



## UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

COMMISSION CIRCULAR NO. 11/2020

No. 20, Ward Place,  
Colombo 07.

1<sup>st</sup> December, 2020

Vice Chancellors of Universities  
Rectors of Campuses  
Directors of Institutes

### **Guidelines for Conducting Alternative Assessments in Universities and HEIs.**

University Grants Commission (UGC) has discussed the importance of conducting Alternative Assessment at various forums including the Sub Committee on Presidential Task Force (PTF) for Higher Education and the Committee of the Vice-Chancellors and the Directors (CVCD), Quality Assurance Council (QAC/UGC). Based on these discussions, the UGC has formulated the following guidelines to be adopted by the State Universities to implement. These alternative methods of assessments have been adopted globally especially the trend has been increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic period due to the inability of holding face to face closed book written examinations.

1. General Guidelines for Conducting Alternative Assessments (Attached)
2. Specific Guidelines for Online Assessments (Attached)

The University Grants Commission (UGC) expects the Universities to adhere to aforesaid guidelines in order to continue with the academic activities in the Universities without much delay and interruptions to facilitate student learning process.

**Senior Prof. Sampath Amaratunge**  
Chairman

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File No. UGC/AC9/2020/Assesments

## **University Grants Commission**

### **General Guidelines for Conducting Alternative Assessments**

Assessment is the most important single component that serves as a tool which makes students learn in any education system. Traditionally, in Sri Lanka, closed book written examination is being practiced in schools and HEIs as the main mode of evaluation. This type of evaluation has many shortcomings and world over educational institutes are resorting to other types of authentic alternative evaluations to assess, whether the students have achieved the intended course learning outcomes. This trend has drastically increased during the Covid-19 pandemic period due to the inability of holding face to face closed book written examinations.

University Grants Commission (UGC) has discussed this issue at various forums including the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Sub Committee for Higher Education and the Committee of the Vice-Chancellors and the Directors (CVCD), Quality Assurance Council/(QAC/UGC). Based on these discussions, the UGC has formulated the following guidelines to be adopted by the State Universities to implement alternative evaluation methods to assess the achievement of intended course learning outcomes by the students.

1. The University Grants Commission (UGC) expects the Universities to continue with the academic activities in the Universities without much delay.
2. Decision to hold either alternative examinations or on-site year-end examinations as opposed to semester-end examinations, or amalgamated examinations expecting the situation in the country to improve shall be taken by the individual Faculty Boards.
3. However, if the Faculty Boards decide to conduct alternative assessments to measure student achievement instead of closed book written examinations, there are many possibilities. Some of the authentic alternative assessments include: Open book examinations, Take home examinations, Student portfolios, Performance Tests, Examinations via zoom, Online Quizzes, Timed quizzes, Online Group and individual Presentations, Online Debates, Time bound examinations, Mini-Projects, Reflective Journals, Collaborative/Cooperative Team-based Assessments, Participatory Co-creations, Online Viva and Online presentations, Proctored examinations, Self and peer assessments, e-portfolios, Project based assignments and presentations, Design

projects, Case studies, Practical examinations based on presentations being done via zoom, etc.

4. The type of alternative evaluation method for both formative and summative assessments depend on the subject matter and the level of the course. Therefore, the type of alternative assessment to be introduced for a particular course should be decided by the individual Faculty Boards and Senates of the universities.
5. All such alternative assessment methods must meet the same learning outcomes expected from the respective course unit/module as per the approved curriculum of the programme.
6. The Faculty Boards and Senates may change the weightages given for assessment components of course units/modules: For example, Continuous Assessment marks can be increased up to 60% of the total and the Final Examination mark can be reduced to not less than 40% of the total with due approval from the Statutory Bodies within the University.
7. Any changes to the assessment criteria should be informed to the students in advance and the students must be awarded the grade they earn through the revised scheme of assessment for each course unit/module.
8. Students should be given sufficient time to adjust to the new evaluation formats and they should be treated fairly while maintaining the quality and standards of such assessment tasks and outcomes.
9. When students submit responses to online assessments, he/she must sign and agree to an academic integrity declaration of the respective Universities and confirm the work is his/her own, and he/she has not communicated with any person, persons or organization about the assessment before the submission deadline.
10. In case a student is unwilling to take part in the proposed alternative assessment method, the University may allow the student to defer the required assessments up until the immediate next semester/academic year and complete the course unit/module on-site (if it is applicable) without any academic penalty.

