



The Future of eAssessment:

Where Will We Be In 2027?

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Introduction

The times are changing, and so are online assessments. The pandemic has accelerated the move towards digital education, and that includes everything from higher education to professional qualifications.

Technology enables these assessments to be invigilated remotely, paving the way for formal exams to be taken on a computer, located anywhere in the world and accurately supervised via webcam.

To find out more about this changing landscape, we asked two key audiences about their experiences with online assessment platforms. **We focused our research on:**

- ✓ Individuals who had completed online assessments for professional (not educational) qualifications in the past **18** months
- ✓ Experts with experience of delivering professional qualifications **online**

The fieldwork was completed in early 2022 with 150 online surveys submitted. Subjects of assessment included accountancy, finance, IT, retail, healthcare, construction and languages. The largest percentage of respondents (34%) were in the 25-34 age bracket, with 26% aged 35-44. 64% were female and 35% male.

Our responses came from a wide range of locations; 13% of respondents lived in London, and 12% each in the South East, North West and West Midlands. Other regions, including Scotland and Wales, were also represented.

Of the online assessments taken, the highest percentage was IT (29%), followed by 15% in education and 13% in HR. Interestingly, only 3% of respondents had taken accountancy qualifications online. Of our sample, 53% took their assessments

entirely online, whereas the remaining 47% of assessments were taken mainly online.

To understand the perspective of those who deliver online assessments, we held two 30 minute interviews with experts in the accountancy and IT sectors, exploring their views on online assessment and the various teaching platforms.

Throughout the research, we were able to gain insights into how the future of online assessments could look, informing and future-proofing further innovation in the field. In this guide, we take a look at how the current landscape of online assessment could grow and change by 2027. From the current benefits and pitfalls of online assessment, to the potential for new initiatives, we offer valuable insights into the future of eAssessment.

Preconceptions and expectations

Prior to the past few years, the majority of professional qualifications would have been completed in person.

Our research found that restrictions put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were the top reason for the digitisation of the assessment (40%). Other reasons included:

- ✓ Only option available - 33%*
- ✓ Online test was available at a more suitable time/day than in-person alternative - 13%
- ✓ Place of work organised test so no alternative option - 10%
- ✓ Test centre too far away difficult to get to - 3%
- ✓ Course was 100% online - 1%

***This figure was higher for finance-related qualifications, jumping to 75%.**

Where assessments were only partly online, this was most often due to practical reasons such as the need for a hands-on exam. When the option was available, **only 13% of people** said they preferred to take exams in person.

Most candidates felt relatively comfortable about the prospect of conducting their assessment online, with the main concerns being around the potential for technical issues when setting up or taking the assessment.

Pre-assessment feelings towards the online platform

55%

Very comfortable

39%

Fairly comfortable

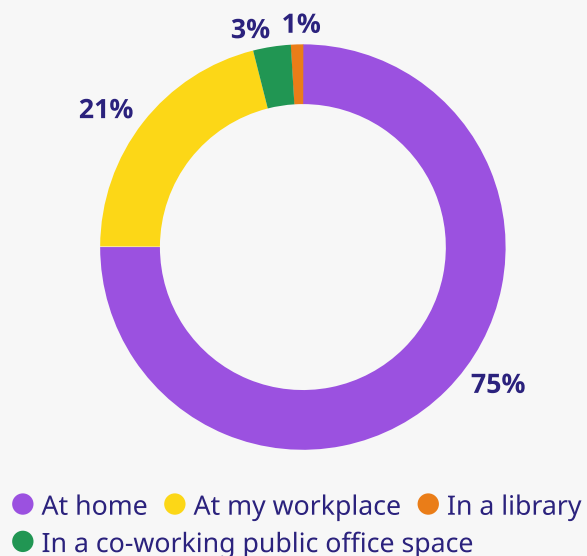
4%

Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable

2%

Fairly uncomfortable

Location of online assessment



The Student Experience

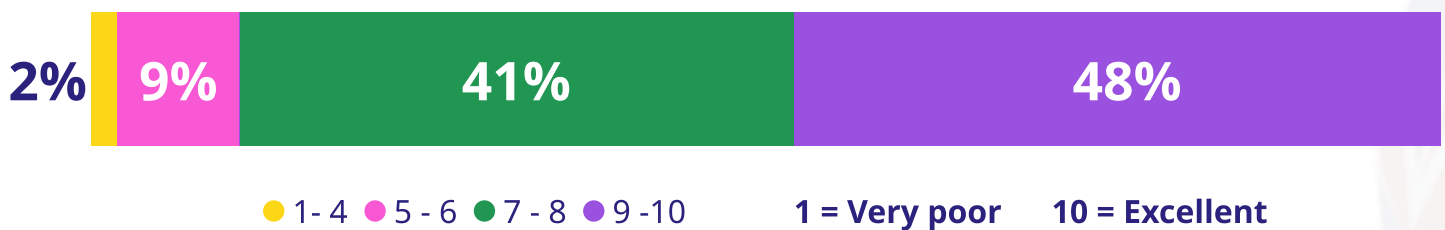
In general, the students expressed positive feedback on their experience.

