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Universities call time¹ on handwriting

More exams are being taken on laptops to save academics from students' scrawls².

Rising numbers of students are doing their exams on computers, rather than having to complete handwritten papers, in a move that could spell the death of the pen-and-paper test.

- 5 Universities such as Edinburgh, Oxford and Cambridge are testing the move — but adopting different policies on whether to allow spell-checking.

10 While undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge are not allowed to use the spell-check function during the trial exams, Brunel's director of learning, Simon Kent, said: "In the real world, students will have access to spell-checkers in their everyday work, so it is reasonable to allow them to use a spell-checker in the examination. We don't award degrees for good spelling. Of course if the spelling and grammar become so bad that the answer is difficult to understand, then this would impact on the grade."

15 Professor Alan Smithers, from Buckingham University, said he worried the move could lead to "the death of handwriting". He said: "There is evidence that learning to write by hand speeds up learning the alphabet, is associated with absorbing information in classes better, and helps to develop dexterity."

The trend is set to grow as universities try to reduce their use of paper while also making it easier for academics to mark students' work without having to struggle to read their often poor handwriting.

- 20 But concerns have been raised that the end of pen-and-paper exams will mean the further deterioration of handwriting skills and manual dexterity. A top surgeon warned last week that some students lacked the dexterity to sew up patients because they had spent too much time in front of screens.

25 Smithers added: "With handwritten exams, you can be pretty sure it is the work of the candidate, and not that of a substitute, or imported from elsewhere, or spell-checked."

Chris McGovern, chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, said losing the manual dexterity developed by handwriting and allowing spell-checking in exams was "de-skilling" young people.

- 30 "We need to break the dependence on, and addiction to, digital technology and encourage young people to remain multi-skilled." he said.

Adapted from *The Sunday Times.com*, November 4th, 2018

¹ call time: put an end

² scrawl: bad handwriting