

# Winter Exams 2020/21 Survey results

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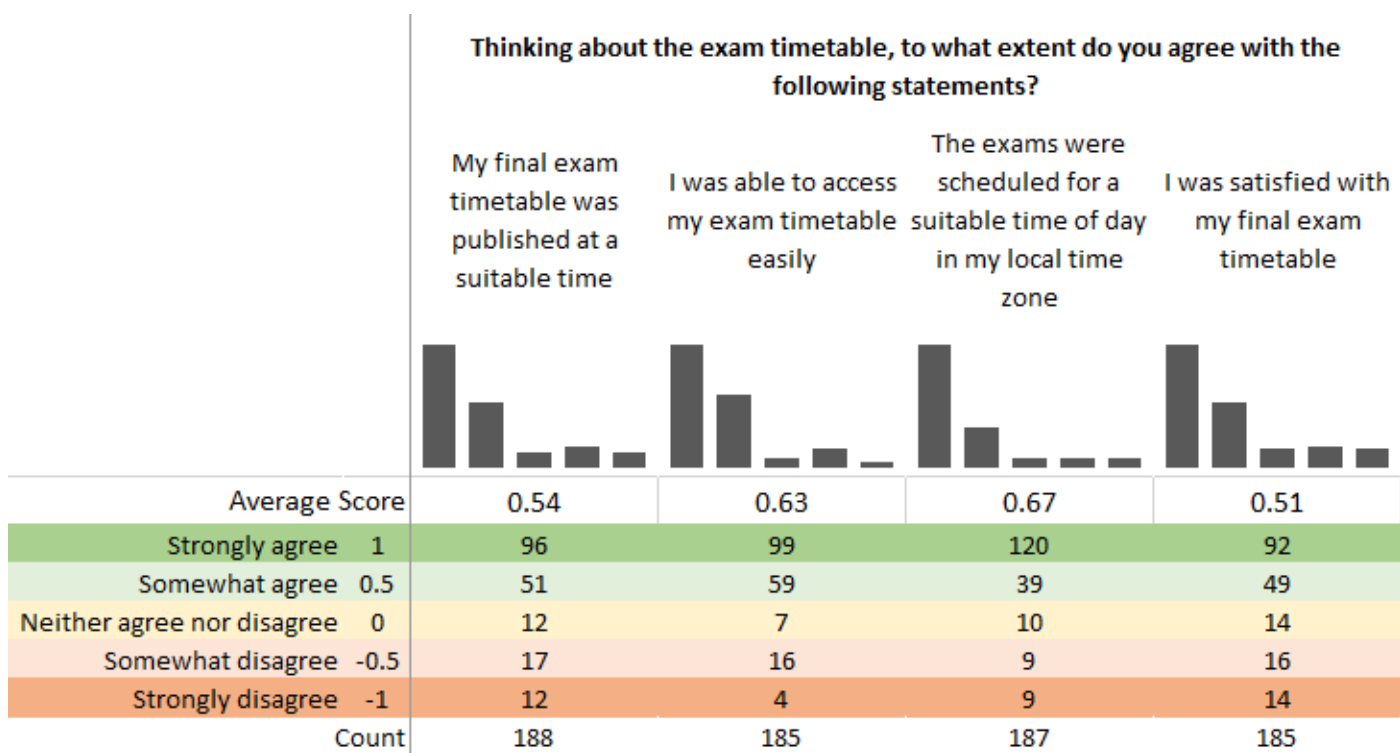
- Survey ran between 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021
- Promoted to all UG and PGT students in two separate Union newsletters
- A total of 190 finished responses

## Most problematic areas identified from the data

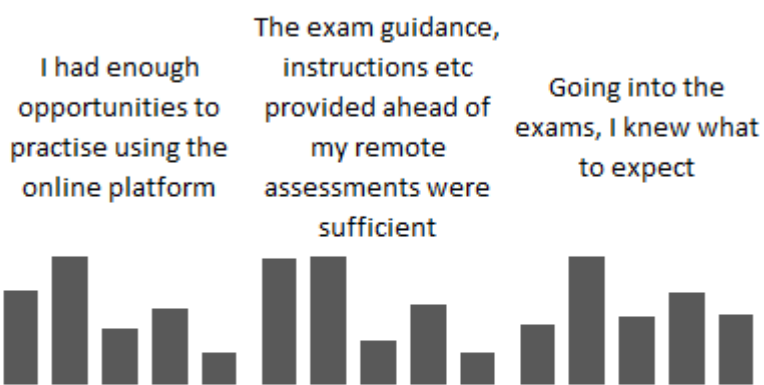
- Students found remote exams stressful – **significantly more stressful than on campus exams**
- Many students felt they **did not know what to expect** going into the exams
- Many students were **not satisfied with the integrity** of their exams
- **Overall satisfaction with exams was quite low**
- **Provision of mock papers** for open book format: not all students provided with a practice paper; where they have been, the questions were often not representative of the open book format asked in the exam
- Potential problematic individual departments to be identified for these questions:
  - Opportunities to practice using platform
  - Exam guidance provided
  - Sufficient submission time
  - Online platform used

