e-Assessment survey

Final report

May 2016

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial findings – overall use and experience</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies and impacts</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers and challenges</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic and policy based</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational and technological</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix of further comments</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

e-Assessment has been embedded in most organisations in the FE and skill sector over the last five years. The primary driver for this report is the Government’s response to the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) report and its target to increase use of technology in assessment by 50% by 2018.

Our response to the government target is for Jisc and other sector bodies to find out more about the use and delivery of technology enhanced assessment so we can respond more effectively to the needs of the education sector. Against this backdrop there is a need for more information about the use of e-assessment in order to allow Jisc and the awarding organisations to respond appropriately to the needs of the sector. This survey was supported by Jisc and the awarding organisations who are delivering e-testing.

The recommendations of the FELTAG report from March 2014 and the resulting government response have had an impact but there are some people/organisations yet to appreciate the full impact.

The survey results show that most organisations are using e-assessment on a day-to-day basis but, in many cases, its impact across an organisation is limited. Organisations are using a wide variety of e-assessment techniques – testing, e-portfolios, formative testing systems but the overall picture, particularly for tracking systems and e-portfolios is mixed. However, e-testing is more embedded and mature than the use of e-portfolios and tracking systems.
Over half of respondents have had a good experience of e-assessment, but that means that just under half haven’t. Many organisations have begun to measure its impact. Significant numbers of organisations have a strategy or plan for e-assessment. However, senior managers don’t necessarily see that this is a priority or that they need to take responsibility for their implementation.

Most organisations expect to increase their use of e-assessment over the next five years. Nevertheless, there are significant barriers and challenges to increased use. These include a lack of strategy or policy, barriers within the culture of the organisation, staff and learner capability, technology resourcing, reliability or support, appropriate accommodation, for example space for invigilated testing.

Despite these significant challenges, in the main respondents reported feeling positive about the increased use of e-assessment.

This is the first broad survey of its kind since a similar survey was undertaken by Becta in 2007.
Introduction

The e-assessment survey was made available from June to October 2015 to all post 16 organisations involved in the delivery of vocational qualifications, in any form.

These include schools, University Technical Colleges, FE colleges, 6th form colleges, work based providers, adult education, employers, and offender education.

The survey was supported by Jisc, the e-Assessment Association, the Federation of Awarding Bodies and by Pearson, City and Guilds, and SQA.

AoC, AELP, FAB, NIACE, the College Development Network and the 157 Group invited their members to complete the survey.

By 12 October 2015, around 175 respondents had either fully or partially completed the survey across a range of organisations and from a variety of roles within those organisations. The survey was designed so that, in addition to a generic set of questions, particular roles would access some questions specifically designed to reflect the views from that role. As a result, some questions were answered by a statistically small group of people.

In addition to responding to the survey, respondents were asked if they would be prepared to participate in a telephone interview to follow up on their replies. Around 40 people offered to take part in telephone interviews and of those, 13 were interviewed.

While the overall total of respondents is reasonable, certain categories of organisations and roles are less well represented. By its very nature, this type of survey self-selects the respondents – there is no attempt to ensure a balanced cross section of types of organisation or roles within them. Several of the people interviewed expressed the commonly held view that technology use tends to be most advanced in those parts of the organisation where there is a ‘champion’.

This report deliberately gives significant space to the very large number of comments generated by the questions asked in the survey. Many of the comments provide a greater qualitative insight into the issues than can, perhaps, be gained from the pure statistical outcomes.
## Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher/ trainer/ assessor/ tutor/ lecturer (27)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of subject department/ faculty (33)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning technologist (21)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning support provider (5)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination/ assessment administrator (7)</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior manager responsible for IT development and procurement (10)</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network manager (2)</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior manager responsible for assessment and curriculum strategies (18)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of organisation (12)</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (23)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation Type</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Further Education</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private training provider</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education provider</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/Sixth form college</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner city/Urban</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer city/Suburban</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only seven organisations responded that they were not a learning provider and therefore have no learners.
Initial findings – overall use and experience

The following is a summary of findings in this area:

» The vast majority of organisations had some experience of e-assessment (88%)

» Around 70% of all respondents used either an e-testing or e-portfolio system of some type with another 30% responding “other”. These included the use of Moodle, Blackboard, wikis, discussion forums and in-house systems

» The use of e-portfolios is less structured than e-testing with many organisations using multiple systems or trying a number of systems before deciding on which one to use

» While 70% of all respondents indicated that their organisation used e-assessment, the percentage of learners within the organisation using e-assessment was often low. For example, 27% of respondents indicated that only 10% of their learners used e-portfolios and around a third of respondents suggested that less than 20% of their learners used e-testing. This suggests that significant numbers of learners are neither using e-testing nor e-portfolios. However, these statistics need to be treated with caution since although asked about the whole organisation, in many cases the answer only referred to the respondent’s part of it ie a faculty, department or site

» Similar numbers of learners were reported as using formative e-assessment and feedback management within some type of learning platform

» Nearly 100% of respondents describe their use of e-assessment as continuous throughout the year with about a third adding that there were defined peaks. This suggests that those learners using e-assessment are using it extensively

» 70% of respondents offer on-demand testing

Respondents rated their overall experience to date as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some enthuse about the introduction of technology; others are wary and have had a less than optimal experience for a range of reasons.

Positive comments include:

Simplicity once set up. Just re-written our Moodle. Get results straight away with better feedback. On paper it could take a week to get them back. All our summative assignments are also through Moodle. This puts everything in one place. It also means that the assessors can be anywhere to assess work. Most learners (age range 19-50) also like the flexible access to learning and assessment.

Trainer, training provider based in a small town

The use of e-portfolios for apprenticeship programmes has been very successful and we have well established e-assessment for European Computer Driving Licences (ECDL) learners, although City &Guilds Evolve system has some administrative issues.

Learning technologist, large adult education service
Experiencing enhanced opportunities for feedback and efficiencies through the use of e-assessment on a small scale.

**Learning technologist, Specialist institute**

As a business with apprentices we need the flexibility that this offers as learners are placed all over the country and assessors can go to them and let them take tests and show them progress at time of visit. Learners can also be interactive with their assessor at any point throughout programme. All evidence is stored and can be easily retrieved.

