



A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

ACS International Schools finds that the benefits of MYP eAssessment are many and wide-ranging.

While the classrooms and hallways at ACS International School Egham in Surrey, UK, and ACS International School Doha in Qatar remained eerily quiet this spring, Middle Years Programme students continued to study and learn. ACS Education Strategy Director Robert Harrison says the schools' experience with MYP eAssessment helped make that process easier, just one of many benefits that the exams and ePortfolios have bestowed.

"In the last few months, being able to deliver digitally and to assess in digital formats is the only game in town," Harrison says. "[Egham and Doha] have already been building digital competency that the assessments are driving. Teachers are used to thinking about how things play on-screen and how to engage students in that sort of thinking. It's one of the things that allowed them to pivot somewhat more easily."

He believes that being technology-forward—in other words, having teachers who comfortably work with educational technologies and students who are familiar with the online learning environment—sets a school up for a higher level of success in any environment.

Of course, a school can be successful only if its students succeed. ACS International Schools understands that and analyses data from MYP eAssessment results for use in educational planning. "It's important for the students to understand the connection between effort and achievement at this age," Harrison says. "It's important for them to be able to take joy from and celebrate their achievements, and sometimes it's an important reality check on 'I will have to work harder if I intend to meet my own educational goals.'" ACS students are the first and most important owners of the information, Harrison says.

Their parents are second because they are paying for the information, Harrison says, and they deserve to know that their children's education can be benchmarked against that of other students elsewhere in the world. "MYP eAssessment provides validation of learning," he says.

ACS teachers also own the data. They put it to work, doing sophisticated analysis of students' results, down to the question level. That is made possible because the International Baccalaureate provides data on what percentage of students got each on-screen exam question right and what percentage got it wrong. The teachers then delve into possible reasons why students got a question wrong, including whether there might be a particular skill that needs to be highlighted for the next cohort. "So MYP eAssessment informs individual teaching practice," Harrison says.

ACS International Schools (private, group of four schools): MYP Years 1-5

First offered the Middle Years Programme (MYP):
1999 (Egham); 2014 (Doha)

Total number of students:
600 (Egham); 900 (Doha)

Head of school:
Jeremy Lewis (Egham);
Robert Cody (Doha)

Education Strategy Director:
Robert Harrison

“MYP eAssessment provides validation of learning.”

— ROBERT HARRISON,
EDUCATION STRATEGY
DIRECTOR, ACS
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

MYP eAssessment can provide detailed information at the subject group level as well. For example, Harrison says, a school might find that its science department seems to be underperforming compared with the global average. "It can be an early warning system," he says, giving teachers in the department the opportunity to figure out why there is an issue and take action.

Considering all the data that becomes available, ACS International Schools sees MYP eAssessment as an important part of its continuous improvement cycle. "We have protocols for as nonjudgmentally as possible looking at what does the test say," Harrison explains. "And then, based on what the test says, we have a whole series of questions to ask about it. So it's not, 'Oh, my goodness, something must be wrong here,' but 'That is interesting to notice. What can we learn from it?'"

At the highest level, ACS uses MYP eAssessment data as part of its quality assurance framework for the board of trustees and senior management to determine whether the MYP is being implemented with fidelity. This sort of external validation provides evidence to stakeholders that learning takes place, Harrison says, and the board likes the fact that the school has a marker of progress two years before the Diploma Programme exams. (All four ACS schools offer the Diploma Programme; Egham is the only UK school to offer all four IB programmes, and Doha has recently applied to offer the CP alongside the PYP and DP as well.) The data helps the schools look at key performance indicators and annual targets and consider where to direct strategic energy and resources. "And because MYP eAssessment is very tightly aligned with the goals of the programme, success in the assessment means the programme is being successful," Harrison says.

That success is something that marketing and admission staff can use as a tool. For many international schools, the only point of reference is average points on DP examinations and percentage of students who earn the diploma, Harrison says. "We now have another very rich data source in the MYP that we also use to show the excellence of learning and teaching in our schools."

Looking ahead to the Diploma Programme, Egham and Doha find that MYP eAssessment provides relevant information about students and helps prepare them. The exams give formative information about students' strengths and weaknesses, flag potential concerns and aid with choices such as higher and standard level selection, Harrison says. Moreover, "we have clear evidence from students that because they've been through an assessment cycle, they're not as intimidated by the DP exams as they might have been. And so the student experience is a really big payoff because most of our MYP students will sit the DP exams."

