Teaching Professionalism through Assessment: A Case for Take-Home Exams in Law Studies

Egle Dagilyte, Peter Coe
Senior Lecturers in Law

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Why this topic?

- Law as a **practical** discipline

- Emphasis on **professionalism** at Bucks New University:
  - personal and professional integrity and ethics
  - time management
  - work/life balance
  - research skills
  - the ability to express ideas in a logical manner and to find solutions to problems
  - The ability to predict and to deal with technological challenges

- Limited **academic literature** (see last slide)
Traditional forms of assessment

Do they develop professional skills?

“The traditional exam is not the best way of assessing these skills because it is limited both by time and by the resources students are able to consult [and] ... in a traditional exam it is difficult to assess if professional skills have been acquired in depth.”

Where are take-home exams currently used?

- Canada: McGill
- Australia: Melbourne
- Sweden: Uppsala
- UK: LSE
Cheating/Plagiarism/Collusion

- Electronic submission of completed work.
- 24/48 hour time limits to complete the work.
- Drop-in tasks as the time goes.
- Set scenario, rather than essay, questions.
- Work completed in student’s ‘own words’
- Follow-up viva.
Challenge 2

Time-consuming and exhausting

- Working with students before the exam to develop time-management and organisational skills.
- Clear instructions and objectives.
- Coordination among assessed subjects
No difference in student performance

- Explain the benefits of being assessed in this way.
- Longer monitoring period required to collect data
- Ensure they understand why we assess.
- Does it matter?
Challenge 3

Not taken seriously by students and employers

• Find out what employers think
• Communicate that to students
Disabilities and family duties

- Alternative/designated locations.
- Provide adequate forewarning of the assessment method and date.
- Splitting the assessment period (e.g. 4 x 6 hours).
Assessment environment (home/university/other)

- Alternative/designated locations.
- Provide adequate forewarning of the assessment method and date.
Students may ‘outsmart’ the tutors

• Why is that a disadvantage?
International students – what skills training?

• More skills-based training before the assessment.
• Ensure they have understood why we assess in this way and how it works.
Final thoughts

- Good idea: professionalism
- Challenges can be overcome, but – staff/time costs?

• AS Freedman ‘The take-home examination’ (1968) 45:6 Peabody Journal of Education;


• A Hemming, ‘Online Tests and exams- Lower Standards or Improved Learning’ (2010) 44:3 The Law Teacher;


• E Marchetti, ‘Influence of Assessment in a Law Program on the Adoption of a Deep Approach to Learning’ 15:2 Journal of Professional Legal Education;
