Assessment of Computer Based Projects by:

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Presentation Transcript & Profiles

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Introduction

The following is a transcript of a presentation by David Naylor, BTL and Marie Larusson of the Association of Accounting Technicians, at the 7th Annual Surpass User Group Conference in Amsterdam in 2014.

All the views expressed by the presenters are their own.

Video Links

Presentation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-33ndrBnOg

Transcript

David Naylor

We're here to talk about – or review – the new Surpass capability for computer based projects.

I wanted to start by talking about computer based tests and how they are the traditional delivery mechanism that we have within the Surpass platform. We use computer based tests for both summative and formative inside surpass. What we mean by computer based tests then is an assessment that's timed, and the candidate has an amount of time from when they enter the keycode and they finish that test when the time runs down. In a 60 minute test, the candidate enters the keycode and they have 60 minutes for that test. Now, Surpass does have some limited support for some project based assessment. We introduced some support for untimed assessments a couple of years ago, and with that, we've started to introduce some new features for things like the file upload question type and the close without submit. But it is quite limited, and there's a lack of control for the awarding organisation to be able to really use that with a computer based project type assessment. AAT approached us last year to start to think about how we can implement projects within the Surpass platform and improve the offering that we've got there. So Marie's going to go through how AAT use projects in their current system and how they started to interact with BTL to move it across into the Surpass platform. When Marie's finished her presentation I'll pick up again and I'll go through how BTL implemented the actual solution inside Surpass. When I'm talking, some of my slides have got video on them, so I'll try and narrate the video. Rather than looking at me, try and keep the focus on the screen as it's a demonstration of the feature and I will talk through that feature.

Marie Larusson

Before I get started, just to give you a little bit of information about AAT, what it is we do and who we are. We are a registered charity, not-for-profit organisation and we offer an accounting qualification to technicians both in the UK and across the world. We're regulated in the UK and with other awarding bodies such as SQA and SAQA. We offer mainly the accounting qualification which is 3 levels and certificate to diploma, but we've also started offering quite a few short courses, for example in book keeping, computerised accounting and business skills. We deliver our qualifications at over 450 different approved centres - that's across the world - and we only do now computer

based assessments, unless there's a need for reasonable adjustments or specific arrangements. Like many other awarding organisations, we offer two types of assessments: we have the summative assessment, which leads to an actual award for the students, and then we have the formative assessment, which is used as a benchmarking activity and for students to be able to practice the environments and the exam and the terms that we use for these are 'live' and 'practice' assessments. The current assessment platforms we have offer us the opportunity to deliver both these types on the same platform.

In our core qualification the function of the summative assessment is to require candidates to demonstrate that they have workplace competence to nationally set levels and we have two different types of assessment. We have the CBTs, which you've heard about previously, and they're externally assessed by AAT, and we have the computer based projects which are internally assessed and moderated by the centres. These are all externally verified by AAT, by our own external verifiers. We're currently obligated to offer recognition of prior learning and workplace evidence, and these are just for candidates to demonstrate that they already have the knowledge that's needed to gain the units required. We're not going to touch on recognition of prior learning or RPO much more in this presentation, we're going to focus on CBP.

This is where we were in June 2014, we had two different assessment platforms, we had the one provided to us by BTL on Surpass for CBTs and we had a separate one for us on LearnPlus, where we had our computer based projects. This is the platform that was provided to us by Kineo – so a different provider – and it also offered us the chance for students to take RPO and WPE. We also separately offered some paper-based exams, but only to students that qualified for reasonable adjustments or special considerations. For any other students, we stopped offering paper-based in December 2013 when we had our last sitting. All the new qualifications that we launch from now on are only offered as computer-based on SecureAssess.

Now, from the 1st September 2014, we launch CBPs on SecureAssess. That means that we now have CBTs and CBPs offered on the same platform as well as RPO and WPE. Our CBTs are set and marked by AAT and they are automatically marked by the system with some elements of the assessment human-marked. The way we do the human-marked questions is by using SecureMarker. We then have our computer based projects which we now offer completely on SecureAssess as well. But you'll see that we still have Kineo and LearnPlus for a short while longer. This is because the assessments that started before the first of September when we moved, they still have to continue on the same platform to allow the students to finish on the same one that they started on. What we're going to be doing is that this LearnPlus Platform will be scaled back and operate until 2015 in March at the latest, but this is only for any students that started the assessment prior to 1st September.

