

## **AQA Video Playlist Complete Transcripts:**

### **AQA talk about their vision for improving examinations with technology, and their role as an awarding organisation**

**DAVE MELLOR - Director of Assessment Strategy (SPEAKER 1):** My name is Dave Mellor, I'm Director for Assessment Strategy at AQA. I have been with AQA for fifteen years, I came on a one year contract and never looked back really. We are the largest of the unitary awarding bodies, so the largest awarding body in terms of general qualifications, so that's GCSEs and A Levels.

I think five years ago we had a view that on-screen tests were the way to go, technology was becoming more and more prevalent in schools, the use of computers was becoming ubiquitous. But there's some real opportunities here now, and the opportunities are two fold, I think, the first is around the non-exam assessment - so all of the new GCSEs and A Levels. Where there is non-exam assessment, quite a large amount of it has the requirement for capturing audio or video evidence.

**Judith Rowland-Jones – Head of Languages (SPEAKER 2):** We're really keen to support teachers in conducting and recording their speaking tests, and one of the areas that we are exploring with our digital partner BTL is looking to use an online assessment platform, whereby teachers can access each student's entry record online and then use the technology to actually record the speaking test within this platform.

There can be lots of issues with the current method of sending speaking assessments off for marking, for example sometimes we get poor quality recordings, sometimes we get the wrong file naming, which can make it difficult for examiners to identify which student's test it is.

Sometimes the CDs or memory sticks go missing in the post, which again is a great area of concern for us. Another advantage is that all of the student's details are already in the online platform because it's linked to AQA's entry system so if there are late entries, amendments to entries, then that can quite easily be accommodated. And when a teacher is ready to conduct a speaking test for an individual student they can just access that student's record within the software and then get ready to do the recording.

**Seb Ross – Qualifications Manager (SPEAKER 3):** AQA has a really pivotal role as a charity in showcasing how an exam board can deliver not just assessment products but a really valuable and empowering assessment service. And that's both in terms of the design of the assessment tasks, in terms of the marking, in terms of the way the evidence is kept and held securely, in terms of the authentication processes to ensure that every student gets the result that they deserve, in terms of the awarding process so that teachers are clear about how the results were derived.

So an assessment service for me is about transparency, it's about quality in terms of the assessment design and the marking, and above all it's about securing teachers' trust in the results and students' trust in the results that they get.

**DAVE MELLOR - Director of Assessment Strategy (SPEAKER 1):** And then the second thing is the idea of students being able to sit a normal question paper, a written paper, but instead of writing their answers up they capture them on their devices – a tablet or a laptop – because that’s the way they normally work; and they’re allowed to do that, so I think that pressure will drive things.

More often than not, what you’re assessing is people’s research skills - can they find the information that they need, can they then use that information, can they apply it to different scenarios, rather than just “tell me what this is” (...).

So, I think at some point in the future someone will turn around and say “this education system we currently have is no longer fit for purpose, what we’re teaching our children to do is no longer the right thing”. But that, I think is 20 years off, but it’s already happening in places like Denmark; They do do some exams where they have internet access.

### **Addressing the challenges of delivering on-screen general qualifications**

I think from a centre perspective if you said that all exams next year are going to be on-screen, it would just be horror, they would throw their arms up in the air they’d say we can’t deliver it, we haven’t got the kit, we haven’t tested it, we’re not used to working in that way. I think there are a lot of teachers who are quite forward thinking and can see that on-screen exams are ok, and I think if you go to the vocational sector and further education colleges they can see that that’s the way they normally work, that’s fine, but for GCSEs and A-levels there are real challenges in getting schools and colleges on board with that sort of thing.

I think what will happen actually is that peer pressure will start to play a really important part here because I can see students saying ‘Miss, they’re doing their exams on-screen, why can’t I do my exams on-screen? I want to type my answers up’, and the real challenge that centres then have is - how can we get enough devices to support this. It’s pretty low-tech, it’s pretty simple, you don’t need really complicated connections or anything like that, but how can we get enough devices, and that’s where the bring your own device type of idea starts to feed in I think, because if they bring their own device the school can check to make sure that the software’s uploaded in advance of the exam, they can make sure it’s in lockdown mode because you can’t start answering until it’s locked down, and they can deal with any instances where they go out of it. There’s no risk to the school, there’s no problem, the main challenge is batteries running out probably, but you can have portable power supplies, you can do all sorts of things like that. So, it feels kind of safe for schools, and yet it feels like it could enable students to start to move in that direction, and once everybody’s doing it, actually to do on-screen tests ceases to be a problem.