**National training provider**

A shift to electronic assessment was student driven and has had excellent student feedback as well as making a number of historic issues impossible (honest I handed in the work). It has seen significant buy in from staff and cut the time taken for some activities from days to hours.

**Senior IT development manager, large further and higher education college**

Comments from the less positive include:

**Teacher, trainer, Small training provider**

Current software is very complicated for what it achieves. Time spent learning to use it by learner and assessor is huge!

**Examinations administrator, FE college**

We are involved with a lot of e-testing and, on the whole, it works well but they require a lot of resources and, when issues occur, they can be very problematic. We don’t have dedicated testing rooms either, which I’m sure doesn’t help.

The interviewees’ views reflected this generally ‘good’ experience of e-assessment, although a significant proportion (42%) had only an average or below experience and their comments reflect this.

Despite some poor experiences most organisations or particular departments have persevered with developing their use of e-assessment. It is not possible to define in detail the reasons for the more negative responses and comments without further research, but wider experience suggests that at least some of them stem from internal decisions about investment in technology and its use or external factors, such as broadband speeds, rather than any inherent issue with e-assessment itself. General issues about investment are noted later in the report but evidence would suggest where there has been a strategy for e-assessment, the technology deployment decision making process has resulted in better outcomes for the organisation.

The implementation of e-testing has traditionally been driven by the awarding organisations. In nearly all cases, they procure the delivery software, develop the tests and manage the automatic marking and awarding. So providers have little or no choice in the delivery mechanism, nor do they directly fund the cost of the system; it forms part of the registration or entry fee for the test.

Comments are taken from both those written in the survey itself and those made during interviews.

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2 Comments are taken from both those written in the survey itself and those made during interviews.
The opposite has been true for tracking systems and e-portfolios; providers themselves are generally free to choose a tracking and e-portfolio system. Unlike e-testing systems, they need to fund these themselves. This, more mixed, picture is reflected in:

- The time it’s taken for many organisations to adopt e-portfolios and tracking systems
- The limited use of organisation-wide tracking and e-portfolio systems in some organisations – adoption very much left to individual departments/faculties/subjects
- The many larger organisations that use multiple e-portfolios systems
- The experimentation that has taken place in some organisations before widespread adoption of a particular system which is reflected in this comment from the head of resources of a regional training provider:

  *We, as an organisation, have embraced the use of e-assessment from day one and will continue to do so. We used multiple e-portfolio platforms before settling on the one we currently use. This has been a big investment. The changes were implemented to ensure we had a fully integrated (between management information systems, tracking and e-portfolio) and robust system. Costly to implement – staff training etc. But we would never go back to paper.*

  **Head of resources, regional training provider**

There are now some awarding organisations who are specifying particular e-portfolio systems for some or all of their qualifications. For example, City & Guilds bought Learning Assistant some years ago and brought it in house. Some users welcome this trend because they can be assured that the system will be structured to meet the needs of the qualification. If well designed, they can be more user friendly, be fully tailored to the qualification and significantly improve the way external verification and quality management operates. However, a number of organisations raised issues relating to this trend. Firstly, that they often find difficulty in getting the various systems – management information systems, tracking and e-portfolio – to talk to each other. Secondly, large organisations working with many awarding organisations have to support multiple systems.

Others reflect the observation above that they would never go back to paper. The overarching evidence suggests that once an organisation has adopted e-assessment, they would rarely consider reverting to paper.
Strategies and impacts

When asked “Which of these statements best describe your organisation’s reason for starting to use e-assessment?” respondents answered:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It offered more opportunities than paper alone based assessment</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results were received more quickly</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners would prefer using it</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was part of an overall IT enabled strategy</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our awarding organisation(s) insisted on it for particular qualifications</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was part of a strategy to increase success rates</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was required for the introduction of apprenticeships</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was the result of requests from employers</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
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*NB: The total is more than 100% as respondents could choose up to three statements.*

‘Other’ reasons given included:

- Greater flexibility around scheduling of exams
- Efficiency
- Monitor learners/assessors/internal quality assurance from a distance
- Early adopters started to use e-assessment thanks to the features of our learning management systems (Moodle) and their success engaged other teachers. (There’s not an institutional plan for it)
- Staff thought it would be a good idea
- In order to be able to report to Ofsted on learner progression
- Reduce need to manage and store paper portfolios
- Assists with the delivery of apprenticeships i.e.: functional skills

These outcomes show strong drivers for organisations to begin using e-assessment with only 26% of respondents suggesting that one of their reasons was that their qualification provider insisted on it.

When the ‘don’t knows’ are excluded, around 50% of respondents said their organisation has measured the impact of e-assessment on various aspects of their operation. These include achievement, teaching and learning strategies, learner satisfaction and assessment management. This suggests that a significant number of the organisations responding recognise that there are impacts from the introduction of e-assessment. Most of the impacts mentioned were related to assessment, learner achievement or ease of use. Fewer respondents had measured the impact on assessment management.
Respondents have provided a considerable amount of comment on these impacts including those classed as ‘other’:

We saw improvements in retention and achievement. It enabled individuals to develop their individual skills and has (helped) learners both personally and in work skills (from feedback).

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, training provider

Impact was addressed through direct student feedback where complaints that had driven the change had been resolved and students surveyed registered their approval. For assessment management the most amazing change has been to exam boards where work on the outcome for accuracy of the data and timeliness have been revolutionary.

Senior IT development manager, large further and higher education college

By comparing year success rates to see if there is an increase, from feedback from learners at the end of their programme, comparing costs of travel across the organisation.

Head of organisation, training provider

[The impact] was measured by retention and success and reported in the self-assessment report and monitored through the quality improvement plan.

Learning technologist, large adult education service

Increase in retention rates, better management of performance information.

Senior IT development manager, large north west England training provider

The wide range of comments and approaches suggests that organisations are not, across the board, measuring the impact of e-assessment in any consistent way. While some, particularly smaller, organisations have identified the need to measure a range of impacts, others have only measured particular aspects of using e-assessment. Of course, the impact for the individual in an organisation often depends on the role they are undertaking. The use of technology potentially has impacts not only on the learners and achievement but also on the way that others carry out their roles and on their workload.

