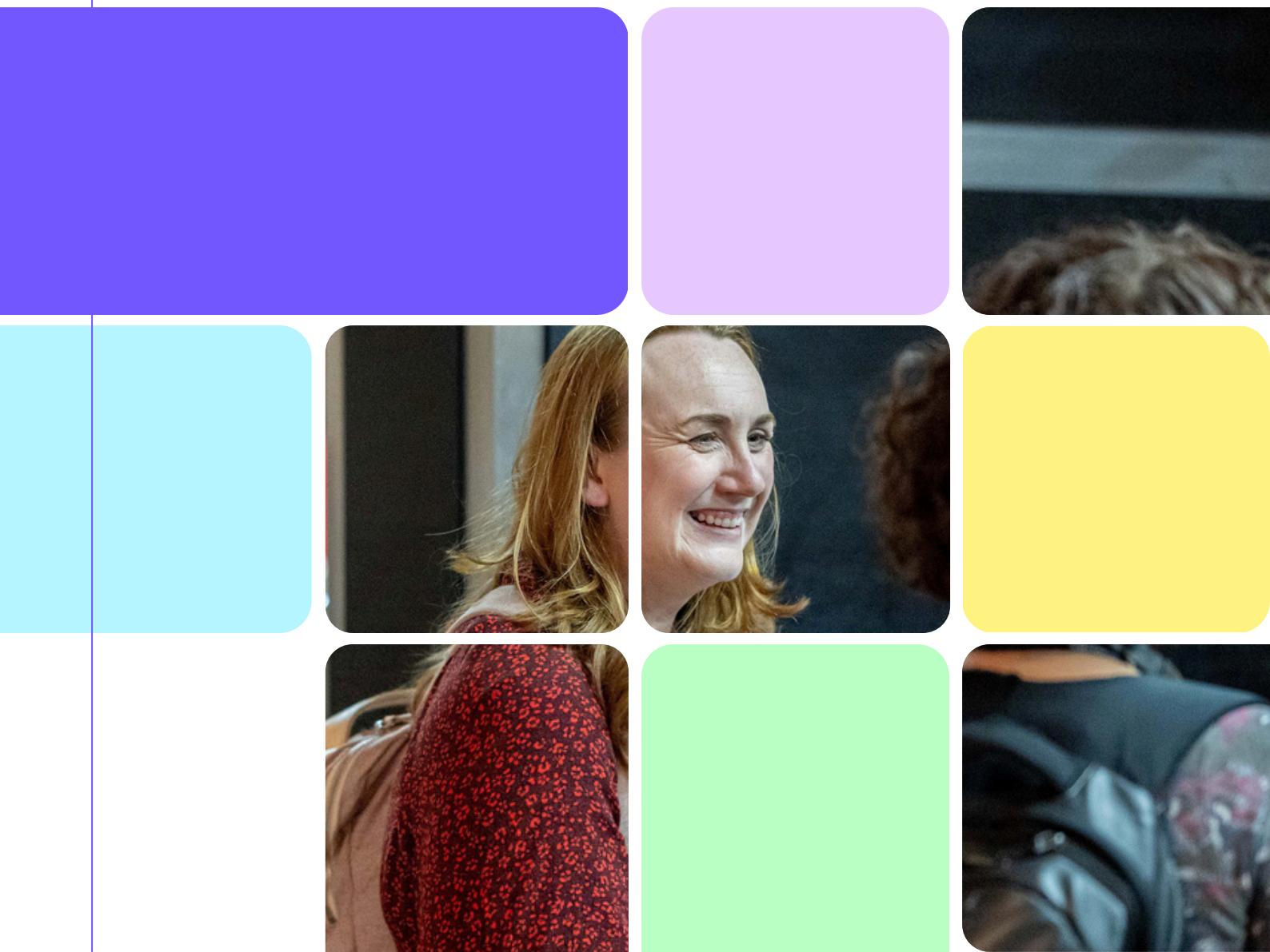


The eAA Report:

Digital Assessment trends and emerging themes



Introduction

In 2025 digital assessment crossed a decisive threshold. The discussion is no longer about whether digital delivery and artificial intelligence should be used in assessment, but how they can be governed responsibly at scale while maintaining public confidence.

This report draws together global trends from 2025 demonstrating that digital assessment is no longer a future ambition but a proven, scalable approach already operating across the world. At the same time, it highlights how artificial intelligence is reshaping assessment practice in ways that demand new models of governance, ethical oversight and design thinking. Trust has emerged as the defining issue of this next phase of transformation, requiring assessment systems to deliver assurance alongside innovation.

