

Case Study

Welsh Government National Assessments for school children

National rollout of on-screen tests for children



AlphaPlus provides full service design and development for learning and assessment programmes, from curriculum standards and national tests, to learning resources and delivery support.

We pride ourselves on a simple and straightforward approach to consulting projects. Part of this is a strong on-site presence, working side-by-side with our clients to understand their requirements and deliver outstanding outcomes.

Challenge

Currently, all children in Wales take tests each year, from Year 2 to Year 9. These tests are taken on-paper. The tests, in reading and numeracy, are designed to identify areas where children and teachers need to focus their efforts in order to make progress. The Welsh Government has decided to move the tests to an on-screen format, starting in 2018. AlphaPlus is leading the multi-partner project team on behalf of Welsh Government, developing new tests and new technologies for school testing.

Solution

The paper tests will be replaced with new personalised assessments to be taken online that have been specifically designed for use in Wales. The new adaptive assessments will automatically adjust the level of the questions to match the individual taking the test, providing an appropriate level of challenge for each learner.

Number of primary schools in Wales:
1330 (of which 450 teach in Welsh)

Number of secondary schools in Wales:
207 (of which 50 teach in Welsh)

School years being tested: Years 2 to 9 -

all children in state education aged 6 to 14 will take the tests

Number of students expected to take the tests each year: 250,000 students

Project start: January 2017

Project live (first on-screen tests): maths assessment - September 2018; English & Welsh assessments - September 2019; maths problem-solving – 2020

Test Language: All tests available in English and Welsh (around 20% of people in Wales speak Welsh)

Purpose of tests: formative assessments with national calibration, to help teachers and students measure their progress and plan their learning

Type of tests: Fully adaptive objective tests. Adaptive tests select subsequent questions based on the response of candidates to previous questions. The software estimates the candidate's ability on a scale, and the purpose of each subsequent question is to refine the estimate, and reduce the error in that estimate, so questions are chosen to optimise those measurements. Of course, the tests also need to cover the curriculum, so the choice of questions also takes account of coverage.



Name: AlphaPlus Consultancy Ltd

Based:
Manchester, UK with major operations in GCC.

Industry:
School Education in Wales

Products & Services:
National On-Screen and On-Paper Examinations Programme

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Challenge: Develop new on-screen national assessments in reading and numeracy for all children aged 7 to 13 in all schools in Wales. Maintain existing on-paper testing while on-screen testing is rolled out.

Solution: we are leading this \$23m multi-partner project to deliver innovative adaptive tests which will provide teachers with formative information about progress and provide government with data for national monitoring
<http://gov.wales/newsroom/educationandskills/2017/online-assessments-set-to-replace-paper-for-national-reading-and-numeracy-tests/?lang=en>

Turning Education & Skills
Policy into Practice

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The assessments are entirely on-line – they are web-based with no local server or installation of software required. The assessments are integrated with the national provision of internet in schools. Students don't have to login to the test, as they are logged in as part of their login to all online services in Wales, via the Hwb system.

Each student is free to take the test twice a year (but is only obliged to do it once). We expect that schools will use the test at the beginning and end of each school year, but we are waiting to see how practice develops.

Key benefits:

- On-screen tests are marked automatically, greatly reducing teacher workload (teachers have to mark the current on-paper tests)
- Adaptive tests enable learners to move up or down the ability range so that all learners get approximately 50% of the questions right and 50% wrong. Learners may therefore move up and down the bank to access content from higher or lower years – challenging the more able while not demotivating those who are struggling. Unconstrained adaptivity allows the assessments to truly test what the learners can do, making no judgement of what was expected to be taught in a given year.
- As the tests are automatically marked, results reports will be available the day after the assessment – considerably faster than with the paper tests – which

supports the key purpose of formative testing, as changes to teaching can be implemented in a timely manner.

- According to our feedback, learners enjoy doing assessments on-screen – they spend less time on questions that are too hard or too easy.
- Schools will be able to test classes, small groups or individuals according to their facilities and at a time that works for them and their learners.

Kirsty Williams (Cabinet Secretary for Education) said:

“These tests are about raising standards by showing the next steps that children need to take in their learning. The move to online personalised assessments for reading and numeracy will benefit pupils, parents and teachers.

“Pupils will be taking assessments that will adapt to their needs and skills. They will have the benefits of automatic marking and schools will have feedback faster than before, giving them a better picture of how they can help all their learners to move on.

“This approach is tailor made for Wales. It shows how we are investing in our schools to continue our national mission of education reform to drive up standards and make sure every pupil in Wales, whatever their background, has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.”



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