



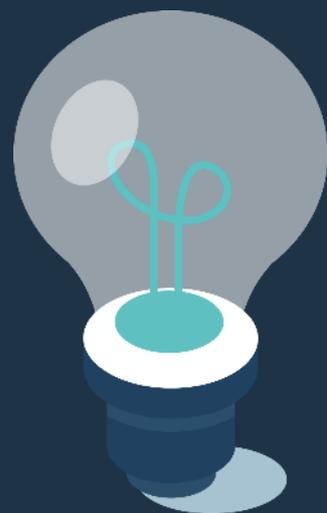
# A matter of trust

*Securely obtaining the assessment data that can transform decision making while satisfying privacy concerns*

Questionmark

*The enterprise-grade assessment platform*

**June 2020**



# Contents

- 1. Introduction .....3
- 2. The challenge considered .....5
- 3. Establishing the business need and creating confidence in the data.....7
- 4. Addressing privacy concerns and reassuring test-takers .....9
- 5. Securing the data and satisfying regulators..... 11
- 6. Conclusion ..... 13
- About Questionmark ..... 15



# 1. Introduction

Times are changing rapidly. The decisions that employers make relating to their people matter now more than ever.

This report will help assessment, human resources and learning and development professionals be sure that they are getting the right information about their people to make fair and informed decisions.

Leaders at every level of an organization need to ask themselves two crucial questions:

- does our workforce have the necessary skills to adapt, survive, and thrive?
- in a world of constant change, how can we get the best out of the workforce?

Employers may not always like the true answers, but the best results will depend on having them.

Good decisions must be underpinned by reliable data. How then, can employers:

- get the information they need about the current capabilities of the workforce?
- understand where they need support and training?

During Covid-19, and the corresponding lockdown measures, we have made three vital observations.

## ***1. Staff tests and assessments remain crucial to obtaining the data needed to make good decisions***

Regular testing and assessment of the workforce is the only way to get the fair, reliable, and defensible information needed to make effective people decisions.

With this information, leaders can ensure that their people are in the right roles and that they are getting the new skills and support they need.

With much of the workforce currently working from home, employers may have to rethink about how to obtain the data they need to do this. Very often this will mean ensuring that skills are properly assessed both within the business and very often across the supply and distribution chain.

Remote assessment of the workforce, partners and suppliers makes this perfectly possible.

## ***2. Senior leaders must be able to trust the data***

When conducting remote assessments, employers must be confident that the data they produce is trustworthy and solid enough to inform critical decisions.

When tests are taken remotely, without direct supervision, it can raise concerns about the possibility of cheating or gaming the results. If the data cannot be trusted it will not inform good decision making.

## ***3. Test-takers must feel that their privacy is respected***

Some of the security measures that have been deployed to maintain the integrity of assessments can raise questions about compromising the privacy of the test-taker. If these concerns persist, it can hinder engagement with the assessment process and, again, undermine the results.

Compliance teams and regulators also need to be satisfied that the data being gathered is done so lawfully and that test-takers are properly protected.

This report will

- Explore the challenges in more detail
- Summarize the importance of accurate assessments and how employers can ensure data is reliable
- Demonstrate how employers conducting the assessment can address privacy concerns and build trust
- Show how measures can be taken to ensure data is lawfully gathered, stored and protected



## 2. The challenge considered: addressing the concerns of internal and external stakeholders

In some respects, there has never been a better time to test and assess the workforce or partners across the supply and distribution chain. Widespread remote working has increased familiarity with digital tools and collaboration apps.

The loss of the commute, as a result of widespread lockdowns over coronavirus, and increased flexibility have increased the appetite for learning and development among workers<sup>1</sup>.

But this new willingness is accompanied by a series of challenges, particularly in the context of staff working from home. Different challenges come from different stakeholders.