The e-Assessment Association has not simply reflected these trends but directly shaped best practice through our conference, awards, webinars, policy engagement, and special interest group activity. Real world examples presented across eAA platforms demonstrate that secure, scalable and inclusive digital assessment is already operational and delivering impact.



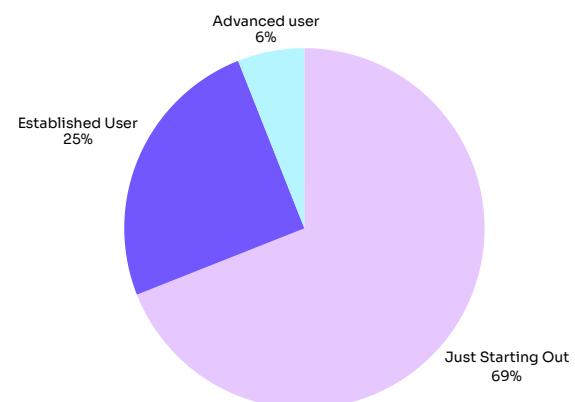
Artificial Intelligence Becomes Embedded in Assessment Practice

Artificial intelligence continues to dominate both industry coverage and professional debate, with 2025 marking a clear shift away from novelty and experimentation toward long term reality and governance. Media narratives reflect both rapid adoption and growing resistance, with some institutions attempting to revert to traditional formats as a defensive response to AI misuse, while others accept that AI is now embedded and here to stay. Stories range from concerns over student cheating and misuse to demonstrations of AI performance in high level professional certification exams. In addition, the sustainability impact of large scale AI adoption is an important topic for debate. Together these developments highlight a sector at a crossroads, where managing AI is no longer about detection alone but about establishing practical governance across content development, assessment design, delivery, marking, quality assurance and, increasingly, rethinking assessment models themselves to remain valid and authentic in an AI enabled world.

We placed artificial intelligence firmly at the centre of our 2025 activity with our dedicated AI Symposium at the 2025 International e-Assessment Conference and our AI Special Interest Group sessions. With real world case studies from the front line of AI driven test development, delegates took part in lively interactive debates on what they genuinely trust AI to deliver in practice.

Inconsistencies in human marking are well documented but the debate should focus not on whether AI can replace human markers, but on how technology can responsibly strengthen assessment quality, consistency and scalability. We will continue to highlight best practice, bringing together experts from across the assessment industry and maintaining a strong focus on AI in assessment throughout 2026.

How would you describe your organisation's level of experience with AI in assessment?
(eAA 2025 AI in Assessment Survey)



Digital Assessment Reaches National Scale

Of note in 2025 was the accelerated transition from experimental digital testing to widespread national adoption, in both education and professional exams.



The eAA Digital Assessment at Scale webinar demonstrated that large scale digital testing is already securely operational. Practical benefits include improved accessibility for learners, reduced administrative burden for organisations, and faster turnaround of results. These insights were further developed at the eAA National Examinations Roundtable. Senior leaders from exam boards, ministries and major providers examined readiness and implementation challenges, including infrastructure resilience, digital inclusion, psychometric comparability between digital and paper modes, contingency planning and the importance of transparency with stakeholders. Across these discussions there was strong consensus that the direction of travel is clear. Digital delivery will become the standard mode of assessment. The remaining issue is not feasibility but how systems can best secure confidence, effectiveness and quality assurance during large scale transition.

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Trust and Integrity Become the Defining Challenge

Integrity concerns featured prominently throughout 2025 media coverage. This included reports of cheating linked to wearable devices, limitations of AI detection tools, and ongoing debates around remote invigilation and surveillance technologies, leading to some organisations moving away from digital assessment. These stories risk generating public anxiety that rapid technological change could undermine the credibility and reliability of qualifications.



Trust was a central topic at eAA events in 2025 and is set to become even more critical in 2026. Through conference sessions and Special Interest Groups, the eAA community shared emerging practice built on privacy by design principles, risk based monitoring approaches and robust human review processes that support both fairness and transparency. Innovation showcased through the eAA Awards further reinforced the sector's proactive response, demonstrating how integrity can be embedded within digital assessment systems rather than added as an afterthought. This theme is expected to remain a major focus going forward, with the eAA continuing to illustrate how technological innovation aligned with thoughtful governance can strengthen exam security and public confidence rather than weaken them.

