

**A FOCUS ON ASSESSMENT: A  
COLLABORATIVE VIEW FROM THE  
HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY AND  
JISC**

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# **A Focus on Assessment: A Collaborative View from the Higher Education Academy and JISC**

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## **Abstract**

e-Assessment is a critical issue for post-16, higher education and the wider education community and is recognised within the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills as fundamental to its success and as an important factor in delivering the emerging 14–19 programmes of learning.

JISC recognised the importance of e-assessment for the UK education and research community as long ago as the late 1990's as part of the groundbreaking work on Managed Learning Environments and work on standards. As software suppliers and test developers become increasingly involved in producing e-assessment tools and content, so JISC is bringing the issues associated with this increasingly complex area to the attention of the Further and Higher Education communities that it serves.

Currently, JISC's activities in e-assessment are divided into the following areas:

- *Programme management* – baseline and evaluation of its current and previous e-assessment activities, community development and support activities (including Special Interest Groups, conferences and web presence)
- *Mapping the e-assessment terrain* – investigating current national, institutional, pedagogical and technical activity in e-assessment and how this might affect e-assessment within JISC's communities, so as to produce a roadmap of planned research and development.
- *Tools* – development and testing of software components and applications. For example, JISC has recently funded the development of QTI v2 item and test players, test content construction tools, and software for managing banks of assessment items.
- *Piloting innovative use of e-assessment* – projects experimenting with uses of e-assessment with new learner communities. For example, JISC is currently funding investigations into the use of e-assessment for formative assessment within learning programmes.

The Higher Education Academy, through its generic learning support activities and its network of 24 Subject Centres, collaborates directly with staff in higher education institutions in developing learning opportunities and resources in order to enhance the student learning experience. The Academy responds to the assessment support needs of managers and practitioners by identifying and promoting evidence-based practice, synthesising current practice and helping build capacity. The disciplinary nature of the Subject Centres enables them to provide support which is both pedagogically sound and contextually relevant.

Within the learning support priority area of assessment, which includes plagiarism and feedback, many of the Subject Centres have collaborated with their discipline communities to produce resources and advice on the use of technology to enhance assessment in a way that is relevant to the teaching and learning within the discipline.

For example:

1. The English subject centre, in common with others, publishes case studies and funds projects which focus on the use of technology to support assessment of and for learning.
2. The Maths, Stats and OR Network has published a series of articles on CAA and developed a computer-aided assessment system (STACK) to aid mathematics.
3. The Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Materials Bank contains a variety of formative computer assisted assessment activities for different languages.

As part of the Academy/JISC Collaboration<sup>1</sup> a themed mapping and scoping exercise is underway across the two organisations, including their respective networks of Subject Centres, Services and Regional Support Centres, to establish the range and extent of activities and resources to support the HE community in the use of technology for the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment. The aims of the exercise are to identify good practice, the impact and usefulness of existing resources, possible duplications/overlaps and to inform future developments. The use of technology to support assessment was the theme chosen for the first of four campaigns, piloted between September 2007 and January 2008, in alignment with one of the three Academy priority themes (assessment, feedback and plagiarism) and associated JISC e-learning activity areas. Inter-working across JISC and the Academy was enhanced through the development of links between groups of staff within the organisations and in the sector. Outcomes from the campaign include the development of materials in assessment to provide appropriate blends of a variety of communication vehicles to raise awareness of Academy/JISC assessment-related activities and resources e.g. online workshops and podcasts. In addition, the two organisations are working together to identify appropriate technologies to support assessment methodologies used by different discipline communities.

Further information on these current and future e-assessment activities of the Academy and JISC will be available at the CAA Conference.

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<sup>1</sup> Academy/JISC Collaboration: [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/aboutus/partnerships/he\\_academy.aspx](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/aboutus/partnerships/he_academy.aspx) (JISC) and <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/elearning/collaboration> (Academy)