Disability and e-assessment seminar

Warwick University, 4 December 2009

Warwick University was the setting for Ofqual's e-assessment and disability seminar on 4 December 2009. With over 40 delegates attending from centres, awarding organisations, other agencies and disability groups, the seminar provided an excellent opportunity for those involved to get together and discuss issues surrounding e-assessment.

The group was split into five workshops, with the morning session discussing the implication of Ofqual's role in delivering the six objectives in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (the Act). The afternoon session hosted discussions on issues surrounding disability and the Equality Bill.

The workshop topics encouraged lively discussion and e-assessment was generally viewed by all of the groups as the future tool for delivering and administering high-stakes assessments. The groups also agreed that the use of computer-based testing allows scope for development of adaptive technologies for disabled learners.

However, despite some recognised benefits of e-assessment, there was a general consensus that there are considerable barriers inhibiting the widespread adoption of e-assessment for high-stakes qualifications. Staff from centres gave examples which included the administration of high-stakes qualifications taken by a large number of candidates at the same time; the cost implication of an IT infrastructure which will support a successful e-assessment process and contingency plans for what happens if computers 'crash' during the assessment and the security of assessments.

The group discussions recognised that e-assessment is used successfully in the vocational sector and has been for some years. It was suggested that this is because, in general, there are fewer learners taking vocational qualifications at any one time and there are more-frequent test windows which spread out the number of learners taking an assessment at any one time.

Other issues raised:

- use of e-assessment for adaptations: resources are limited and consideration has to be given for the manageability of the adaptations of the qualifications

- comparability of e-assessment and pen and paper assessments. AOs need to know how this comparability will be measured and feel secure that their e-assessment processes meet Ofqual's regulations.
- it can be expensive for AOs to develop and implement front-end e-assessment systems.
- it can be confusing for centres to administer all the variations of e-assessed qualifications due to platforms and systems in use.

As well as discussing Ofqual's policy role under the ASCL legislation, there was a very informative demonstration of computer adaptive technology from Inclusive Technology and an informative talk from Becta about the economic efficiency considerations of e-assessment.

The day raised many interesting points and gave a forum for discussion on several important issues regarding e-assessment and disability. The feedback from the workshops indicated that this seminar was useful in *'getting the ball rolling*' for discussion on e-assessment and disability. Now that Ofqual has started to consult on this matter we need to follow up as part of an on-going dialogue with stakeholders on this issue. It is envisaged that once Ofqual's role regarding 'the desirability to facilitate innovation' has been defined, a follow-up seminar/workshop will be organised as a way of continuing dialogue with stakeholders.