Automation Reshapes Assessment Operations

With pressures including difficulties in examiner recruitment, inconsistency in human marking and rising delivery costs, automated marking is now a mainstream policy discussion. Media reports include proposals by education ministers to use AI supported marking systems and pilots within several national and professional testing programmes.

Best practice case studies demonstrate how digital assessment can operate effectively within tightly governed safeguards and how to combine automated marking with structured human moderation.

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By combining the best of human insight with the power of digital technology, we can create a system that is not only more efficient and scalable, but also more authentic, inclusive and reflective of the real world our learners are heading into.

Patrick Coates, CEO of the e-Assessment Association

The winners and finalists of the 2025 International e-Assessment Awards showed real operational gains achieved through hybrid models, including improved turnaround times and examiner workload management while maintaining measurement reliability. These examples reinforce the view that automation works best not as a full replacement of expert judgement but as an augmentation of it.

Recognising the importance of this issue, we are leading major 2026 industry study into the use of AI in essay marking, bringing evidence, rigour and independent insight to one of the most critical areas of assessment innovation.



Workforce Assessment Gains Prominence

Although mainstream media coverage continues to focus largely on schools, colleges and universities, a parallel and increasingly significant shift is taking place in workforce related assessment. Advanced professional examinations are testing the capabilities of AI directly, while employers and certification bodies are increasingly questioning how credentials must evolve as job roles diversify and required skills change more rapidly than ever before.

Evidence of this transformation is already visible across the eAA community. The 2025 Award winners and finalists demonstrated how digital assessment is reshaping workforce development. Benefits include measurable reductions in staff turnover, particularly among high potential employees with AI being used to streamline and standardise recruitment processes. The new Professional Certification Programme of the Year award further highlighted initiatives that deliver outstanding design, delivery and impact in supporting career progression and raising industry standards.

To advance this agenda, the eAA partnered with the Federation of Awarding Bodies to deliver the Workforce Mobility Roundtable, bringing together senior representatives from government agencies, qualification bodies, employers and assessment technology providers. The roundtable explored how assessment and credentialling systems must evolve to support flexible labour markets, international mobility and the need for continuous upskilling.

These discussions informed the eAA Workforce Mobility and Skills Report, which set out eight themes for future development, focusing on how to create trusted, credible and scalable approaches to assessment and credentialling in a global context. These themes now underpin the dedicated Special Interest Group, which is accelerating shared learning on the use of innovative technologies to validate skills across increasingly international workforces.

Workforce credentialling is rapidly emerging as one of the most dynamic areas of assessment innovation, and it is likely to play a defining role in the next phase of digital transformation.



Sustainability Strengthens the Case for Digital Transition

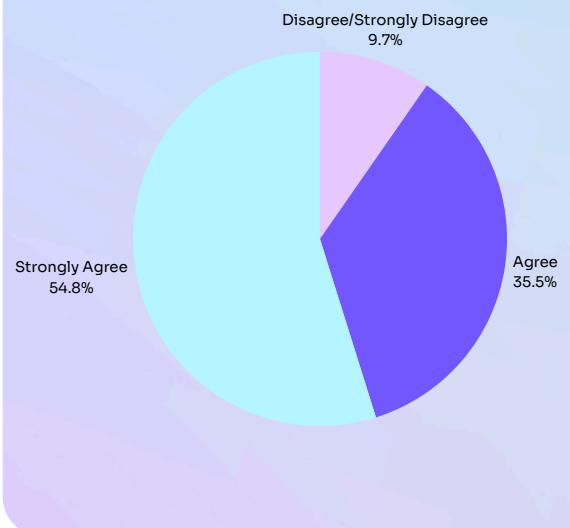
Environmental considerations are becoming an increasingly visible part of the digital assessment narrative. Reductions in paper consumption, transport emissions and physical storage are often listed as one of the benefits of implementing digital assessment.

At the same time, attention is turning to the emerging environmental costs associated with large scale AI adoption. At the International e-Assessment Conference, Rita Bateson emphasised the importance of embedding sustainable AI practices within assessment systems, noting the growing energy demands of increasingly complex models. Her call to action focused on the need to identify which AI applications genuinely support educational outcomes, careful selection of models based on efficiency rather than raw capability, and the integration of environmental consciousness into digital literacy education.