## University Grants Commission

### Specific Guidelines for Online Assessments

Online Assessment involves the use of internet-based tools for the creation, storage and delivery of assessments to candidates, the capture, marking, storage and analysis of their responses, and the provision of feedback and encouraging learning. The general principles that apply to the setting of face-to-face assessment also apply to the setting of online assessment. In order to facilitate successful online assessment due attention has to be paid to the following:

1. Making required modifications in policies, by-laws and regulations pertaining to:
  - ICT use for assessment
  - Access to devices and the internet by staff and students
  - Electronic security measures information integrity, validity and data protection
  - Ethical and legal standards for e-assessment
  - Weightage assigned to formative and summative assessments.
  - Protection against academic fraud
  - Holding alternate exams when a student could not complete the examinations for justifiable reasons.

Please note that **prioritizing formative (in-course) assessment is a good practice** because frequent and diverse low-stakes formative assessments, such as quizzes helps students familiarize themselves to online assessment methods increases student engagement which in turn improves learning and helps students to gain confidence and prevents them from falling behind.

It is important to clearly communicate the following to the students:

- Examination schedule, modes (Open/Close book), Duration, Types of questions (MCQ, SE, Essay), # attempts allowed.
- Tentative time of releasing results/ providing feedback Procedure to be followed to access results.
- Procedure or the contact person in case of technical difficulties during examinations.

2. Ensuring that the available technical infrastructure and operating systems has sufficient coverage and alignment with the different e-assessment methods comply with the ethical and legal requirements suitable for all learner profiles regularly updated and tested prior to use provide access for students and staff to devices and technologies that are appropriate for the setting within which they are situated. Able to accommodate large numbers of students submitting assignments simultaneously.
3. Ensuring availability of sufficient numbers of well-trained, technical support staff capable of managing online assessments and overcoming emergency situations such as incorrect online assessment tool settings, outage of University and/or external servers during online assessments.
4. Ensuring timely provision of required support for using e-assessment platform by learners and teaching staff.
5. Provision of sufficient training on the use of ICT tools to Staff and students.
6. Making the staff aware of available online assessment facilities, rules and regulations, sound assessment practices and use of available online assessment applications.
7. Provision of adequate guidance to students on online assessments and academic integrity.
8. Requesting the academic staff to consider the following when designing online assessments:
  - Design assessment tasks of each course focusing on the intended learning outcomes (ILO), and the teaching learning activities of the respective course (Constructive alignment).
  - Revisit each course ILOs to check whether they can be assessed online. If they are too complicated due to targeting at higher levels of learning, and difficult to be successfully assessed online, simplify the ILO by disintegrating it to relevant sub-ILOs that together will enable online assessment of the complicated ILO, and design assessment tasks focusing on the sub-ILOs.
  - Assign appropriate weightage to individual assessment tasks considering the time spent on learning activities and the nature of learning activities pertaining to respective ILOs.

- Using different types of questions to assess the achievement of each ILO is a good practice.
- Assessment tasks should be valid, reliable, fair and practicable.
- Online assessment instructions and question wording should be clear, concise and free from ambiguity.
- Assessment rubrics/ Marking scheme for each assessment task should be prepared when designing the assessments.
- Select Synchronous(real-time) or Asynchronous approach for different assessment tasks. Synchronous assessment requires good internet facilities and good time management. If synchronous approach is deemed necessary, options such as designated centers with good internet facilities where students can sit for their examinations, should be made available for students without access to good internet facilities.
- Select appropriate mode (Open/Closed book) of administration.
- Allocate adequate time for every assessment task used for in-course and end-semester examinations. Provision for 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate students with special needs (in terms of accessibility, connectivity etc.) should be considered.
- Prepare on-line assessment plan for each course. An example is given below:

