Abstract

Many learners with disabilities and special educational needs have difficulty reading or accessing traditional paper examinations at school. The most common method of accommodating these candidates, in Scotland, is the use of reader and scribe. This article defines requirements for digital examination papers for candidates with disabilities, identifies a suitable electronic format and reports on trials of these digital assessments.

Main findings

Adobe portable document format (PDF) was judged to match the specification most closely. Successful pilot trials in 2005, 2006 and 2007 led to the introduction of digital papers by the Scottish Qualifications Authority in 2008.

There is some evidence that digital papers provide a more independent and less costly alternative to reader/scribes; this requires further research.

Between 2008 and 2011, the number of requests for digital papers increased fivefold, indicating that digital question papers in PDF offer a practical and cost-effective method of accommodation in examinations.

The research is of interest to examination boards, assessment designers, educators and learners. It demonstrates that candidates with disabilities can successfully access assessments in digital format.

Web link for additional information

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