



### Running online tests through VITAL

This tips sheet brings together advice for running online tests using the VITAL Test tool from experienced practitioners around the University. They cover running tests under:

- Controlled conditions – students sit test together in a computer lab under formal exam conditions.
- Remotely – students can take the test from remote locations including campus machines and home connections. Tests might be available to complete for a number of days or for a strict window of a few hours.

You will also find some of the general advice useful for using the test tool in informal and formative contexts. They are not exhaustive as every test will have its own circumstances. Any tips that you have from your own experiences will be gratefully received and added to this list <mailto:elearning@liv.ac.uk>

Please be aware that there are currently no rooms at the University that have been specifically designed with running online tests in mind. For high-stakes, credit-bearing summative assessments in controlled conditions then it is very important to prepare as thoroughly as possible to be ready for the risks involved. It is not currently recommended that high-value, summative tests are run remotely (rather than under controlled conditions) as there are no controls over collusion, cheating, ISP service levels, quality of home machines and operating systems etc.

### General recommendations

#### Prepare your students

- Make sure your students have as much information about this test as possible, how it works, what the rules and regulations are that you will be following, and how and when you will be offering feedback and scores. The eLU have prepared [this written guides on accessing test grades](#) and [also this video](#).
- Give the students a draft/example online test similar to that which you will run to try out, a week or so in advance. Post example questions in the same format as the real test.
- If not being taken under controlled lab conditions encourage students to try these examples out from wherever they'll be taking the actual test - this will help identify technical issues in advance. Specify the browser they should use. Firefox is the preference for tests. It might be best to advise students to take such tests on an MWS machine (e.g. in the library) during normal working hours.



# VITAL 'How to' Guides

## eLearning Unit

### Anticipate problems

- Always try out the test that you create as a student to ensure that the test functions as you would expect it and that all of your questions are correct. There is a **Student Preview** facility in VITAL which is a one-button click to view the module as a student, including taking tests and seeing the feedback that students see etc. ([this guide explains Student Preview](#)). You can also try out your marking and feedback strategies by switching back to your Instructor mode. Try and get 100%.
- Be clear what your course of action and the outcome will be where there is a technical problem (network failures or VITAL service downtime) in different situations so that students are treated equally and fairly. A paper back-up for exam condition tests is highly recommended, either printed out or ready to print.
- Be prepared for financially suspended students for credit bearing tests. Students who are financially suspended will not be able to sit the online test. You should decide, according to the relevant assessment rules and procedures, how to deal with them. You may find that a student becomes suspended the day or even hour before the test is due to be taken, so you cannot really plan based on known individuals. You need to make more general provision.
- If you do not want students to see their test score, feedback, correct answers etc immediately upon completing the test you should configure the feedback options accordingly **AND** hide the relevant column and **Total** column in the Grade Centre, **AND TEST** that your settings work as expected before students sit the test.
- Rename images! (If the picture is called kidney.jpg and the right answer to the question is "kidney" then...)

### Controlled lab - exam conditions

Here you are running an online test in a computer lab under exam conditions. If you have booked a room through Orbit for the purpose of running an online examination then you will be contacted by CSD with the latest advice on browsers for exams and a special network login account for exams; this is a recommended first MWS log-in for students which they use in the exam room instead of their own, and which prevents them potentially accessing roaming profiles, following which they log in to VITAL with their usual MWS details.

You can also discuss with CSD how to use NetSupport School to limit student online access during exams to just VITAL pages and the University website (this is in addition to the online exam network login). You are recommended to contact CSD if running a test in a computer lab to discuss any potential support needs. Do not leave it until the day before or the day itself as the support that can be offered is then very limited.



# VITAL 'How to' Guides

## eLearning Unit

### On the day - running the test – tips

- Have a phone ready to call CSD ServiceDesk if needs be.
- If possible double space students in PC labs. This also allows for plenty of spare PCs, inevitably a few will have technical issues.
- There needs to be at least one more computer available than there are students in the examination room for you/whoever is in charge of the test to adjust any necessary settings in VITAL, for instance if the assessment has to be made live just before the test begins. It is also useful to monitor the progress of students through the Grade Centre live.
- It is useful to have 2 or 3 staff in the assessment room to help solve any VITAL problems.
- Students should use the Firefox browser (check the advice email from CSD about the latest recommendations on this).
- Students should be advised that they **must not navigate through the test using browser buttons** when they have started the test, if they want to go back to a question they need to use the navigation options inside the assessment. They should not double-click buttons. Emphasise that they should not to use the browser's back button.
- If you are manually making the test available once everyone is ready to start (i.e. changing the test option **Make the link available** from **No** to **Yes**) make sure the students are all at the same point ready to begin (for example, at the correct login screen) before you make it live. Alternatively, the assessment can be started by a password given to students at an appropriate time. The assessment is taken off-line at an appropriate time. Plan the start and end of the test carefully.
- After the test completion and before the student leaves the room, you may want to check whether their attempt has been recorded in the Grade Centre. Make sure the student cannot see your screen, go to the module's **Grade Centre** in the Control Panel and the test column and check whether their grade has recorded or a green exclamation mark is shown (if the test is not automatically graded). If an "Attempt in progress" icon appears for a student and stays in Grade Centre, it means that they may have lost their Internet connection or stopped the assessment without completing it.
- Have your fallback plan for if there is serious disruption to the network, VITAL or the room in some way e.g. CSD contact at the ready. How long do you wait? What do students do in the meantime? Have a paper version ready for the most serious disruption (or a paper version ready to print).
- Ensure all invigilators are clear as to what would happen in the event of a system or power failure. For example, if paper based tests are available or whether the test would be rescheduled.
- Ensure all invigilators know how to use the relevant parts of the Grade Centre, Test Options and any other technical requirements of your test.