Together, these perspectives frame sustainability as both a benefit of digital assessment and a governance responsibility, reinforcing the need for balanced, responsible innovation as digital systems continue to expand.



Do you agree that AI will fundamentally change how we design and deliver assessments?
(eAA 2025 AI in Assessment Survey)



Policy response and regulatory engagement

There is growing recognition across governments that assessment systems must modernise in response to technological change, and in many countries digital assessment is already operating successfully at scale. However, policy momentum remains uneven. While proven delivery models exist, some education systems continue to move cautiously, delaying meaningful implementation and reform.



In the United Kingdom, the publication of the Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report in late 2025 represented a missed opportunity to commit to real transition toward digital assessment. The consultation on regulation of on-screen assessment identifies the well-documented benefits of digital assessment, it demonstrates that England remains in a prolonged cycle of discussion and caution. In early 2026, Ofqual published a Working Paper, *Principles of AI use in marking*. While supportive of work to explore use of AI for quality assurance and training new markers, Ofqual does not support AI marking in high stakes qualifications. Without greater pace and ambition, England's examinations risk becoming progressively less relevant, less inclusive, and less effective at capturing the broad range of knowledge, skills and competencies learners need for life beyond formal education.

At the eAA we will continue our programme of webinars, roundtables, research reports and Special Interest Group meetings to convene regulators, awarding bodies, technology providers and employer groups to share best practice, address governance challenges, and support the practical implementation of digital assessment across both education and workforce sectors.

Conclusion

The evidence is clear. Digital assessment has reached operational maturity and artificial intelligence is now an enduring feature of assessment systems across education and employment. The challenge facing the sector is not whether these tools will remain part of assessment but how they are governed, deployed and designed to ensure qualifications remain trusted, fair and relevant in a rapidly changing world.

Public scrutiny of integrity, concerns around automation, questions about sustainability and the growing need for skills based credentialing all point to a single conclusion. Technological innovation alone is not enough. Long term confidence depends on transparent governance, ethical design, quality assurance frameworks and sustained collaboration across regulators, awarding bodies, technology providers and employers.

The eAA's work demonstrates how this collaboration can be achieved in practice. We have convened critical discussions through our AI Symposium, Digital Assessment at Scale webinar, National Examinations Roundtable, Beyond Multiple Choice series and Special Interest Group meetings. Innovation showcased through the International e-Assessment Awards has provided real world evidence of what is already working, while initiatives including the Workforce Mobility and Skills Report and the forthcoming industry study into AI in essay marking continue to supply the sector with practical insight and independent leadership.

Looking ahead, the central mission remains unchanged. Digital assessment must continue to scale with integrity, ensuring that innovation enhances rather than undermines trust. The e-Assessment Association will remain at the forefront of this work, acting as a convenor, evidence builder and thought leader to support confident adoption of digital assessment across education and the workforce and to shape the future of assessment with credibility, responsibility and purpose.



Digital assessment must continue to scale with integrity, ensuring that innovation enhances rather than undermines trust.



Further Reading

- eAA Industry News: www.e-assessment.com/news/industry-news
- 2025 International e-Assessment Award winners and finalists: www.e-assessment.com/eaa-awards/2025-winners-and-finalists
- BMC 2025, Intelligent Assessment for a Changing World Watch Again: www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkXG0oQNhgHisLo4OouZySOoxt-3STZyU
- Rita Bateson's article, Sustainability and AI: The Hidden Cost of Our Digital Revolution: www.e-assessment.com/news/viewpoint/sustainability-and-ai-the-hidden-cost-of-our-digital-revolution
- eAA AI Special Interest Group: www.e-assessment.com/special-interest-groups/ai-special-interest-group
- Digital Assessment at Scale webinar Watch Again: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYjlgvWmm8A&t=3s>
- National Examinations Roundtable report 2025: www.e-assessment.com/news/national-examinations-roundtable-2025-report-published
- The Workforce Mobility Roundtable Report: <https://www.e-assessment.com/files/resources/2025/july/workforce-mobility-report-2025.pdf>
- eAA commentary and press releases: <https://www.e-assessment.com/news/press-release-news>
- Ofqual's consultation on regulating onscreen assessment www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulating-on-screen-assessment/regulating-on-screen-assessment
- Ofqual's Principles of AI use in marking: www.gov.uk/government/publications/principles-of-ai-use-in-marking/principles-of-ai-use-in-marking

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