



Getting Assessment Right

**Steps to take when choosing an
assessment platform for your institution**

Table of contents

1 Introduction

3 Setting up your working groups

3 Project team

4 Steering group/committee

5 Reviewing your institution's current assessment strategy

5 What you assess and how

6 The pros and cons of your current assessment strategy

7 Comparing platforms and features

7 Deciding which features you really need

8 Comparing platforms and feature sets

11 Defining your institution's objectives for digitisation

12 Where does digitisation fit with your assessment strategy?

13 What you hope to achieve with digitisation

14 What should be digitised

15 Beginning consultations

Introduction

In the past few decades, our lives have become increasingly digitised and education is no exception. Higher education institutions around the world have gradually implemented virtual learning environments, learning management systems, career-relevant online tools and other electronic content.

The pandemic has only served to speed up this digital revolution and many universities have rushed to close any remaining gaps so that learning could continue even when lecture halls were closed. For many, assessment was one of the areas that was far from fully digitised with institutions either still using pen and paper or a mix of online tools.

With many other aspects of teaching and learning taking place online, it makes sense to have a dedicated solution for assessment. After all, assessment isn't separate from learning but an important part of a student's studies: allowing them to get feedback on their work and to prove competence to future institutions or employers.

But it can be difficult to know where to start when choosing and implementing a new assessment solution. It's a significant change that demands time and resources and affects many different stakeholders across the institution. So, it goes without saying that it's important to get it right.

This toolkit is designed to help you consider what your assessment needs are and how to map them to the right tool. You'll also find tips for engaging stakeholders and building a focus group.

Setting up your working groups

As with any major project, it's important to establish a well-organised working group from the very beginning. Having a team of engaged stakeholders from across your institution means that all angles are considered and no group is left feeling that they weren't consulted. Plus, you'll be able to develop a group of evangelists who can engage others throughout the implementation process.

The time required from the people involved will, of course, depend on the scope of the project. Is your digital assessment pilot a part of a bigger rollout plan or is it just testing on a very limited scale? Either way, we recommend that the following areas should be covered at this early stage:

- **Project team**
- **Steering group/committee**

Now, let's take a closer look at the teams and groups mentioned above:

Project team

The project team should include representatives from all departments in order to cover all the requirements and needs of the project. The members of the project team should have a dedicated role in the project.

You should include:

- Project manager
- Learning technologists
- Administration/Exam office
- Representatives that cover the needs of:
 - Faculty covering both those who write assessments and those who mark
 - Invigilators
 - IT department

Steering group/committee

The project members should be able to raise important decisions and risks to the steering group/committee. This way, any issues can be resolved quickly, allowing the project to progress in a timely manner. An example committee is shown below:

Project sponsor

The project sponsor is a key role and is ultimately the individual responsible for the project budget. The project sponsor should chair the committee. Note, this role could be held in conjunction with another role on the committee. Note, this role could be held in conjunction with another role on the committee.

Head of IT/Learning Technology

To act as senior representative who is responsible for IT/LT resources and able to provide steering on IT/LT risks.

Head of Education/Assessment/Learning

To act as senior representative who is responsible for assessment practice resources and able to provide steering on assessment practice risks.

End-user representatives

Student representation is important to ensure that the test taker experience is considered and prioritised. This will ensure that student experience is improved by the project and that buy-in is achieved from the student community.

Academic/teaching staff representation is important to ensure that the end users responsible for setting assessments and grading assessments are considered. This will help ensure buy in from academic staff by considering their stakeholder requirements. Note, there may be overlap between academic requirements and assessment practice requirements.

The project manager should report to the steering group.

Reviewing your institution's current assessment strategy

Once your working groups are in place, it's a good idea to meet with the project team to determine what your current assessment strategy is, what your goals are, what's working well and what can be improved. It's important that staff from different parts of the institution contribute to this process and that students' voices are considered, if possible.

