

## ACCA works in partnership with TestReach to Transform Exam Performance with the ACCA Practice Platform

The ACCA logo consists of the letters "ACCA" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within a solid red square.

**ACCA**

### Executive Summary

ACCA supports over 200,000 members and 500,000 students in 180 countries. The Association focuses on helping students succeed in achieving their career aspirations through a range of qualifications. When ACCA launched computer-based exams (CBE) for their strategic professional qualifications, they also decided to provide their students with a comprehensive online CBE practice solution.

ACCA knew that the better students were prepared for their exams, the better the outcome. The Practice Platform Solution was designed to simulate the in-exam environment – from the question types through to the online help tools, to the range and quality of the content with which to practice. In addition, it was to provide marking capability so students could both mark their own answers or have them marked by an expert to better understand how to demonstrate their application of knowledge in their exam. Lastly, it was required to give diagnostic feedback on performance over time so students could understand where to focus revision.

Operationally, there were various requirements to consider: the system had to enable offline or online access, from any location worldwide; it had to work for a range of different types of users including learning providers, content providers, tutors and self-study students; practice exam content had to be catalogued so that different learning providers and students could access the appropriate content; it had to be robust and capable of accommodating very high peaks in usage.

TestReach was the supplier chosen by ACCA after a competitive tendering process, and the results of the solution in action have been impressive. Already 125,000 students have used the practice test solution and it is having a very positive effect on pass rates. The March 2021 results showed up to a 21% exam pass rate difference for learners who used the platform (see Figure 1). Iain Dickens, Head of Professional Education Technology & Delivery at the ACCA, said: **“Working with TestReach has been a really good experience. The customer support**

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Sheena Bailey, CEO at TestReach said: **"TestReach prides itself on being an innovative assessment technology company which enjoys working in partnership with clients to bring real-world value, and the ACCA project was a clear example where two teams worked together to bring innovative ideas to life, in a complex solution, with many requirements and stakeholders."**

## Full Case Study on Project and Results

### Background

The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) is the global body for professional accountants, offering first choice qualifications around the world to people seeking a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management. ACCA supports over 200,000 Members and 500,000 Students in 180 countries. The ACCA global infrastructure means that exams and support are delivered at a local level, directly benefiting stakeholders wherever they are based.

ACCA typically runs over 400,000 examinations per year, covering qualifications from RQF Level 2 for the foundation qualification to RQF level 7 for the ACCA qualification. ACCA works with 450 learning providers across the globe to deliver learning support for its students. Each learning provider employs tutors to deliver learning and support the student in preparing for exams. Some students, however, self-study without the support of a learning provider. ACCA also has two approved content providers (ACP) who are responsible for creating study texts, practice questions and mock

exams. Content is created by the ACPs and quality assured and approved by ACCA, before being made available to students. The ACCA ethos is to make learning accessible to all: as a non-profit organisation they are not in the business of selling exams but in helping people to acquire qualifications, achieve ACCA membership and enjoy career progression. The focus is on supporting the student to succeed. In this context, when ACCA launched its Strategic Professional exams in a computer-based format, using a range of constructed-response question types and multiple answer options, they wanted to provide practice test exams in a similar format. ACCA also listened to feedback from students and learning providers who were asking for this type of support.

The Strategic Professional exams simulate real-world business case scenarios. The candidate has to understand the situation, apply their knowledge and demonstrate technical and professional skills using multiple answer formats such as spreadsheets, word documents and presentation slides. A practice exam solution therefore had to provide a mirror of the real exam experience, and it also needed to include marking and feedback capability, so students could learn how their papers were graded and see how their work could improve over time. This would help them to understand how to demonstrate the application of their knowledge to the examiner in a practical scenario. It would also reduce exam stress and pressure for students and enable them to be better prepared.

To meet this goal, the ACCA had to find a supplier who could provide a Computer-Based Exam (CBE) Practice Solution, where practice tests and mock exams authored by ACCA, content providers and learning providers would be made available to students, with the provision of expert marking and diagnostic feedback.

As such, the Practice Solution would have to have capabilities such as: content creation & maintenance; test administration; test execution; test marking & feedback; performance tracking and data analysis / reporting.

A sophisticated cataloguing system for practice content would be required. For example, practice exams written by learning providers could be published and accessed by only their own students, but other ACCA mock exams could be made available to all students. In addition, a very wide range of user types had to be accommodated in the system, including learning providers, tutors, students, approved content providers and administrators / assessors.

## Solution

Following a competitive tendering process, TestReach was the ACCA's supplier of choice to provide this CBE Practice Platform Solution. TestReach's focus was on innovation and quality of service, coupled with the technical skills, agile methodology and flexibility to allow the development of a complex solution at scale and on schedule.

