

Aberystwyth University Moves Online Assessment to Questionmark Perception

Managing Summative Assessments Online

Background

Founded in 1872, Aberystwyth was the first college of the University of Wales. Today, it has more than 7,000 registered students, including 1,100 postgraduates across seventeen academic departments. Prior to 2007, Aberystwyth used a web-based online assessment system developed in-house, but as support for this system was to be discontinued they needed an assessment management system that could carry them into the future.

Transition to Questionmark Perception

The university chose Questionmark™ Perception™ because it fulfilled the requirements for providing large-scale, reliable summative assessments. As it is an established product with well developed support and is used widely in higher education, it was felt that Perception was the best product for their use. Aberystwyth are now successfully using Perception to manage their online summative assessments, with positive feedback from staff on ease of use and the overall capabilities of the product. Aberystwyth needed to migrate hundreds of existing questions into Perception from the previous assessment system and ensure items were organised in a useful way. All the questions were converted to assessment packages called Qpacks, which make it possible to put an assessment, its questions, templates, and graphics, into a single, compressed file. With the Qpacks created, the E-learning Technical Support Team easily imported the existing questions into Perception. The E-learning Team then organised the questions and assessments into topic folders, ready for use by university academics. This was a one-off project for the team; now authors are able to input questions directly into appropriate topic folders.

Authoring Questions

Authors use Perception's Browser Based Authoring or Authoring Manager to create new questions, which are then imported directly into the Questionmark repository. Authors' questions are fed directly into the item bank without requiring support from the E-learning Team. This is a positive benefit because it means that the authors have complete control over their questions ensuring security of questions.

Scheduling and Administering Assessments

Assessments are scheduled according to the University timetable for examinations, with Questionmark also allowing administrators to manage extra time for candidates as required. Access to the exams is then integrated with the in-house authentication system; students taking an exam only need to enter their University user name and password to gain access to the online exam system.

The exams are held across three university computer labs, using the same invigilation process as they would for paper based exams. Restricted by the number of computers in the lab, Aberystwyth have staggered start times, and students are not allowed to have contact with each other during the exam period. To maintain security, students must enter a password for each assessment they are scheduled to take, and this is only announced once students enter the room to take the exam. When it's time for students to leave the room, the password is changed again to ensure it isn't passed on to candidates waiting outside the exam room. IP addresses are also checked after each exam to ensure that only assessments completed within the computer lab are regarded as valid.

Efficient Reporting

Staff members have also found the reporting tools within Questionmark Perception easy and straightforward to use. Once the exam is completed they can immediately pull off an Excel spreadsheet with the marks. Again, the fact that academic staff can do this themselves without technical support helps to maintain the integrity of the results, as marks are delivered without involvement from the E-Learning Team.

A Smooth Transition

Even though most staff have found using Questionmark easy and straightforward, support systems are available to ensure a smooth transition to the new system. In-house documentation provides screen shots of the Perception implementation, and staff members may take a course to help them make the transition to Questionmark from their previous assessment management tool.

Expansion

Introducing Questionmark Perception has helped to create interest in online assessment throughout the university, and the E-learning Team is now planning to expand its use to other academic departments. The wide range of question types and the opportunity for personalised feedback within formative assessments is driving interest in the advantages of using online assessment. As usage grows, Questionmark may be integrated with existing systems to create a seamless flow of data. As a bilingual institution, the university plans to investigate Questionmark's translation management capabilities with a view to streamlining the administration of online exams in both English and Welsh.

More information

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