## Most positive areas identified from the data

- **Timetables:** very good overall satisfaction with exam timetables, as well as with each of the component (accessibility, timeliness, timetable working for people)
- **Access to technology:** the majority of students reported good access to technology
- **Working environment:** the majority of students reported having a good working environment to take their exams in

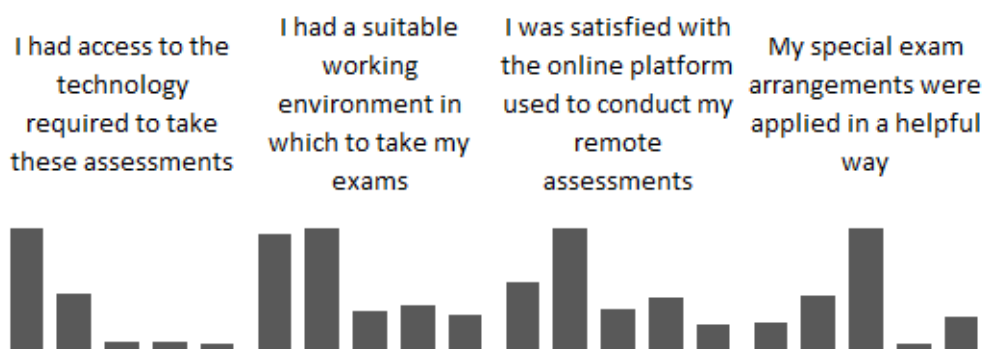


**Thinking about preparation for the exams, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**



Average Score		0.23	0.29	0.02
Strongly agree	1	46	58	27
Somewhat agree	0.5	63	59	58
Neither agree nor disagree	0	28	20	31
Somewhat disagree	-0.5	37	37	42
Strongly disagree	-1	16	15	32
Count		190	189	190

**Now thinking about the exams themselves, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**



Average Score		0.67	0.33	0.24	0.08
Strongly agree	1	106	58	39	7
Somewhat agree	0.5	50	61	70	13
Neither agree nor disagree	0	9	20	24	29
Somewhat disagree	-0.5	8	23	31	2
Strongly disagree	-1	7	18	15	8
Count		180	180	179	59

**Now thinking about the exams themselves, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

Department staff were responsive during my remote assessments when required

I had sufficient submission time allocated after the exam duration to submit my assessment

I was satisfied with the overall exam integrity of remote assessments

Taking remote assessments was no more stressful than taking on-campus assessments



Average Score	0.29	0.18	0.04	-0.32
Strongly agree 1	24	43	28	15
Somewhat agree 0.5	30	56	43	12
Neither agree nor disagree 0	26	21	43	13
Somewhat disagree -0.5	10	35	39	28
Strongly disagree -1	6	22	23	42
Count	96	177	176	110

**I was overall satisfied with the delivery of remote assessments**



Average Score	0.04
Strongly agree 1	19
Somewhat agree 0.5	57
Neither agree nor disagree 0	45
Somewhat disagree -0.5	36
Strongly disagree -1	23
Count	180

Did your department provide a mock paper / practice questions, or point you to relevant past papers to help you prepare?

Did they also provide the solutions to these mock papers / questions?

To what extent do you agree that the style of the mock paper / questions was representative of the kind of questions you were asked in the exam?