The solution to be developed had to achieve the following goals:

- Enable familiarisation with the computer-based exam environment through replication of the exact exam format specific to the ACCA exams, using practice tests and mock exams.
- Facilitate expert marking of practice exams to be carried out by learning providers (tutors) for their own students.
- Provide personalised diagnostic feedback on exam performance to guide future revision for students.
- Enable learning providers to assess their students' exam readiness.
- Enable learning providers and content providers to create their own content for additional practice, and publish it to their own specific student base.
- Enable marking by self-study students who do not have access to expert tutors.

Because ACCA qualifications are available worldwide, it was crucial that students in any country could access the Practice Platform. It would need to be available offline and online so students without consistent access to the internet could use the solution. For example, in China, although students have mobile phones and usually have WiFi when at college, they may not have internet access at home or in their halls of residence, so offline access was essential.

## Results

After a 12 month development phase, the CBE Practice Platform was created in partnership with TestReach, and launched in September 2019 for the Strategic Professional level exams and in January 2020 for the preceding Applied Skills level Exams.

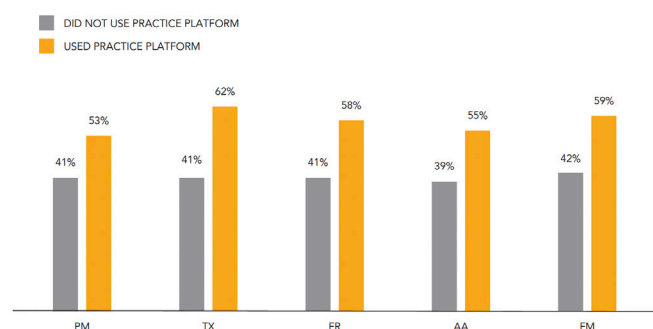
The COVID-19 pandemic arrived shortly after the January launch. This meant that the quarterly ACCA exams in March and June were severely disrupted with most being cancelled. In the circumstances, having the Practice Platform available was very useful. Students could continue to practice their exams and remain up-to-speed for when the actual exams could be sat again.

Since the CBE Practice Solution was launched, it has been used by over 125,000 students and this number is growing rapidly. The solution is scalable to any number of users, and has facilitated access for the wide range of stakeholders involved in ACCA learning programs – the students themselves, the learning providers, tutors and content providers.

There is a demonstrable marked improvement in pass rates for students who have engaged with the practice tests, even taking into account that students who are more engaged overall will generally perform better (see Figure 1). At the first exam session after implementation (March 2020) the impact was clear, as exam rates soared by up to 11% for learners who used the platform compared to those who did not. Each exam session has continued this trend. The March 2021 results showed up to a 21% exam pass rate difference. The Practice Platform is an essential resource that is

making a real and tangible difference to student exam performance and helping students progress through to ACCA qualification (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Pass rates for Applied Skills Level 1 students using / not using the Practice Platform (March 2021)**



The Practice Platform is a great benefit to ACCA students. They can immerse themselves in the experience of the live exam, using online tools such as calculators, scratch pads and spreadsheets. The ability to self-evaluate and have expert marking guidance allows them to demonstrate their application of knowledge to the examiner. Repeated practice exams help with knowledge retention over time, so overall learning improves as well as examination skills.

The ACCA are now sharing with learning providers and tutors the results of the practice test solution and its impact on pass rates. Over 60% of learning providers are already using the platform. They can now write their own content directly into the system, or access a library of ready practice tests, mock exams and past papers, which they can then assign to their students. They can view dashboards to discuss performance with the student and guide them to areas where they may need extra revision.

Commenting on the practice solution, Iain Dickens, Head of Professional Education Technology & Delivery at the ACCA, said: **“At ACCA, the key thing for us is to help our students to progress. We are non-profit, so we have no interest in students buying repeated exams. Rather, we want to**

**enable them to move on to the membership stage of their career, and this practice exam tool is there to help students to progress and avoid the cost of resits. There is no cost to students to use the practice test solution, it is purely there as support to our learners. I’m pleased to say that there is a very high level of student satisfaction with the product and they are very happy using it.”**

**“Working with TestReach has been a really good experience. The customer support has been fantastic and they have provided a stable and scalable service which can be accessed by multiple user types. We have a symbiotic relationship with TestReach, where they have been very flexible in developing the features and enhancements we needed and getting it over-the-line. There’s a lot of pressure on us to make sure that the quality is there for both exams and resources, to ensure we retain our licence to operate in all countries. This in turn means we put a lot of pressure on our suppliers to provide not just product features but a complete support package and a high level of quality overall. Having a partner like TestReach who understands this and can step in and provide what was needed was essential. We went on a journey together and the final product is really innovative.”**

**“There isn’t anyone else doing this level of support, practice and B2B expert marking. It is a pioneering product supplying something that has not been done before. It was great to work with TestReach, who had the flexibility, innovation and project management skills to make this happen,”** he added.

With no cost to the student, and availability worldwide irrespective of access to materials or internet, the CBE Practice Solution truly supports the ACCA ethos of accessibility to learning and career progression for all students.