2025

Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences

2025 Annual Quality Report (Institution)
CASE STUDIES RELATED to
Academic Year September 2023 – August 2024

CASE STUDIES

Case Studies Guidelines

Guide:

This section provides the institution with the opportunity to provide details of key themes or specific topics arising during the reporting period, as well as more detail on related cross-institutional quality enhancement initiatives that occurred during the reporting period.

In a specific reporting period, QQI may request updates on specific national thematic areas/topics or may invite the institution to submit a case study from a list of topics linked to national policy developments. Themes or topics may also be identified by the institution which arise from specific local initiatives or activities, and/or from national policy initiatives. They should be developmental, reflect on and highlight areas that may be of interest to other institutions, relate to quality, QA and QE and would benefit from wider dissemination. Selected case studies should not have been submitted previously as part of the institution's AQR.

Guidance for Drafting Case Studies

QQI recommends that written case studies should:

- Be between half a page and two pages in length (c. 500 to 1,000 words);
- Have a reasonably short title,
- include the theme, keywords, and an optional short abstract;
- Relate to a specific time- and subject-bound issue;
- Avoid long descriptions of processes, but rather focus on the any challenges encountered (and how these were overcome) and impacts (intended and unintended) achieved;
- Include an introduction that sets out a brief overview of contextual matters;
- Include any relevant supporting data and data analysis;
- Include links to any sources cited;
- Include a clear concluding paragraph with overview of key outcomes/learning.

Although case studies will generally be in written form, institutions may also provide links to audio-visual/multimedia case studies. QQI does not prescribe a format for case studies.

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CASE STUDY 1

Title: Assessing the Feasibility of Proctored Online Examinations as an Outright Replacement for On-Site Examinations in an Online Only Context.

Theme: The future of examination as an assessment type in an online only environment

Keywords (2-3 words): Proctored Online Examinations, Invigilated Online Examinations, Online Only Learning.

Insert Case Study 1 below (in any format/media – QQI does not prescribe):

Description

In compiling a gap analysis between Blended Learning and Online Only provision in preparation for an application of extension of provision, the QAE Officer had cause to revisit temporary arrangements for proctored online examination which had been initiated during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Analysis

That the arrangements were temporary, was of particular significance not least from a GDPR perspective where "necessity" is a defining justification. That examinations could not be carried out in any other way during the pandemic was offered as a key justification under Article 6(1). As will be evidenced below, this view, that proctored examinations are contingent on necessity, has endured to some extent in that it is still contended that online proctorship should be preferred only in exceptional circumstances. In suggesting a framework to guide the use online proctorship, a QQI news item stated "Remote proctored exams are a last resort: We never jump straight to remote proctored exams. If there's some other task that we could use instead that will have good enough assessment security, it's going to suit our purpose better" (QQI, 2021). This has been echoed in best practice guidelines in other jurisdictions (see below)

Successful legal actions taken by students, increased sectoral anxiety about the propriety of online proctorship (see GPDP, 2021 as a pertinent example). The evidence-base also raised important issues including privacy concerns related both to data security and surveillance anxiety (Balash et al. 2021; Coghlan et. Al., 2021; Giller 2021); psychological and emotional impact adversely affecting performance and scoring (Ahn & Roh, 2024; Conijm et al 2022; Giller 2021; Woldeab & Brothen, 2019); corrosion of trust within the educational community (Dawson, 2022); and inequitable accessibility arising from resource or technical disparities (Hartnett et al 2023; Daffin Jr & Jones, 2018; Swauger, 2020; Giller 2021). Moreover, the reliability of proctored examinations in ensuring academic integrity has also been questioned in that it may not be effective in the

prevention of cheating and, as worryingly, generates false positives where proctoring systems misinterpret behaviours as suspicious (Karch 2022; Giller 2021; Swauger, 2020).