				-0.21	
Yes, for all exams	117	Yes, for all of them	69	Strongly agree	16
Only for some exams	55	Only for some of them	70	Somewhat agree	42
No	17	No	33	Neither agree nor disagree	15
				Somewhat disagree	53
				Strongly disagree	46
	189		172		172

## Different results for different groups of students (more than $\delta=\pm 0.15$ , better vs worse)

PGT students (33 responses):

- Timetables less likely released at a suitable time (0.33 vs 0.54)
- Had more opportunities to practice using online platform (0.41 vs 0.23)
- Less likely to have sufficient time to submit assessment (-0.05 vs 0.18)
- Less satisfied overall (-0.12 vs 0.04)

Students in different time zones (at least 5h behind or ahead, 25 responses):

- Less likely to have exams at a suitable time of day (0.26 vs 0.67)
- Less likely to be satisfied with timetable (0.33 vs 0.51)
- Worse working environment during exams (0.17 vs 0.32)
- More likely to find exams no more stressful than on campus (0.10 vs -0.32)

Recipients of Imperial Bursary (30 responses):

- Worse access to exam timetable (0.39 vs 0.63)
- More likely to find exams no more stressful than on campus (0.10 vs -0.32)

Students with a diagnosed mental health condition (19 responses)

- Timetables more likely released at a suitable time (0.71 vs 0.54)
- Less likely to know what to expect going into the exam (-0.18 vs 0.02)
- Worse working environment during exams (-0.05 vs 0.33)
- Less satisfied with online platform used (0.05 vs 0.24)
- Department staff less likely to be responsive (0.10 vs 0.29)
- Less likely to find exams no more stressful than on campus (-0.65 vs -0.32)
- Less satisfied overall (-0.16 vs 0.04)

Students with a specific learning difficulty (8 responses)

- Timetables less likely released at a suitable time (0.21 vs 0.54)
- Guidance & instructions less likely to be sufficient (-0.36 vs 0.29)
- Less likely to know what to expect going into the exam (-0.43 vs 0.02)
- Less likely to agree with every single statement about the exams themselves (-0.18 vs 0.17 on average)
- Less satisfied overall (-0.16 vs 0.04)

No significant differences (less than  $\delta=\pm 0.15$ ) for:

- First year students (68)
- EU/International students (102)
- BAME students (74)
- Female students (107)

# Themes from free text comments

## Timetables

- Some students complained about exams being too close together
- Some students' timetables released too late, esp. given a module selection deadline

## Exam preparation

- While most departments provided mock / practice papers in the lead up to the exam, students found those to be in a significantly different style than the exam
  - Exams were reported to be significantly more difficult (84% of complaints about mocks)
  - Past papers provided often did not reflect the open book nature of the exams
  - Students reported questions in the exam were often longer than before / in the mock (too long)

## General comments

- Some comments on problems with the exam platform used (especially in Computing)
- Many complaints about exams being made too difficult
- Some students complained about insufficient time for submitting their exams
- Communication problems during exams
  - Some departments send out unrelated emails during exams, which is distracting
  - Problems contacting department for questions / hearing back from department or when announcements are made

## Department-specific issues

We will be looking at data broken down by department to identify specific problems with specific exams / approaches in departments. We will share this data with the relevant VDEs and Education Managers.

## Recommendations for summer exams

1. Exam timetables should be released at least 10 weeks before the exam period, in line with College policy. Faculty oversight should ensure this is happening.
2. Mock papers should be released for each exam students are taking, alongside model solutions, at least 5 weeks before the exam. Students in each department should be clearly told who to contact (e.g. the DUGS) if a mock paper is not available for some of their modules. Where the exam style has changed for open book TRAs, the mock should be written in the same style, length, and difficulty (i.e. not just reused past papers).
3. Departments should reconsider the difficulty of their open book exams. Access to notes in most cases does not make an exam significantly easier, and there has been plenty of feedback from students reporting that departments went too far with the difficulty this year. Even if the marks are scaled up later, an extremely difficult exam can have a negative effect on student wellbeing, confidence, and their performance in other exams, and should therefore be avoided.
4. Each exam should be tested by an independent academic or a GTA, without the solutions, to ensure it is possible to solve it as a TRA, fix any mistakes, and test appropriate difficulty.
5. Departments should allow sufficient time for exam submission where scanning and uploading of exam scripts is needed; at least 30 minutes for 2h exams.
6. Departments should ensure their chosen platform works properly, and this should be tested prior to the exam (preferably by students themselves), especially where their own platform is used.
7. All departmental staff should refrain from sending out emails unrelated to the exam to students while an exam is happening.
8. Departments should investigate, in discussion with their students, the possibility to establish separate communication channels for in-exam announcements so that students don't need to check their emails during exams.