continuous course assessment, must be avoided, since there is no assurance

that they are being prepared by the examinee.

- 7) Examination depends on teaching and vice versa: We examine what we teach and we teach according to what we will examine. However, in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), in programme levels 6,7,8, students are taught and assessed on questions/subjects that meet the requirements of the open book, challenging examinations, avoiding memorizing and copying of books or notes of specific responses that are retrieved as such and / or with minimal variations or with cliché responses that can be used to a number of responses (e.g. pedagogical/social science responses, where the answer "depends on the well-being of the child / citizen ..." has become a cliché).

B. POSTPONEMENT OF THE EXAMINATION PERIOD

In cases where, due to the specific nature of the subjects and/or the higher education institution itself, the quality of distance examinations is not guaranteed, it is recommended to extend the duration of the current semester and to extend the examination period accordingly. In these cases the collective institutional decisions on one single method of examination cannot ignore the documented suggestion by the coordinators/faculty/and students of specific courses.

- 1) This provision may, as a rule, also could include final year student audiences, in particular where the examination involves laboratory activities that cannot be conducted with virtual representations and simulations by the teacher and observations/responses by students.
- 2) For the Colleges that suspended their operation and will resume again in Summer, the final examination must be conducted at the end of the semester extension.

B. Concluding

As we do not know, when examinations with physical presence can be conducted, and taking into account, the international opinion of epidemiologists that the duration of the restrictions will last for quite some time, it is necessary to consider alternative methods of final examinations, in order for institutions to meet the requirements for completing the semester.

The Institutions' response, however, should in no way be hasty and without quality standards, nor they should employ a fits-all and easy solution, such as "We place the topics on a platform and we're done" for all subjects and all students.

In this context, the documented positions of teachers/students, by sector and thematic area, should be taken seriously and alternative methods that ensure quality should be applied.