However, there were some areas that the students felt could be improved upon, which offers insight into the potential for future platform innovation.

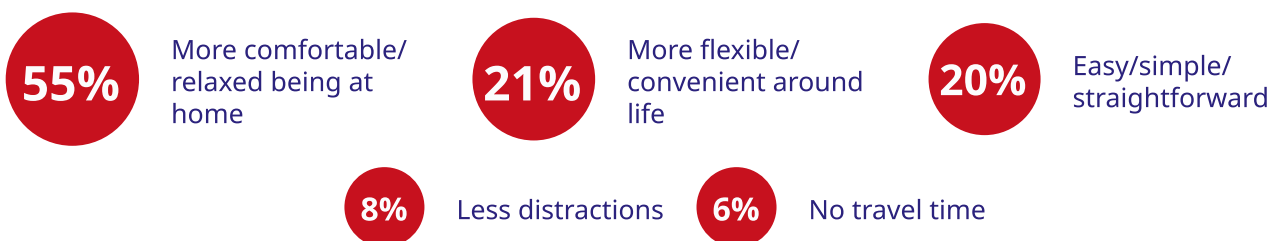
The plus side

Feedback on the user-friendliness of the online assessment platforms was generally positive, with almost half rating it at least very good (9-10), compared to approximately 1 in 10 who rated it poor to average (1-6). **The total user-friendliness came in at 89%.**

How would you rate the user-friendliness of the online assessment platform?



Our research found that the students felt more **comfortable and relaxed** during their online assessments, citing this as one of the main benefits of the digital experience. The improved comfort helped to lessen pressure on students, allowing them to feel less anxious when completing their test.



“I actually felt more comfortable being at home. I had a drink with me and being in my own surroundings put me more at ease. I normally find test conditions give me anxiety so I preferred it this way”

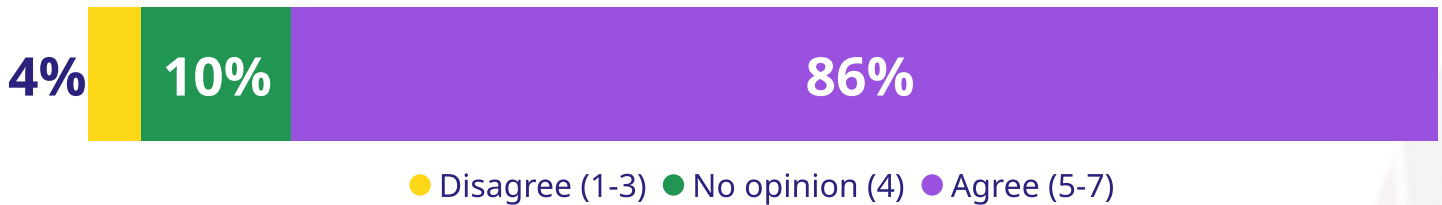
The Future of eAssessment: Where will we be in 2027?

Easy online access and flexible time frames were also positioned as positive elements of the assessment experience, meaning that learners could fit their eAssessment around their schedule and other commitments

Students commented that it took into account their circumstances and there were no distractions anywhere so it was easy to complete the assessment in one sitting.

More than half of respondents indicated that their online assessment was invigilated - an even higher number for candidates of accountancy, bookkeeping, healthcare and finance qualifications. For the majority, this process worked well and didn't impact their experience or the process.

To what extent do you agree that the online Invigilation worked well?



The flip side

While 45% said there wasn't anything they didn't like, there were some frustrations about dealing with technical problems, having less personal interaction and the intrusiveness of being digitally monitored.



Another issue was the difficulty in accessing practice papers. Where those seeking professional qualifications took practice papers online beforehand, almost a quarter found these difficult to source.

The largest complaint revolved around technical issues. Some students found the potential for technical malfunctions stressful, whereas others actually experienced some form of technical problem during their assessment. Although only 13% said they

needed technical support whilst completing their online assessment, over a quarter of these found help difficult to access and many were unsatisfied with the level of support they received.

