

1. Introduction

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1.1 About this guide

This guide has been developed by the qualifications regulators for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland as part of their commitment to support effective practice and quality improvement in the assessment of qualifications. It is intended to promote the use of e-assessment in an advisory rather than a regulatory capacity. It offers practical information and advice to people involved in the management and delivery of e-assessment within qualifications.

The guide has been developed by a team at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), supported by colleagues from the other qualifications regulators and by e-assessment practitioners across the post-school sector.

1.2 Who the guide is for

The guide is for people involved in the management and delivery of e-assessment in awarding centres delivering accredited qualifications. It will be relevant to those working in colleges, workplaces, training centres, community education centres, voluntary organisations and other types of provider in the post-school sector.

It will also be of value to staff offering e-assessment opportunities in schools and universities, and to those wishing to gain formal recognition of their skills and knowledge as assessors within the context of e-assessment.

The guide is linked to the new Level 3 Award, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in delivering e-testing. The units that make up the Award form part of the new Teacher Qualifications Framework for England being developed by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), and are integrated directly with the key e-testing roles that the guide sets out. In Scotland these units will be considered with a view to linking them, where appropriate, to existing qualifications in e-assessment already recognised within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Although staff working in organisations offering e-assessment are the primary audience for this guide, it will also be of value to awarding bodies for centre recognition and monitoring, and to organisations involved in quality assurance and improvement in the post-school sector.

The guide is intended to be used alongside the specific guidance on the use of e-assessment systems issued by awarding bodies and other suppliers. This additional information is referred to at a number of points within the guide.

1.3 Scope of the guide

The guide covers two key aspects of e-assessment:

- ◆ the management and delivery of e-testing
- ◆ the use of e-portfolios for assessment

These concepts are summarised as ‘e-testing’ and ‘e-portfolios’. The guide focuses on the practical delivery of e-assessment to learners through e-tests and e-portfolios, and the knowledge and skills needed by people involved in the process. It is not a guide to the development or procurement of technology, nor to the technical design of the content of e-assessment opportunities. It excludes from its scope any references to e-marking of examination scripts, as these processes do not involve direct relationships with learners.

The guide takes into account the current UK developments towards the reformation of vocational qualifications, particularly the development of a jointly regulated Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland which is currently being tested across the three countries. Work is also underway to explore relationships between the QCF and the Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework (SCQF). It also takes account of the new *Regulatory principles for e-assessment* (2007) by the qualification regulators for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. These principles represent a new approach to regulatory intervention that is intended to ensure flexibility and encourage innovation in e-assessment.

1.4 Format and terminology

The issues and processes involved in conducting effective e-testing are different in many respects from those needed to facilitate the use of e-portfolios for assessment. This is why the guidelines are divided into two sections (3 and 4). It is possible that people will make use of only one of these two sections in their practical e-assessment work. However, the underlying skills and knowledge required have some areas in common. For this reason, and for ease of reference, roles and responsibilities are covered in a separate section (2) to help centres identify the skills that staff will need either to have, or have access to.

The body of the guide is followed by a series of annexes. These annexes include detailed documents designed to support the use of e-testing and/or e-portfolios. They contain tables, checklists, process guides and other resources that may be copied and used in e-assessment centres.

Section 5 offers a collection of e-assessment case studies, drawn primarily from centres involved in piloting the guide in its draft form. These illustrate not only examples of effective practice in the delivery of e-assessment, but also different ways in which the guide itself can be used.

E-assessment: Guide to effective practice

Section 6 provides an overview of the Level 3 Award in delivering e-testing. Further details can be found in part 1.7 of this introduction.

There is also a glossary of key terms (section 7), drawn primarily from the larger e-assessment glossary produced by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), to whom thanks are due.

Section 8 refers users to other sources of information that may be useful in the continuing development of e-assessment opportunities.

To ensure that terminology is applied consistently, specific terms and definitions are used as follows:

- ◆ ‘Centre’ is used in a broad context, encompassing temporary and permanent venues used for e-assessment as well as ‘virtual’ assessment centres.
- ◆ ‘Learner’ is used throughout, apart from where the guide refers to the conduct of the e-test, or to that part of the process, where the term ‘candidate’ is used.
- ◆ The term ‘teacher’ is used throughout the document, although it is recognised that a wide range of titles may be used to describe this role.

The only departures from these rules are in the case studies, where centres’ terminology has been followed.

1.5 Critical success factors

The guide assumes that a senior manager within the organisation will be responsible for development of the e-assessment strategy, and for successful implementation of the strategy.

It is intended to be of value to a wide range of people and organisations offering e-assessment opportunities to learners in the post-school sector. This range may include small organisations offering occasional e-assessment opportunities to individual learners, as well as large centres offering frequent opportunities for learners to undertake assessment for a wide range of qualifications.

Given this range, the guide does not assume a single operational model of e-assessment, nor a predictable range of job roles and responsibilities within centres offering e-assessment. It assumes that, within a single centre, there may be quite different arrangements for the management and delivery of e-testing, and for the use of e-portfolios for assessment.

However, there are critical success factors that need to be present in all centres:

- ◆ Processes must have demonstrable consistency and reliability.
- ◆ Staff must have the appropriate skills to manage and deliver these processes.
- ◆ Centres must be able to demonstrate their accountability for the quality of these processes to external agencies.
- ◆ A degree of flexibility needs to be maintained so that these processes and skills are able to evolve in response to technological improvements.

The guide seeks to address these critical success factors for both e-testing and e-portfolios. In so doing, it seeks to balance the potential impact of rapidly changing technology with the right of learners to be offered high-quality e-assessment opportunities.

1.6 Further information

The guidelines for e-testing and e-portfolios have been developed in different ways. These differences reflect not only the different technologies involved, but also the different assessment processes that these technologies have been designed to deliver. The facility to support both these processes through the application of technologies should not blur the distinctions between these approaches to assessment.

The e-testing guidelines are based on existing national and international standards developed over the past decade and continuously updated in response to technical changes. Foremost of these is the British Standards Institution code of practice for the use of information technology (IT) in the delivery of assessments (BS 7988:2002), which has now become an international standard (ISO/IEC 23988:2007). A representative of the group developing this international standard has been a member of the QCA project team.

The e-portfolios section of the guide has no such authoritative process standards on which to draw. The majority of existing guidance on the use of e-portfolios focuses on their use in the process of learning and formative assessment, rather than in formal assessment leading to credits or a qualification. This section therefore seeks to build on case studies and proprietary guidance documents issued by awarding bodies and technology suppliers. Sources of information used in its development are listed in section 8.

1.7 The Level 3 Award in delivering e-testing

In parallel with the development of this guide, the project team has been working closely with LLUK to develop units and an award within the new QCF that will recognise the skills and knowledge of people involved in the delivery of e-testing. As the use of e-portfolios for assessment develops, further units may be developed to recognise the different skills and knowledge needed to deliver these.

Details of the award are included in section 6. The units that make up the award are linked directly to the key roles in e-testing identified in section 2. The particular skills and knowledge that are recognised through the units of the award are identified in the text.

The award and units have been developed in collaboration with the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) and have been approved by LLUK as part of its Teacher Qualifications Framework for England. The award is available for any awarding body to offer, and the units that make up the award may be offered as stand-alone units leading to the award of credit within the QCF. In Scotland these units will be considered with a view to linking them, where appropriate, to existing qualifications in e-assessment already recognised within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).