

Barriers to online and on-screen assessment

Ofqual have [published](#) the report of their **review into the barriers to online and on-screen assessment** for high stakes qualifications such as GCSEs 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.

Briefing paper here: <https://bit.ly/34bncDp>

Full detailed report here: <https://bit.ly/3a7LfqH>

[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