Some respondents noted that, having measured the impact, the outcome had aspects that were less positive. The first example lists a number of the impacts and implies that, at the very least, e-assessment (primarily e-testing) has had a range of impacts on how the individual manages their role.

Reviews of exams, count of exam days, use of invigilators, count of rooms used. E-testing requires a lot of resources, whether it be the actual number of computers, the layout of rooms, the need for security measures (eg privacy screens), the smaller ratio of candidates to invigilators, the requirement for IT Services to check the computers before each test. Some staff also use the flexibility of the tests to request them at very short notice and to hold frequent re-sits.

Examinations administrator, FE college

Workload changes compared to paper assessment - increased workload because of on-demand availability.

Examinations administrator, school in small town

Feedback from centres and learners - largely because of our non-traditional learner base, paper/ hard copy assessments continue to be the more popular option for assessments.

Head of organisation, specialist awarding organisation
Senior managers were asked about the organisation’s strategies for e-assessment. It should be noted that numbers here are small but over 50% (56%) of organisations have a strategy for using e-assessment and of these 77% think that FELTAG will lead to a revision of that strategy. Of the ‘no strategy’ group, 41% thought FELTAG would lead them to developing a strategy.

This is a positive message and provides some, albeit limited evidence, that FELTAG is beginning to have an impact alongside other developments in the way people think about using technology for assessment. In answer to a later question, over 40% said that it has either already changed their organisation’s view and strategy or they expect it to. Only 7% thought that the organisation did not need to make any changes.

Many respondents commented that the FELTAG report was one of many drivers that were pushing the organisation to consider how they used technology.

_The FELTAG report is only one of the many drivers to increase the use of e-assessment._

_Head of organisation, specialist awarding organisation_

Others were less certain about the impact of FELTAG and there were a few respondents who commented that they had not heard of FELTAG.

_We have an information and learning technologies strategy which includes e-assessment but is driven by internal requirements rather than FELTAG._

_Senior curriculum and assessment manager, FE college organisation_

All respondents were asked the question “Does your organisation have a plan/strategy for using e-assessment?”

Over half (51%) said their organisation did, a third (33%) said ‘no’ whilst 15% responded ‘don’t know’. From the wider group of respondents this is a reasonably positive outcome and, combined with the senior managers’ views above, suggests that some organisations may be beginning to move beyond the ad hoc implementation of e-assessment.

The range of people within organisations who are responsible for any plan or strategy for using e-assessment is very wide. In some cases, it’s clear that it’s the responsibility of the senior management team or an individual member of the senior management, in others it’s clearly down to individual teams or even individual delivery staff.

When asked who has responsibility for implementing e-assessment, most responses either put the responsibility with an IT or information and learning technologies (ILT) function or within a quality/curriculum function.

When asked “Is the e-assessment strategy linked to a wider technology or learning and teaching strategy?” respondents said:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However 22% suggested they weren’t sure, and given respondents were able to skip this question those numbers are likely to be higher.
Barriers and challenges

Several questions in the survey asked in different ways about the barriers and challenges respondents faced in implementing and managing e-assessment.

They broadly fall into two categories, strategic and policy based, and operational, which includes technology and related capabilities. Inevitably, helpful comments often carried information about one or more of these.

### Strategic and policy based

When respondents were asked to identify up to five significant barriers to implementing or planning a strategy, they cited some of the realities of moving towards greater use of technology (figure 1).

Not surprisingly, the real or perceived lack of funding to implement widespread use was identified by just over half of respondents. Of more concern is the view of 42% of respondents that they would prefer to continue with current methodologies. A number of interviewees also highlighted the issue of getting staff who were not confident with technology to begin using it. It is interesting to note that only 19% of the respondents thought that learners would prefer to remain with the current methodologies. These are addressed later in the report.

### Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no funding to implement widespread use of e-assessment</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff would prefer to stay with the current methodologies</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The technologies are difficult to implement</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The logistics of increasing the volume of e-assessment are difficult to implement</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lack of direction being provided by government/Ofqual/Ofsted</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lack of overall strategy from awarding organisations and professional bodies</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are receiving mixed messages about the development of e-assessment generally</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Assessment is not high on the senior management’s agenda</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners would prefer to stay with the current methodologies</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NB. The total is more than 100% as respondents could choose up to five statements.*
A very large number of comments were provided in response to this question about barriers to implementing a strategy, and they help to illuminate respondents’ reasons for their answers. The following selection is a reflection of the many topics raised as barriers.

The plethora of e-portfolio software packages make it horrendous for standards verifiers. A recent LinkedIn Assessor forum gave vast variation in application and success or lack of it.

**Classroom teacher/trainer, small training provider**

I am all for e-assessment, but many of my colleagues are resistant. The college as a whole is trying to move towards paperless assessment, but the hardware and software currently in place is inadequate, and is unlikely to be replaced within the next couple of years due to financial restraints.

**Classroom teacher/trainer, inner city FE college**

The use of VLE e-assessment is not being promoted by senior management, partly due to cost implications (for proper e-learning support) caused by decreased funding for sixth form colleges.

**Classroom teacher/trainer, large FE college**

There is no long term plan for e-assessment development. Exam requirements are still too rigid which means access to equipment can be difficult to implement truly on-demand testing.

**Head of subject department, inner city/ urban FE college**

Our biggest issue is knowing technology enough to buy the right packages. We have recently asked Jisc for advice.

**Senior manager for assessment and curriculum, training provider**

Funding and logistics are the main barriers to the implementing e-assessment, this is frustrating as, of course, the implementation of e-assessment would help with both of these issues college-wide.

**Manager, inner city FE college**

The last comment is particularly pertinent and was reflected by many of the respondents and interviewees. The point was repeatedly made that the efficiencies and pedagogical advantages suggested in the FELTAG report, and which the sector needs to implement, could only be achieved with sufficient investment.

**Operational and technological**

Not surprisingly, respondents cited a number of challenges that would need addressing if their organisations were to develop and bring their plans and strategies to fruition. Many of these had already been identified as being barriers to developing and implementing an e-assessment strategy. Broadly, these barriers and challenges can be divided into two categories: day to day operations and more fundamental structural and investment issues.

