Ofqual have published the report of their review into the barriers to online and on-screen assessment for high stakes qualifications such as GSCEs and A Levels.

IT provision, security and staffing issues are some of the barriers to the adoption of online and on-screen assessments in England. This review is in part a response to suggestions from some stakeholders that these assessment methods could be used to mitigate risks around disruption to summer 2021 exams.


The Dods summary of the report content follows below.

**Barriers and challenges identified**

- **IT provision in schools and colleges**
  - a lack of enough devices of a consistent specification for whole cohorts to sit assessments at the same time
  - insufficient or unreliable internet and local network capabilities
  - insufficient staff with the expertise or capacity to support the adoption and ongoing use of new online or on-screen assessments
  - a lack of physical spaces with the electrical and network facilities suitable for large cohorts to take assessments on devices concurrently
  - insufficient ability of the variable infrastructure to manage security risks
- **Implementation challenges**
  - gradual adoption, typically involving dual running of paper and on-screen assessments, risks unfair advantage or disadvantage to groups of students
  - a national approach introduces increased challenges with the physical estate and IT constraints within schools and colleges, and heightens the risks associated with large scale IT change
  - concern in stakeholder groups essential to the success of any deployment, and in broader public opinion
  - lack of appetite or demand from schools and colleges to transition to online and on-screen assessment
  - a consequent absence of commercial or strategic benefit for awarding organisations to being first to implement
- **Ensuring fair treatment of all students and cohort of students**
  - lack of established methods to prevent unequal opportunities for students to practise on the relevant software or devices creating unfairness
  - lack of established methods to prevent unequal performance of different devices in assessment conditions creating unfairness for students without access to the most up to date technology
• lack of established methods to develop appropriate adjustments for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) - although it is noted that a number of current arrangements use on-screen assessment as an adjustment and that appropriate adjustments are in place in many qualifications outside the scope of this review

• lack of established methods to manage the impact of any mode effect during transition, in the event of ‘dual running’

Potential measures for overcoming barriers:

• Jurisdiction wide initiatives led by a sponsoring national or regional government or awarding organisation, often in collaboration – which feature: investment in school/college infrastructure and online or on-screen systems, well considered risk appetite including an acceptance that things may go wrong, and system leadership

• A vision that assessing on-screen or online matches wider societal changes and needs, including those of students and employers and that the anticipated benefits justify the investment and required appetite for risk

• Redesign or reconsideration of what should be assessed to forms which support on-screen or online assessment methods

• Significant engagement and communication activities with key stakeholders, often inviting early adopters to play an influential part in the roll out of programmes or pilots

• Thorough testing and piloting of new software and systems used

• Practice platforms for students to become familiar and confident in the use of new software and devices

• A high degree of student input during transition

• Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities between all those with a role in successful delivery including schools, colleges, awarding organisations, government, regulators, and teachers

• Clear advice and support for teachers, IT support staff, exams officers and invigilators on expectations of them prior to and on the day of the assessment

• Robust disaster recovery and risk management plans and mitigations, which stakeholders have confidence in, if things go wrong