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ACCEPTANCE AND USAGE OF E-ASSESSMENT FOR UK AWARDING BODIES – A RESEARCH STUDY

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Acceptance and Usage of e-Assessment for UK Awarding Bodies – a Research Study

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Abstract

This research provides an exploration of the UK e-Assessment market, in relation to the UK Awarding Bodies, comparing findings with those of twelve months ago. It also elucidates on the key areas that have emerged since the first research was conducted.

This provides an insight into the remaining drivers and barriers to the adoption of e-Assessment, but also the widespread acceptance and adoption in the UK.

With 81% of all recognised Awarding Bodies being interviewed, this study is verging on an Awarding Body e-Assessment census based on sound research principles which will lead to continuing e-Assessment development.

The level of e-Assessment industry knowledge and uptake of programs within UK Awarding Bodies is at a much more advanced position compared to the previous research findings. The pace of market change has clearly quickened. It is possible to state that these findings will allow Awarding Bodies to revisit their thoughts on e-Assessment, altering the pace of market maturity in the short to medium term.

Questions related to topics such as psychometrics, use of multiple choice questions for higher levels of learning and e-Assessment location preference, have provided responses which give a sign-post for the key emergent market needs.

Overview

Using the previous study as a benchmark and noting the changes in the regulatory environment and further exploration of e-Assessment issues by the QCA, it was decided to consider the acceptance and usage of e-Assessment.

The new study would once again consult the QCA recognised UK Awarding Bodies and other key stakeholders as to their level of acceptance and usage of e-Assessment. Within this market, there are a handful of UK organisations,

outside of the UK Awarding Body field, having great e-Assessment experience and using ‘mature systems.’ Similar to the previous study, it was important to capture the input of these organisations at the qualitative stage, so that the quantitative phase could be as fully informed as possible.

The idea of a ‘census’ of the 115 UK Awarding Bodies recognised by QCA was retained with the contacts being those who have a specific responsibility for their organisation’s exam or qualification system.

Number of Quantitative Respondents

93 respondents from 115 Awarding Bodies (currently accredited by QCA) responded to the quantitative phase of the research. This covers 81% of the research universe. This exceeds the 87 respondents from 116 Awarding Bodies from the previous study.

Key Findings

The headline finding from this study is that 38% of Awarding Bodies surveyed currently use e-Assessment to deliver up to 60% of their assessment programme. If the rate of change remains the same, e-Assessment will soon be adopted by over 50% of Awarding Bodies: a clear majority. e-Assessment has now achieved ‘acceptability’ within the marketplace with strong majority verdicts on understanding, acceptance and usage.

The key benefits of current e-Assessment are now being understood as more organisations implement the changes. Market movement and increasing recognition of factors such as ease of administration and time flexibility are hallmarks of systems that have successfully been bedded into organisations and accepted by stakeholders.

An area of business concern that was raised in the qualitative phase was the notion of e-Assessment’s return on investment (ROI). Clearly when significant resources are staked in e-Assessment, stakeholder interest in delivering organisational benefits are paramount. Seven out of ten respondents believe that e-Assessment will deliver ROI – clearly a sign of confidence in how it can improve not just the candidate experience, but also deliver efficiency savings and / or stakeholder value.

The subject of psychometrics was also flagged in the qualitative phase as being one of emergent, but increasing importance. Whilst there is limited understanding of the subject at large, this can be compared to the weak knowledge regarding item types that was highlighted in the previous study. If the positive results regarding multiple choice items is indicative of how the market can quickly assimilate e-Assessment knowledge, it would be reasonable to suggest that the market knowledge of the benefits of psychometrics in e-Assessment will rise quickly.

The focus on candidate needs is called out by a number of the findings. It is pleasing that whilst there is an acknowledgment of commercial factors,

candidate needs such as accessibility and time flexibility remain at the forefront. The importance of candidate satisfaction remains a key importance factor for Awarding Bodies.

The need to make the most appropriate and best e-Assessment choice is a suggestion arising from the strong call-out for multiple technologies conforming to agreed standards. As wider issues such as the Unique Learner Number and ID cards impact on facets such as registration, exam booking and candidate verification, the need for differing e-Assessment systems to have a mutually compatible interface point, recognised and mature e-Assessment standards will become more important. Additionally, this raises a flag to e-Assessment providers to ensure that their systems are capable of adhering to the demands of these standards.

Conclusions

The acceptance and usage of e-Assessment has clearly grown at a substantial rate compared to the previous research study. The strong confidence shown in the ability of e-Assessment to deliver return on investment is a major finding of the research. The use of psychometrics is emerging with some usage reported by Awarding Bodies. Multiple choice question usage for higher levels of learning and high stakes exams is more widely understood and acknowledged.

Disadvantages traditionally associated with e-Assessment such as cost and technical issues have decreased in importance as uptake has increased and technology has matured. In parallel, areas of risk previously thought to be inherent in e-Assessment (data security and technology in general) are not as prominent as areas which perhaps are not exclusive to e-Assessment. Candidate authenticity is a key issue called out in the findings. The needs and desires of the learner/candidate continue to be at the forefront for organisations wishing to adopt e-Assessment or already using an incumbent system.