What you assess and how

Make a list of each type of assessment carried out at your institution and the medium used. These could include, but are not limited to:

Assessment types:

- Summative assessment
- Formative assessment
- Practical exams
- Oral exams
- Coursework
- Informal quizzes or tests

Assessment mediums:

- Paper exams
- Digital assessment platform
- VLE
- In person-presentations

The pros and cons of your current assessment strategy

Now, it's time to consider which elements of your current assessments work well and which are causing issues. You may want to consider:

Ease of administrative tasks

Test-taker experience

Ease of exam creation

Ease of marking

Academic integrity

Environmental sustainability

Accessibility

Digital resilience

Digital Literacy among all stakeholders; faculty, staff and students

Authentic or varied assessment types

You may now want to map out the pros and cons of each type of assessment. It could be that you discover some conflicting pros and cons. For example, whilst your VLE may provide a good student experience for formative or open book assessments, it falls short for students when it comes to summative assessments.



Comparing platforms and features

Now that you've completed an audit of your current assessment processes, you'll have a good idea of what's important to stakeholders throughout your institution. You may also have discovered some tensions or disagreements between different user groups, regarding what is and isn't important to them.

At this stage, you can begin to research potential solutions. Conducting early market engagement with technology providers can help you to understand what technology is available right now to help you solve your problems. Gaining an understanding of the market will help you to come up with a realistic list of requirements later on.

Deciding which features you really need

First, ask your project group to each prioritise the problems they'd like to solve and goals they'd like to meet. It's likely that representatives with different roles will have different priorities: for example, administrators may wish to have a clear overview of how each exam is progressing whilst academics might be more interested in the marking process. They should think about which aspects are essential for exams to run and which are secondary priorities. At this stage, your team should understand that there may need to be some compromise later on.

After everyone has prioritised their own goals, it's time to come together to consider the features that would meet these goals and decide which are must-haves and which are nice-to-haves.

A helpful way to differentiate between them is that must-haves are features that you categorically require for digital assessment to function at your institution. On the other hand, nice-to-haves are features that would improve stakeholder experiences but aren't strictly a requirement. For example, if your institution works with an accreditation institution that requires proctoring, then this feature would be a must-have. A nice-to-have feature may be a question type that an academic has expressed interest in using but doesn't yet require in their exams.

Some categories you may want to consider are:

Security, including lockdown browsers and proctoring
Test authoring, including question types
Test administration and planning
Marking and feedback options
Accessibility
Student experience
Integrations with LMS, VLE or other tool used at your institution
Implementation support
Ongoing customer service and product innovation

These categories are unique to every university and your own may not fit these examples or the needs of another institution.

Comparing platforms and feature sets

Once you've decided on the features you need to conduct successful digital assessments, you can formalise your market engagement by looking into different solutions. As you start this process, you'll need to bear in mind that some platforms offer very different feature sets. Some of these include:

Full-cycle assessment platforms

Allow you to design, deliver and mark your assessments in one place. Most of these platforms also include the option to activate proctoring and lockdown browser functionality, when and if it is needed.

Proctoring solutions

Monitor students during the test, either with AI or human invigilators who track the student's screen, webcam and microphone for signs of academic dishonesty. These solutions are available to use alongside an exam delivery platform that doesn't already include proctoring.

Lockdown browser solutions

Stop students from navigating away from the exam browser during the test. Similar to proctoring solutions, these are designed to be used with a delivery platform that doesn't include its own lockdown browser.

Computerised Adaptive Testing (CAT) platforms:

Automatically select the best questions for each student from a question bank, depending on their current knowledge or skill level.