**Operational barriers**

73% of respondents commented that, on a day to day basis, their ability to offer and use e-assessment was often impacted by technology support. Typical comments included:

**Staff will need to embrace a new way of working and when faced with issues they sometimes panic and then revert back to old methods especially if IT support is not available instantly.**

**Teacher/trainer, training provider**
I can’t realistically use some of the online resources as our computers struggle to load the new-style web pages. We are running on Windows 7 and Internet Explorer 8.

Teacher/trainer, FE college

When asked “Does the availability or structure of your technology (eg Wi-Fi, network, PCs) impact on your use of e-assessment?” 67% commented that the availability or structure of the technology impacted.

Poor Wi-Fi provision means that it is difficult to get a whole class successfully using tools like Socrative.

Teacher/trainer, large sixth form college

Delivery in rural locations (in the community not at our centres) is limited by poor or non-existent Wi-Fi/3G/4G signal.

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, rural training provider

In addition, over 50% of respondents commented that their organisation had capacity issues when planning to run e-assessment (eg rooms suitable for on-screen testing). 13% suggested that the issue was enough to stop them from offering all the e-assessment that they would like to.

These are key operational areas which are vital to any expansion of e-assessment activity and are likely, in some cases, to prevent organisations from implementing their strategies effectively.

**Awarding organisation support**

Senior IT managers were asked to identify any technology issues with the e-assessment provided by their awarding organisation(s). The responses were primarily related to the e-testing services that are directly supplied by the awarding organisation, who take responsibility for their delivery.

Each provider has their own software, procedures and processes. These are not common and we juggle multiple requirements and conflicts on a regular basis.

Senior IT manager, FE college

All respondents were asked about general support from their awarding organisations. They were each given the opportunity to rate up to five organisations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This outcome suggests that up to three quarters of respondents rated their support as at least “good”.

The relatively small number of comments provided mainly described the reason for answering ‘poor’. However, taken as a whole, respondents did not indicate any specific poor quality support either from a particular awarding organisation or in relation to a particular piece of software. The conclusion must be that the individual organisations had a specific issue that was poorly handled on that occasion.
**Digital Literacy**

The survey asked two specific questions about staff and learner digital literacy—both essential if organisations are to achieve their development goals:

» “How would you rate the overall digital literacy of your organisation’s staff in respect of e-assessment?”

» “How would you rate the overall digital literacy of your learners in respect of e-assessment?”

Whilst just under half of respondents considered their organisation’s staff to be capable or very capable in terms of their digital literacy, this left the other half claiming that their staff lacked some capability (47%) or with very poor capability (4%). Rather surprisingly, their learners had only slightly higher levels of digital literacy; 53% seen as capable or very capable and 47% as lacking capability.

Several interviewees made the observation that learners’ digital capabilities, while often very good in terms of their social use of technology, lacked many of the skills needed to use e-assessment, especially when creating appropriate evidence for e-portfolios. Respondents rated their learners’ digital literacy as:

» Very capable (11%)
» Capable (36%)
» Lacking some capability (47%)
» Very poor capability (4%)

This suggests that teachers/trainers need to spend some time developing learners’ ability to use e-assessment effectively, particularly in the creation of e-portfolios.

Comments on capability development included:

*(We need) time, 1 to 1 coaching and ongoing support from others who are capable. This is an ongoing program to ensure all staff move forward.*

Teacher/trainer, large sixth form college

We are currently running staff, learner and employer surveys and skills checks to help us develop appropriate staff development to meet the needs of learners and employers.

Learning technologist, adult education service

There is dedicated Training Team available throughout the whole academic year to all teaching staff. We provide group training and one-to-one training either through managers organising or by request. The difficulty is in getting staff to engage.

Continuing professional development/assessment systems manager, FE college

We offer CPD for tutors - on how to access the VLE, we build courses for them, offer them loans of equipment such as digicams, voice recorders, training on how to embed apps into learning, so that learners become used to using equipment and technology in their learning and can transfer those skills outside the classroom.

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, adult education service
The future

We asked respondents a number of question relating to their perceived view of the future of e-assessment in their organisation.

Inevitably, particularly in relation to education and technology, there is an element of crystal ball gazing and also some wish lists. Nevertheless, the responses give a view of where e-assessment might be going and the ability of organisations and other stakeholders to manage those possible developments.

**Technology**

In relation to the use of technology in assessment generally, they were asked: “Considering the development of your organisation’s use of e-assessment over the next five years (to 2020), from the following please select up to five statements that you feel are most likely to contribute to the achievement of the FELTAG proposal for increasing the use of e-assessment?” Respondents could select up to five statements (see figure 2).

Not surprisingly, well over half expect increases in the use of e-assessment generally, but also how it’s used and where it’s used. This has significant implications for

<table>
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<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We would expect to see more innovative use of e-assessment across some qualifications</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>We would expect to see more use of e-portfolios</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>We would expect to see more use of assessment opportunities outside the classroom</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<tr>
<td>We would expect to see an increase in the volume of use but using similar systems</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>We would expect to see more use of on screen testing</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>We would expect to see the introduction of assessment systems in addition to on screen testing and e-portfolios</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases in the use of e-assessment will also come from those awarding organisations and professional bodies not currently using e-assessment</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases in the use of e-assessment will come mainly from those awarding organisations already using it</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We would expect to see few changes from our current activity</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We would expect to see a reduction in or changes to the qualifications we offered if e-assessment was mandatory</td>
<td>12%</td>
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**Figure 2**

*NB. The total is more than 100% as respondents could choose up to five statements.*
resources, access to IT and the ability of staff and learners to benefit from that increased use. While most people expect to see the increased use through existing systems, nearly a third expect to be using other assessment methodologies as well. There is little expectation (12%) that organisations can get out of using e-assessment by dropping qualifications that require it.

