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Q-Interactive Psychological Assessment Review

Dr Ben Laskey writes a comprehensive review of Q-Interactive, the Psychological...

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January 31, 2014   0 Comments   by Ben Laskey

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I was lucky enough, thanks to NCPIP and Pearson Assessment, to have the chance to try out Pearson's new ipad-based testing platform. Q-interactive includes a range of Pearson's key tests (WAIS-IV UK, WISC-IV UK, CVLT-II, CVLT-C, D-KEFS, NEPSY-II and CMS) and the range of assessments has expanded over the last 12 months and presumably will continue to do so as more users come on board.

Over recent years, I do most of my assessment work in the Family Courts, assessing parents and children in childcare proceedings, so the WAIS and WISC were of the most interest to me. I tend to be a late adopter of new technologies and prior to my chance to try out Q interactive, I'd had very little experience of using ipads, though I am familiar with the Apple operating platform, having made the shift to Macs for work about 3 years ago – in search of increased reliability.

I was pleasantly surprised by how easy Q-interactive felt to use. It leads you through testing in a very intuitive and accessible way.

Q-interactive uses 2 ipads, and they have now adapted the software for use on ipad minis too, which potentially saves a substantial upfront cost. The ipads link up through Bluetooth, so you don't need an internet connection at the testing location. One ipad has the examiner's information on and the other displays test items for the person being assessed.

Pearson offers webinars and a really helpful telephone helpline in case you do get stuck with anything. I made a quick phone call to the support team to enquire about set up and was then able to connect the ipads, store client information and undertake testing without further support. The user interface was really smooth and intuitive and the whole set up was really easy to use.

Unfortunately, I haven't had the chance to use Q-interactive as much as I had hoped, because the recent Legal Aid cuts have meant that I have taken on fewer Family Law assessments than expected in recent months. This means that I didn't have the chance to get really familiar with the materials.

Even so, it is obvious that Q-interactive saves a very significant amount of time with both administration and scoring of assessments and I imagine that this benefit would increase with familiarity. I reckon it reduced my overall time by about 25%. I'm pretty efficient on WAIS administration ordinarily and I would think that someone more familiar with Ipads than me would be saving more like 40% on total time needed once they were properly familiar with the system.

Another massive benefit is especially salient if you travel around for testing (and in particular if you use multiple assessments with a single individual). The 2 ipads represent a huge saving on space & weight and are very transportable in comparison to a full WAIS kit. And you avoid all the rummaging and re-organising required between different stimulus booklets etc. on the WAIS and WISC.

Not all of the subtests have been configured for the ipad. For example on the WAIS you still need the blocks for block design and cancellation, coding and symbol search are still completed on the paper booklet, hand scored and then entered into the scoring key. Pearson detail on their website which additional materials are required to undertake Q-interactive assessments for each of the instruments available (see: http://www.helloq.co.uk/overview/pricing.html for details) and the standalone costs of these items. I personally found it helpful to have access to the paper administration manual as well as the ipads just so I had the option to skip ahead of the test subject for my own reference.

I ran into a few specific problems when I used Q-interactive in clinical practice. On my first attempt, I arrived at the testing location to discover that my assessee hadn't been stored (queue mild panic and unsuccessful search for an available, secure, wifi signal). This was entirely my own error and I was able to use another stored individual (adjusting the age) and conduct the testing anyway, but it was an anxious moment.

I noted that the ipad's automatic spell checker is enabled across many of the Q-interactive fields. This is generally unproblematic but when you have individuals' names (spelt in an unconventional way) to enter this can become a rather frustrating process. I raised this with customer support, who say it is a feature of the ipad, but I would have thought there was a way round this – my ipad only corrects spellings, on other programmes, in some of the fields

and email addresses (for example) are not autochecked.

I also found that at some points during testing, if there was a brief pause between items or subtests, that the ipad screens switched off and the connection between the ipads was lost. I'm aware that this links to the ipad security settings but also that in some programmes (watching films etc.) the ipad screen remains illuminated and I wonder if the programme could be adapted to avoid mid-test screen loss. It was easy to restore the connection, and I'm aware that these points are being pretty picky, but the overall experience would be improved if these issues were corrected.

