eAA
the e-Assessment Association

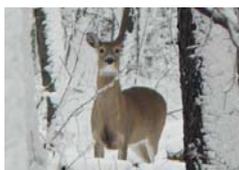# Winter Newsletter

Issue 04: March 10th, 2010

Contents

*Have you visited the **eAA** website?*

www.e-assessment.com

Welcome to Winter Edition!

It may feel like spring in the lowlands, but parts of the country are still very much in the grip of winter - spare a thought for the red deer in the highlands, who after facing the prospect of a cull, now are contending with the worst weather in decades (http://tinyurl.com/yhkplvg).

Well, as we wait for the last of the snow to clear, this edition of the newsletter brings you tales of how e-Assessment can be successfully embedded into a school curriculum, different views of assessing free text responses, and available options to ensure a secure test environment . There are also a number of exciting eAA-related developments, beginning with our AGM on the 17th, and the election of new board members – more of this overleaf.

We're just adding the finishing touches to our new website and will be unveiling a sneak preview at the AGM – we should be welcoming you to the new site after the Easter break.

Other dates that you should be pencilling in your calendars are the 20th/21st July, the 'rebirth' of the International CAA Conference in Southampton, which will host the launch of our new Journal in collaboration with Cambridge Assessment. You can find details of the call for papers by following the link: http://caa.ecs.soton.ac.uk/.

CAA 2010
Research into e-Assessment

The date for eAssessment Scotland 2010 - our own conference in collaboration with the University of Dundee, JISC, SQA, HEA and eLearning Alliance is set for the 3rd of September. A call for papers will be announced on the mailing list shortly.

eAS eAssessment Scotland 2010

Now, that's what I call an exciting start to the year!

Kenji Lamb (Editor)

Upcoming Events

e-Assessment Association News

Have you voted yet? The election for the eAA Board is currently underway and will officially close at midnight on the 15th March. There are seven nominations from the Ordinary membership for three available spaces:

- Bill Foster
- Vincent-Comlan Gomez
- Tony Gurney
- Phil John
- Jeff Ross
- Denise Whitelock
- Matt Wingfield

At the time of writing, several of the nominees are tied, so please do take the time to vote – your choice really will count and help to shape the future direction of the association. It will only take a few minutes of your time to read over the brief biographies and make your decision.

Simply visit the eAA site at www.e-assessment.com to register your vote. Note that only Ordinary members, those with a membership number without an 'A' prefix, are eligible to vote.

The results of the vote will be announced at this year's AGM which is being held at the end of the first day of the e-Assessment Question conference on March the 17th. There's no charge to attend the AGM and we warmly invite all members to come along:

Programme

17:15   1. Welcome
          2. Membership
          3. Financial report
          4. Election results
          5. New website demo and features
              5.1 Discussion of future features
          6. eAA Future Plans
              6.1 Discussion of the plans
          7. Introduction to panel
          8. Vote of thanks
          9. Close
18:30   Reception for members
19:30   End

The venue is the America Square Conference Centre, directions to which can be found here: http://tinyurl.com/ydbebju

It's an excellent opportunity to meet with other members, chat with the (new) Board and put forward how you think the Association should carry on into 2010. We look forward to seeing you there!

Integrating Innovation in Schools

In her keynote at the annual Association for Education Assessment conference at the end of 2009, Marian Sainsbury, Head of Literacy Assessment Research at NFER, www.i-nfer.co.uk, presented a paper on the adoption of the *i-nfer plan* formative e-Assessment system within primary schools in England. The paper charts progress from the initial decisions that shaped the development process, to the lessons learned after observing schools trying to integrate the platform over an 18-month period.

Some interesting choices were made at the conception stage, such as the decision to only provide feedback to teachers, with an option for them to share a "child-speak" version of the feedback if desired. The primary function of the reports that the system generated would be to provide information that would aid teachers in planning, teaching, and grouping children.

The authoring tool and delivery platform were developed by RM and includes over 70 item templates which can make full use of multimedia elements. The system will also incorporate the ability to parse short open responses using an engine created by Intelligent Assessment Technologies. Feedback is presented by 'profiling' students according to a method of latent class analysis, which is then translated into strengths and weaknesses that provide suggestions for the next steps in teaching. Reports

Example of an *i-nfer plan* Reading question for Years 5-6

on performance can be displayed in a variety of formats (25 in all): raw scores, standardised scores, scores divided by 'focus' to name but a few.

Four schools were closely observed to determine how well the new system could be integrated in the schools' assessment practice. Each school had a 'champion' of e-Assessment, a senior member of staff who had taken the decision to introduce the platform – though as the case studies showed, adoption across the schools was far from immediate. The expectation of being fully operational within 3 months wasn't realised, with some of the schools taking as long as a year and a half to reach this stage.