Overall, organisations feel their strategic direction for e-assessment should be trying:

- To achieve more flexibility than offered by paper-based assessment (82%)
- To improve learner experience of assessment (82%)
- To increase the overall use of technology in the organisation to lower costs/improve efficiency (73%)
- To receive results more quickly (59%)

Respondents’ reasons for these choices included:

> It is more cost effective to work online and it would engage students more and they would be more productive. It also speeds up assessment.
> Classroom teacher/trainer, FE college

> As we are only now starting fully on the e-assessment journey I would expect to see an increase in usage as staff become more proficient in the use of the technology and as awarding organisations bring their online systems up to date to meet the needs of the current technology.
> Head of organisation, training provider

Awarding organisations not moving towards e-assessment are going to appear dated very soon […] I expect pressure to be brought to them by the Government.
Continuing professional development/assessment systems manager, FE college

Most organisations use or are planning to implement new technologies to support an increased use of technology by both staff and learners. Organisations were asked a series of questions about specific technology developments, many of which could have a significant impact on the development and deployment of e-assessment.

To the wider question “Do you see the availability of technology in your organisation as a barrier to your future e-assessment developments?” 60% answered ‘yes’. Supporting comments included:

> Lack of investment in hardware which leads to inability to use current software technologies.
> Teacher/trainer, FE college

There is little doubt that without some investment, coupled with new approaches, some organisations will struggle to implement the likely change in assessment technologies over the next five years.

Just over half (53%) of respondents suggested that their organisation planned to implement new technologies over the next two to three years to improve capability. Of the 47% that did not, there were a significant number of ‘Don’t knows’ (41%). This suggests that many organisations, at the very least, have not communicated specific development plans to staff, even if they do exist.
We asked organisations about their use or proposed use of new technologies or approaches to improve the availability and reliability of their technology systems.

Firstly, they were asked “Do you plan to implement new technologies over the next 2-3 years that will improve your e-assessment capability?”

The responses were:

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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>44%</td>
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Some respondents went on to identify the types of technology planned, for example:

- Improved Wi-fi services across all campus sites
- Services that support mobile devices and particularly BYOD
- New network infrastructure and use of 4G
- Use of online assessment systems eg e-portfolios and online learning platforms
- Effective use of cloud services and storage
- Greater use of initial diagnostic software

In all cases, the question was “Does your organisation use/expect to use these services?” Respondents could tick more than one box.

- Cloud technology for storing learner files including assessment: Only one person was unsure whether their organisation would be using cloud technology
- Open access Wi-Fi available to learners and staff for both the organisation’s IT equipment and BYOD. Again only one person was unsure that this was planned. For half the respondents, this was a clear part of their e-strategy
- Use of local 4G/3G services: Less confidence here with only half using or planning to use

Interviewees were all asked about BYOD with the general view being that, provided the classroom teacher approved, they could be used for specific learning and assessment purposes. One FE manager commented that their local schools were so tough on the issue of phones in the classroom that college staff found it difficult to get learners to understand their value. For example, they could be used for capturing digital portfolio evidence. All suggested that without BYOD, they would struggle to equip learners with the necessary kit. Respondents said that, if this was the case, learners in their organisation would not be able to undertake some of the more appropriate, valid assessment activities and collection of competence evidence. “In many cases the learners possess high quality IT kit in their pockets – it would be perverse not to make use of it”, was the gist of many conversations.
Qualifications
Respondents were asked to identify any subjects/sectors/specific qualifications they thought would be ideal for e-assessment. Their responses cover a very wide range including a number that simply said “all subjects”. The most common subjects suggested were:

- Any ICT
- Business/business administration/management
- English and maths functional skills
- Apprenticeship skills
- Sciences
- Engineering including motor vehicles, construction
- Hairdressing
- Health and social care
- Art and design including graphic design and photography

Comments included:

_There is no reason why e-assessment can’t form a part of all qualification based subjects as long as it is flexible to meet the needs of all learners._

Learning technologist, adult education service

_Learners are adept at technology - it will be their preferred choice to learn and to be assessed. IT facilities tend to be available at the workplace to allow remote learning and assessment._

ILT co-ordinator, adult education service
Visions

At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were asked two final questions:

“What do you believe are the most significant barriers to e-assessments over the next 5 years?”

“Assuming the removal of barriers, what would be your vision for assessment and the use of technology over the next five years?”

Three themes dominated responses to the first question:

» Funding
» Staff and learner capabilities
» Culture

Capability of both staff and students.  
Classroom teacher/trainer, FE college

The (unproven) belief amongst those driving the agenda that everyone (particularly those under 25) have an extensive working knowledge and ability in the use of ICT. A particular concern of mine is that the tech used by our students is often very far removed from the tech used for assessment. Plus anyone not able to touch type will be at a huge disadvantage when it comes to ‘written’ exams.

Head of department, large further and higher education college

For the second question, responses included:

» Greater use of advanced systems that exploit what computers can do (much more than are offered by VLEs and most commercial systems) as part of a blended assessment regime
» Exponential growth would occur once staff realise the administrative time savings and power of analysis
» Every learner has access to on-demand e-assessment at a time and place when they require it
» A greater take-up of e-assessment options
» Match questions to Bloom’s taxonomy to achieve the highest level of automation possible
» We intend to offer flexible, on-demand assessment at a variety of locations and times to suit the requirements of candidates and centres
» Increased opportunities to e-assess in class and in the home/workplace
» To use wherever appropriate
» To see a move towards greater use of technology for assessment and a reduction in traditional methods
» Offer a blended e-learning and assessment model for all of our qualification courses. This would open up the way for more remote assessment but this should not be the only method as it is important that learners have face to face contact. More achievements as learners will get quicker feedback on their progress
» To continue with 100% e-assessment and testing but on more platforms and with unrestricted connectivity
» Positive outcome and increase productivity
» A blended approach to assessment that meets individual learner needs where the staff have more tools available to them to carry out assessment using a wide range of methods
Conclusions

There are significant examples of good practice and successful implementation emanating from the survey but there are challenges and issues to be addressed to take the overall use of technology to the next level – one where technology enabled assessment is seen, where appropriate, as the norm across the sector.

There is little doubt that the use of e-assessment has continued to grow successfully in the seven years since the last survey of a similar nature was conducted: Becta E-Assessment Readiness Survey, AlphaPlus on behalf of Becta, May 2008. This includes further use of e-testing, higher take-up of e-portfolios and the use of learner tracking systems.

