

# **IMPLEMENTING LARGE SCALE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMMES**

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More and more testing organisations are moving their traditional paper and pencil assessment programmes to computer-based testing. There is little doubt that computer-based testing offers many advantages, but careful consideration needs to be given to the transition from paper and pencil to computer.

Converting to computer-based testing can streamline back end business functions and cut costs by reducing administration and improving efficiencies. It is important at the business requirements stage of the transition to look at what impact this new way of delivering tests will have on the business and how it may be able to improve operational efficiency, existing processes and procedures.

Another consideration is what the final test will look like? Will it be just a straight conversion to computer of the paper based test or will it be a more complex computer adaptive test? When first converting to computer-based testing many organisations start with a straight conversion of the paper based test and then progress to more complex forms of testing.

Testing organisations also need to determine whether to deliver their tests online or via a server. This is largely dependent on the environment in which the test will be delivered and the level of security required. Low stakes or practice tests can be delivered directly over the internet, whereas most high stakes testing organisations would prefer the security of delivering their tests via a server.

There are also administrative procedures to take into consideration. Where will the test be delivered? Does the testing organisation's current channel have the necessary IT infrastructure to support computer-based delivery? Is the integrity of the test at risk using the current channel due to lack of security? Are there other potential markets that could be explored by expanding the existing channel?

If there is a charge for the test can the testing and registration system take into account different pricing structures? Can it accept credit card payment and manage invoices? Can the testing organisation take accounting control for customers and invoice or them on a monthly basis? Perhaps it is more cost effective to outsource financial services to a testing partner?

With computer-based testing it is much easier to get useful management information compared to paper and pencil tests. This can help improve both the test and marketing as well as provide feedback to candidates on how to improve their learning. When converting to computer-based testing, organisations need to think about what data is going to be useful for growth in the future, who else needs access to this data and what reports will be required.

Of critical importance for large scale or rapid growth assessment programmes is the testing infrastructure. This is the glue that sticks the test development, delivery, financial services, registration and scheduling and information management together. The infrastructure needs to be reliable and scalable, so that as the volume of tests delivered increases the system is able to support this increase.

This presentation will consider the experience of two of the largest testing organisations in the UK. It will review their business objectives for converting to computer-based testing, critical success factors and implementation timescales.