Once an item had been completed, the stimulus display remains illuminated. This means that if an examinee has made an error, they are more likely to notice this and become upset or discouraged, which happened with one lady I was assessing. This is obviously also an issue with the paper version of the test, but I wonder if the ipad format provides the opportunity to address this issue, by simply removing the stimulus display once an item has been completed.

In terms of administering the WAIS-IV, I found that the system was less automatic than I would have liked. For example on Block Design I had to enter correct design (yes/no), configure the response pattern, add in time taken and manually score each item. The time bonus was not automatically applied. It would save quite a lot of testing time if the design and score were entered automatically in the event of a correct response and in my view this would be preferable. In discussion with Pearson, they told me that preliminary tests had elicited the feedback that people wanted to maintain more control over the scoring process and I guess that this is one of those cases where you can't please all the people all of the time.

If you do forget to enter a score (after inputting response and whether it is correct or not) Q-interactive won't discontinue the subtest, which is certainly preferable to this being treated as a wrong answer and discontinuing erroneously.

If you miss out a score, which I did, and need to go back to re-insert it while testing you can only swipe backwards to the previous subtest item on the ipad. I needed to go back further, which you can do via the sidebar (I subsequently discovered). For me, this links to the issue of computerizing the scoring. I'd suggest that either the programme is developed to automatically score subtests based on whether a response is correct/incorrect, including time bonus; or that the programme does not let users proceed to the next item or prompts you if necessary information is omitted. Alternatively, it would be a help if more flexibility was built in to allow examiner to return by swiping through items to edit any previous items if necessary. I'd acknowledge though that my problems stemmed from inexperience with the software and that my personal preference (for a computer programme that either doesn't let you miss information out, or lets you easily correct mistakes) may differ from that of others.

I ran into a couple of other minor problems due to inexperience (I was unsure how to discontinue a subtest, and

struggled initially to enter block design responses) but these were simple to resolve on subsequent administrations, and I would say no less problematic than procedural issues with (for example) transitioning between hard copy versions of WAIS-IIIR and WAIS-IV. Again, Pearson's support line was absolutely brilliant at helping me with these points.

I suspect that for most organizations, the key issue in deciding whether to move to ipad testing will be the cost. As an example: in a practice of 2 independent psychologists, the costs for WAIS-IV license only would be as follows:

1 ipad mini:	£249.00
1 ipad 2:	£329.00
2 testing licences valid for 1 year:	£250.00
WAIS-IV test materials:	£343.80
20 x WAIS admin fee (10 subtests @ £1.25)	£312.50
total cost would be:	£1,484.60

In comparison, the cost of buying a traditional WAIS-IV kit, is currently £1391.10. A kit has 25 record forms after which it costs £299.40 to replace (or £11.98 per assessment).

Year 1 of Q-interactive would cost £1,484.60 as opposed to £1391.10 using the traditional materials. In year 2, the costs would be £562.50 (Q-interactive) versus £299.40 (traditional). If you use a wider range of tests, the per-test costs of Q-interactive quickly drop.

See: http://www.helloq.co.uk/overview/pricing.html to work out how this would apply for your own use.

So am I going to make the switch to Q-interactive?

I have some minor criticisms of some parts of the user interface (none of which presents any serious problem) and I had some teething problems, which I am confident would be overcome through practice.

The technical support is friendly and very responsive, the range of assessment instruments is expanding all the time and Pearson are very clearly investing heavily in ironing out any issues that users are identifying because they really want this to work and (I think) see computerized testing as the future for psychological assessment.

If you are starting without owning any test materials or are replacing outdated tests, the additional upfront costs of Q-interactive are pretty small in comparison to buying a traditional test battery. You'll more than make your money back in efficiency savings if you're getting through around 20 test batteries a year. The cost is even smaller if you already own an ipad 2 (or more recent version).

Personally, there has been a huge reduction in my testing activity due to legal aid reforms meaning that I'm not currently doing enough assessment to warrant the switch. I already own a WAIS-IV and I don't own an ipad, so the upfront costs for me would be substantial.

This means that I won't be making the transition to Q-interactive at the current time.

Having said that, if my numbers began to increase even relatively modestly, given the very real time savings, I would want to move to Q-interactive as early as possible.

I'd like to thank Pearson and NCPIP for the opportunity to review this exciting new tool in psychological assessment. I'm sure it will revolutionise the face of psychological assessment over the coming years.

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