### *Senior leaders*

1. ***Making the business case*** – with a changing landscape and a host of external challenges, some employers may feel that conducting staff assessments may not be toward the top of the list.
2. ***Demonstrating reliable results*** – it is not enough for an employer to be satisfied that staff, suppliers, or partners have complied with the rules of an assessment. They must be able to demonstrate to stakeholders and customers that the results of assessments are reliable, valid, and defensible.

### *Test-takers across the supply and partner chain*

3. ***Dispelling fears of an invasion of privacy*** – sometimes employees or third-party test-takers express concern around the techniques used to deliver exam-condition assessments remotely online when they are home. A proctor, or invigilator, typically inspects a test-taker's room over a webcam and uses remote access to a test-taker's computer<sup>2</sup>. If not managed, these concerns could prompt test-takers to avoid courses with remote exams, such as certification programs.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/leading-with-learning>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/us/online-testing-cheating-universities-coronavirus.html>

4. **Raising awareness of individual privacy rights** – the attention given to the topic during the roll-out of more recent regulations has created greater awareness of privacy rights<sup>3</sup>. Employers must be ready to face greater scrutiny when running assessments for their employees and across the supply and partner chain.

## Compliance

5. **Meeting different requirements** – when gathering data, satisfying the needs of regulators is vital. Different requirements are paramount in different corners of the globe.
6. **Reducing the risk of failure** – failing to observe privacy and security regulations can create financial and reputational risks. Fines for data breaches have risen dramatically in recent years.

The sections that follow will address these challenges and provide answers to the important questions raised.



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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.welivesecurity.com/2019/06/14/gdpr-europeans-awareness-rights/>

## 3. Establishing the business need and creating confidence in the data

### *Establishing the business need*

The current business environment, which is changing rapidly, means many employers may question whether the workforce has the skills to thrive. In financial services, the trend toward fintech solutions is accelerating<sup>4</sup>. Some predict that the way people in professional services work, travel and communicate will change forever.<sup>5</sup> While experts believe the physical shopping experience will survive the new familiarity with online purchasing, retailers that seek to thrive will need a radical shake up<sup>6</sup>.

Robust staff testing and assessment can give employers the information they need to make good people decisions.

It can help them recognize where the strengths lie across teams and business functions. Such data can also reveal where gaps and weaknesses are concentrated. Training and other interventions can be introduced. Continual assessment can measure the impact of those changes, enhancing performance.

But data from assessments can only transform decision making if it is trusted. Measures must be taken to guard against cheating.

### *Creating confidence in the results: cheating deterrents*

An insecure assessment can be vulnerable to several different types of cheating. These can include someone else taking the test on the candidate's behalf, the use of 'cheat-sheets' or getting prior knowledge of the questions.<sup>7</sup>

Employers must ensure that assessments are run on a platform that guards against cheating. At the most basic level, this should include features such as randomized

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<sup>4</sup> <https://martechseries.com/sales-marketing/customer-experience-management/coronavirus-lockdown-massive-surge-use-fintech-apps/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/5801a710-597c-11ea-abe5-8e03987b7b20>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2020/05/01/retail-coronavirus-pandemic-shopping>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.trainingjournal.com/articles/features/six-main-types-assessment-cheating-%E2%80%93-and-how-prevent-them>

questioning, whereby no two students need ever sit the same test, so no one can get an advantage by asking a previous candidate.

Greater security measures are needed for many assessments. Forensic analysis tools are available to make it possible to identify types of cheating that are usually hard to spot. Questionmark Forensic Analysis looks for patterns such as similarities in answers and the time taken to answer each question.

When the stakes of the assessment are high, some form of proctoring or invigilation will be necessary. With social distancing measures in place, gathering people to an assessment center is not possible in many countries.

Questionmark Record and Review records the test and flags anomalies for future analysis. These might include for example two heads looking at the computer. Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology observes the testing process, can spot possible anomalies and notify the test-setter that footage of the test should be reviewed.

Questionmark Proctoring Online is the most robust form of remote invigilation. It is popular among certification bodies and increasingly used by academic institutions. It enables exams and tests to be taken remotely without compromising security or the integrity of the assessment.

