



## **eExam Feedback, Semester 2 / Trimester 3 2020<sup>1</sup>**

The MGA has been contacted by several students with issues relating to their Semester 2 or Trimester 3 exams in 2020. The problems faced by students can be categorised into the following:

### **1. Technical issues**

Received a number of reports from students about IT problems during their exam which prejudiced their performance. In all cases known to MGA, students experienced great stress and loss of time while trying to fix issues (sometimes more than an hour of exam time). The students all contacted eSolutions for help. In some cases, the students were granted extra time to complete their exams, but this did not take into consideration the loss of composure and the mental state of the students.

In multiple cases, students with IT issues were instructed either by eSolutions or their teaching staff or their associate dean to apply for Special Consideration due to losing time and composure and impact of stress. In all cases known to MGA, the Special Consideration application was rejected because the students had started their exams, even though the subsequent IT issues prejudiced their performance. In one case, a student was granted a deferred exam after submitting a complaint about the outcome of their rejected Special Consideration.

IT problems will occur with eExams. The University appears to recognise these are outside of the student's control and so grants them extra time, however, more needs to be done to recognise the mental impact these have on students.

Students also reported being interrupted during their eExam and being required to restart their eExam portal multiple times because the invigilator suddenly could not see the student's camera/screen or hear them through their microphone, even though the student did not change any sharing options. Students lost time trying to fix the issue but were not granted extra time to make up for it and felt disadvantaged from the time lost due to these technical issues.

In other cases, students had part or whole answers deleted, or had the exam question scenario does not load properly, meaning they began their analysis based on incomplete information.

Examples:

*"One student in the JD T3 Public Law exam had exam scenarios not loading. It happened twice. Student went back to check qn 1 and two more paragraphs loaded completely changing the scenario. Student was horrified because clearly it changed the whole scenario and hence the answer. Student quickly rewrote the answer and moved on but lost a load of*

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<sup>1</sup> JD students gave us permission to name their faculty. Students from other faculties did not.

*time. Near the end a whole different scenario popped up which hadn't loaded earlier. Student emailed CE while waiting for IT to join. Then exam invigilator advised student that IT said to contact the CE."*

*"JD T3 Admin law students also had issues with exam content not loading. Started the exam late after eExam platform remained frozen for over half an hour. One student spent 2 hrs on phone to eSolutions begging for extra time to be added with eSolutions reluctant to do so as the system had recorded them "starting" exam at 10am as that's when the student logged in, but the platform was frozen until after 10.30. Student was informed by other students that the other students got 45min extra but this student didn't. Unclear why tech support applied so inconsistently."*

## **2. Absent invigilators**

Received reports of students logging into invigilated eExams but the invigilator was not present. In one case, the student contacted Monash Connect, had to wait 10 minutes, and then it took Monash Connect a further 40 minutes to find an invigilator for the student. In another case, a student had to wait 1 hour and 45 minutes for an invigilator to be found.

The students were given extra time in recognition of the delay only. Students were panicked and stressed out by the experience and could not perform in the exam. The mental and physical impact of the stress was not recognised by the University. At least one student failed the exam due to stress and panic brought on by the experience, another performed poorly/below expectation.

This could have been prevented by Monash University ensuring all assigned invigilators are aware of their responsibilities, had been assigned correctly, had appropriate technical knowledge and resources, and backup invigilators are ready to immediately step in if one experiences any issues on the day.

Examples:

*"My invigilator did not log onto the call until 40 minutes after the start time of 1pm" (JD T2 student)*

A complaint was raised with the Deputy Dean. The complaint was acknowledged, and they said they would look into this matter and get back to the student. There was no further correspondence from the Deputy Dean to the student. As the student did better than expected in the exam, they decided not to progress the complaint further.

## **3. Lack of nurse or medical support during eExams**

In on-campus exams, Monash arranges for an onsite nurse to see and assess any student who becomes unwell during an exam. If the nurse thinks it's appropriate, they provide a student with a note that the student can submit with a special consideration application. There were no nurses during the online exam period, nor was there an equivalent system in place.

In one case, a student (registered with DSS) had an episode during their exam. They searched for someone to contact but the only information provided by Monash was for technical/IT issues, not for medical. They ended up contacting Monash's medical service and DSS. They could not see a doctor until the following day (no appointments) and their special consideration was rejected because the doctor saw them after the date of the exam.

Medical support needs to be made available to students sitting eExams, or the special consideration criteria must be expanded to recognise medical certificates in which a treating professional states it is their professional opinion that the student was affected on the day of the exam, even if they saw the student post-exam date.

#### **4. Lack of relevant eExam updates**

Students from the Faculty of IT reported that they were not updated about corrections to the eExam questions. Some students were informed about the correction while some were not resulting in some students complet

Students also reported that the eExam servers were down and displayed an error message 'Service unavailable' for over an hour. Students were not updated with any details about when the issue would be resolved. This created panic and anxiety, which students felt impacted their performance.

#### **5. Lack of Special Consideration around eExam conditions**

The Special Consideration options available to students are inadequate to address the issues students are facing. In many cases, students are requesting Special Consideration to address the fact that they cannot facilitate eExam conditions in their homes, but the only option available to them is to sit the same exam in the same conditions at a later date, as soon as three weeks later for JD/Law students. This only drags out the exam preparation process and prolongs the students' stress but does not fix the underlying issues. Many students are electing to postpone subjects that require invigilated exams in the hope that these issues will be addressed in the next study period, but the issues persist.

Examples:

*"The university's handling of COVID-19 arrangements, in particular the alternative exam arrangements, has caused an undue amount of stress and was a significant roadblock to me being able to study effectively for many weeks. As a result, I was very worried about my grades. I have deferred a subject in order to avoid undertaking any further invigilated exams in these circumstances."*

*"The JD could also be more accommodating with exams during Covid19."*

*"I have been putting off my last core subject for my Juris Doctor to avoid doing an eExam until the university sorts out the various issues with special consideration and tech support. However I'm running out of time left in my degree, so I'm going to have to do it in these poor conditions anyway, and hope for the best" (JD student)*