

# Computer-Based University Examinations

## Recommendations for College Sittings

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### Introduction

The following document describes **recommended but non-compulsory steps** that could be reasonably taken by College Offices, Invigilators and Computing Staff to ensure computer-based college-sitting examinations run smoothly.

This document has been produced with the assistance of the Examinations and Assessments, College IT Manager's Committee and IT Services.

## Advice for College Offices / Invigilators

This advice is specific to Computer-based Examinations and is in addition to practises for other Examinations, such as booking rooms and invigilators.

### Upon Notification of College Sitting

Inform your IT service as soon as possible of the dates and number of Examinations requiring computer assistance – if two or more are concurrent, please make this especially clear.

As soon as the candidate requirements are available to you, pass these to your IT service:

- IT should prepare the computer as specified by the requirements.
- If the College Office or invigilators wish to check equipment, they should inspect proposed setups at this time.
- The candidate should be approached and invited to inspect the proposed computer set-up both with respect to hardware (e.g. keyboard type) and to software (e.g. font/character sets or equation editors). Any agreements made with the candidate should be confirmed in writing, perhaps through summary e-mail. Significant changes may require additional approval, so this process should occur as early as reasonably possible.

### Week Preceding Examination

Please satisfy yourself that the intended examination room is suitable for the equipment the candidate requires.

The room should be available and booked for long enough beforehand to allow any computer equipment to be setup (and for any issues to be resolved). If your IT staff work office hours and the examination is outside these hours, or starts first-thing in the morning, it is reasonable to book and secure the room from the latter part of the preceding working day, to allow equipment to be assembled in working hours.

If the College Office or invigilators have a particular layout preferred for the Examination room, this should be considered and clearly communicated to IT **before** computer-setup begins. Computing staff will not normally be expected to move furniture or solve any problems with the examination room, such as lighting, curtains/blinds, heating etc.

The invigilator for the specific examination should be familiar with the standard operation of the computer facilities provided (eg: saving a file, printing) and, if applicable, and the operation of any reserve facilities. IT staff may be asked to provide instruction documentation. If required, the invigilator should contact the IT service well in advance of the examination, for suitable training/familiarisation.

The College Office or Invigilators will already be familiar with procedures for ordinary sittings – computing examinations are largely similar to written examinations with regards to steps to be taken in extraordinary circumstances, such as if the examination is interrupted.

College Office or Invigilators should be satisfied with all preparations for running the examination.

### Day of Examination

The examination room will have been prepared by the IT service, with the layout and environmental factors checked with the College Office or Invigilators. It is ordinarily expected that the examination should proceed and complete without assistance from anyone aside from the invigilator.

If there is a check-list or procedure to be followed before the examination, please complete this at a suitable time (normally around 10-15 minutes before the exam starts), which may involve confirming

the computer and printer provided are operational, checking the invigilator has a blank memory key (e.g. if the script is transferred from the computer and printing is done elsewhere) or similar.

You may wish to allow 10 minutes for the Candidate to familiarise themselves with the operation of the computer setup. Specific instructions for saving the file containing the examination script should be carefully followed.

The College should satisfy themselves that the examination is sufficiently prepared. As with written examinations, it would be expected that the invigilator should be aware of the correct procedure for escalating any incident in the event of unforeseen problems. This would usually be via telephone, to prevent the invigilator having to leave the examination room.

## **After Each Examination**

Once the physical copy of the script has been produced, the computer used and any storage devices must be cleared of any copies of the examination script:

- If applicable, the invigilator should follow any instructions provided by the college to prepare for subsequent examination sittings, which may involve a process they complete themselves, or may involve informing IT staff (or an assistant) that the examination is over and the machine is to be inspected.
- If there is no immediate process, the machine should be physically secured from use until IT staff can complete the required work, which may be the following working day in the event of evening or weekend examinations. Locking the room is acceptable, provided access is completely restricted, as is moving the computer unit into a secure area, such as offices, where it can then be promptly collected by IT staff.

