



October 8th, 2020

### **Statement on Assessment Methods in Universities during COVID-19**

The National Union of Icelandic Students, hereafter LÍS, urges university administrators to seek all means to offer other forms of assessment than examinations in person, for those who so choose.

It has been LÍS's demand since the beginning of the pandemic that on-site studies be offered as much as possible, but that everyone should have the opportunity to participate fully in their education through distance learning. The requirement to offer on-site training is, of course, subject to government regulations. But it should be the choice of each student and employee whether they attend in person. It is normal for students to reconsider at any given time according to the recommendations and information received from the authorities whether they feel able to attend on-site studies, as students themselves or their relatives may be at risk. As infections have been increasing rapidly in the community in recent days, more and more people seem to choose to study from home.

#### **Risk groups, foreign students and the general student**

A genuine possibility for students to pursue distance learning is an important issue of equality. The pandemic makes it difficult for many students to attend, but those who are unable to attend on-site should still have the opportunity to participate. Individuals in high-risk groups do not have the opportunity to attend exams at the examination site and the general student may be infected or sent to quarantine at short notice. Foreign students at the University of Iceland [are collecting signatures in support of a request for online exams](#), so that they can study in their home country. It is natural that foreign students want to be where they have a support network and family in the difficult times we are experiencing now, and that is yet another reason why electronic assessment should be available.

### **More notice**

Infection control rules change often and without much notice, and as a result, school rules also change rapidly. It is time to take action in advance. It will make it easier for students to plan their studies and life if it is decided well in advance how the assessment will be at the end of the semester. The assessment arrangements must be genuinely accessible to all, regardless of students' status due to the epidemic.

### **Distance exams must be made an option for students**

Exams and assessment are an integral part of the teaching. It is unacceptable that students are required to attend exams in person. The option of taking make-up exams if an individual is not able to be present at the scheduled exam time is not sufficient, this solution only pushes the problem ahead. Distance exams must therefore be made an option for students. It is a great challenge to adapt teaching materials and assessment to distance learning at short notice, but other ways of assessing academic achievement must be sought than with exams at the examination site. We believe and trust that university professionals can find solutions. There are other methods than on-site exams available for assessing academic achievement: continuous assessment, more frequent smaller assignments, final assignments and final papers. Tests where reading materials are permitted are a realistic and efficient option when it comes to remote tests. Regardless of the assessment method, trust and mutual respect should prevail in the learning community. Students should be trusted to pursue their studies with integrity.

### **Stress on teachers**

The epidemic itself, and the changes in teaching arrangements that accompany it, put a strain on teachers. They need to spend more time preparing, teaching smaller groups at once, and then more often, and a lot of overtime is added unexpectedly every time school rules change. There is therefore a need for increased funding for the universities not only due to increased attendance but also due to increased workload on staff, who should be fairly paid for their work. Adequate support for university staff is a key factor in ensuring quality during these turbulent times. The management of the universities also bears a great deal of responsibility,



as it is necessary to give students and staff clear answers as soon as possible about the assessment of the other.

**Final words**

"Living with the virus" can have a variety of meanings depending on the activity in question and the status of the infection at any given time. It is important to keep the work of the universities going, but people should not be put in a position to choose between their studies and their health.

On behalf of the National Union of Icelandic Students

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