This is where we will be in March 2015. We'll have our CBTs and CBPs on SecureAssess as well as RPO and WPEs – we'll have all of our assessments on the same platform. The only reason that we will continue to have Kineo and LearnPlus is if there are any investigations which means we will have to retrieve the content. We won't offer any assessments on the platforms after March 2015.

This was really easy to do – moving our CBPs over to SecureAssess, as you can imagine. But actually, it did come with its challenges. One of the things that we had to do when we moved platform was to get the workflow right. We had to make sure the students were able to take their assessment, we had to make sure that automatically went through to the assessor, so the person at the centre who'd be marking the assessment. Once the assessor had selected an outcome for the student, so a

competent or a not competent, that would need to go through to the internal verifier, for them to either agree with the decision, or disagree. If the internal verifier disagrees, then that needs to be sent back to the assessor again, to re-evaluate why they gave the outcome that they did. If the internal verifier agrees with the decision, then that one gets automatically sent through, and that result goes onto the student's record. It was a bit of a challenge getting that workflow right. What we didn't want to do, was simply replicate the old system that we had. The old system came with quite a few challenges, it wasn't extremely popular with our customers and we had to design something that fit their needs rather than just copying what we had on LearnPlus and moving it to SecureAssess. One other challenge that we had with the old system was students being able to take their assessment and then upload their finished document. When they take our computer based projects, they use a secondary software, such as spreadsheet software or computerised accounting, and it did pose challenges to the students getting that workflow right, where they upload at the end of the assessments, so we wanted to make sure that technology didn't get in the way of the students' assessment experience. And 'Mark My Words', we needed to make sure that the marking of the words and figures in the assessment actually worked the way that it should.

David Naylor

Okay so introducing computer based projects. So the surpass computer based project functionality allows control of the creation, delivery, submission, marking, moderation and file management of fixed term assessments inside SecureAssess. So as Marie discussed there, the old system in terms of LearnPlus had its quirks, and BTL worked quite closely with AAT to make sure that the implementations we did inside Surpass worked for that entire process flow, but we didn't want to just duplicate an old problem so we made sure that the things that we developed inside SecureAssess were going to work for the users. It was also really important that the users of the old system embraced the new and were encouraged to use SecureAssess so we needed it to really be a nice slick and controlled transition. I want to spend a little time going through the key developments that we did inside Surpass to support computer based projects. At the start of the presentation, I talked about a computer based test and how that's delivered in a duration in minutes or hours and there's a countdown time where the candidate gets a fixed amount of time. The key difference for the project inside SecureAssess is that we set a start date and an end date and the project is live in that time window. The CBP schedule is in number of days, so we've got here an example of the start date and submission date being selected, and at the end of that day, so the 11th November, that project will submit. If our candidate enters the test on the 11th, they've given themselves a single day to do their assessment. If they start it on the 4th, like every good candidate should, then they'll get the full window. So this differentiates between a project and a test. One of the other key enhancements we made to the candidate experience was to give them visibility of the fact they were in a project versus a CBT. The traditional CBT has a countdown timer, whereas we have a project deadline presented to the candidate for a CBP. The candidate will see something different depending on where they are in the assessment window. At the start of the assessment window they'll see a project deadline, but we wanted to give them a sense that the project deadline was approaching. If the candidate gets within 7 days of the project deadline, we start introducing that they have days remaining, which you can see on the slide. Finally, we show that there's a countdown timer. That appears of the final day of the assessment – we start from 24 hours and we start counting down, just to give the candidate the feeling that the test is going to submit at the end of that window. A key point though is that the candidate is free to submit at any point that they want, they don't have to wait until the end. The system will submit for them if they don't do it themselves, and it will submit in terms of where that candidate's progress is, so if they've done half of the test, we'll get half of the test, if they've done all of the test, we'll get the whole test. But they can finish

that test in one day and submit that, there's no problem there. Marie also touched on that we needed to support the business process for CBPs. The two things that I went through there were the fundamental architecture changes that we did inside of the Surpass system. But we've also changed quite a bit of the platform to support that business process and that was a critical success for the entire project. I just want to make the point that although we are focusing on CBPs in this presentation, many of the enhancements that we've got in the product now are available for CBPs and CBTs, so it's important to remember that. This is a key point because what we've done in the system is going to unlock some big potential for awarding organisations. You can look at your current business process and enhance that with these features inside the Surpass system.

