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Protecting brand and building revenue

How credentialing organizations can learn from the current crisis and discover the best ways to assess awards, certifications and qualifications

Questionmark Viewpoint

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Introduction

Future commentators may look back on 2020 as the year that everything changed for the awarding and qualifications market. But that would be a superficial analysis.

For many years, test publishers, certification bodies and professional associations have debated and discussed the best ways to assess awards, certifications and qualifications. These questions will continue when the current crisis is a distant memory.

How can the whole process be made quicker and more cost-effective? Can better use of digital technologies be made without compromising the integrity of assessments? How can international opportunities be grasped? How can all of this help drive growth and increase revenue streams?

The catalyst of Covid-19 has caused awarding organizations to innovate at a quicker rate than they would have believed possible six months ago. With widespread social distancing measures in place, how to keep assessments going became an all-consuming challenge overnight.

Pulling candidates together into test centers or exam halls was not an option. Some tests could be conducted informally without posing too many problems. But when the stakes of an assessment are high, exam integrity must be beyond question. Many exams have always required proctoring or invigilation. Thought had to be given as to how this is possible in an online environment.

Meanwhile, the need for certifications and qualifications has never been more urgent. Front-line services need to ensure that new professionals can qualify and continue to expand their capabilities.

Employers need to recruit new talent, and develop the people they have, to help them meet the challenges of a rapidly changing business environment. Many employers need to ensure their people continue to meet regulatory requirements.

Certifications and qualifications continue to give employers confidence that staff have the skills they need to do their jobs. For the public sector, citizens have never needed greater trust in the services they receive.

This white paper will explore the challenges facing awarding bodies. It will acknowledge the immediate problems posed by the pandemic and recognize the wider trends that are driving new approaches. It will show how our assessment platform and services can support customers through these challenges and make the most of new opportunities.

A note on language and terminology. The term 'awarding body' will be used when addressing points relevant to the whole sector. If a particular point is more pertinent to test publishers, professional associations or certification bodies, we will make this clear.

Questionmark Viewpoint

Questionmark Viewpoint is a series of white papers and reports that we produce to explore the challenges that our customers are facing, and which we help them address. These papers are based on what we are hearing from customers, and on research from other experts.
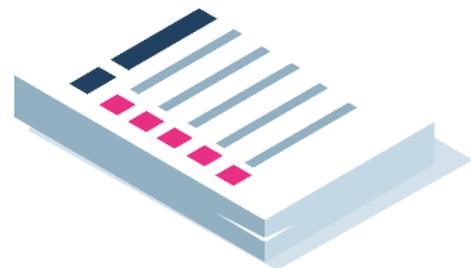
Taking stock of the challenges

Test publishers, certification bodies and professional associations face common challenges. Some of these struggles have been exaggerated and made more urgent by Covid-19. The four challenges highlighted in this section have been high on the agenda across the sector in recent years.

1. Integrity of exams and protection of the brand

The award of a certification or qualification invariably depends on successfully completing a formal assessment, often a test or exam. If the integrity and security of that assessment cannot be trusted, the award may be worthless. The reputation of the awarding body may also be damaged.

To guard against cheating, formal assessments have often taken place in assessment centers, with proctors, or invigilators, physically supervising proceedings. In a world where social distancing measures linger, this is simply not possible.

Even before the outbreak of Covid-19, many questioned the sense of calling candidates together into one physical location.

In a world where people often study at a distance using the latest education technology, traveling to a test center is time-consuming, costly and logistically laborious. This is especially true for work-related study where a learner has to juggle responsibilities.

2. Lack of integration with assessment platforms

In recent years, awarding bodies have explored offering assessments online. Many have found that often assessment platforms only support customers with one part of the process.

As a result, assessment managers have been left trying to perform different tasks such as proctoring, authoring content, managing e-commerce and badging on separate platforms. This can be both time-consuming and frustrating, making it difficult to deliver a seamless experience for the user.

3. Pace of change

Certification bodies, particularly in the tech sector, constantly need to create new assessment content. The sector is driven by innovation and new programs and applications are regularly brought to market. Assessments need to keep up to certify that professionals have the skills to work with the latest tech.

While these assessments can often be conducted securely online, too many assessment platforms make it difficult to adapt and amend questions. When changes or evolutions are made to a program or application, it may be that only tweaks to an assessment are required.

However, due to the inflexibility of the platform, entire new assessments often need to be written, or once written they can only be implemented at a predetermined time in the future.

4. Meeting global demand

Often qualifications are tailored toward a specific domestic market or recognized by a specific regulator. But they can still be popular internationally. Meeting the requirements of regulators in certain countries can be seen as a 'hallmark' of quality, increasing appeal to other international markets. In many other cases, certifications are truly global.

To take advantage of these commercial opportunities, awarding bodies need to offer global distribution. Not doing so is a missed opportunity.

Digital delivery makes it much easier to reach global markets. Physical assessments typically mean relying on a supplier or partner in other countries. Having to send papers to one physical location for marketing is slow and laborious. Too often opportunities to boost revenue are missed.

Overcoming challenges and realizing potential

Working with the right online assessment provider can overcome the challenges outlined on pages five and six.

As well as helping ensure business continuity for the duration of the current crisis, the right platform will equip awarding bodies to thrive for the future.

- ***Creates a secure online environment –*** 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.

    Questionmark Record and Review records the test and flags anomalies, such as two heads looking at the computer, for future analysis. 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 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.

- ***Provides a one-stop-shop solution –*** our online assessment platform gives customers a one-stop-shop to deliver remote assessments. We combine:
    - Secure test-taking with a range of proctoring services
    - Authoring and vendor content
    - E-commerce
    - Reporting
    - Badging for successful candidates

This enables test publishers and certification bodies to build revenue and to protect the integrity of their brands.

They can deliver a consistent service, globally and locally, without having to integrate with other platforms.

- *Enables global reach –* the Questionmark platform enables an unlimited number of test-takers from anywhere in the world to participate. Assessment content can be automatically translated into several different languages. This makes it easy to deliver the same assessments anywhere in the world, with minimal marginal cost.

- *Makes it quick and easy to adapt assessment content –* assessments are easy to alter, adapt and update. Content can be stored in a 'questions bank' and imported into relevant new assessments.

Working with Questionmark also provides awarding bodies with additional benefits:

- **Set the right level of assessment –** our professional services team can advise on appropriate testing for qualifications

- **High-quality assessment software –** designed to build trust with customers and satisfy the needs of regulators

- **Quickly spot patterns and trends –** identify where changes need to be made in assessments, and make them immediately

We work with test publishers, certification bodies and professional associations around the world to meet the challenges outlined in this white paper. Our customers include the British Computer Society and NLN.

If you would like a conversation with us about how we can help you meet your objectives and create new opportunities, please visit our website, and book a demo:

https://www.questionmark.com/sectors-and-uses/test-publishers-and-certification/

About Questionmark

We help organizations and their people unlock their potential to deliver better performance.

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

Questionmark offers secure powerful integration with learning management systems (LMS), learning record stores (LRS) and proctoring services making it easy to bring everything together in one place. Questionmark's 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.

Complete details are available at https://www.questionmark.com