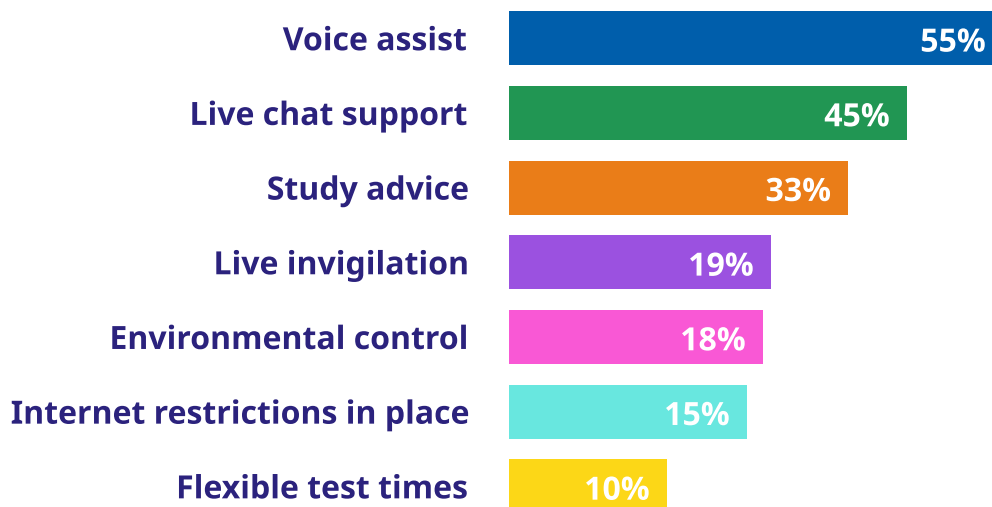
“Having to wait for technological assistance”

Future features

The majority of respondents (80%) were positive about their remote online assessment experience.

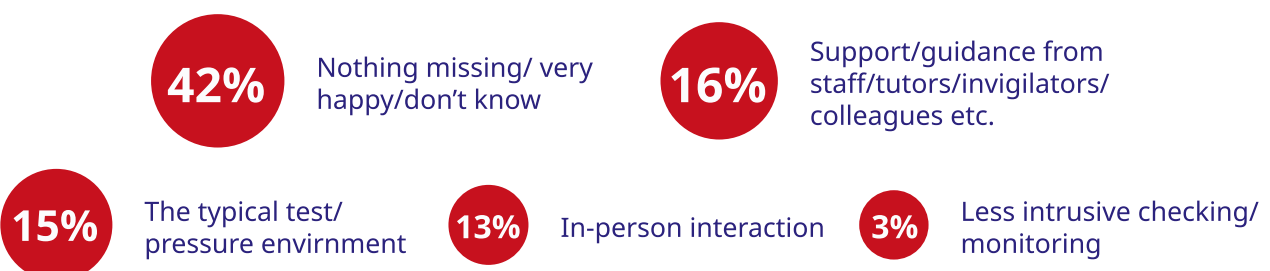
They believed the process to be better than they expected, relatively straightforward, and more of a relaxed experience than they would have in a traditional test centre.

However, the students offered interesting insights into how the online assessment platforms could be improved in the future. From technical details to more flexibility, these features included:



The future of online assessment looks bright, with **the majority of students happy to be assessed online for a professional qualification in the future.** However, there were some concerns around the level of online support and tracking software, which could be improved upon in the future.

How would you rate the user-friendliness of the online assessment platform?



What the experts say

The positives of remote online assessment



Flexibility and convenience

Much like their candidates, examination professionals no longer have to take the time to travel in order to ensure a reliable testing experience. Everything can be set up beforehand, meaning examiners can offer more flexibility and a less stressful environment for students.



Platform features

Online platforms also give teaching staff and examiners the opportunity to organise assessments in bespoke formats, allowing them to control how a student moves through a test or lecture series. They also make marking easier as it can be done by anyone across the world.



Automation and expanded volume

Automation has made assessments more accessible so that they can be taken anytime, anywhere. This has increased the number of students that can be catered for and makes it easier for staff, with the systems already being in place and a question bank centralised.

“The way that you can use online testing is brilliant because students have to complete and study one part of the course and get to a pass mark before it opens a second one. I know they’ve reached the right level of standards and I know they’re going to be ready then for the exam.”

