

# Lessons Learned – Online Exams and Education in Times of COVID-19

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# About the speaker

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- **The German Association of Actuaries (Deutsche Aktuarvereinigung e.V., DAV)** is the professional representation of all actuaries in Germany. It was founded in 1993 and has more than 5,600 members today. Another 1,600 candidates for membership are actively enrolled on its in-house education and examination program. Hence the DAV is one of the five biggest actuarial associations in the world.



# Overview

- A look at the changes to the education and exams for qualification as a DAV actuary that were necessitated by the pandemic.
- What experience have the DAV and DAA had in the last six months in terms of running and managing education and training and exams?
- What will we do in the future?

# Online Exams and Education in Times of COVID-19

## Education

# ***Education - Facts***

- 30 classroom-based seminars for up to 40 participants each were planned for the first half of 2020 to prepare candidates for the spring exam session in May 2020.
- Most of the seminars were already fully booked.
- Some of these seminars are mandatory.

# ***Education – Developments during the pandemic***

- Initially exam preparation courses began as normal in the usual teaching facilities.
- Rising numbers of COVID-19 cases in February meant we had to develop plans for hybrid solutions as some employers were already forbidding their staff from travelling.
- The official ban on events and gatherings that was declared shortly afterwards meant we had to find a solution ‘overnight’.
- Any solution would have to comply with our core objective of maintaining the continuity of actuarial education.

# ***Education – The solution: Remote Training***

- The obvious solution was quickly clear:
  - ➡ Make all classroom-based seminars exclusively online: remote training
- This change not only involved an administrative effort by the DAA.
- At very short notice our instructors had to modify their seminars, both in terms of content and didactics, to enable remote / online delivery.
- Initial concerns on the part of our instructors were eradicated after we provided them with comprehensive training in using our remote / online teaching tool.

# ***Remote Training – Practical experience***

- The interactivity of the remote training quickly convinced our instructors and participants.
- Feedback from instructors and participants in response to a questionnaire sent out by the DAA after every session identified potential areas for optimisation in the use of the remote training tool. These are currently being analysed and assessed.



# Remote Training – Feedback

- Analysis of the participants' feedback questionnaires confirmed the overall positive impression we had gained:
  - *“I really enjoyed the group work during the online training. The separate break-out environment was simple to navigate. It made it easy to discuss things with the other participants. The questions and exercises were directly available in the separate break-out environment (also available as downloads). All in all the straightforward group work made the training more relaxed and it certainly benefited from this!”*
  - Another benefit highlighted in the feedback was that participants did not need to travel (thus saving time and money).

# Online Exams and Education in Times of COVID-19

## Exams

## ***Exams – Facts***

- Traditionally DAV written exams have been held in the Exhibition Hall in Cologne with capacity for around 1500 candidates.
- This was also the original plan for the spring exam session in May 2020.

## ***Exams – Changes during the pandemic***

- Shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic in Germany the DAV Board decided to postpone the exam date from mid-May to mid-June (before the summer holidays in NRW, Germany)
- This postponement was intended to give the DAV additional leeway to be able to assess the current situation and to allow more time for making alternative plans.

## ***Exams – The solution: e-Exams***

- Finally, in a further meeting the DAV board decided to hold the exams in a decentralised digital format rather than in the conventional manner.
  - ➡ Exams would thus be held as e-Exams

## ***e-Exams – What are they? (I)***

- Candidates sit the exams at a location of their choice (at home, in the office etc) on the originally scheduled examination date and must adhere to the originally scheduled start and hand-in times.
- The entire process – answering the exam questions, submission of the candidate's answer paper and the subsequent marking – is done digitally.
- Candidates can download the question papers at the time of the examination after they have logged into a secure area of the DAV website.

## ***e-Exams – What are they? (II)***

- After completing the exam or after the allowed time has elapsed candidates upload their digital answer papers to the secure area. In this area their data is clearly recorded (candidate no., time of submission, file name).
- In addition to the submission of their exam paper, candidates must submit a signed affidavit confirming that they have completed the exam with no external help and within the time allowed in accordance with the current exam regulations.

## ***e-Exams – What are they? (III)***

### ■ Other features:

- Additional offline safety net
- Each candidate must complete a mandatory candidate e-Exam test process in advance



## ***e-Exams – Practical experience***

- All in all the e-Exams were managed with almost no technical or organisational problems.
- The DAV support team were able to solve, together with the candidates, any technical problems that did arise on the day.
- The DAV gained valuable technical and organisational experience when running the first e-Exam session and the test procedure that preceded it; this experience is currently being analysed and assessed.

# e-Exams – Feedback

- After the e-Exam process was announced candidates expressed a great deal of interest. Very quickly, we saw a further 200 registrations, meaning that 1708 e-Exams were sat in spring 2020.
- Candidate feedback confirmed this positive impression :
  - Almost all candidates had a positive opinion of the switch to e-Exams and the handling of the process on the exam days and not only under the present challenging conditions.
  - The vast majority of the candidates reported that they would welcome the continuation of this online format in the future.
  - *“Not having to travel to the exam venue makes the atmosphere on the day much less stressful; moreover it means saving travel expenses.”*

# ***Lessons learned – Online Exams and Education in Times of COVID-19 (I)***

- Both DAV and DAA are very satisfied with :
  - the overall very positive way that the online processes for training and exams, which were established on an ad hoc basis, worked during the COVID-19 pandemic;
  - the positive feedback of the candidates during the delivery of remote training and the e-Exams;
  - how we were able to guarantee meeting our primary objective of maintaining the continuity of actuarial education during the extraordinary events of spring 2020.

# ***Lessons learned – Online Exams and Education in Times of COVID-19 (II)***

What now?

- Given the continuing uncertainty surrounding the pandemic the board of the DAV has decided to offer training and exams completely online for the second half of 2020 too.
- Alongside the good experiences from the ‘first round’, the DAV and DAA are presently examining further optimisation of the organisation and design of the remote training sessions as well as the technical environment of the e-Exam process.
- Aim: obtaining a web tool that meets both the requirements of remote training delivery and e-Exams in order to offer these formats in a smoother fashion that is even more valuable in terms of content and more user-friendly.

# Thank you very much for your attention!



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