

Building the e-Assessment Centre

In the Beginning...

This poster describes the establishment of Edinburgh's Telford College (ETC) first dedicated e-Assessment centre. The project began with the 'Learning and Teaching @ ETC Project' in 2008. Visits to Aberdeen College to view established e-Assessment centres were helpful in providing a model to work towards. A formal 'Request for Change' was submitted to the SMT in January 2009, with the centre being completed in the summer of the same year.

The centre was set up to BSI Standards and external awarding body specifications as outlined in the SQA Guide to Effective practice. The centre can accommodate 31 candidates at a time (on 31 PCs), with larger groups being staggered via a waiting area.

e-Assessment is becoming widely used in Further Education and has many advantages over traditional (paper-based) assessment including:

- ⇒ lower longer-term costs
- ⇒ instant feedback to students and tutors
- ⇒ greater flexibility with respect to location and timing
- ⇒ greater storage efficiency – tens of thousands of answer scripts can be stored on a server compared to the physical space required for paper scripts
- ⇒ enhanced question styles which incorporate interactivity and multimedia elements

Challenges

There were a number of practical challenges to address during the set up of the centre:

Issue 1: Capacity

A waiting area within the centre was established to allow for larger groups to split, so that one half could sit the test while the other half waited in the adjoining area.

Issue 2: Personal belongings

A shelving unit containing a number of numbered plastic boxes and a clothes rail with numbered hangers were installed to store personal belongings during test sessions. These numbers match the PC number to which the candidate is assigned.

Issue 3: Allocating use of the centre to staff

An online booking system has been developed to allow staff to view/select available assessment slots.

Issue 4: Navigation

PC layout posters were displayed to direct candidates to their assigned PCs.

Issue 5: Preparation and closure

Pre/Post checklists have been developed to ensure hardware is working properly, candidates have appropriate ID, etc. at the beginning of sessions and that systems have been closed, belongings collected, etc. at the end of sessions.

Issue 6: Logging problems

Issue sheets log any problems that occur during the session, so that the appropriate appeals can be lodged with external bodies.

Issue 7: Security

A number of the assessment platforms included security features (SQA Solar Secure Browser, AAT Secure Browser and Questionmark Secure). The Centre's PCs were also equipped with Browse Control which could lock PCs and monitors, block applications and control access to websites.

Issue 8: Unfamiliar Interface

There was a worry that candidates would face problems using e-Assessment for the first time (especially where there was no opportunity for practice/formative sessions), but no issues relating to usability have arisen so far.

Issue 9: Commercial activities

Although some consideration was given to the commercial aspect of the centre (renting out the space to external organisations who wanted to deliver e-Assessment), high utilisation of the space by staff and students has lessened the need for this.



Issue 2: Personal belongings kept in numbered boxes/on numbered hangers matched to seating positions

Feedback

Feedback from staff has been extremely positive:

"This is an excellent aid to improving efficiency with regard to the teaching and learning process in the college as not only can the time saved in marking be diverted into planning and upgrading teaching materials, but the students and lecturers have instant feedback with the addition of very informative reports."

"The majority of the group clearly enjoyed undertaking their assessments using the material as it provided instant feedback. The e-Assessment material has been fully validated by SQA for use and at present can be used to undertake the multiple choice assessments. Now that we have a dedicated assessment centre, it will be easier to arrange times/dates to allow students to undertake the assessments."

Outcomes

One of the clear indicators of the success of the e-Assessment centre is the utilisation of the space, which is now at 65%, and expected to rise over the coming term.

With a reliable track record, the centre is set to assess the core skills of incoming students (roughly 2,500 candidates) in the autumn. There has also been a sizeable uptake in the use of summative (and to a lesser extent formative) e-Assessment across the college, with staff expressing an interest in learning more.