### **The future of technology in schools**

Schools are starting to issue students with devices that are actually owned by the student, so it’s a sort of hire purchase, and that means it’s a uniform set of devices, it’s easier for the schools to manage, they know that the software will work on them, they know that they’ll do the things they need to do. Bring those, that’s very easy.

Schools might struggle a bit more with a variety of different devices, because what happens if there’s different ways of setting the devices up? Different platforms have different ways of working.

The IT capabilities in schools is very variable; some are brilliant, some might be less good. So you can see some challenges around that, but eventually the students will move away from pen and paper and in ten years' time they're not going to be carting around folders and writing their notes up. It will be some sort of handheld electronic device that they're producing their notes on.

At that point, those devices will probably be cheap enough that they can support general use within the population, and there'll be a common set of standards probably that can be used to allow kids to do their examinations on those devices. So I think, we tried to introduce on-screen tests as a revolution, and actually it doesn't work.

It's too big a leap of faith, it's too big a step for the centres, schools and colleges to say, 'Yes, we trust in this, we'll go for it.' There are a few forward-thinking schools and colleges who have embraced it in some subjects, but if you want to make stuff happen you need to build it from the ground up and (Surpass)Paper+ allows you to do that. And if you tie that in with the non-exam assessment, using on-screen tests, you then come in at it from both directions, you give people the choice and the option to do it, and all of a sudden it becomes ubiquitous.

### **The advantages of on-screen marking via scanning and CBT**

We mark millions of scripts a year. If it's marked off a scanned image, the examiners log in to the system and they can see the questions, they are presented with the questions, and they mark those questions. The advantage of having it marked from a scanned image is that you can have real-time quality assurance, so you effectively can have your senior examiners looking at the marking of examiners as it goes along. If it's paper-based you can only sample halfway through the process and at the end of you need to, so there's some advantages of working off scanned images. Also, it saves moving paper around the country quite so much as well. The real advantage in doing stuff on-screen is it cuts all that scanning out, and it allows us to take those on-screen tests and take them straight to the examiner, so there's a load of delays that it also eliminates, and it reduces the loss of scripts as well because of course there's nothing that can get lost in the post or in transfer around the country.

The thing about on-screen tests, if you move to on-screen tests, there's stuff you can do on an on-screen test that you can't do in a paper-based exam. So you can present quite complicated case studies with video evidence and stuff like that, of a practical experiment or something, and ask the students to comment on the experiment or identify where there's health and safety breaches, or talk about the results and outcome from the actual experiment, as opposed to having just a black and white image of a set of apparatus, it's not really very rich and it limits what you could assess, so you can make your assessments a lot more real-world and a lot more realistic, and actually you can assess stuff that you just can't do on paper.

And what we can do is we can present that data back to the school, that says, here's how all your cohort performed, here's how all your students performed, on a class-by-class basis or on a whole school basis, so you can see, oh, as a teacher, blimey I didn't teach question 4 very well because look, my students are not performing as well as the rest of my peers' are; go away, devise some better lesson, think about some resources whatever it is you want to do, how can you improve your performance? You can also compare the school against the national average, or you can compare a school against schools like us, so, if you're a grammar school you can compare just against grammar schools or if you're a comprehensive just comprehensives, single-sex, mixed-sex, or whatever it is. That sort of level of data is really important. If you're doing an on-screen test you can get even richer

data about it, because what you can get from an on-screen test is you can say how long did it take the students to answer the individual questions for instance.

### **Using SurpassPaper+ as a tool to evolve paper-based assessments**

I think the real advantage of moving to something like (Surpass)Paper+ is we already know some students do their exams using a computer, they word process them, and they like doing that. That's the way they work. It could be for a variety of different reasons, and the exam boards allow that to happen. It just might be, 'That's what I wanna do,' and therefore they can do that. That sort of volume is relatively small, it's a dozen kids in the school, or two dozen kids, or it's a special school and they're all geared up with the technology to support that, maybe for a disability or something like that. If you say, rather than just typing it, why don't you type it into Paper+, and then the information comes back electronically to the board.

It does a couple of things. One, it's much more secure, we have much more control because we know exactly what conditions that exam is sat. If they're just typing it up on a word processor, there's no control from the board's part there. We have to assume that the centre has turned off web access and all the other things that they're supposed to have done. So it gives a bit more control in the system. Two, it means that it's a very much faster upload to us, and it's in a format we can cope with. And I think the third thing about it is it's what centres are used to doing anyway. So they'll all just go, 'oh, that's okay. That was great, we can use this system instead of just word processing it. I don't have to print the bloomin' thing, I don't have to then stick it in the envelope, I don't have to send it off.' It's a kind of stealth, I suppose, introduction of on-screen tests.