An online proctor or invigilator supervises a test-taker using the webcam and audio built into the test-taker's computer. The proctor confirms the test-taker's identity and can pause or terminate the assessment if they see suspicious behavior.



## 4. Addressing privacy concerns and reassuring test-takers

Obtaining trustworthy assessment data means ensuring that robust security measures are in place. But the increases in security can appear alarming to individual test-takers.

In the academic world, some students have raised questions about invasions of privacy<sup>8</sup>. They have been concerned about the use of AI technology to monitor patterns and identify anomalies. Some are also concerned about being recorded and observed in their home.

Such concerns could have an impact on employers that need staff to sit training and certification programs which include these deterrents.

These important issues need to be addressed, but without compromising the integrity of the assessment. If it is not clear that cheating has been discouraged or prevented, the results may be untrustworthy. Good decisions will not result from untrustworthy data.

Consider the following suggestions:

- ***use the least intrusive technology possible*** – without compromising the integrity of the assessment, source a solution that minimizes privacy issues. For example, Questionmark Proctoring Online allows proctors to guide test-takers through the process without having to take control of their computer.

Many proctoring solutions require the proctors to take control of the test-takers computer. This raises concerns about whether the proctor could access other files and applications. Questionmark Proctoring Online does not require this, because the proctor is connected directly to Questionmark's service and can manage the exam without going through the participant's computer.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/seanlawson/2020/04/24/are-schools-forcing-students-to-install-spyware-that-invades-their-privacy-as-a-result-of-the-coronavirus-lockdown/#42b864d0638d>

- **communicate the platform's security measures** – most test-takers do trust their employer, client, or partner with their data. But they may be worried about what would happen to it in the event of a cyber-attack. The employer should communicate the robust security measures that have been taken to protect data. More information on choosing a secure assessment platform is outlined in the next section.
- **explain the reason for the extra vigilance** – communication can be key. It is critical to explain to the test-taker why it is important that such high-security measures are taken. Remember, the test-taker benefits from the scrutiny too, by having unimpeachable results.
- **provide all privacy information in advance** – ensure that the test-takers know exactly what will happen during the assessment. Provide as much detail as possible as to what the proctor will need to see and allow time for preparation. Be clear on what happens to data, including recordings, after and how the test-taker can request more information.
- **listen to concerns and debunk myths** – employers may find that their test-takers have specific concerns. Some media articles will encourage people to struggle with concerns that are unfounded. By taking the time to listen to specific concerns, employers can communicate more effectively and dispel any myths that emerge.



## 5. Securing the data and satisfying regulators

As has been demonstrated, good people decisions must be informed by knowledge.

To ensure that data can usefully inform these critical decisions, assessments are best managed through an assessment platform that gives employers a quick and clear read of the results. The platform should compile results instantly and make it easy to spot patterns and trends.

The platform, however, must do more than effectively deliver and analyze the assessment. It must satisfy both regulators and test-takers that any data entered will be collected, stored and protected appropriately.

### *Ensuring effective delivery and data security*

Employers must ensure that the assessment platform provider they choose to deliver their assessments is

1. **Compliant** – all standard compliance requirements must be detailed in the contract. The provider should actively help their client meet any additional privacy and security needs.
2. **Secure** – the provider should have been audited by a third-party against a standard like ISO 27001. Data stored must be held safely. A robust incident response plan should be in place.
3. **Able to guard against cheating** – for the results to be trustworthy, the integrity of the assessment must be protected (as outlined in section 3).
4. **Transparent** – providers should give the client all relevant information to support and enhance the client's transparency statements and privacy policies.
5. **Able to give swift access to data** – for all companies operating in Europe and in some cases in California, data stored in the platform could be relevant to a 'subject access request'. This is when an individual, including current and former employees, can ask to see all personal data that an organization holds on them. It is vital that processes exist to ensure that this data can be accessed and, if necessary, deleted.

**6. Accurate** – employers setting the tests must ensure that all personal data collected is accurate. Robust platforms provide tools that will be able to help with this.