E-Marking platforms

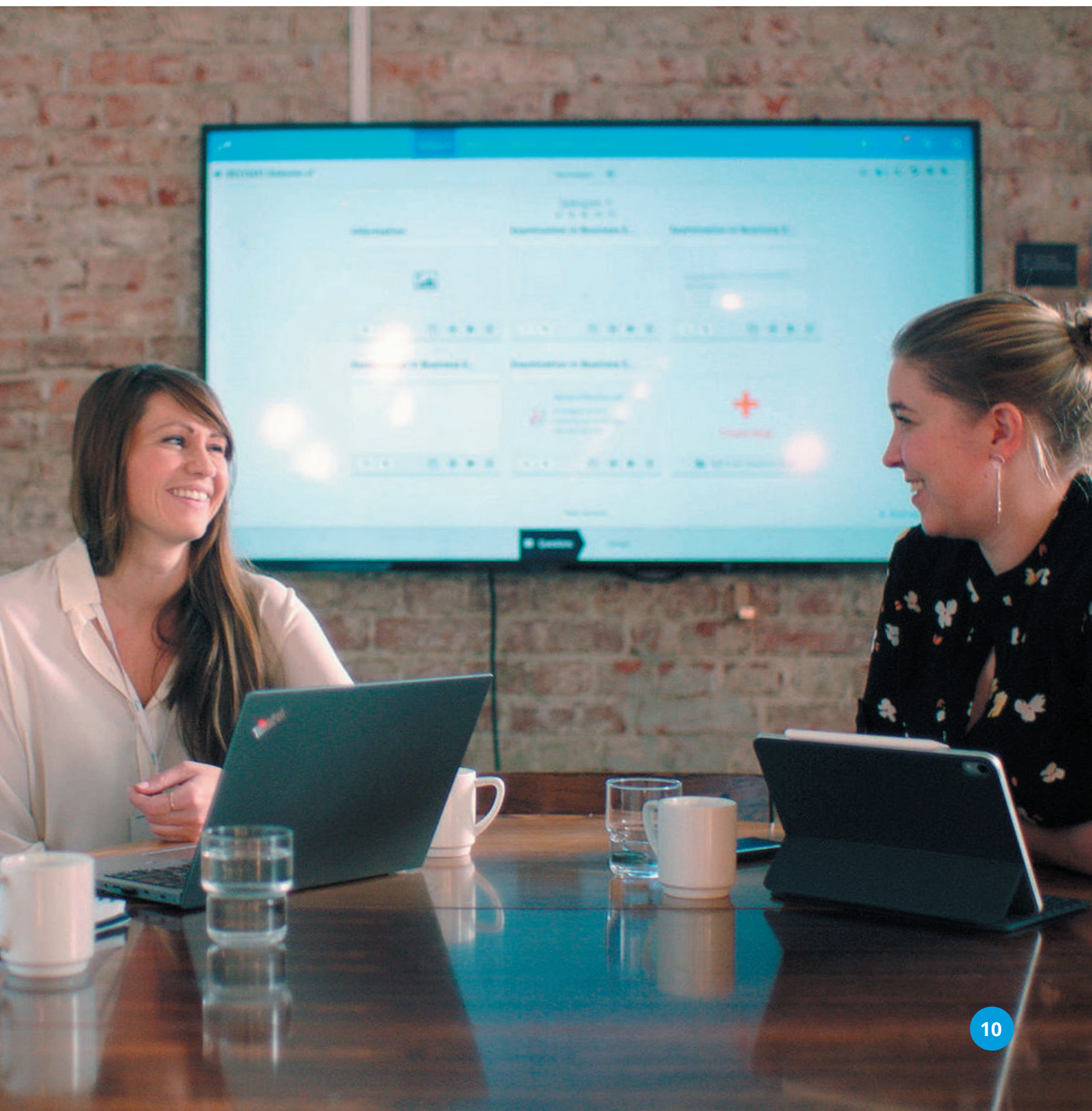
Focus solely on the digital marking of large scale summative assessments. These platforms are used extensively by awarding bodies with large volumes of seasonal paper exam scripts to mark.

VLEs

Are not assessment platforms but are often used for assignment submissions or to carry out formative quizzes. They aren't usually designed for high-stakes, summative assessments and may become overloaded when used for high-volume, simultaneous assessments. Most don't include lockdown browsers or proctoring, so a separate solution would be needed for use alongside these platforms.

