

COVID-19 Education Response Webinar 4

Managing high-stakes exams and assessments during the Covid-19 pandemic

Thursday 9 April 2020 (13h00 - 14h30 GMT+2)

Link to connect to the webinar: www.unesco.org/webinar-on-exams-covid19

Introduction

Education systems around the world are working to react to the unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 1 April 2020, over 1.5 billion children and youth are affected by school closures in close to 190 countries. This represents 90% of the world's student population and is an unprecedented situation in the history of education¹. Moreover, about 63 million primary and secondary teachers² have also been affected, and where ICT infrastructure exists, are trying to transfer teaching and learning online. While the statistics that show the scale of the impact on technical and vocational training and higher education institutions are not readily available at the time of this webinar, initial observations indicate similar pattern of going on-line in many countries.

Given the prolonged and massive school, university and other learning institution closures and a shift to remote learning in many countries in the world, considerations for handling exams and timetabled assessments³ are now among top priorities of all policymakers' agenda. This is especially the case for high-stakes exams and assessments, where, for example, passing the test would allow the student entry into a higher grade or permission to graduate, and many of which are forth-coming as the current school year ends in May and June in many countries. In most of the cases, these assessments are standardized high-stakes, high-accountability tests, and in some others also linked to teacher performance evaluation and school funding.

This fourth UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response Webinar will look at coping strategies that countries have adopted or are considering with regard to high-stakes exams, in particular those related to end-of-key levels, compulsory education, school leaving, university entrance exams and gateways/qualifications for job. A variety of strategies have been adopted in this regard including cancellation, postponement, derogation, on-line assessment/onscreen test, exams with special arrangements (e.g. paper-based examinations with physical distancing, remote assessment with parents supervision), using alternative approaches for validation and certification (e.g. review of past assessments and validation of learning without exams). They represent a sheer challenge for policy makers as the interruption of these

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures>

² <https://en.unesco.org/news/teacher-task-force-calls-support-63-million-teachers-touched-covid-19-crisis>

³ Examinations, mostly series-based, that specify the date and time at which all candidates must take the assessment. The tests are timetabled in conjunction with the common school year calendar or academic timetable, i.e. all assessments within a given series will fall within the exam period defined by concerned schools, institutions or education authorities.

examinations is delaying the decisions on student progression and graduation and in the case of technical and vocational training and higher education, on validation, certification and qualification. This, in the longer term, could lead to, among others, an increased use of online assessment and onscreen test, a potentially larger learning gap within and among countries and a potential lack of qualified individuals for the following year in most of the professions, leading to lifelong consequences on the students and learners as well as a broader socio-economic impact on the economies and societies.

Objectives

- To share information and facilitate peer learning about how governments are planning for assessments, especially high-stakes exams in the context of prolonged and massive school and university closure and a shift to distance learning;
- To explore and examine evidence of emerging practices of national education policies on testing, assessment and evaluation in response to Covid-19;
- To explore the potentials and limitations of on-line assessment and implications regarding equity and inclusion.

Audience

The webinar is designed for senior officials and managers of Ministries of Education and relevant agencies, especially those responsible for examination and assessment, curriculum development, teacher policies as well as education research institutes. As and where relevant, members of UNESCO's existing networks for facilitating and monitoring educational quality and learning such as NEQMAP, TALENT and LLECE will be invited to attend.

Language

The working language of the webinar is English, with AI powered translation in 6 UN languages in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

Format

The discussion will feature a sort of "keynote" by UNESCO and interventions from a high-level representative of countries (maximum 5 countries from all regions) reflecting different perspectives/constituencies around the following policy questions:

- What are the different strategies countries are taking with regard to high-stakes exams (e.g. end-of-cycle exams, university entrance exams) to ensure that pupils and students due to sit for exams in the coming months would get the qualifications they need "in time"?

- What are the considerations for countries to take into account for decisions on the options for high-stakes exams and assessments?
- Is there any evidence for effective approaches and if so, what are the implications for policy making?
- How to ensure that exams and assessments – in case countries choose to opt for on-line assessment - are conducted in a fair and reliable manner? How can formative and summative assessments play their roles in this regard? What can technology offer in this context and what are the limitations and challenges? What security measures should be put in place to safeguard trust and confidence in e-assessment systems?

Technical Specification

The webinars will use Microsoft Teams live as a technical platform. Participants do not require a Microsoft Teams account, but can connect as guests through this link: www.unesco.org/webinar-on-exams-covid19

Agenda

Time	Agenda items
13:00-13:10	Welcoming Remarks and Introduction <i>Mr. Borhene Chakroun, Director, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO</i>
13:10-13:20	School & University Closure and Options for Exams and Assessments <i>Mr. Gwang Chol Chang, Chief, Section of Education Policy, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO</i>
13:20-14:00	Options for High-stakes Exams and Assessments: Country Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dr. Xiaoting Huang, Director, Examinations, Assessment and Research, (HKEAA), Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority</i> • <i>Dr. Karma El Hassan, Director, Office of Institutional Research & Assessment American University of Beirut, Lebanon</i> • <i>Prof. Anne H. Anderson, Non-Executive Director, Higher Education, UK National Commission for UNESCO</i> • <i>Mr. Hugo Labate, Director, Curriculum Agency, Argentina</i> • <i>France (to be confirmed)</i>
14:00-14:20	Questions and Answers followed by a short discussion <i>Mr. Gwang Chol Chang, Chief, Section of Education Policy, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO</i>
14:20-14:30	Closing Remarks <i>Mr. Sobhi Tawil, Head, Education Research and Foresight, UNESCO</i>

Documents/Resources

Before the webinar:

- Concept Note and Agenda
- A glance at countries' coping strategies with regard to high-stakes exams and assessments
- A collection of think pieces (food for thought) from partners
- PPT

After the webinar:

- Summary report with a set of clear recommendations
- Resources (available national tools, guidelines) for organizing and conducting exams and assessments under emergency and crisis situations