The *i-nfer plan* platform is a complex product, and the research recognised that it required a high level of interest and expertise from teaching staff to realise the full potential of e-Assessment. Significant progress was made by the four schools, though the following points stood out as prime determinants of successful implementation:

- Technical support within the school;
- Assessment expertise and technological maturity.

To find out more about the *i-nfer plan* product and read the complete paper, follow this link: http://tinyurl.com/yfcnu7b

Assessing Free Text - A Step Too Far?

In our November mailing list digest, we highlighted a BBC article that described the failings of a Pearson free text e-Assessment system to accurately evaluate Winston Churchill's iconic "fight them on the beaches" speech, http://tinyurl.com/yehaw73

This time, in CIEA's Make the Grade Spring 2010 edition, Julie Nightingale examines why computers still have some way to go before they replace assessors of English essays and considers the views of exam boards.

Read Julie's article here, http://tinyurl.com/yz36ycq

Assessment by Tweet

It may surprise you to discover that Twitter is celebrating its 4th birthday this year, though you could hardly have missed the recent explosion in 140-character messaging or 'tweeting' as the new vocabulary goes.

Twitter applications are commonly included with the latest mobile phones, making it even easier to 'tweet' on the move.

Now journalism students at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia are using the service as part of their summative assessment. Around 340 first-year students were tasked with tweeting the challenges they encountered when writing a series of news stories.

Lecturer Dr Jacqui Ewart commented, "We thought it was important to introduce it because increasingly employers are asking employees to use these kind of (social networking) mechanisms and marketing and promotional devices."

The reaction from students has been mixed, with some (about 30%) expressing doubts about the use of the technology in formal examination.

Read the full article here: http://tinyurl.com/yf8fe7h

A Doctor Does Not Get Five Choices

Professor John McEwen, School of Medicine, University of Dundee

If you're involved in the high stakes e-assessment of knowledge, you may be interested to know that the Medical School at the University of Dundee now assesses all undergraduate medical students using an on-screen, computer-marked test. You may be even more interested to know that the questions are not multiple choice, they're short-answer free-text. And that the system was recently awarded the Scottish e-Assessment Award for Summative Assessment.

Professor McEwen with his e-Assessment Award

The Progress Test

The Medical School at the University of Dundee has a history of educational innovation, and one example of this was the introduction of a Progress Test to reinforce the School's assessment processes. When the Dundee Progress Test was designed, multiple choice questions were discounted on the basis that "A Doctor does not get five choices". Fundamentally, the test had to be one of recall, not recognition: doctors must really know their stuff. The Dundee Progress Test therefore, is comprised of short-answer free-text questions. Many of these questions can be answered with a single phrase (for example, the name of a treatment or a drug). Others require more of an explanation.

From Paper to On-Screen

Typically, questions of this type cannot be accurately marked by available e-Assessment software. However, the ExamOnline system developed by Intelligent Assessment Technologies (IAT) does have that capability. One of the advantages of working with a small supplier such as IAT is that the School has been able to ensure that ExamOnline's design was specifically customised to support the Progress Test in several ways. As a result of the collaboration, the ExamOnline platform has now evolved to be a powerful tool for the assessment of knowledge. Moreover it is fully
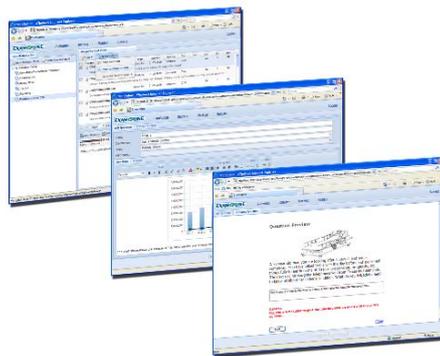
Figure 2: Browser based authoring and administration through ExamOnline.

browser-based, with simple, intuitive interfaces.

The Student View

The students have readily adapted to the online exam format, and have appreciated the consistency of marking which computer software can give by contrast with the vagaries of hand-marking. Medical students are very competitive, and the detailed level of feedback which ExamOnline provides is eagerly sought.

The Faculty View

The open-ended, non-triggered, nature of the free-text response, which provides no clues to the 'correct' answer, has also been viewed positively by faculty, as this is similar to the open question and answer dialogue which goes with small group learning and teaching. In addition, the free-text nature of the responses has some resonance with those members of faculty who have previously used oral exams – but who have had to abandon this type of assessment in the face of its poor validity and reliability. By contrast, the computer marked Progress Tests have an alpha reliability coefficient in excess of 0.95.

