

Case Study: Education

Millions of Learners Now Use One Scalable Assessment Platform

To make this large-scale project a success, Cognizant and Cambridge Assessment technical and management staff came together to create a scalable, flexible standardised platform.

Established over 160 years ago, Cambridge Assessment operates and manages Cambridge University's three exam boards and carries out leading-edge academic and operational research on assessment in education. Every year, more than eight million learners take Cambridge Assessment's exams in one of 55,000 centres across the globe. With its international candidate numbers growing fast, the not-for-profit organisation needed powerful, scalable IT systems.

Cambridge Assessment's Group Infrastructure Services Director, Bruno Laquet, explains, "We need to invest and continue to invest because this world is becoming digital... and we are committed to investing to stay on top of the game."



At a glance

Cambridge Assessment worked with Cognizant to create a standardised, centralised SAP ERP system, new portals for exam centres and assessors, and a results determination engine built on SAP HANA. Key benefits of the transformation include:

- Ability to process 7,000 grades per second
- Saved the onsite testing team valuable hours and days before the go-live date
- Exam centres and assessors now have everything they need in one place and available through an easy-to-use interface

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– Bruno Laquet, Infrastructure Services Director,
Cambridge Assessment

With continued rapid growth, the organisation knew its custom-built applications would come under increasing pressure. The IT team was also keen to deliver more business value by shifting their focus to growth initiatives, and reduce the time spent supporting older systems and focusing instead on growth initiatives. To meet its goals, Cambridge Assessment looked for a partner to help transform its infrastructure into one that would be easily scalable and flexible enough to support the peak season, which requires processing at least 7,000 grades per second.

Cognizant had already been working with Cambridge Assessment to support its existing systems, so the organisation came to us to help deliver a standardised, centralised SAP ERP system, new portals for exam centres and assessors, and a results determination engine built on SAP HANA.

Delivering the right solution the right way

For such a large-scale project to be successful, close collaboration was essential, with technical and management staff from Cognizant and Cambridge Assessment coming together to form a single delivery team.

“During user acceptance testing, for example, Cognizant put the right people on the ground with us and combined that with offshore resources to prepare data overnight,” says Barry Newman, Programme Delivery Director at Cambridge Assessment. “That saved our onsite testing team valuable hours and days in the run up to our go-live date.”

Putting expertise to work

Our SAP expertise and implementation experience also helped Cambridge Assessment transition to a new delivery methodology. “Cognizant helped us make changes on an in-flight project to move to the right methodology that delivered the right results,” Barry explains.

And while moving to a standardised platform was a cornerstone of the transformation strategy, there was no out-of-the-box support for complex scaling and grading processes for millions of exams, so we built a custom solution based on SAP HANA.

Flexibility and dedication

One of the keys to the project’s success was our ability to be flexible with our resources. Whether it was leveraging onshore and offshore capabilities to deliver 24x7 working, or quickly plugging unforeseen resourcing gaps, flexibility was the key that enabled the project to come in on time and on budget.

Cambridge Assessment knew it could rely on us to go above and beyond to drive the project towards its goals, with the team often working extended hours and at weekends to ensure key milestones were reached on schedule.

An award-winning system built on a standard platform

Cambridge Assessment’s custom-built exam results determination engine (a number of well-orchestrated processes that turn marks into results) doesn’t just support continued growth, it also won a prestigious SAP innovation award.

	 Challenge Support continued rapid business growth	 Solution Standardised ERP, new portals, results determination engine	 Result Powerful, scalable and future-proof platform
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“Cognizant’s can-do attitude, focus on collaboration and flexibility with its resources were vital for this project’s success. And the team has also helped us move toward a more agile, collaborative way of working that will underpin our ongoing IT transformation and support our future growth.”

– Barry Newman, Programme Delivery Director, Cambridge Assessment

“We now feel we’re in a much better place to start our expansion plans and grow the organisation. Cognizant have definitely been a fundamental part of that from a technology perspective and will continue to be in the future.”

– Darlene Schroeder, Group Chief Technology Officer,
Cambridge Assessment

“We’re very proud to have built one of the first bespoke applications to benefit from SAP HANA’s in-memory processing performance,” says Richard Upstone, SAP Project Manager at Cognizant.

Two new portals make working with Cambridge Assessment even easier for exam centres and assessors, with everything they need in one place and available through an easy-to-use interface.

Now, standardised SAP systems handle growing transactional workloads, and the IT team has a clear ERP upgrade path with far fewer support requests to deal with. That frees up resources to focus on innovation and growth.

Supporting continued growth

Cambridge Assessment’s new scalable platform, based on a native SAP HANA solution, makes faster, more efficient operations possible, to support the organisation’s expansion. Cognizant is also closely involved with helping the organisation work on further growth-enabling projects, and define a roadmap for its continued investments in transformation.

As Barry points out, “With Cognizant, we know we won’t just get a sales pitch. They bring opportunities to us and we evaluate them together. They’re our transformation partner, not our IT supplier.”

About the University of Cambridge

Founded in 1209, the University of Cambridge is the fourth-oldest university in the world. Cambridge is a globally diverse institution and has students come from different countries. Cambridge promotes the interface between academia and business and has a global reputation for innovation. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/>

About Cognizant

Cognizant (Nasdaq-100: CTSH) is one of the world’s leading professional services companies, transforming clients’ business, operating and technology models for the digital era. Our unique industry-based, consultative approach helps clients envision, build and run more innovative and efficient businesses. Headquartered in the U.S., Cognizant is ranked 194 on the Fortune 500 and is consistently listed among the most admired companies in the world. Learn how Cognizant helps clients lead with digital at www.cognizant.com or follow us [@Cognizant](https://twitter.com/Cognizant).

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