### *Thinking through issues and developing policy*

The burden of satisfying the regulatory requirements lies with the employers conducting the test. However, a robust platform should have experts that can help develop the policy and process so this runs smoothly.

Among the highest considerations are

1. **Get personal** – at the heart of managing assessment compliance is being clear on where responsibility lies within the organization. This creates transparency and identifies who people can talk to if they have any concerns.
2. **Keep it legit** – employers setting tests have a legitimate interest in collecting some of the personal data of those who sit an assessment. However, they must be clear what data is being collected, why there is a need to do this and how, and for how long, the data will be stored, and document this formally. This is particularly important when collecting data from outside their organization, for instance from a partner, supplier or distributor.
3. **Make privacy everyone's business** – organizations invariably have a privacy notice in place. This document must contain information on how data is collected and stored during assessments. Those taking tests should be given access to the privacy notice prior to the assessment.
4. **Review the risk** – with each different facet of personal data collected, the risk of privacy being compromised must be assessed. With each risk, it is good practice to identify the likelihood of it occurring and how severe the consequences would be if it did.



## 6. Conclusion

Now more than ever, employers need valid, reliable and defensible information from assessments to make vital people decisions. Senior leaders must be confident that the workforce has the skills to adapt and thrive.

Obtaining this essential data to inform people-based decisions can present challenges. Robust anti-cheating measures must be in place for the results to be trusted. But employers need to be ready to explain to the workforce, supply-chain and regulators how they are protecting their privacy and keeping their data secure.

Specialist knowledge is vital in meeting these challenges. But overcoming these challenges cannot be left to specialists alone. It must be owned at the most senior level in each organization.

To meet these challenges employers should

- Make use of the most appropriate anti-cheating measures to protect the integrity of the assessment. This will differ for different kinds of assessments. When the stakes are high, some form of remote proctoring or invigilation is likely to be required.
- Listen and respond to the concerns of test-takers. Use the least-intrusive possible form of technology and articulate the reasons why the chosen measures need to be adopted.
- Ensure that the assessment platform provider has the necessary security and privacy features to satisfy the employers setting the tests, regulators and test-takers. These will range from anti-cheating measures to robust protections against data breaches.

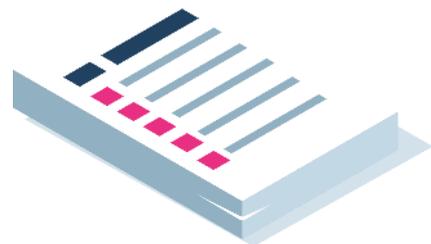
The Questionmark Platform can assess an unlimited number of test-takers, from anywhere in the world. In April and May 2020, during the height of the coronavirus lockdown, we have delivered a 30% year-on-year increase in assessments, supporting more than three million assessments over the cloud.

The platform provides a range of assessment formats. Tests are automatically marked. Results are instantly compiled. Trends and patterns are easy and quick to spot.

We are experts in gathering the data needed for effective people decisions in a safe and respectful way.

We are keen to begin conversations around how we can help employers meet the challenges outlined in this report.

We believe that gathering the fair, valid and defensible data from assessments can transform decision making. It will help ensure the workforce has the skills to thrive.



# About Questionmark

Questionmark provides a secure enterprise-grade assessment platform and professional services to leading organizations around the world, delivered with care and unequalled expertise.

Our full-service online assessment tool and professional services help customers to improve their performance and meet their compliance requirements. Questionmark enables organizations to unlock their potential by delivering assessments which are valid, reliable, fair and defensible.

Questionmark offers secure powerful integration with other Learning Management System, Learning Record Service and proctoring services making it easy to bring everything together in one place.

Our cloud-based assessment management platform offers rapid deployment, scalability for high-volume test delivery, 24/7 support, and the peace-of-mind of secure, audited U.S., Australian and European-based data centers.

## Working with Questionmark

To further explore how Questionmark could work for your organization, or to book a demo, please see:

<https://www.questionmark.com/request-demo/>

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