

## **OCR Case Study**

### **Background**

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations) is one of the leading UK awarding bodies and is committed to providing a wide range of general and vocational qualifications that engage learners of all ages.

### **OCR and e-assessment**

OCR is part of the Cambridge Assessment Group which has over 20 years experience in developing e-assessment solutions. OCR is committed to offering and developing e-assessment across its qualifications and sees e-assessment and the use of e-portfolios as becoming fundamental in a modern education system.

### **Introducing e-assessment**

As part of the Cambridge Assessment Group, OCR has been involved in the development of e-assessment solutions since the 1980s. Over the years this has progressed to the development of computer mediated solutions which include online marking, e-testing and the use of digital evidence and e-portfolios. There have been several drivers for the adoption of e-assessment, notably business drivers in terms of cost savings and efficiency both at AO and centre level as well as operational systems and administration allowing data to be moved around and communicated more effectively and efficiently. E-assessment also leads to improved quality of assessment becoming more consistent, more frequent and more accurate. Scripts can be marked onscreen with better systems for monitoring marking schemes through moderator sampling resulting in greater standardisation. E-assessment also opens up opportunities for other forms of assessment, it is more interactive than paper based systems and allows for greater manipulation of data on screen including the use of digital video and audio files. OCR views e-assessment as a fundamental in a modern education system and is responsive to what its centres and candidates want.

### **Key focus for e-assessment**

OCR's key focus for e-assessment reflects many of the regulatory principles for e-assessment, namely accessibility, data security, validity and reliability of assessments as well as meeting their customer expectations. When OCR designs an e-assessment environment they ensure careful consideration is given to the needs of all candidates and OCR is keen to ensure that any assessment experience does not provide an obstacle to individuals demonstrating what they know, understand and can do. OCR has worked closely with their systems developers with this aspect in mind to ensure maximum accessibility.

The biggest challenge is to move more towards on demand assessment. Currently success can be demonstrated through the provision of key skills and basic skills with an average of 85,000 candidates per year taking online assessments.

Another major factor given careful consideration is the resilience and reliability of e-assessment systems. OCR considers it vital that data integrity is protected and systems are as fail safe as possible. Power outages, server failure, loss of on-line connectivity, network failure are all considered and appropriate measures are taken to mitigate against such events.

OCR has had to overcome some technical difficulties in the provision of e-assessment in GCSEs. The use of computer based testing in GCSE Environment and Land based studies is being revisited due to the technical difficulties experienced using the KS3 platform. OCR is currently developing their own platform Connect 6 which should help overcome these issues. E-assessment in GCSEs remains optional but is accessible across the OCR GCSE offer. The e-repository is widely available across most of the GCSEs – it is an e-portfolio which allows the acceptance of digital evidence, e.g. presentations, web based materials linked with "ModMan", an online moderation system. OCR have carried out research into the comparability between digital

and paper based portfolio evidence and found that there was a broad equivalence between the two forms when evidencing the same criteria. This means that for most GCSEs with controlled assessment elements, centres can be offered a choice between e-assessment and traditional assessment approaches in the knowledge that candidates will not be disadvantaged by their choice.

### **Are there constraints on e-assessment?**

Despite huge developments in e-assessment, there are still challenges that remain especially within schools and general qualifications. There is a degree of variation in demand for e-assessment and the technology infrastructure within schools is inconsistent, e.g. in some schools whole year groups may have access to networked PCs whilst in others this availability is very limited. This in itself presents challenges for carrying out e-testing and especially on demand testing. In addition there are different attitudes towards e-assessment with many in the teaching profession still favouring the "pen and paper" approach. The amount of e-assessment compared to paper based is still relatively small. It gradually building up over the years and is very dependant on equipment levels and expertise in the area. Some subjects and areas lend themselves better to e-assessment, and so it is a slow growing development.

Capacity building is only one of the challenges facing the awarding organisation, OCR currently provides online information in the form of podcasts via their website on how to use the e-repository. Internally they have produced video training materials for moderators and are attempting to make the system as integrated and user friendly as possible.