Short Report on the HUBS/HUCBMS Workshop on the Implications of Remote Exams for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, hosted by Aston University.

Attendance: About 25 people took part in person or online. Numbers were lower than registered (40) due to COVID and the hot weather making travel problematic. Everyone who registered received copies of the slides and the paper by David Smith which was associated with his talk. Staff from fifteen universities were registered including: Aston University, Birmingham City University, Sheffield Hallam, University of Hertfordshire, York St. John, University of Bristol, University College London, Brunel University, University of College London, Brunel University, University of Derby, Royal Holloway University of London, University of Liverpool, University of Oxford, University of Sussex, University of Birmingham, and the University of Bedfordshire.

Online remote exams offer opportunities and risks. Much of the workshop discussion focused on how we could best deploy them.

Exams and EDI: Dr Olivia Hunt started the workshop by encouraging us to examine data on attainment/awarding gaps between different subgroups of students. To understand the gaps, focus groups are often needed before action plans can be formed. The key to a successful action plan is to identify a role (not a specific person) who is accountable for the implementation. Accountability is essential.
We don't currently know who benefits from online exams. In a survey conducted by the Aston Student Union in 2021-22 of the entire student body, 2/3 of the students reported that they preferred online, remote exams and 1/3 preferred on-campus exams. We don't know whether learning differences or COVID or home environment played a part in their preferences. Progression data at a sufficiently granular level and analytic tools to work with the data are essential to understanding the impact of remote exams. Remote exams should be used as part of a varied mixture of assessments which together provide opportunities for all students to shine.

Remote exams are a great opportunity to test application if properly designed: Dr David Smith provided a great talk on good question design for online exams including an inspiring collection of case studies. For many participants, access to his review paper was the most useful output of the day (a PDF is with the workshop materials).

Digital poverty and unsuitable home environments are a risk for remote exams: Dr Amreen Bashir discussed her study of Aston students during the first COVID lockdown which documents the difficulties with computer/WIFI access and appropriate study spaces at home. Access to campus computers is a potential remedy. Staff from the University of Birmingham reported that they provide quiet computer rooms staffed with technicians who can help with computer problems. More discussion with the Student Unions might lead to better student/exam friendly spaces.

Students need to practice for both remote exams and on-campus exams: Model questions and answers should be discussed in class. Similar questions/skills needed for the exam should be embedded in coursework. The transition to on-campus exams has been hard for many students, so skills should be scaffolded. Instead of completely closed book,

perhaps students could bring in one A4 sheet to take some of the pressure off memory and to encourage them to identify what is most important or consider defining the resources to be used in a remote exam so students spend less time on internet searches and less suitable materials.

Tools for Learning can help with exam preparation: Jo Gough and Charlie Clarke-Bland explained Aston's resources for free software to help exam revision. The tools can also help with polishing writing in long duration exams. The tools are available for everyone. Students do not need a diagnosis of a learning difference to access them.

Exam Duration: MCQs can work online if the questions are drawn from pools and the duration is not so long that students can google the answers. Aston Bioscience has been running 12 hour essay exams. These may be too long and exhausting for staff and students. Cutting down to 8 or 4 hours would be worth trying, based on the experience shared by other universities in the Workshop.

Institutional Support for Better Online Exams: **Ann Vernallis** addressed what could be addressed at Institutional level. For those students who have poorer access to computers and quiet at home, better facilities for taking on-campus exams are important. Clear regulations around computer failure in exams and late submissions are also important. More engaging materials around plagiarism would also be helpful.

Preventing Collusion and Plagiarism: Alan Goddard addressed exam malpractice. Module leaders need to explicitly define what counts as collusion. Students might be encouraged to revise together but would be expected to write their answers independently and not share resources during the exam. Rather than just asking students to declare that they understand plagiarism and collusion, maybe a video and a quiz on both within 24 hours of the exam would be more effective as discussed in the Workshop.

Online Exams Run on Campus as Another Way Forward: There is an appeal to open book exams which are run in the more uniform setting of an on-campus computer lab. They can provide authenticity without the risks of digital poverty. Aston Pharmacy has had success both with unlimited access to the internet and access only to a defined pack of materials (such as primary papers or NICE guidance). Students are not allowed phones and many staff invigilators are used to discourage collusion. Common social media sites are blocked. For this to work successfully, the IT department must be fully on board.

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