

Testing Times

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Welcome to the first issue of the CAA Centre newsletter, in which we aim to outline recent Centre activities, provide information about CAA-related events and publications, and offer case studies and articles. We hope that the newsletter can be used as a forum for sharing ideas about a range of CAA issues, such as question design, pedagogy, evaluation, overcoming resistance, getting support and quality assurance.

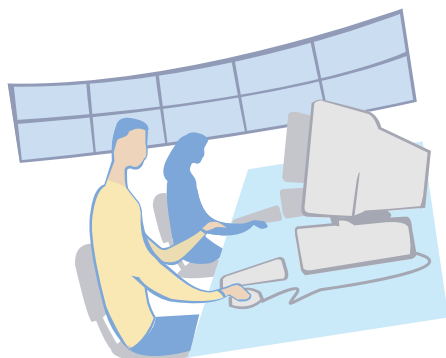
It's an exciting time to be involved with CAA. Learning and teaching innovations are clearly on the national agenda, in the shape of both the ILT and HEFCE's Learning and Teaching strategy entitlements for which nearly all HE institutions are currently applying. More specifically, two new CAA projects have been launched in recent months: SCAAN in Scotland (<http://www.scaan.ac.uk>) and The Centre for Interactive Assessment Development at the University of Derby (<http://www.derby.ac.uk/assess/ciad/ciad.html>). Also, new versions of web-based CAA software continue to be developed and released, including Question Mark Perception version 2 and WebMCQ.

In this issue, we've included an overview of the CAA Centre national survey, general information about the Centre and a description of the Centre's future work on the use of CAA with students with disabilities. We've also included announcements about forthcoming conferences, publications and study opportunities. We will be publishing the newsletter three times a year and in order to keep production costs low and distribution as wide as possible, we will be distributing it electronically in pdf format. Any suggestions on how we might improve the newsletter would be gratefully received. Additionally, if you would like to publicise work or events in the area of CAA, or if you have suggestions for forthcoming articles, please contact us.

Joanna Bull and Colleen McKenna

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COMPUTER ASSISTED ASSESSMENT

CAA CENTRE NATIONAL SURVEY

In January to April of this year, the CAA Centre conducted a national survey into the use of CAA in UK HE. The survey aimed to gather information about the methods of delivery of CAA, attitudes towards CAA and objective testing, success factors and obstacles for effective implementation, and regulations governing the use of CAA.

In order to canvass opinions from a full range of those involved with CAA, we devised four versions of the questionnaire, targeting the following groups: academics, educational technologists, staff developers and quality assurance staff. In total, 754 questionnaires were returned. Below is a sample of the findings:

- * Some use of CAA was reported in over 80 universities and colleges of higher education. Of these, there were 42 "old" universities and 30 "new" universities.
- * CAA is predominantly used in computing, sciences and maths. However, there is some use in social science and humanities courses.

* The majority of CAA tests reported were used for summative assessment, followed by formative, self-assessment and diagnostic.

* MCQ was the most widely-used question type followed by multi-response and text/numeric input.

* Academic staff were most likely to use CAA if, tests were available and computerised for them OR they created the test and someone else computerised it for them.

* Critical success factors for the effective implementation of CAA were identified as support (pedagogical and technical), availability of time to develop assessment, time savings, confidence in the system and access to subject-specific materials.

* Obstacles to effective implementation included a lack of the following: support, time, training, sound computer infrastructure and strategic guidance.

For a fuller account of the initial analysis of the survey, see our ALT-C 99 presentation, available as a pdf file at <http://www.caacentre.ac.uk/altc99v2.pdf>

Thanks to everyone who took part in the survey.

RESPONDENTS TO THE CAA NATIONAL SURVEY WERE ENTERED INTO A PRIZE DRAW FOR £20 BOOK TOKENS.

THE 10 NAMES OUT OF THE HAT WERE:

- Hazel Hall, Queen Margaret University College
- David Tucker, University College Scarborough
- Professor D.A. Brannan, Open University
- Chris O'Hagan, University of Derby
- S Ross, University of Glasgow
- Seb Schmoller, Sheffield College
- D. Ross-Simpson, Liverpool Hope University College
- Tim Fearnside, University of Wales Swansea
- Dr M MacEwan, Edinburgh College of Art
- Kenneth H. Scott, Newcastle

The Centre would like to congratulate the winners and thank all who took part in the survey.

4th International Computer Assisted Assessment (CAA) Conference

Continuing the successful series of CAA Conferences, Flexible Learning are pleased to announce the Fourth Annual CAA Conference on the 21st and 22nd June 2000. We invite you to submit proposals for papers, workshops and panel discussion contributions. All proposals will be considered for inclusion by the selection panel.

Full guidelines and further conference details (including the 1999 conference proceedings) are available at: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/service/fli/flicaa/conferences.html>

Or contact Susan Clowes, Executive Officer, Flexible Learning, S.E.C.Clowes@lboro.ac.uk 01509 222893

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WHAT IS THE CAA CENTRE?

The CAA Centre is part of a TLTP3 project on the implementation and evaluation of CAA.