The first changes that we've done are around the marking and moderation. Marie referred to assessors and internal verifiers, that's what AAT call markers and moderators in the Surpass platform, so I will be saying markers and moderators, just to differentiate. One of the major requirements for AAT was to be able to devolve marking and moderation down to the centre level. We started that work in 11.3. In 11.3, we introduced some stricter controls about who can void tests in the marking screen and who can release tests, through moderation. We've enhanced that in 11.4, so that the ability to change the marks that a marker gave an item is controlled through a new permission. Currently, if you've got moderation, you can change marks that markers assigned. In the 11.4, you'll need to have that advanced, elevated permission to be able to do that. Out of the box, for everybody else, everybody gets that, so you'll have to choose to step it down if you want to, so don't worry, you're not going to lose any functionality in the system.

The other major change we did in marking and moderation was to support the concept of assignment of markers and moderators. It's possible to select a marker and moderator at the point of scheduling now. We've introduced a choice there, and I'll be using the word choice quite a bit over the next few slides because what we wanted to make sure was that we actually allowed the awarding organisations to choose which of these features they turned on or off within the system. You can select to use markers and moderators assignment at the assessment group level, so for one assessment you might have it on, for another assessment you might have it completely switched off. There's two levels of control when you have it switched on. We have soft control, in the sense that you can assign markers and moderators but anybody is free to mark or moderate that test within those screens. Then we've got strict control, which is quite a powerful feature in the sense that only the marker or moderator that is assigned to that test can get into that test and do the marking and moderation. Just to point out, the assignments of those markers and moderators can be changed after the scheduling wizard as well, so you're not stuck with the people you chose at the point of scheduling.

The first of the videos is coming up here, so I'll try and time this right. File upload management is what's coming up next and with the introduction of project based assessments and the file upload question type, we've increased the possibility for mistakes in the candidate's submission of evidence. So, it's now possible to upload files on behalf of the candidate in the marking and moderation screens. The video here is showing a selection of the new file within Surpass – which side of the marking and moderations screens, I'm not sure which – but we're using the file upload question type that's built into the test and we're asking for a reason why we're asking to do that. So we've got 'failed to upload all files', 'uploaded the wrong file', 'the file was corrupted' or we allow the choice of presenting another option as well. We've also enhanced the file upload manager window to show a bit more information about where that file's come from. Traditionally, we

wouldn't have had the user type, or uploaded by, or the reasons column within there, but now it's showing where it's come from – whether it's come from the candidate, whether it's come from the marker, whether it's come from a moderator. If it's a marker or a moderator, who it was and why that file was attached to that assessment. All of that information is available through the audit trail as well, so that supports the external verification process that AAT need to do.

There's another video on the next slide, as well, so what we've got here is the marking and moderation feedback loop. We needed to do further work to require the devolving of marking and moderation down to the centre. It's possible now for the moderator to review an item and send that item back to a marker so the moderator's identified that this one needs to be sent back. If they click on the flag for review button and return that script to the marker. The marker then comes along in the marking screen, and sees that a new test has entered that screen. We're covering that through the percentages covered, if there's 100% marked and we knock off one item then it'll drop down to whatever that number means. They can view the marking history and get the comments from the moderator and re-mark the test. That supports that feedback loop that Marie was talking about. Again, there's a full audit trail for that, so we saw that there's the comments in the marking history so we can see that marking and that moderation loop through the system.

One of the final key changes that we did was with time extensions for in-progress assessments. So this has come about with the introduction of fixed-term assessments – it was important that the submission date could be amended. Traditionally, we'd cover this using the DDA features in Surpass and you'd be able to extend the time for a particular candidate before they started the test. But, when you've got a fixed term assessment, or an extended term assessment, that could last for 60 days for example. We needed to be able to extend the duration of the test when it was in progress. We've done this in two ways: for computer based project this is switched on and left on and you can't touch that, you have to be able to extend the time for a computer based project. Again, we've introduced choice, for a computer based test, you can choose now whether you'd like to extend the duration or not while in progress. For a project, we allow you to modify the submission date, for a computer based test, we support the capability to add extra minutes effectively. You can go up to 24 hours additional time on a computer based test, and the test will then submit as it would do before.