For more information visit the Intelligent Assessment Technologies website: http://www.intelligentassessment.com

Assessment is SIMPLE

SIMPLE, the SIMulated Professional Learning Environment, is an open source teaching, learning and assessment environment. SIMPLE supports the creation of a virtual town where students engage in authentic simulations of professional transactions. Learners are sited in a professional context, where their work is, as it will be in the workplace, distributed between tools, colleagues, resources, anticipated and unanticipated problems, and individual constructions of knowledge and experience.

The SIMPLE project built on the transactional learning environment in use for several years at Glasgow Graduate School of Law (GGSL), where students simulated legal transactions in Ardcalloch, a virtual town. The application has received several awards - in May 2009 SIMPLE was designated best simulation toolkit at the IMS 2009 Global Learning Impact Awards and in September received the Innovation in e-Assessment award at the Scottish e-Assessment Awards.
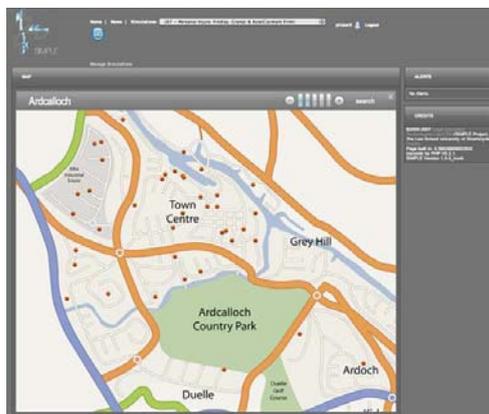
The virtual town of Ardcalloch, situated in the SIMulated Professional Learning Environment

SIMPLE has two components:

1. SIMPLE tools - The tools are contained within an application called the narrative event diagram or NED, which allows the creation of blueprints containing the roles, resources and structure of the simulation itself.

2. SIMPLE platform - an online office environment within which the simulations run, including templates and resources to provide context and content (for example a map and business directory for a virtual town).

Visit the SIMPLE Community at http://simplecommunity.org

New efutures Site Launched

In our last newsletter, we highlighted the launch of Ofqual's e-Assessment Toolkit. The regulator has now updated their **efutures** website, which has been designed to encourage dialogue between regulators and stakeholders on the key themes and topics relating to e-Assessment: systems, security, accessibility, e-testing, e-Portfolios as well as general help and support.

The new layers of content and functionality will enable users to interact more with the information on the site, by providing comments, asking questions and uploading data.

The new look site aims to encourage users to form communities of practice and is supported by the other qualification regulators: CCEA, SQA and DCELLS. Features include:

- personal profiles
- awarding organisation contact details
- tailored newsfeed/ updates
- interactive calendar of events
- online comments and questions
- case studies

Visit efutures at:

www.e-assessment.org.uk

## Locked Down - How Secure are your e-Assessment Processes?

It's a question that is commonly asked of any organisation looking to implement e-Assessment. There's always the worry that, by introducing technology into the assessment equation, somehow there will be more of a temptation to try and 'beat the system'. Outlined below are some of the methods to ensure that this never happens.

Securing assessment at the University of Bradford

The JISC IT4SEA project aimed to combine thin client technology with smartcard readers to secure Questionmark Perception assessments at the University of Bradford.

The project made a significant impact on institutional use of e-assessment, with a major increase in uptake of online assessments following the creation of a new 100-seat thin client cluster with an innovative seating layout designed to meet exam situation guidelines and also serve as a functional teaching space.

Research was carried out into best practice for the design of the facility and a detailed account of this process is included in the final report – potentially useful to others considering development of their own centres.
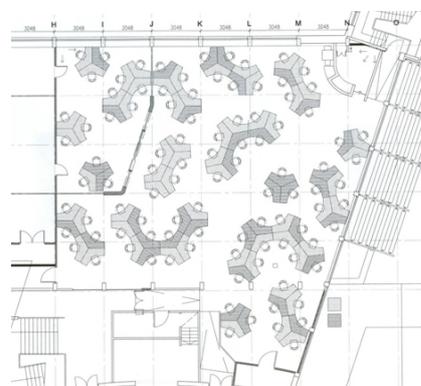
Layout of the University's new 100-seat Assessment Centre

Tightly integrating the process with the student record system, the student exam experience has been improved by the provision of personalised examination timetables, delivered by email, and the automatic allocation of facilities for students with special needs. The design specification for a new examination administration system also forms part of the final report.

