



Adapted Question Papers in Digital Format

Mintlaw Academy, Aberdeenshire

Morag Watt, Support for Learning, Mintlaw Academy

Published: February 2011
Publication code: BC5744

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DQ
Ironmills Road, Dalkeith, Midlothian EH22 1LE

www.sqa.org.uk

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Background

Digital papers went 'live' at Mintlaw Academy, Aberdeenshire in 2006 after the serving Support for Learning Principal Teacher recognised the advantages and potential of using digital papers.

Producing adapted digital papers involves a huge amount of work. However, Avril Park, a member of staff who was competent in the use of ICT, was willing to undertake training by CALL Scotland¹. Two further members of staff (Morag Watt and Kathryn Crowder) have now also had formal training.

Why did we go digital?

Digital papers give pupils the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding to the best of their abilities, allowing them to raise their attainment and to achieve national standards. Pupils (including those who have just come from primary school) are relatively secure when using the technology and gain independence, confidence and motivation in line with Curriculum for Excellence.

Using adapted digital papers gives staff more time for other duties and, in the external exam, can reduce the number of Invigilators and separate rooms required.

Candidates who would benefit from using digital papers

Candidates who have a relevant identified disability and/or additional support need and normally use ICT to access teaching materials and or classroom assessments could benefit from being assessed with digital papers. Some examples include:

- ◆ Pupils with reading and/or writing difficulties benefit from the text-to-speech option and typing their own answers.
- ◆ Pupils with dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, or ADD, benefit from the text-to-speech option, typing their own answers, and the use of a spell-checker.
- ◆ Pupils with organisational difficulties benefit from seeing everything on screen, because it is easier for them to make alterations or insertions and they are able to improve the presentation of their work.

Preparing pupils for digital papers

Pupils' additional support needs are assessed at the transition from P7 to S1 to identify whether they may benefit from using digital format assessments. At this stage, those who have laptops are highlighted as potential users.

¹ CALL (Communication, Access, Literacy and Learning) Scotland is a unit within the Moray House School of Education, The University of Edinburgh

After relevant pupils have been identified they are given a training session to introduce them to the digital format. They are also given the opportunity to try the available tools to see which best suits their needs.

Pupils are encouraged to work digitally wherever possible; this includes end-of-topic assessments in most subjects from S1 to S6. All digital assessments are monitored and details recorded as evidence to support the request for digitally adapted papers. Readers/scribes are still an option if digital assessment does not suit any individual pupil.

S3 exams are offered digitally to candidates who have shown positive benefits from the digital format. Almost all candidates who sit S3 digital exams go on to sit their prelims and Standard Grades in the digital format.

Preparing digital papers

We have one dedicated standalone computer, a scanner and a printer available to produce digital assessment papers within the department — from either paper or electronic files using Adobe Acrobat. This has become highly successful and most departments request regular updates or the creation of new digital assessments. This equipment is also utilised when S3 exams and prelims need to be created.

ICT

We recommend the following ICT provision:

- ◆ Adobe Acrobat Reader (version 9 or later) to open the Adapted Digital Question Papers and type answers into the question and answer paper.
- ◆ networked computers
- ◆ secure exam user log-in — with no access to any other part of the network or internet
- ◆ Adobe Professional 9 to convert from Word, add answer boxes and 'enable' the paper to be accessed by pupils using Adobe Reader
- ◆ Adobe Acrobat 9 Reader installed to open the Adapted Digital Question Papers and type answers into question and answer papers
- ◆ PDFaloud for pupils who need the paper read out by the computer
- ◆ Microsoft Word to type answers for question-only papers

Digital papers used

Almost all subjects can use digital papers, however some are easier to adapt than others. English and social subjects where content is in the form of text only, and where straightforward text answers are required, are most suitable. Mathematics and science subjects, which may contain subject-specific formulae, and which require answers in the form of figures, formulae or drawings, are not as suitable.

Most of Mintlaw's S1–S4 assessments are now available digitally. Workbooks and Course material are currently being targeted for the transfer to digital format. S1–S2 Science and RMPS have already been completed; however this is an ongoing procedure for other subjects.

Administering the digital papers on the day

- 1 During the exam diet, pupils are allocated an exam user log-in — eg examuser1, examuser2, etc — which has only very limited access to the network. No access to the internet is available to pupils on exam days.
- 2 About an hour before each examination, a technician logs-in each candidate and checks that all ITC is functioning properly. Headphones are provided only if the pupil is entitled to a reader. Access to a spellchecker is allowed where applicable. The printer is also checked.
- 3 The Digital Examinations CD is then received from the Invigilator. It is opened by the technician in the presence of the Invigilator, and the digital exam copied from the CD into each identified exam user's log-in. The exam is then opened up and a check made to ensure that the software is functioning correctly and that the correct paper has been loaded.
- 4 A check is also made to ensure that pupils have a paper copy of the exam.
- 5 Examinations must be saved by the pupils at regular intervals.
- 6 At the end of the examination, the pupils print out their examination papers, ensuring that the correct printing procedure is followed.
- 7 The printed examination paper is checked by the pupil and the technician to ensure that all the pages have been printed.
- 8 Each pupil's printed examination paper is stapled together with any hand-drawn diagrams/graphs. Each pupil must hand their examination paper to the Invigilator. Pupils are then allowed to leave the examination.
- 9 A check is made to ensure the number of papers corresponds to the number of pupils taking each examination, before the technician deletes them from the desktop.
- 10 Finally, the Invigilator takes the papers and the Digital Examinations CD from the technician and passes them to the Chief Invigilator.

Quotes from pupils

'I much prefer using the digital.' (S1)

'I have used digital since S1 and like it. I want to use it in all my exams.' (S3)

'I can work on my own when using digital.' (S4)

Quotes from teachers

'Digital papers are a huge advantage to pupils and to all departments. Pupils enjoy the independence offered in the use of ICT and their confidence and performance are boosted accordingly. Instead of reading and scribing, staff can be deployed elsewhere to maximise support for pupils. The adaptation and setting up of the digital papers in the initial stage was very time consuming and a big job, but the response from pupils and subject teachers has made this very worthwhile.'

PT Learning Support