## Advice for Computing Staff

College-sitting University examinations are examination papers which would usually be sat in Examination Schools, which for one reason or another need to be held within College. The requirement for a college sittings vary and can be due to religious, health or other personal reasons. As such, please be sensitive when dealing with the requirements of different candidates.

Please also read the 'Advice for College Offices' section above, as a number of the suggestions will directly affect your timescales.

### Hardware

Unless specifically stated in the alternative arrangements approval letter, the choice of hardware is down to the college:

- You are recommended to provide good quality and fit-for-purpose equipment.
- It is expected that the college will properly resource the equipment and staff as required for each examination; you may have a case to present if resources are tight.
- There is no requirement for specifically desktop or laptop equipment, although you are recommended to invite the Candidate, College Office and Invigilators to inspect proposed equipment well ahead of the examination. You are also advised to document the meetings with each of the above, in case any questions about acceptability arise at the time of the examination.
- Reasonable requests for the candidate to use their own specific mice, keyboard and screen for laptop-use are acceptable but do require specific approval and should be noted in the alternative arrangements approval letter. It is recommended that the compatibility of any such items is checked well in advance of the examination - any external mice or keyboards must be connected by wire (not Bluetooth).
- Any specific assistive equipment requests should be approved in writing in the alternative arrangements approval letter, and may require additional steps (for instance, extracting user files from Dragon Read/Write).

### Software

Unless stated in the alternative arrangements approval letter, choice of software setup is down to the college and should fall into one of the following categories

- Word Processor with Spelling and Grammar checking.
- Word Processor without Spelling and Grammar checking.
- Special Arrangements (to be advised in the alternative arrangements approval letter).

In addition, IT Services have shared the set-up implemented on the Examinations & Assessments team PC suite. Notes and guides prepared by college IT staff on recreating these typical configurations are available on the ITSS Wiki at: <https://wiki.it.ox.ac.uk/itss/College-Exams>. These pages will be updated each year with the current best-practice for exam setups, so that the college examinations will be broadly consistent between colleges. At time of writing this is to be based around Word 2010.

### Mitigating against risk

Use of computers brings risks which are not found in written examinations. Each college should satisfy themselves that reasonable steps have been taken to combat foreseeable and likely risks related to the use of computers in the exam. It is expected that actions and solutions would be in-line with the actions taken for written exams (if an exam is interrupted there should be a procedure, regardless of cause).

It could be useful to identify, and to address risk related to computer use. It is expected that reasonable resultant steps would be such as:

- Using reliable hardware and/or rigorously testing proposed computers.

- Producing clear instructions for invigilators.
- Being involved with the candidate procedure to ensure regular file saving.
- Provision of an alternative computer in some cases.

If a request is made by the college for computing-staff to be present during a college-sitting examination, you may like to ask them to explain the risk which requires staff to be available and work towards mitigating it via some other method; such as further documentation or a trained student helper.

## After the Examinations

Care should be taken to ensure that the scripts created by examinations are electronically deleted as soon as possible after each exam.

Methods such as re-imaging and audit trails may help with this, as could standard searches for files 'modified in the past x days'.

## Summary

Overall, the aim is for a reliable and consistent examination setup, which ordinarily need not be excessively complex or elaborate. Basic, robust configurations are the order of the day.

It is hoped that good practice will be shared amongst the whole community and that a regular yearly review of process and procedure will ensure that guidance in these matters is kept up to date and relevant.

## Useful Contacts

Examination Operations – for exam day queries, timetables, invigilation and exam papers:

Tel: 01865 276907

[exam.arrangements@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:exam.arrangements@admin.ox.ac.uk)

Examination Processes – for Alternative Arrangement approvals:

Tel: 01865 276917

[eap@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:eap@admin.ox.ac.uk)

IT Services:

Tel: 01865 612345

[help@it.ox.ac.uk](mailto:help@it.ox.ac.uk)

Conference of Colleges IT Committee:

<https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/hierarchy/colleges/confcoll/cict>