Established in October 1998, the Centre aims to assist staff in higher education with the development and implementation of CAA. We are located physically at the University of Luton, the lead site for the project, and virtually at <http://caacentre.ac.uk>. Ultimately, we hope the Centre will act as a focus for CAA in higher education, providing a one-stop shop which offers the following resources:

- * Up-to-date knowledge of CAA activities
- * Strategic advice on the implementation of CAA
- * Guidance on the evaluation of cost and learning effectiveness of CAA
- * Consultancy on the implementation and evaluation of CAA
- * Generic and subject-specific workshops
- * Models for the implementation of CAA
- * Staff development and training materials

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The project is a consortium of four institutions who contribute the following specialisms:

- * Luton contributes expertise in running PC-based CAA examinations. Approximately 6,000 students per year are tested using CAA at Luton. Project manager Joanna Bull and project officer Colleen McKenna are based at Luton along with project administrator Valerie Martin Revell and researcher Ian Hesketh.
- * Glasgow offers extensive knowledge of web-based assessment. The project team is led by Dave Whittington, who is the technical director of the Clyde Virtual University and a member of the SCAAN consortium. Dave lectures in the Robert Clark Centre for Technological Education.

* Loughborough brings experience in optical mark reader (OMR) assessment. Approximately 20,000 scripts were marked by OMR at Loughborough last academic year. The project team consists of Myles Danson, CAA officer; Bryan Dawson, deputy head of Flexible Learning and Derek Stephens, lecturer in Information Science.

* Oxford Brookes contributes expertise in staff development. Brookes will pilot and evaluate many of the models of CAA implementation that are being constructed by the project. The project team includes Chris Rust, acting head of the OCSLD, and Richard Francis, learning technologist, who is also a member of the EFFECTS, TLTP3 project.

RECENT CENTRE ACTIVITIES

Much of the early part of 1999 was taken up with the Centre's national survey into CAA. The spring saw us deliver a set of workshops on an introduction to CAA and question design at Oxford Brookes University. In June, the project team at Loughborough, led by Myles Danson, ran the 3rd Annual CAA Conference and later in the summer, members of the Centre presented several sessions at ALT-C 99. We've also been developing early drafts of models for implementation and guides on question design.

The Centre has recently redesigned and substantially expanded its web site (<http://caacentre.ac.uk>)

The new site contains:

- latest CAA related news
- an on-line tutorial to writing objective test questions
- an extensive FAQ
- downloadable CAA Centre resources
- CAA bibliography
- links to on-line resources, including subject-specific resources, software, case studies, reviews and more

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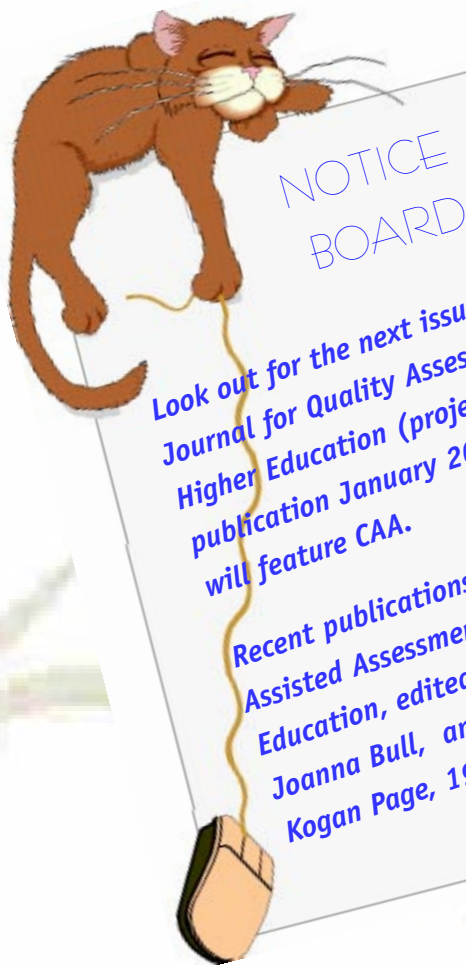
MAKING CAA ACCESSIBLE!

One area that is often overlooked when people consider CAA is how useful it is to students with special needs. In order to bridge the gap, the CAA Centre project will be developing guidelines on the use of CAA for students with dyslexia, visual and hearing impairments and mobility problems. The Centre web-site will be expanded to include a dedicated resource with information and advice about using CAA with students with disabilities, and we'll be modifying our materials to make them more accessible to staff with disabilities.

The work is being funded by an additional £5,000 grant from HEFCE, which has enabled Ian Hesketh to be seconded to join the Luton project team. Ian will be considering ways of advising universities about how to help students with special needs to use computerised assessments.

"The Centre will look at improving assessments by starting with the basics of changing layout and adding coloured backgrounds, and working up to using sound and video," said Ian. "Additionally, a modified web site will provide us with the opportunity for testing designs suggested by disabled students themselves."

The work, which began this October, will run until September 2000. The Centre would be interested in hearing from anyone who has experience in using CAA with disabled students.



NOTICE BOARD

Look out for the next issue of the *Journal for Quality Assessment in Higher Education* (projected publication January 2000) which will feature CAA.

Recent publications: *Computer-Assisted Assessment in Higher Education*, edited by Sally Brown, Joanna Bull, and Phil Race, London: Kogan Page, 1999. 200 pages

The Robert Clark Centre for Technological Education has one or two PhD studentships available in the fields of online learning, online assessment or the evaluation of either topic. Those undertaking the study would be expected to join the research group at the University of Glasgow.

Interested parties should contact Dave Whittington with a brief CV and outline of their proposed research as soon as possible.
d.whittington@elec.gla.ac.uk

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To contribute items for the next issue please contact Colleen or Joanna at info@caacentre.ac.uk