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First eExam in an Australian University opens way to transformation of schooling

A significant millstone was removed from the necks of educators today.

With 124 students sitting a university examination using their own laptops, academic testing has been unshackled from the persistent pen-on-paper mode which has served us for centuries.

Maintaining the security of a fully supervised exam, students can now use the keyboard for writing their essays. This opens the door for assessment in Years 11 and 12 to move towards the new computer-based system.

There are several laptop schools in Tasmania, such as Friends and St. Michael's Collegiate in Hobart, and more recently, Devonport High School. Despite the exceptional use of information technology in these schools, they have known their students will face pen-on-paper assessments at University.

So there has been no pressure to change to computer-based assessment.

And schools have generally languished behind other areas of society in adopting computers. Hence the Australian Government \$1.2b push to put them into the hands of Year 9-12 students.

Now teachers can include new topics into the curriculum. UTAS researchers Dr. Andrew Fluck and Associate Professor Dev Ranmuthugala are already starting a project to put calculus into primary schools. Students will use laptop computers in 2010 to do the 'hard bits'.

The advantages of the new computer-based testing include full-colour diagrams (handy for biology), fully functional economic models using spreadsheets, and short videos describing scenarios.

National testing of pupil literacy and numeracy could also use the new system in future.

The eExam system is released using a creative commons licence, which makes it easy for students to practice and others to adopt it.



One of the eExam USB sticks



Student personal laptop running eExam system from the USB stick and showing the security image for the day.

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