What the experts say

The learning curve



Practical examinations

These can be difficult to do online, especially if the assessor has to pay particularly close attention to the student, like with complicated medical assessments. There's a greater risk that things may be missed if the exam is being conducted remotely, despite the invigilation technology.



New processes to learn

Students and teachers alike need to get used to new processes with online assessments. They also need to become familiar with the platforms or software that replicates their exams and lectures in an online format, which can be difficult - especially when there is limited technical support available.



Internet infrastructure

One of the main technical drawbacks of eAssessments is the level of infrastructure available in the student's region. This isn't as much of a problem in the UK but, for global organisations such as ACCA, students can have their assessments or teaching interrupted by technical issues through no fault of their own. There needs to be a technical safety net in place to protect students if this is the case to ensure a truly fair assessment.

"[Covid-19 was] a game-changer because it's going to mean that eventually the exam centres will no longer be needed. You don't need an exam centre because you can do it from home or from an office, providing you meet the conditions."

Current trends

What's happening in the online assessment world today?

The main trends highlighted by experts were improving alignment between online and face-to-face assessments, and an increase in demand driven by growth and convenience factors.

Plus, learners are beginning to demand online assessment. Learners are already starting to demand online assessment. They know that remote assessment is a

viable option, so won't tolerate courses which don't offer the choice for eAssessments - unless there is a specific reason such as a heavy proportion of practical exams. Remote assessment is becoming, and will continue to be, a competitive advantage for training providers.

The future

Experts anticipate that technology, including AI, virtual reality and data analytics, will take online assessment platforms to the next level.

Artificial intelligence could be used to mark examinations, allowing for quicker test results using word recognition and objective testing.

There's also the opportunity for greater insight into the patterns of testing behaviour to help to combat plagiarism and confirm the identities of students.

With the rise of virtual reality and platforms like the Metaverse, exams in the future could be taken in 'real virtual' environments from students' own homes, enabling the possibility for more practical examinations.

But, however the sector develops, the changes will need to be driven by the assessment providers themselves.

"The learners will simply follow what they are told. It's more for the training providers to come back and use the platform because that's how it's going to be monetised."



Online assessment platforms

- in practice

During our interviews, the experts reported good experiences with online assessment platforms and remote invigilation.

The innovative potential of eAssessment was clear to them, highlighting that the technology will only continue to improve as new providers enter the market, bringing solutions to current challenges. For example, technologies like machine learning, artificial intelligence and biometrics are likely to be employed, giving the assessor greater insight into the assessment process.

Convincing assessing bodies of the potential of eAssessment hasn't always

been straightforward, but the pandemic pushed the boundaries of our digital presence on a global scale. The transition means that more organisations are willing to embrace the technology, which offers increased opportunities for students worldwide. In remote islands in South East Asia, for example, where they don't have access to any doctors, professionals can use the technology for important on the job training, such as giving medication.

The future in focus: Where to go from here

Looking to the future, we expect eAssessment platforms to offer more diverse assessment methods, including greater opportunities for bespoke assessment creation. The issue of internet access is not directly related to the online assessment platform provider, but it is likely that provisions will be put in

place in the future to counter the effects of technological malfunctions during assessment. Finally, platform developers are continuing to prioritise user experience when creating new software. We expect to see this grow even further and include new features such as integration and exportation options.

"It needs to work first time, every time, perfectly. It must not break down!"



Next steps

There is no question that COVID-19 has accelerated the use of online assessment platforms for professional qualifications. But will this acceleration continue, and what will eAssessment look like by 2027? Will in-person exams have been phased out altogether?

Our research has shown that the majority of learners are relatively comfortable with completing assessments online, and see them as user-friendly.

Online assessments give students the benefits of convenience, flexibility and accessibility. They also reduce anxiety and pressure as the student is in a familiar environment when taking the exam.

There are some concerns, however, regarding the online assessment experience for learners in terms of technical issues and the level of support provided where these arise, particularly mid-assessment.

However, in-person assessments are still seen to be more effective in terms of providing support and interaction. Some learners can find the online invigilation experience more intrusive, or the process of ID verification.

Technological developments continue to address these concerns by improving the user experience, incorporating new and creative questioning and assessment tools and introducing more innovative technologies such as AI. In addition, diagnostic tools continue to evaluate the behaviour and performance of those taking eAssessments, offering further insight into student experience.

It is expected that demand for online assessments will only increase in the future, developing growth opportunities through market expansion and diversification into other areas.

By 2027, we expect eAssessment to become the norm. What's more, in light of the technological advances already in the pipeline, the future of eAssessment is likely to offer even greater flexibility, convenience and insights.

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