

SUMMATIVE POLITICS ASSESSMENT



Figure 1: Example questions authored in QuestionMark Perception

Outcomes

The goal was to devise a new online summative assessment for the Politics unit which would benefit both learners and the lecturer. All questions were written from the beginning, with online usage in mind. We hoped to create an assessment which would not only thoroughly test learners' subject knowledge but also do so in a user-friendly and intuitive manner.

The e-Assessment Advantage

Previously, assessments in Politics were presented in a traditional, paper-based format which required manual marking. This involved a large investment of time and effectively delayed publishing the results. Using QuestionMark Perception allowed us to utilize interactive question types (e.g. drag & drop) and use colour images in question stems at no cost. It made the whole process of assessing simpler and eliminated the need for manual marking. The system automatically compiled reports with detailed results describing each learner's attempts. Using short formative tests before the main assessment allowed learners to assess their knowledge and, through automated feedback, pointed to the sections of materials which should be revisited.

Conclusions

The work on the assessment started about 3 months before the exam, giving us more than enough time to carefully prepare and test it. All efforts were made to ensure that both the learners and invigilators were well informed about the whole process. Also, all computers in the assessment centres were checked to make sure they are in good working order, with the necessary software installed.

Feedback from learners has been very positive and we hope to make further use of online assessments in Politics in the future.

Background

The Blackboard VLE is at the core of our managed learning environment, integrated with additional systems such as Turnitin UK, Wimba and QuestionMark Perception (QMP). QMP assessments are deployed in Blackboard and are accessed by learners via a 'building block' which automatically authenticates users using credentials from within Blackboard.

Summative assessments are mostly delivered in a secure assessment browser, QuestionMark Secure, on computers in our Assessment Centre.

The assessment was used with full-time Intermediate 2 Social Sciences learners. Claire Jamieson (Politics lecturer) and Kacper Lyszkiewick (Content Developer from the VLE team) worked together to create the test from scratch specifically for deployment in Question Mark Perception.

Challenges

As the assessment was an internal one, we had a high degree of freedom in creating it. However it was the first online summative assessment of such a scale (more than 80 learners) to be conducted in College and we weren't sure whether the system would cope with it. Also, it was the lecturer's first venture into e-assessment territory. Her initial doubts were however soon dispelled when she discovered the possibilities presented by the use of online assessments.

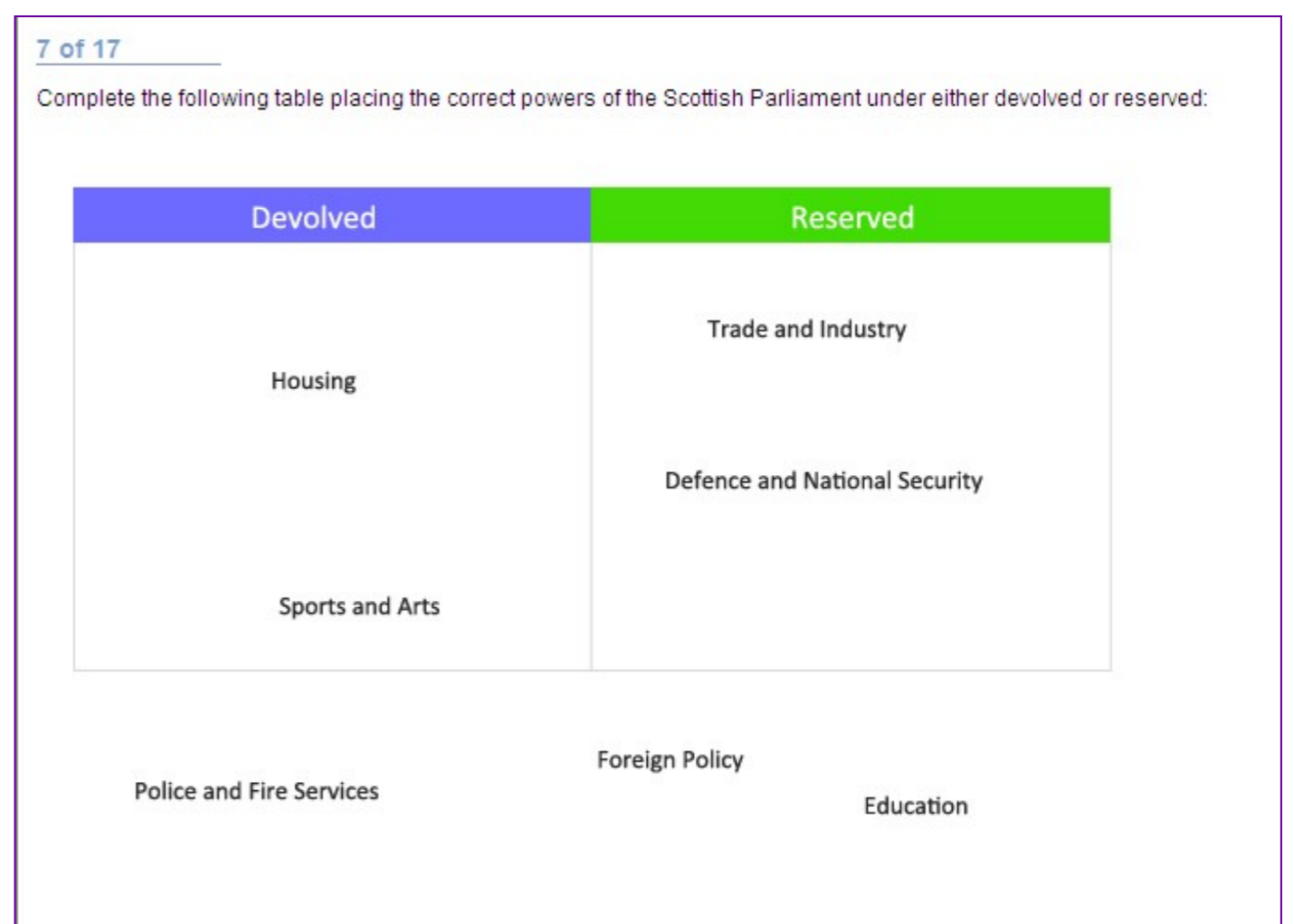


Figure 2: Example questions authored in QuestionMark Perception

Key points for effective practice

The assessment was thoroughly tested before going live to ensure all questions worked and were automatically scored as planned. To familiarise learners with how e-assessments work, short online tests were given on general knowledge followed by a formative assessment covering the unit's content. To accommodate the number of participants, the assessment was held in 3 different rooms simultaneously. Every learner received a printout explaining, step by step (from the moment of switching on the computers), how to launch the assessment. The start of the assessment was staggered in each group (with 5-minute intervals) to avoid possible overload of the system. This approach worked well and all learners managed to complete the test with no technical issues.