Nevertheless, the survey evidences that not all of this activity is happening comprehensively or evenly across the FE and skills community.

**Technology challenges**

Whereas seven years ago there were significant problems identified with connectivity, the reliability of some systems and the suitability of some hardware, these technology issues have virtually disappeared. The issues that remain are:

1. The capacity of organisations to fund the technology required for further developments
2. Continued concerns about culture, and a lack of staff and learner digital competence related to assessment

Some of the technology issues can be addressed through ‘smart’ developments eg cloud technology, encouraging the use of BYOD and so on. However, some comments from respondents suggest that their organisations are not catching up with current capacity issues let alone addressing how to provide future assessment capacity. Organisations are going to have to find some kick-start funding. The real benefits of e-assessment can only be realised if appropriate investment is made in technology and CPD.

The real benefits of e-assessment can only be realised if appropriate investment is made in technology and CPD.

**Cultural challenges**

The cultural issue is more difficult to address, and the positive pedagogical case for e-assessment needs to be made in addition to making the case for technological and efficiency reasons. A strong case can be made for well-designed e-assessment to increase validity and reliability. The Jisc initiated FE and Skills Online Academy will be an ideal opportunity to engage with staff and increase their confidence in using the technology.

In many cases, staff are not yet convinced that e-assessment is going to be as widespread as suggested. Organisations (government departments, BIS and DfE, awarding organisations, Ofqual, Ofsted) which set policy and direction need to understand that to change this cultural view, they need to give out a positive message – a neutral one helps some people to argue for the status quo.
However, the survey also identifies some important differences in development between the various technology enabled assessments.

**e-Testing and e-portfolios**

The e-testing market (not tools) has become semi-mature with most awarding organisations in the vocational qualifications market offering e-testing, primarily to assess knowledge. This survey suggests that outstanding issues specifically associated with e-testing are primarily capacity issues – IT hardware, suitable accommodation for invigilated tests and managing the examination process. Where issues do occur with the technology, they often stem from wanting to run e-tests away from the main test centre.

This is contrasted with the e-portfolio market place, which offers a varied range of products so it isn’t always as well understood by organisations. The growth in the use of e-portfolios has been significant, with less top down implementation than for e-testing. Take-up has, in many cases, been a decision for the staff concerned, rather than an organisation wide decision.

However, pedagogically e-testing hasn’t gone as far as it could in enhancing the learning experience, and could go much further in terms of moving beyond ‘paper on screen’. Whereas e-portfolios are enabling new and more pedagogically enhanced approaches to assessment. It is important to note that these differences reflect the need for different approaches to gain buy in from the community and maximise the benefits that technology can offer.

e-Testing innovation needs to be driven by the awarding organisations, for e-portfolios it will be primarily provider organisations that have the power to make decisions around use, but importantly acceptance is needed from awarding organisations to facilitate their take up. More could be done to promote and communicate the benefits and opportunities offered by these tools. All awarding organisations should now be encouraged to insist on e-portfolios, where appropriate, and assessors and verifiers should be able to remotely access to improve the efficiency of the assessment process. Digitally produced evidence already forms much of what is in paper based portfolios and significant amounts of evidence is more valid and reliable in a digital format and it provides the biggest opportunity to bring together blended learning with its associated assessment.

**Next steps**

The survey outcomes suggest that the next steps and effort need to concentrate on:

- A dialogue across the sector stakeholders about the end-to-end benefits of e-assessment including being able to evaluate the benefits to learners, improvements to achievement and potential efficiency gains
- Demonstrating the value and role of e-assessment, particularly formative assessment, in providing learners with an employment related experience e.g. through the use of work related technologies
- Engaging, through Jisc, with a range of stakeholders to address the challenges and agree the key actions that need to be taken to improve the uptake and use of e-assessment. These bodies include Ofqual, college and training body organisations, awarding organisations, Federation of Awarding Bodies and the e-Assessment Association. There is a real need for all organisations involved in the sector to be consistent and positive in their message to organisations and to ensure any potential barriers to uptake are removed. In conjunction with stakeholders, a review of the international standard for e-testing, ISO/IEC 23988:2007, would help support organisations to
deliver their e-testing as effectively as possible.

» Engaging with skills sector staff through the Jisc initiated FE and Skills Online Academy to identify the key issues that staff find challenging. In particular, they should engage on those issues which lead to their lack of confidence in the use of e-assessment generally

» Including within the FE and Skills Online Academy a range of good practice examples and other support to help improve staff confidence and digital and assessment literacies

Lastly, vocational education and training has undergone significant changes over the last few years both in its structure and the curriculum and qualifications offered. Some stability would no doubt support organisations to plan their use of technology in these areas.

Thanks to all those who contributed to the survey.
Appendix of further comments

The following is a further selection of comments, taken from both the survey and interviews.

Initial findings, overall use and experience

Additional comments include:

*Our client learners are external to our organisation and they like the fact that they do not have to travel to be assessed.*

**Teacher/trainer, national sector training provider with multiple locations**

*The students achieve and have a good experience. They particularly like the assessments that have immediate results.*

**Examination administrator, large FE college**

*We all embrace technology and have done for many years. All staff are competent with all aspects of e-assessment.*

**Head of organisation, training organisation**

Less positive comments included:

*It works very well when working!*  
**Examinations administrator, FE college**

*Mixed use of e-portfolios. Have tried several and there is still a mixed use (in the college). Now using one system for tracking and moving to Moodle.*

**Senior IT manager, FE college**

*Lincolnshire broadband speed is slow and this impacts on e-assessment.*  
**Senior curriculum and assessment manager, FE college**

**Strategies and impacts**

Respondents provided a considerable amount of comment on these impacts including those classed as ‘other’:

*Cost saving on travel in particular as we work across rural locations.*

**Head of organisation, skills training provider**

*Post-course feedback. The impact has been a spread via word of mouth leading to a greater take-up of the e-assessment options as opposed to the traditional classroom.*

**Teacher/trainer, national sector training provider with multiple locations**

*I have spoken to all our apprentices who inform us that they generally prefer online activities.*

**Teacher/trainer, small FE college**

*We utilise several reports showing progress, first time pass rates, hours spent learning, learner surveys etc to see how changes were impacting the learners and have also used the feedback from Ofsted - changes made have really assisted us with our recent (last week - not published [at date of survey!]) visit.*

**Funding and human resources analytics, international hospitality and catering sector training provider**
The impact was that we could offer on-demand tests with timely resits. We measured the impact on the number of timely achievements.