While online proctorship has been framed as educational deterioration rather than innovation (Lee & Fanguy, 2022), there is growing evidence that students are receptive to online examinations with some studies indicating greater satisfaction and preference (Nicola-Richmond et al 2023; Milone et al 2017). There are obvious advantages related to increased levels of flexibility and accessibility especially for part-time learners (Dawson 2022). While some research indicated disparity between onsite and online performance (Alessio et al, 2017), there is also evidence suggesting little difference in student outcomes between proctored onsite and online examinations (Andreou, 2021). It has even been suggested that educational providers find benefits outweigh potential risks (Dawson 2022), however the issues outlined above remain problematic most especially from a policy generation perspective where clear operational, legal and evidential concerns remain.

In the age of authentic assessment, the efficacy of proctored examination, and by extension proctored online examinations, has been questioned (Singh, 2022). But its retention was significantly bolstered as it emerged as the most reliable means of combating digital forms of cheating (Fawns & Schaepkens, 2022). This has become even more evident as tertiary providers respond to challenges presented by AI with proctored onsite examinations being proffered as a reliable, if not foolproof, means of ensuring academic integrity. Even progressive approaches to the use of AI in student assessment retain examinations as a key format nested within a range of assessment types. For example, guidelines in Australia are reflective of a growing consensus around the use of "meaningful points" in assessment strategies. In essence, this translates as a filtration point involving the identification "of key assessment moments at a program level and securing those" (Lodge et al 2023, p.6). How security is maximised at "meaningful points" is illustrated through the following example "The team remove some exams from the first year and introduce an exam in one final-year unit per major" (Lodge et al 2023, p.6). In other words, examinations are not merely retained but serve as pivotal because they remain among the most secure forms of assessment.

As noted above, necessity, or even absolute necessity, is a key justification for the use of proctored online examinations with post-pandemic reconfiguration the pertinent context. In formulating the gap analysis another form of necessity emerged albeit of a very different nature to the conditions experienced during the pandemic. It arose from the definition of fully online learning "refers to a type of programme where all teaching occurs entirely online, either synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination. Importantly, learners can complete their programme of study from a distance *with no in-person or on-site requirements* [author's emphasis]." (QQI, 2023). The immutability of this right for a student participating on an online only programme is a matter of debate, but it must be assumed any requirement to attend in person would be exceptional and certainly not a recurrent

element in the assessment strategy. In essence this discounts the viability of onsite or in-person examination placing heightened emphasis on proctored online examination.

Outcome and Implications

The policy and procedure for proctored online examinations was reassessed based on best practice guidelines. It should be noted that this form of assessment was parked once the public health restrictions were lifted after the pandemic and had not been used in the intervening period. The Gap Analysis between Blended and Online learning was therefore the primary impetus for this review. It is now a decade since online proctorship guidelines were published in the US (ATP & NCTA, 2015). More recently, TEQSA (Dawson, 2022, pp. 6-7) published the following guidelines which echo the opinion piece published by QQI referred to above in significant ways:

1. Online invigilated exams are used as a last resort
2. Exam designs are sound assessments of learning
3. Students are offered an alternative
4. Equity, diversity, adversity and accessibility are catered for
5. Providers pilot online invigilated exams adequately before using them in assessment
6. A whole-of-institution approach is taken
7. Regulatory requirements and standards around privacy and data security are met
8. Regulatory requirements and standards around privacy and data security are met
9. Effective governance, monitoring, QA, evaluation and complaints procedures are in place
10. Staff and student capacity building and support are available and ongoing

As noted above, the use of proctored examinations within parameters of absolute necessity band and the renewed justification and legitimation of examination as an assessment strategy feature prominently. This has significant implications. Most notably, can online only provision be reasonably construed as a justification for “last resort” deployment. Secondly, if examinations should be retained as a valuable and perhaps necessary form of assessment in the context of securing the academic integrity of the overall assessment strategy (e.g. within a “meaningful point” model) how can that be accommodated by proctored online examinations under existing best practice guidelines. Thirdly if an alternative form of assessment must be offered what form could this take in an online only environment where on-site examination would not be an option. And finally, given the legal, evidential and operational questions surround online proctorship what level of confidence providers can have in this mode of assessment.

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