CIVICA

Achieving the right mark for students and markers in Western Australia

Civica MarkManager helps Western Australia School Curriculum and Standards Authority improve assessment standards with new secure online marking platform.

Reporting to the Minister for Education, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority is responsible for Kindergarten to Year 12 curriculum, assessment, standards and reporting for all Western Australian schools.

Examinations were a huge logistical exercise for the Authority. This included hiring and training markers, printing examination papers, distributing them to the examination centres, collecting the scripts and getting them securely transported to the markers. Every year, over 17,000 candidates sit examinations - each doing on average an exam in 4 courses. Over 68,000 exam booklets are printed, with 1,350 markers involved in marking of the scripts and non-written (practical) exams.

One of the major challenges the Authority faces is the vast land area of Western Australia, with some cities and towns more than 3,500km away from the capital city Perth. This makes it hard for teachers to participate in marking. Another challenge faced is that traditional marking is the overhead in catering for double blind marking, which the Authority

found effective in improving reliability and accuracy. In a traditional marking environment, there is a time delay before a supervisor's check marking or inspection of "control scripts" highlights a shortfall in accuracy. Additionally there is a lot of "paper-handling" in ensuring the scripts are moved securely and quickly between markers. The Authority went to tender to acquire a new solution to help retain their high assessment standards.

Delivering value for money

"We selected MarkManager because it met our criteria and offered value for money," explains Jenny Morup, Examinations Logistics Manager. "Value for money is a very important factor for a government agency when a tender is let. We want to achieve the best possible outcome for every dollar spent. That means you need to assess the costs, benefits and risks inherent in an offer carefully, rather than simply selecting the lowest offered price."

Another important factor was that the solution was already proven for the high school examinations in New South Wales (NSW). Civica was also able to provide their expertise to implement and support the new engagement with the Authority.

17,000

students sitting examinations every year

1,350

markers remotely marking across a vast 3,500km territory

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Jenny Morup, Manager, Examinations Logistics, Western Australia School Curriculum and Standards Authority

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In the first year, the Authority used MarkManager for 9 exams (English, Maths, Biological Sciences, Physics and Chemistry).

"The team from Civica was very knowledgeable, and helped us with planning and gave very good support. Together we set up an operational plan that worked exceptionally well throughout the project," says Morup. The new solution helped digitise the examination process.

- Writing booklets scanned and upload to MarkManager. Number of pages are validated and the student and exam centre identification details are masked.

- Pages were reassembled into separate documents, so markers only got to see the exam section they have to mark.

- Removal of marking centres with markers using their own equipment to access the scanned scripts remotely.

- Improved security as no marks or scripts ever reside on the marker's desktop.

- Markers can set their individual screen preferences, scan view a list of the scripts they have been working on and can add notes for themselves or for the attention of the chief marker.

- Chief markers can pre-mark practice scripts to improve confidence with markers before accessing real scripts.

- Chief markers have a real-time dashboard to monitor markers and can quickly move to any script to look at the marker's notes and marks awarded.

Ease of use for markers

MarkManager's ability to allow markers and chief markers to exchange messages was extremely helpful, especially with markers working remotely. A marker can ask the chief marker for their opinion, or a chief marker can comment on the marking of a certain script.

Melanie Jasper, Senior Consultant Written Examinations (Marking), says feedback from the markers was very positive "They found the application easy to use and liked how they could adapt the screens to suit. Access to the scripts was easy with markers able to work on one after another without issue. The system was quick, even in peak periods."

Improving standards

"The ability to monitor the standard of marking as it is occurring is exceptionally important," explains Morup. "In addition to double blind marking, we also have good quality control as reference scripts can be placed throughout the marking process. If a marker starts scoring outside the expected range, the chief marker can take immediate action. The solution helps us to achieve accurate and unbiased marking."

The Authority select markers that are currently teaching the course. "It is really good professional development for teachers to experience the high standard of Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) examination marking. They learn to mark using the proper marking keys, which are the explicit statements about what the examiner expects of a candidate. They can take that knowledge back into their classrooms. It is one of our priorities in choosing markers," says Morup.

Secure online marking

"Travelling for a training course in marking is do-able for most teachers, but spending a few weeks away from home marking exams is less so. Online marking enables us to take the marking process across the remote regions of Western Australia, while we can still closely monitor the quality and the process. We have international schools that do our courses and the online solution allows us to also include markers that are based overseas. So they can benefit as well," continues Jasper.

"An additional benefit is the safety and security of online marking. There is no risk of losing scripts. Having the scripts online is much safer and far more convenient."

Jasper finds the ability to split an exam into sections very beneficial, "It gives you a lot more choices of how you are going to mark an exam and who is going to mark which section. We can configure the software ourselves to split an exam into sections. We can give markers those particular sections that they are specialized in. The examination scripts are still available intact, so we can still look at the whole paper as well."

On the implementation, Morup concluded, "It was an absolutely smooth transition and the implementation went exceptionally well. It worked very successfully right from the beginning. The team from Civica was very responsive. They listened to us, understood our requirements and adapted the program where needed. It was excellent. The success of any project is the communication."

School Curriculum and Standards Authority

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