Read the full report here: http://tinyurl.com/ykts3k8 and listen to John Dermo, e-Assessment Advisor at the University, describing the project here: http://tinyurl.com/p9ha6w

Safe Exam Browser

Users of Moodle (and the lesser-known Ilias) VLEs might want to take a look at the Safe Exam Browser developed by the University of Giessen and ETH Zurich. Essentially a modification of the popular Firefox browser which provides a secure testing environment. Features include:

- Fullscreen mode (without navigation elements)
- Disables
  - ▷ shortcut keys (Ctrl + Alt + Del, Ctrl + P, etc.)*
  - ▷ right click actions
  - ▷ switching to other applications*
  - ▷ closing the test before submission
  - ▷ surfing the internet*

*unless permission is granted (e.g. to allow access to assistive tools)

Currently, the project uses a German version of the Firefox browser, which means that some prompts appear in that language - however some tinkering (http://tinyurl.com/ybu47ua) will allow you set this to rights.

Download the Safe Exam Browser here: http://tinyurl.com/yf5ccvh; additional patches available here: http://tinyurl.com/yjxn76b

BTL SecureClient

As part of its Surpass e-Assessment platform, BTL has its own secure testing environment with the ability to lock down various parts of the PC to ensure there is no single point of failure when delivering high stakes assessments however rich and innovative the content may be.

As Microsoft partners, BTL has specifically had the SecureClient application tested by a Microsoft-certified independent testing partner (Lionbridge). This test is required in order to maintain BTL's status of being a Microsoft Certified Independent Software Vendor.

Read about BTL's SecureAssess platform here: http://tinyurl.com/yl8n3jo

Security Goals in Summative E-Assessment

A paper from the University of Southampton proposes that the existing models for the security of e-Assessment systems, by focusing on the hardware, software and network elements, can disregard the user phase of the process. The paper defines three security goals specific to user security:

- Presence - Are you there?
- Identity – Who are you?
- Authentication – Is it really you?

Through a series of examples, the authors demonstrate that identity and authentication are susceptible to impersonation threats if the presence security goal (both electronic and physical) is excluded. They are developing a model of online summative assessment which seeks to address the issue.

Read the complete report here: http://tinyurl.com/yl75u7s

Adding Quizzes to WordPress

Many educators are turning to blogs as their main online interface with learners, often sidelining what they see as overly complicated institutional learning environments. Although blogs offer flexible publishing and collaborative options - the same can't be said for assessment.

A simple MCQ option for the popular open source WordPress blog is Quizzin, which offers multiple questions sets, feedback and basic grades.

Download Quizzin: http://tinyurl.com/lw4nm9,
Step-by-step guide: http://tinyurl.com/ygvlga6

eAA Mission Statement

''The eAA campaigns for the widening of the effective use of e-Assessment in support of learning. The eAA will do this by encouraging individuals and organisations to make good use of e-Assessment, by explaining the issues to the public and by influencing educational thinking and policy."

Corporate Membership

The eAA is delighted to welcome JISC to the ranks of corporate membership!

Current corporate members of the eAA include:

Cambridge Assessment*
SQA*
CCEA*
Pearson*
AQA
City & Guilds
AlphaPlus*
ALTA*
BTL*
SCHOLAR*
TAG*
WJEC
CARET*
JISC

* Founding members

Snippets

STACK Survey - Please Help!
http://tinyurl.com/ylc9jbq

The developers of STACK (System for Teaching and Assessment using a Computer algebra Kernel) are looking for users of the open source mathematical tool to complete a short online survey to assist them in making a case for future funding. If you know of anyone using the system - please pass on the link to the survey!

SQA Case Studies
http://tinyurl.com/yfclfdm

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published a series of case studies supported by a selection of short video clips a few years ago. These clips are available on DVD and can still be usefully employed as an introduction to the topic.

MentorBuddy
www.mentorbuddy.com

MentorBuddy is a new free online application that merges together simple e-Assessment tools, lesson planning, class management, performance tracking and social networking features. The developer, Jesmond Mifsud, aims to create a platform with an intuitive interface which offers a gentle learning curve for new users - still in Beta, he would appreciate any feedback you can offer.

Spring Issue

The spring edition of the eAA newsletter is scheduled for the end of May. We'll be featuring some of the output of this year's AGM - specifically details of the plan of action for 2010-2011, where we'll be aiming to run more events, produce a series of publications and as always, enable you to have a voice in the evolving area of e-Assessment.

As always, we welcome your feedback on this edition and any suggestions for future topics. Items should be submitted electronically to the Editor, Kenji Lamb, at the JISC Regional Support Centre Scotland North & East:
klamb@rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk

(deadline for contributions is 23rd May, 2010)