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, training provider

Learner voice, external examiner and verifier reports reviews with course teams and results

Teacher/trainer, rural specialist FE college

Impact of FELTAG

Many respondents commented that the FELTAG report was one of many drivers that were pushing the organisation to consider how they used technology.

FELTAG has informed the new strategy.

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, Youth Development Trust

Increased urgency but we need to seek a way of meeting FELTAG despite the wishes of some of our learners so adoption will need to be further explored and implemented with consideration to the learners.

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, adult education provider

It (FELTAG) will help decision making.

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, training provider

Others were less clear on the role of FELTAG:

Still being talked about.

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, FE College

Not heard of FELTAG report

Head of organisation, small training provider

Barriers and challenges

Further comments on the barriers and challenges to greater use of e-assessment included:

No funding for development.

Classroom teacher/trainer, small training provider
Staff do not always like change, and there is not a clear strategy for how it would all work. Also, the college limits access to Moodle and the like for those of us working off campus.

Classroom teacher/trainer, FE college

The main issue is regarding training - we have a Moodle virtual learning environment which is clunky and not intuitive to both staff and students - I suggested iTunes.

Classroom teacher/trainer, large FE college

e-Assessment not driven as a priority or requirement by the centre, more as a requirement from awarding organisations.

Examinations Administrator, sixth form college

Although e-assessment is liked the provision of testing facilities is expensive in an area of education (FE) that is facing large cuts.

Examinations Administrator, large FE college

Although we have been developing the e-assessment in our organisation it would be good if there was clear guidance on what is acceptable to the Skills Funding Agency in terms of audit requirement and also that awarding organisations embraced it fully with standards verifiers able to do more remote sampling etc. Additional funding would mean that we could develop the use of wider technologies for our staff and learners.

Head of organisation, training provider

We only have a part-time IT engineer and under-developed IT resources and a limited internet speed.

Head of subject department, inner city/urban FE college

It’s not as high on the agenda as it should be, we’re just skirting around the edges with it at present.

Learning technologist, FE college

Often it is assessors who are the barrier not the learners.

Head of learning technology, training and consultancy provider

We would like to use formal e-assessment more widely, but providers […] require a minimum number of learners or minimum spend.

Head of learning, training provider

Staff are required to learn new ways of operating, which causes distress, when there are other pressures on their time eg quality, targets. Funding has been cut year on year, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to manage the budget and investment in new technologies is a considerable cost. The expertise within the organisation to suggest the investment, the constant changing demands placed on the organisation and in the technology world only causes further dilemma and procrastination.

Head of learning, large training provider

We are unable to secure Senior Management approval to launch a college-wide approach to introducing e-portfolios and supply equipment eg iPads mainly due to financial restrictions.

Quality manager, large urban FE college
Access to internet a big hurdle for many learners as well as access to the training centre facilities.

Trainer/assessor, care sector training provider

The management don’t understand what is required or why (we are) using it, unfortunately our management don’t teach at all and this is a huge barrier.

Course co-ordinator, large sixth form college

We have one dedicated exam room for e-assessment and don’t have the space or resources to expand this.

Senior manager for assessment and curriculum, rural FE college

Teachers are often reluctant to embrace new approaches. It takes time to develop e-assessments but there is no obvious funding to support this. We have a finite number of computers/devices available for e-assessment. It would be helpful if there were clear directives and awarding bodies were as consistent in their approaches to e-assessment as they are to exam protocols.

Senior manager for assessment and curriculum, small town FE college

Operational and technological barriers

As noted in the main report, respondents cited a number of challenges that would need addressing if their organisations were to develop and bring their plans and strategies to fruition. These included:

If we do not have IT support available for failed systems then we may have to cancel training courses.

Teacher/trainer, national sector training provider

Our IT department limits what we can do.

Teacher/trainer, FE college

We find that not having support into the evening and at weekend makes running tests to suit learners difficult.

Examinations administrator, large FE college

Broadband in some areas is poor and this affects what can be achieved.

Head of organisation, training provider

No support onsite on some days of the week and all evening sessions.

Head of subject department, unitary authority adult education provider

We have a risk averse corporate IT Service that has difficulty in separating data security and integrity from the requirements of public access for teaching, learning and assessment.

Learning technologist, adult education service

Customers are external so if there is no network then we are unable to provide learning.

Teacher/trainer, national sector training provider

PCs with low processing power cannot cope with demands. Wi-Fi at college is excellent and reliable.

Teacher/trainer, urban FE college

Ageing equipment, lack of funding for new resources. Replacement of networked, stand-alone machines with virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) machines. Replacement of printers in rooms with corridor photocopiers (there are some exams which require printers in the room).

Examinations administrator, FE college
We have a limited number of PCs available so can only run 30 tests at any one time; at peak times this is not sufficient.

Examinations administrator, large FE college

Current Wi-Fi is slow where available and [there is] limited availability in the community venues.

Head of subject department, adult education service

The corporate Wi-Fi is capped for (the) number of users county-wide so is not reliable.

Learning technologist, adult education service

Not enough technology, not the right tools, not fit for purpose.

Learning technologist, adult education service

If staff perceive kit as being unreliable this has an impact on their willingness to engage with e-assessment

Assessment systems manager, FE college

Having enough devices that are of good quality and having the spaces that conform to online exam conditions is challenging.

Senior IT manager, FE college

Digital literacy
Respondents identified further tactics for supporting staff/learner digital literacy in their organisations.

On line training can help (webinars / message forums etc). The main task is to get suitable software that we can ALL use.

Classroom teacher/trainer, training provider

Hands-on plus a requirement from management to use the system as an essential part of (their) role.

Classroom teacher/trainer, urban FE college

Employing at least one full time educational technologist, providing time for enthusiastic staff to develop e-resources, providing training for the whole staff.