# VITAL 'How to' Guides

## eLearning Unit

### Test Settings – some considerations

- For the most secure way of making sure students do not see the test before they are due to sit it, use the **Make the Link Available** setting, set at **No**. The test should then be made available immediately before the start of assessment begins and once everyone is ready to start then you should change this setting to **Yes**.
- If using the timer function consider configuring the test to auto submit when the time expires. If you do not do this, every student who goes over the time allocation by even a fraction of a second will be registered as “needs marking” in the VITAL Grade Centre, and will not be automatically-marked (if your test consists of all automatically-marked questions). Students that should have more time to take the test can be individually allocated extended time allowances using the Test Availability Exceptions facility in the test set-up options.
- The **Force Completion** setting is generally best left unset (the default). For instance, if only one attempt is allowed (default) and force completion is set, then if there is a system failure, this will close the test down to the student and it will be entered in the Grade Centre as completed, it takes the crash point as being submission by the student. The student will not be able to re-access the attempt they were working on or try again and your only option will be to clear the attempt via the Grade Centre before they can try again which raises other problems. They will have to restart their test attempt completely. Leave **Force Completion** unchecked and this will allow the student to resume from where they left off following restoration of service.
- If multiple attempts are allowed but **Force Completion** is set then if there is a crash, again this will close this attempt down to the student and it will be entered in the Grade Centre as a completed attempt. When they re-access the test they will start a new attempt from scratch. The system will record both (all) attempts.
- **Presentation Mode: One at a time** - set the test to show one question at a time as this will automatically save the student’s answers as they move through the test up to the point of the crash (When a student navigates to the next question their previous answer is saved). It also prevents problems with image-heavy tests and lots of questions trying to display on the one page.
- Leave the associated **Prohibit Backtracking** setting unticked (which is the default setting) to allow the students to go back and change their mind or revisit unanswered questions.
- If the test consists of essay-type questions requiring responses of more than a couple of sentences, it is worth considering asking your students to write their answers in a word document which they save in their M: drive as they go along, and to copy, paste and save their answers into the relevant text box in the test, also as they proceed with the test. That way they will have a more reliable back-up if the test crashes during writing up a lengthy essay response.
- If you are planning a lengthy exam, especially with essay-style questions, it may be worth thinking about splitting up the test into shorter units. For instance, a two hour test could



# VITAL 'How to' Guides

## eLearning Unit

be split into separate units of 30 minutes. Remember, tests should not be more than about 50 questions as tests with larger numbers of questions can cause problems when you come to mark them.

- Consider carefully the feedback you want to provide and at what point. Even though the system works so that feedback, scores etc. can be shown only after the student has submitted finally you might not want the correct answers to be displayed whilst other students are still completing the test in the room.
- Check carefully all of your feedback settings and also the column in the Grade Centre for the test and the Total column for the module in the Grade Centre to ensure these are hidden.

### **Remote test conditions – running the test - tips**

- If not being taken under controlled lab conditions encourage students strongly to try these examples out from wherever they'll be taking the actual test - this will help identify technical issues in advance. You might, for preference, require students take the test on MWS machines (e.g. in a library) during CSD support hours so that there is a certain level of service guaranteed.
- Run the test and set any deadlines well within office-working hours so that full support from module teams, office staff and central support teams (CSD) is available.
- For unsupervised tests consider combining different functions to reduce the chance of collusion. For example, for a test which will take 60 minutes, set a 60 minute timer but make the test available during a 90 or 120 minute “window” to allow for temporary technical failures. VITAL tests can be configured to (a) display all questions in a random order for each test participant (b) display multiple choice/answer options randomly for each test participant. Creating question banks is another option.

With thanks to Denis Duret, Jeremy Marshall, Peter Reed, Martin Ralph.

If you have an online test tips please contact us <mailto:elarning@liv.ac.uk>