Those are the features that we developed in 11.4 to support AAT and then moved to computer based projects. It's worth spending a bit of time talking about what advantages this brings to other awarding organisations as well. We've got a single system to manage, moderate and control multiple assessment programmes. Those assessment programmes are a key thing here, because where we had the traditional CBT where we could do formative and summative tests we've now introduced the ability to have coursework, fixed term assessments, research projects, e-portfolios is a big one there, and learning journals, evidence based assessment. All of those things run through the Surpass platform now. That brings me on to the next point where we've got a single solution, so rather than having multiple solutions to delivering an e-portfolio system and an e-assessment system, you can bring those together now and run those two things through Surpass. By doing that, we bring it to the familiar interface that is Surpass. The centre-level users of Surpass and the awarding organisations commend us for the cleanliness of the UI. It's an easy system to work with and it's familiar for all of those users. It's also backed up by BTL's robust and proven service, so we have a clean user interface that everybody is happy with and we've also got a really strong backend system that's been proven through the years and we have test numbers to back that up. We can consolidate all of those things into a single platform.

Computer based projects are offered out of the box in Surpass release 11.4 for the Surpass Enterprise customers. AAT went live with these on 1st September, so it's a new thing, but it's out there. Surpass Editions will gain support for computer based projects in early 2015. There is a full demonstration of all of the features that I've talked about today, we'll share these slides after the presentation. There's a link to it there. You can also see it over by the stands in the lobby, Tim's set up a computer that we can show this video on if you want to see it.

About the presenters

Marie Larusson, Assessments Programme Manager

Marie has been with AAT and the Assessments Team since 2010. In 2013, she was appointed as the Assessments Programme Manager, a new role within AAT. This role has a key focus on managing the programme of delivery of assessments for AAT's Qualification Development programme and managing specific assessment development projects. Recent projects have included the introduction of a customised version of the AAT Accounting qualification in New Zealand which launched in January 2014, and the translation of existing assessments into other languages which is ongoing.

David Naylor, Senior Product Owner

David joined BTL in 2004 and worked within the development team for 6 years as a Senior Developer, working on the Surpass Platform. Following this, David led a newly created Live Services team to provide 3rd line support to the BTL Operations team. During this time, David also managed the live service infrastructure and transformed the Performance Testing offering from BTL.

David is the Senior Product Owner, responsible for working with the Product Owner team to deliver on the BTL business strategy, following best practice and consistent development approaches. Dave is also the Product Owner for Enterprise Surpass Analytics.

About AAT – Association of Accounting Technicians

AAT is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1980 to provide a recognised professional qualification and membership body for accounting technicians. It is a worldwide organisation with more than 133,600 members. AAT is dedicated to offering extensive support to all its members and their employers, through its continuing professional development (CPD) scheme, professional regulations, ethical guidelines and more. AAT support their members through more than 500 AAT-approved training providers across the world. BTL has been working in partnership with AAT for a number of years. All AAT exams are developed and delivered through our Surpass Assessment Platform. We work very closely with AAT to develop and deliver relevant, engaging and forward-thinking exams.

Following the renewal the partnership in 2012 Suzie Webb, Director of Education at AAT, states:

"This long-term partnership with BTL strengthens our strategic approach to the provision of assessments for our qualifications. As our portfolio of courses and qualifications expands to meet increasing demand from accounting technicians and their employers around the world, the Surpass Platform provides a reliable, resilient and flexible environment for developing and delivering engaging, challenging and robust assessments."

Following the announcement that AAT would be phasing out Paper Based Exams in favour of e-Assessments, Susan Harper, Manager of AAT Exams stated:

"The computer based assessments we have developed with BTL enable us to assess students' skills and knowledge in a robust way that reflects and prepares them for the workplace of today."

Example Assessments: http://aat-interactive.org.uk/aat/practice_assessments/

Statistics: Contract since 2006; 133,600 members across the world; 300,000 computer-based assessments taken in 2014, 800 each day; Members in 100 countries working with 500 training providers;1 million green light tests taken to date. (Source: https://www.aat.org.uk/sites/default/files/assets/AAT_annual_report_2014.pdf)

Website: http://www.aat.org.uk/