Classroom teacher/trainer, large sixth form college

(We use) Online courses and resources delivered during staff CPD events and learner tutorials.

Head of subject department, FE college

Workshops, sharing of best practice.

Head of subject department, training provider

A need to have more learner-centred support services, not just for when issues arise but to drive innovation at that level.

Learning technologist, FE college

Time to develop staff competency and resources. Time/opportunity to then develop learners’ skills where needed in the classroom.

Manager, community learning service

I’m developing a digital literacy course via Moodle over the summer to address student shortcomings, which I’m hoping will prompt the
organisation to address potential gaps in staff knowledge as well.

Moodle administrator, sixth form college

Digital literacy skills and formal training is by far the best way for staff to improve their skills. Unfortunately, resourcing this in terms of time or being able to fund staff qualifications is very challenging. The same is true for learners.

Senior IT manager, FE college

Technology: the future
We asked respondents a number of questions relating to their perceived view of the future of e-assessment in their organisations.

We have an IT design and development department and are constantly looking at ways we can use e-technologies inside our own provision […] We need to embrace change and support the staff in managing the use of a wide range of e-technologies. We have worked on a pilot for e-learning for functional skills which means we have a large number of effective online resources which the internal staff have been tasked to use over the next 12 months.

Classroom teacher/trainer, training provider

e-Portfolios and distance learning/assessment are here to stay and could be very beneficial. We need more simple/up-to-date software that benefits the student as well as the training organisation. Too often the e-portfolio satisfies the Skills Funding Agency rather than improves the learning experience.

Classroom teacher/trainer, training provider

There’s certainly a lot of opportunity to enhance learning through the use of electronic assessment, but it will be a slow burner as the culture, infrastructure and strategies currently in place will need plenty of adapting for this to really take off.

Learning technologist, FE college

The general direction is in the growth of digital technologies to make savings and efficiencies. However, there is no formal strategy at this time.

Learning technologist, FE college

The maturity of our e-assessment journey means that strategically we have to consolidate holistic use and then move to more innovative/different systems. EVERYTHING has to be measured and therefore the opportunity for innovation in this FE college is not high so pressure will need to come from awarding bodies for any impact to be made.

Learning technologist, FE college

Our focus is on increased apprenticeships and gaining efficiencies for ourselves and our customers.

Head of learning technologies, training provider

There is a clear commitment and enthusiasm across the board to increase the use of e-assessment.

Quality assurance, FE college

We need to make the most of the current systems (unless there is a fundamental shift for example abandonment of the VLE).

Classroom teacher/trainer, specialist rural FE college
Change is always happening and time becomes more of an issue. With more electronic assistance learners can be given more opportunities to show improvements between visits and upload additional supporting evidence. This provides a more rounded evidence portfolio. We need to find ways of working smarter and time and money constraints are close to breaking point.

Quality assurance, FE college

Current online assessment methods are fairly predictable and it is likely that there will be more innovative approaches introduced to meet the needs of different types of qualifications. On screen testing already exists and no doubt this will increase. Assessment systems will extend the types of assessment beyond current systems. Awarding bodies not currently using online assessment will feel obligated to introduce forms of e-assessment so that they meet the FELTAG requirements and also to reflect the different types of qualifications requiring e-assessment.

Senior curriculum and assessment manager, FE college

The above will build the ‘digital culture’ that is much needed in the sector.

Senior IT development manager, FE college

To the question “Do you see the availability of technology in your organisation as a barrier to your future e-assessment developments?” 60% answered ‘yes’. Supporting comments included:

Ageing equipment, lack of funding for new resources.

Examination administrator, FE college

Poor network infrastructure, tools and support

Learning technologist, FE college

The following are comments on which subject areas would be most appropriate for e-assessment:

Opportunities with all, as increase of accessible technologies and platforms support these methods. There’s enough variety of e-assessment to support all subject and qualification types at all levels, with the right support.

Learning technologist, FE college

We currently have a hybrid system of paper assessment and electronic tracking, if the electronic side could be improved there would be no need for the paper-based assessments.

Learning technologist, FE college

Colleges that we work with are increasingly embracing online assessment and teaching and so our qualifications should as well. Large (learner) portfolios suit e-portfolios and assessment so feedback can be given at regular intervals.

Account manager, awarding organisation

(For digital photography) Digital photographs and exchangeable image file format (EXIF) data provides much of the required evidence.

E-learning co-ordinator, adult education service
Visions

At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were asked two final questions:

“What do you believe are the most significant barriers to e-assessments over the next five years?”

“Assuming the removal of barriers, what would be your vision for assessment and the use of technology over the next five years?”

Staff - embracing the changes that are inevitable & learning new methods.
Classroom teacher/trainer, training provider

Culture of not understanding that it’s a valid and good option.
Classroom teacher trainer, FE college

Government funding of sixth form colleges, conservative behaviour of the college.
Classroom teacher/trainer, large sixth form college

Funding for resources.
Examination administrator, FE college

Staff attitude.
Head of organisation, training provider

Colleges are struggling to finance new technology measures and continue to face cuts in funding; another significant barrier is staff engagement in new technologies.
Head of department, FE college

Continuously changing policies and drivers in the sector prevent a proper focus and investment in several key areas with the limited and reducing resources available to providers. Which of the many top priorities are the top, top priorities without taking time and resource away from the learners?
Manager, community learning service

Time and funds for staffing to prepare materials for e-assessment. Ensuring there is no collusion or misconduct will be increasingly challenging. The risk of remote access to exams leading to compromise for academic conduct of exams.
Senior curriculum and assessment manager, FE college

The digital literacy of learners and staff. For assessment to be ‘e’, teaching and learning (in fact, the culture of the organisation) needs to be ‘e’. Upskilling staff and learners is a challenge.
Senior IT manager, FE college

Inflexible and overly complex systems. Systems that don’t prepare the learner for work or further learning and are there just to tick administrative boxes. Access to equipment and data charges in deprived areas.
Senior IT manager, FE college

Shifting education structures and targets, staff buy in, poverty limiting access to services (eg BYOD)
Senior IT manager, FE college
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