Importantly, ACS parents appreciate the way MYP eAssessment warms their kids up for the DP exams, Harrison says, because many of them see those exams as high-stakes. They like that this data comes back and that eAssessment is moderately low-stakes, he says. Some parents do express concern about putting 16-year-olds under the pressure of taking examinations. "We work hard with parents to help them understand that the consequences for underperforming are not tremendous at this point, that it's a good exercise for kids and that students often actually enjoy the examinations," Harrison says. "And of course, many students excel." In the ePortfolios, he points out, students are just doing the sort of work they do in class at a more constrained level for external assessment.

Among ACS students, approximately 20 percent have identified special education needs, and some are still English language learners. The school does not use formal entrance exams, considering itself broadly selective. "So there's a pretty wide spectrum of folks who are welcome and engaged in the MYP," Harrison says.

ACS teachers have gained many benefits from MYP eAssessment as well. An overarching one is that eAssessment provides a clear benchmark from which to backwards plan the programme. "They understand the scope and sequencing and the curriculum alignment that flow backward out of eAssessment structures," Harrison says. With on-screen assessment blueprints, topic lists and teacher support materials that say what a good ePortfolio is, he explains, a positive effect builds back down.

Teachers also gain confidence that what they are doing meets global standards; at the same time, their hard work is validated. MYP eAssessment even offers them professional development opportunities, as they can become examiners, exam writers and workshop leaders.

They become more aware of the need to have digital-friendly classrooms because the on-screen exam should not be the first time students encounter exam technologies, Harrison says. At ACS, "in terms of teaching strategies and tools, everybody does a really good job of incorporating that into teaching and learning along the way. It's not 'We'll learn like we always did, and then the last semester, we'll learn a few new digital tricks when we practice.'"

eAssessment also provides the Middle Years Programme and the schools that offer it with more "street cred," Harrison says. He believes that some people in the education community used to perceive the DP as being for serious students and the MYP as possibly being a bit soft. "And you can't say that when you have kids in a 2-hour on-screen examination with a full range of ePortfolios that have to be managed with the same level of intent as DP internal assessments."

Egham is among the schools with the most experience with MYP eAssessment, having been part of the trialling process and then quickly moving to implementation. With a mature programme and many families who were used to examinations for students at age 16, MYP eAssessment was a natural fit there, Harrison says. The school offered all MYP eAssessment from the start.

Doha, which was founded in 2011, also quickly implemented MYP eAssessment. It began by offering exams in some subjects and expanded to all subjects in 2019. Almost all middle years students at Egham take the exams in all five subjects and aim to obtain the MYP certificate; many at Doha also do so. “We encourage students to take eAssessment even if they’re not sure they’re going to be at the top of the class,” Harrison says. “Because that’s ok. What you learn through the assessment is also very vital learning.” MYP eAssessment is not mandated at either school.

Confidence in the high quality, technology and cultural appropriateness of MYP eAssessment eased its implementation at ACS. “The same safeguards and statistical analysis and very careful monitoring of a standard that are true for the Diploma Programme—that have held the Diploma Programme as a gold standard for that sort of work in the industry for 50 years—were immediately available to the MYP,” Harrison says. MYP eAssessment has won three technology awards, he notes.

In addition to all the other benefits of MYP eAssessment, he says, the IB understands what it means to have intercultural understanding. Therefore, “we have confidence that those examinations will be appropriate, not just for people who speak English or who grew up in England but for people who work in English as a language of instruction, not necessarily as a cultural orientation.” That matters because ACS International Schools has students from all over the world, families of multiple nationalities and students of all religions.

For schools that are implementing eAssessment, Harrison offers a few suggestions: “You need to understand why you’re doing it, you need to understand all the implications of how to do it, you need to communicate clearly to all stakeholders—the students’ parents, the governing body, other teachers in the school all the way down through the Primary Years Programme—that this is coming.” From a technical standpoint, he suggests making sure the IT and infrastructure teams know the technical requirements and ensure that the curriculum is clearly aligned and mapped to ensure engagement of all topics. He also suggests that teachers plan to incorporate educational technology effectively.

For schools that have not yet implemented MYP eAssessment, Harrison offers some insight. MYP eAssessment provides a rich way to determine whether they are doing the MYP with integrity and fidelity, he says. “I think that schools that are serious about the programme should consider it because it provides such a lot of positive influence on the way the programme is done,” he says. “You can’t ignore the most important parts of the MYP because eAssessment is about the most important parts of the MYP.”

When ACS International Schools considers the experience with MYP eAssessment, it sees exams and ePortfolios that strike “a fine balance of validity, reliability and manageability,” Harrison says. “We found eAssessment to be helpful and to get at the nature of the programme in a new way without bruising its heart because it’s asking the right questions.”

For information about MYP eAssessment visit: www.ibo.org/e-assessment