You may be able to reduce your options straight away by ruling out any of the above that aren't suitable. Now, you can look more closely at the features of the remaining platforms and narrow them down to those that cover your must-haves.

At this point, you'll hopefully be left with a shorter list of potential solutions that cover all the features that you must have in order to deliver successful online assessments.



Defining your institution's objectives for digitisation

Now that you have a good understanding of your institution's needs as well as the products that are available, you can begin to dig deeper into what you want your digital assessment strategy to look like.

Now is the time to agree on some clear and realistic objectives that will benefit all parties within your institution. It's beneficial to be ambitious at this stage, with the understanding that some compromises will need to be made later on in the process. Having already scoped out what is available in the marketplace will help your team establish a clear and viable plan.



Where does digitisation fit with your assessment strategy?

There are two potential routes to digitisation:

1. Digitise what you have now

Pros

No need to change your assessment strategy

Familiarity

Cons

Likely to result in more system requirements, training and support

2. Amend your strategy to account for digitisation

Pros

Harmonise assessment instruments across the institution, which also increases efficiency

Streamlined training and support

Quicker adoption

Cons

Requires time and effort

What you hope to achieve with digitisation

Next, consider the benefits you'd like to see from an assessment platform. Some examples include:

Reducing the cost and administration associated with printing, delivery and collecting paper exams

Providing a more user-friendly test-taker experience;
Being able to create online assessments with question types that cater for all disciplines

Speeding up the marking process

Creating a more standardised assessment process across your institution

Ensuring a balance between security and privacy for candidates

Reducing the institution's carbon footprint

Adding digital resilience to your assessment process

Making assessment more accessible for all students;
Delivering assessments that better reflect the tasks that students will be required to complete in the workplace.

What should be digitised

While considering the benefits of online assessment, it's important to consider a realistic scope for your digital assessment platform. Although your end goal may be to digitise all of your assessments, you may find that some assessments can't be digitised immediately or that a single platform won't meet all of your needs. For example, many digital assessment platforms allow you to digitise exams that would usually take place on paper. However, while digitising observational or practical assessments may technically be possible, you may need to consider if this should be in the same project phase as digitising pen and paper exams.

It's also likely that there will be detractors who don't want to move to digital assessment because they are accustomed to paper exams. It's therefore important to think about what can and should be digitised and what should be exempt because of significant impracticality or technical impossibility.

To help you make the distinction between what should be digitised and what shouldn't- or perhaps shouldn't immediately- be digitised, you could consider the following:

- 1 How could your current assessments be replicated on screen?**
- 2 Does it need to be replicated or will digital functionality allow for new ways of assessment?**
- 3 What is the best way to assess a student given the functionality available?**
- 4 What is the most authentic form of assessment?**

Beginning consultations

Next, consider the benefits you'd like to see from an assessment platform. Some examples include:

If you can run a trial or pilot

The cost of the platform and what the cost includes: does it provide good value for your institution?

How flexible the platform is: will it be suitable for every use-case you require?

If you require proctoring or lock-down browsers, how flexible are these features: will the settings be the same for each assessment or can you adjust them?

What kind of support will be available, both during onboarding and on an ongoing basis

If the organisation has worked with institutions similar to yours before: do they have testimonials or case studies?

If there are any significant features or updates in the pipeline

How robust the platform can be when candidates have poor internet connectivity

How data is managed and where it is stored

Whether the platform covers all of your needs in one-place, or relies on additional integrations or services that you will need to manage.

After seeing the platforms in action, reviewing their features and asking the right questions, you'll now be able to take this information back to your working groups and make a decision. You should have a clear map of which features each platform covers and why they're important to your assessment strategy as well as any other important financial and logistical considerations.

Of course, this isn't the end of the road (in fact, it's just the beginning!) but your stakeholders will now be well prepared to make an informed decision and feel confident during the digital assessment implementation process. To find out more about the next stages, including implementation and creating better exams, have a look at [our other e-books](#).

Ready to talk about the future of digital assessment?

**Get in touch to find out how
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