Assessment item	Associated ILO	Weightage (Formative/ Summative)	Teaching Learning Activities	Assessment Rubric/ Answer key	Appro ach	Mode of admin	Time allocated (minutes)
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- Clearly communicate the expectations regarding assessment, including criteria for grading, to students, ideally at the beginning of the course.
- Ensure provision of timely and quality feedback to students regarding their performance after the completion of assessment task/s.
- Present the prepared assessment schedule for scrutiny board to check for validity, reliability, fairness and practicability.

**Potential problems associated with online assessment and approaches for minimizing:**

1. Context under-representation (CU) and construct-irrelevant variance (CIV), can be avoided using constructive alignment.
2. Mistakes in passing score determination.
3. Threat to integrity of assessments attributed to examination security and cheating by students:
  - a). Cheating by students can take place in many ways including the following:
    - Access to Notes in closed book examinations.
    - Use of webcams based online proctoring / lockdown browsers\* can be used to minimize the impact, but costly
    - Encouraging honesty among students, and reminding about academic integrity policy and making them to agree to it
    - Clear communication regarding outcomes and expected performance also helps
    - Open-book examinations is a far better choice.
  - b). Impersonation - Ensuring whether the person who attempted the examination is exactly the same person, is a challenge.

This Can be minimized if the students are asked to keep their webcam on throughout such exams, and an examination invigilator is observing the student remotely (Online proctoring).

- c). Plagiarism - Student copying content from others or internet sources is an increasing concern. Technical strategies to deter copying from others include randomizing questions, shuffling question and options order, limiting the number of attempts, limiting the time for tests and deferring automated feedback. Copying from internet sources and others can be moderated by the use of plagiarism detection software (Turnitin). In the absence of this option, the recommended approach is to prepare questions which test higher order skills with the use of scenarios / case studies + problem solving skills. Lockdown browsers (that prevents student from printing, copying, going to another URL, or accessing other applications during a test) can be another solution where one is not permitted to copy text from other locations.

4. Student facing difficulty in gaining equal accessibility to assessments. Student community is diverse in terms of:

- a. Accessibility to online assessment due to inadequacy of ICT infrastructure/ bandwidth/Internet Connectivity
- b. English language proficiency
- c. Computer using skills (inadequate typing skills, lack of familiarity with certain applications)

d. Devices used :

- I. Depending on the nature of the examination, the recommended device for engaging the examination may vary.
- II. If some students do not have access to laptop/ desktop computers, but only to mobile devices such as smart phones, the interaction space (i.e. screen size) is limited. Expect to type descriptive answers creates disparity among the students.
- III. A more suitable interaction mechanism would be to use MCQ / drag and drop/ matching.

**e. Connectivity**

Internet (Data) connectivity within the country is not uniform. Pockets of areas which have no coverage from telecom providers exist. There are instances students requiring to go to an open area for Internet connectivity. In such situations **continuous connectivity can be challenging for the conduct of long duration examinations.**

Alternate strategies such as **permitting to download examinations and submit after completion** maybe more suitable.

**f. Electricity related issues**

Power failures are common occurrences in Sri Lanka and often the resumption takes time. Unless a student has a mobile / portable device for attempting the examination and uninterrupted internet connectivity (such as via a UPS or Mobile Router/Hotspot) expecting students to answer timed exams such as of 1-2-hour duration may affect some of them. Strategies such as take-home assignments with a 24-hour submission window can be adopted.

- g. **Hardware/Software issues** depending on the hardware/software setup on the personal devices, some computers may have performance issues. Although rare, software issues as well as computer malware related issues can affect the computers.



Under such situations that are beyond the control of students, some students may not be able to complete the examinations.

Appropriate procedures should be in place to permit them to submit details of extenuating circumstances, and to hold alternate exams and/or provide attempts to re-sit at a future examination.