

Examination space: stating the University's need

Purpose of paper

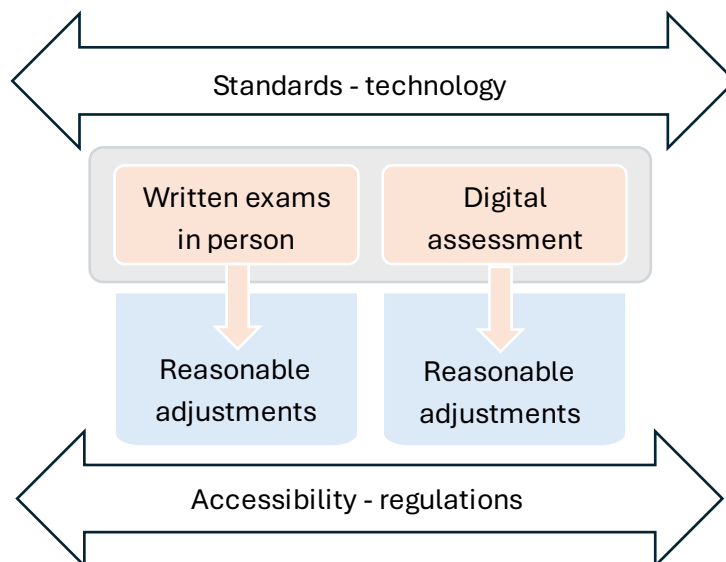
There have been efforts to describe the problems associated with examination space – the lack of sufficient space, of sufficient quality that is within the University's control against a pattern of growth of demand. This paper summarises the situation now and sets out what is required.

The background

The trends in assessment have fluctuated and are difficult to predict. Both Covid and concerns about AI have had a significant but different impacts on assessment practice.

Covid reduced in person handwritten exams, and there have been a number of different ways of doing assessment which have been used or considered. Post Covid many in person handwritten exams have returned, especially with AI driving concerns about closed book or online assessments. However the University has committed to supporting digital assessment for all departments who want to use it, with effect from Michaelmas 2025. Departments will shortly be written to inviting requests for digital assessment. The time for booking exams using digital assessment in Michaelmas 2025 is next term.

The demand for examination space affected by the type of assessment, the nature and quality of space, and the standards, technology and regulations relevant to the mode of assessment (see diagram below). For example, examinations are delivered in different ways, each one requiring the ability to make reasonable adjustments for an unknown, but increasing, number of students. There can be requests for reasonable adjustments even at a late stage, due to illness for example.



Understanding what University space is available for use for examinations

The University estate contains very little space that is used for exams and all of it is used for other purposes, whether that is for education (such as delivering teaching and other academic purposes) or it may have a completely different primary purpose (such as the sports hall). There is no dedicated exam space and the amount of existing exam space that is digital assessment ready is unknown.

	Teaching and Exams			Exams (no teaching)		
	Number	Capacity	m ²	Number	Capacity	m ²
A&H	7	373	469.81	2	32	75.93
H&SS	9	1,262	1,309.5	0	0	0
SBS	2	118	207.01	9	706	1,488.33
SCM	0	0	0	0	0	0
SoP	15	874	1,270.11	0	0	0
SoT	8	1,219	1,252.74	0	0	0
UAS	26	3,070	3,552.48	3	746	1,798.45
Total	67	6,916	8,061.65	14	1,484	3,362.71

And the following shows the type of spaces there are:

Activity	Number spaces	Type of space	m ²	Capacity
Exam & teaching	2	Group area	554.31	267
	21	Lecture Theatre - raked	3,636.9	4,046
	1	Meeting Rooms	73.45	22
	43	Seminar Rooms	3,797.02	2,581
s-total	67		8,061.68	6,916

Activity	Number spaces	Type of space	m ²	Capacity
Exam (no classroom teaching)	9	Wet Lab	1,488.33	706
	2	Seminar Rooms	75.93	32
	3	Sports Hall	1,798.45	746
s-total	14		3,362.71	1,484

This shows that there are just **14 spaces** in which examinations take place which are not otherwise used for teaching. And only **67 spaces** where examinations take place, alongside teaching.

