btl learning & assessment

QTS Skills Tests Powered by BTL Content Development Tools
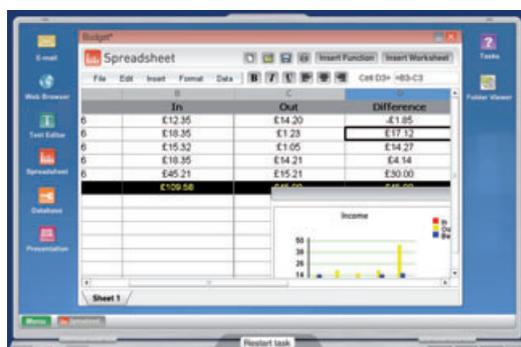
Case Study

Background

In 1998, the Department for Education and Employment published the Green Paper, Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change. This paper recommended that all new teachers should have a thorough grounding in Numeracy, Literacy and ICT. In 1999, the TTA (which in 2005 became the TDA (Training & Development Agency for Schools)) was tasked with developing the QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) skills tests and taking responsibility for policy in this area.

The skills tests assess specific skills in the context of a teacher's professional role. All trainee teachers in England must pass the skills tests as a prerequisite for the award of Qualified Teacher Status. This is to help ensure that all teachers are competent in numeracy, literacy and ICT, regardless of their teaching specialty.

The first set of QTS tests were taken in 2000 and, in 2001, computer-based testing was introduced.

Summary of the Client's Requirements

The QTS tests required a robust yet flexible solution; the TDA therefore sought to recruit suppliers with broad experience in both e-Assessment design and delivery.

The TDA required that the content and context of the QTS tests be relevant to Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in their professional teaching activities. The test functionality and content would also have to be engaging and provide instant results as a pass or fail. In addition, the test feedback had to support the candidate by suggesting areas of weakness.

The TDA required that 10% of the exam content be replenished each year, in time for the new candidates starting programmes in September, and they also required that candidates be able to undertake practice tests in an environment that is as realistic as possible.

BTL Involvement

In 2003, BTL was selected to develop the content for the QTS tests in partnership with a content authoring partner and third party delivery partner, with whom BTL has forged a successful and productive relationship.

The test content was authored using BTL's award

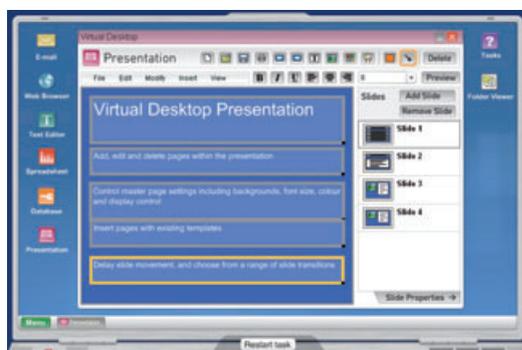**Creators of:**

⊞Surpass®
THE E-ASSESSMENT PLATFORM

BTL has created one of the most comprehensive, secure and innovative e-Assessment solutions on the market: Surpass. Surpass is used by a number of leading national and international Awarding and Professional bodies to develop and deliver their global e-Assessment programmes.

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winning content production tool, ContentProducer, and The Virtual Desktop™ - a powerful ICT desktop simulator that allows users to interact with key desktop applications such as Text Editor and Spreadsheet. The BTL Virtual Desktop™ presents these in a self contained environment where candidates can create and edit documents whilst being marked automatically at the same time.

How the QTS Tests Work

The three QTS tests consist of the following elements:

- The ICT tests consist of tasks based on the use of Text Editor, Spreadsheet, Email, Presentation, and Web Browser applications. Each application offers a generic level of functionality that is applicable to the NQT's teaching context.

- The literacy tests comprise spelling, punctuation, grammar and comprehension questions. The tests use a mix of free text entry (for spelling), multiple choice, drag and drop and paragraph-manipulation questions.

- The numeracy tests consist of 12 time-controlled questions in mental arithmetic followed by 16 on-screen questions which use a mix of table and chart based information.
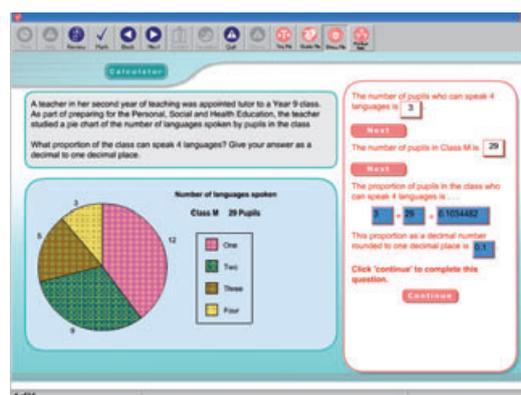
Each test is computer marked and a pass or fail is awarded based on a percentage pass mark. The ICT

marking scheme reviews the interactions and results and then awards the candidate marks based on logic. Candidates have to pass all three tests, in addition to the other QTS standards, before they can be recommended for the award of QTS by their Initial Teacher Training (ITT) provider.

The questions within the QTS tests go through a stringent quality assurance process involving a panel of representatives, from ITT providers, teachers and external bodies, for example, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and Ofsted.

Candidates have access to online practice materials and extended time tests are available for candidates with special requirements.
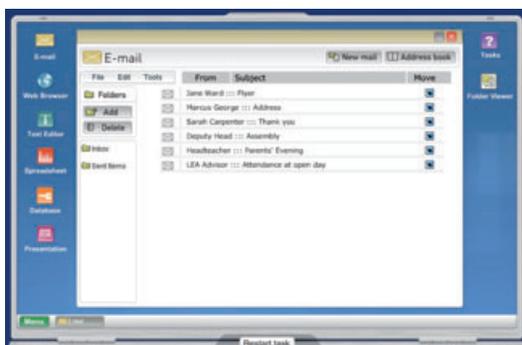
The numeracy test support material has been developed using BTL Engage® a highly innovative and supportive learning environment. BTL Engage® allows the candidate to take the practice test as normal, but with the option to access 'show me' or 'guide me' interactive information features for assistance.

Tests are booked online and can be taken at around 50 tests centres around England, the majority of which are located within ITT providers.

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What the Future Holds

QTS tests continue to be the largest and longest running e-Assessment programme of their kind, with over 100,000 tests being taken each year.

The TDA has recently awarded BTL a new 3 year contract to develop QTS test content and work with existing authoring and delivery partners. BTL is committed to developing its products, methods and content to make sure that the QTS programme continues to be both forward thinking and respected as a valid means of ensuring the highest standards in new teachers.

Project Performance

To date, BTL has been involved in the development of test content for 5 years. BTL has now also been approved as a content development partner for a further 3 years, under a new contract.

Working closely with the TDA, BTL manages the authoring of content by AlphaPlus Consultants. Once content has been approved and signed off in script form, the items are setup for pilot within ContentProducer. BTL has been commended for its strong communication skills with both the TDA and its delivery partners. Core to the communication strategy is the online file management tool, SharePoint. This facility is provided by BTL and is an invaluable tool for sharing documents, such as project plans, as well as risk and issue logs.

Year after year, BTL have been successful in ensuring the delivery of quality content and functionality that is on schedule, specification and within budget.

Fiona Longmore from the TDA states ;

"The TDA is delighted to be working with BTL on the development of the QTS skills tests, as we have confidence that they will continue to fulfil the brief for innovative and fit-for-purpose test content, delivering on time and to budget. "