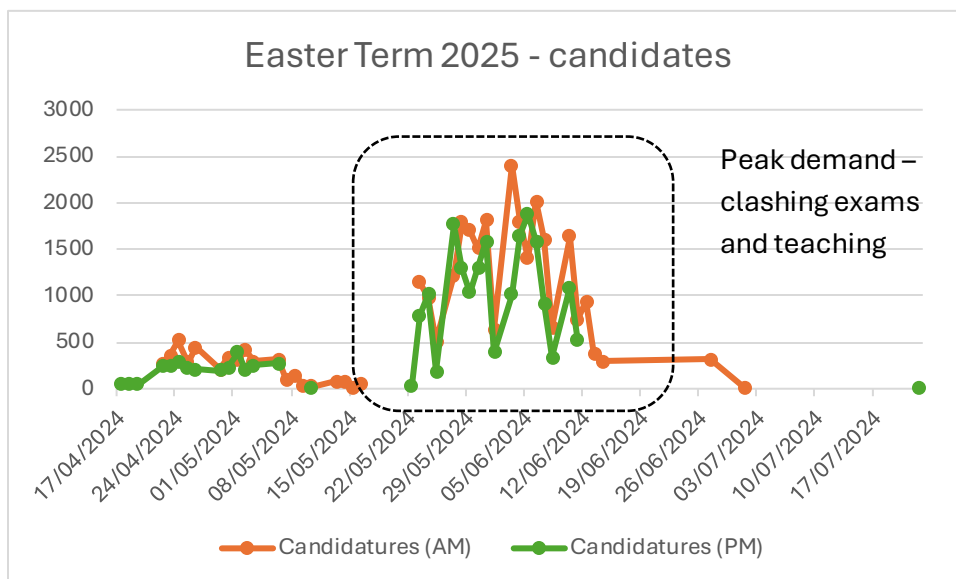
Some teaching spaces (raked lecture theatres) are likely to be mainly used for teaching, but even this dedicated space type cannot be assumed to be used entirely for delivering teaching. The vast majority of space used for teaching is also used for other purposes – other education and research activities such as graduate or faculty seminars, academic research team meetings, grant application or grant management meetings etc.

Space that is used for teaching and exams is pressurised as this is a finite amount of space which is the first call when there are increases in demand for both teaching and examinations. During Easter Term when there are most exams, there is typically teaching for the first 4 weeks of the Term.

The demand for exams is not evenly spread through the year, they are:

Term	Number of papers	Number of candidatures	m ² used in exams (range)
Michaelmas	75	2,500	5,000 – 6,250
Lent	100	4,500	9,000 – 11,250
Easter	2,500	62,000	124,000 – 155,000

The diagram below shows the current situation for exams this Easter Term, the additional demand on already overpressurised teaching spaces.



The demand for exam space

There is insufficient space to accommodate the main cohorts and almost all students requiring reasonable adjustments (comprising 25% of candidatures) are accommodated off of the University estate, in Colleges. The trend is that the need for reasonable adjustments continues to grow and this expansion cannot continue to be accommodated within Colleges. Indeed the existing demand for College space is already too great. Reasonable adjustments for digital assessment is likely to need University space, as the IT infrastructure cannot necessarily be guaranteed for Colleges or other third parties.

For in person exams those taking place within the University have to compete with other activities taking place within education space throughout the year, notably teaching, and this clash becomes particularly intense during the Easter Term where teaching continues typically for 4 weeks while demand for examinations increases dramatically. There is a high risk of failure here and it represents a risk to the University's reputation.

Furthermore the University wishes to offer all departments the opportunity to use digital assessment. Of the available teaching space within the University (or space that is used within Colleges) it is not known what is currently capable of supporting digital assessment including reasonable adjustments. It is also not known what amount of work would be required to bring the rest of the examination estate up to standard to enable digital assessment. The Task & Finish which worked over the summer group explored this area but were not able to come up with conclusions. In the spring Departments will be requested to state what plans they have for digital assessment and for this to be delivered there must be a clear view of what education spaces have digital assessment capability now, and what can be guaranteed by Michaelmas 2025. This must happen early next Term or the University will need to change its offer to Departments, and they in turn must change their assessment plans.

The Task & Finish group also considered the fundamental sufficiency of examination spaces and requested Schools to state if there was additional space that could be used for examinations.

Although a couple of spaces were identified, it did not contribute significantly to improving the picture.

Statement of need

There is a need for an urgent, Estates-led search for appropriate space, involving UIS as required (to provide technical support around digital assessment requirements).

This involves bringing forward candidates for examination space - both new space, for both in person examinations (and associated space suitable for students needing reasonable adjustments) as well as digital assessment (again, with associated space for reasonable adjustments).

In relation to digital assessment the readiness of the education estate must be known before Departments have to decide what assessment will be done via digital assessment, by end January 2025. If there are spaces which require further work to be digital assessment ready and it is planned to use them for this purpose in Michaelmas 2025 then Estates and UIS must confirm that the work will be done in this time.

Assessment type suitability	Number of spaces	Capacity
In person examinations	10 (available during Easter Term)	100
	5 (available during Easter Term)	200
Digital assessment	TBD – which teaching and / or exam spaces will be digital assessment ready by Lent Term 2025 (deadline for establishing this is end January 2025)	
	TBD - when will the rest be digital assessment ready (deadline for work completion is September 2025)	
Reasonable adjustment candidates for in person examinations	20 new low density spaces (ie in addition to the existing teaching and / or exam spaces) to deal with absolute levels of growth and change in offsite practices	25
	Generally there is a need for a prudent contingency plan to be able to accommodate off site arrangements if they change	?
Reasonable adjustment candidates for digital assessment	20 new low density spaces which are in addition to existing teaching and / or exam spaces to offer for digital assessment in Michaelmas 2025 (ie a minimum starting point)	25