A sure thing

SureQ GCSE science and maths

Published by Counting Thoughts

Maths review by Kester Brewin

For a series of lessons at the end of the summer term, I used the SureQ Maths revision package with a group of high-achieving year 10 students.

The version I was given was the full network version, and once the package was up and running, it was clear from the start that it was a comprehensive tool, allowing detailed tracking of pupils' progress.

As a teacher using the administration tools, this was achieved very easily, and provided interesting data, including a breakdown of the (perceived) areas in which students were going wrong.

During the testing of the package, I invited students to email me their own thoughts about how they felt it was benefiting them. Being as they are, the most immediate comments were about aesthetics.

I would add my voice to that of the students who felt that the general look and feel could be improved. Some interesting work has been done about what sort of screen colours are best for long-term viewing, and the colour-scheme used here does leave a lot to be desired, being as it is rather heavy on the eye.

Getting below the first impressions, once students had settled in to using the revision tools, most found that it was genuinely helpful. It took a while for them to appreciate that they could select questions at various difficultly levels and collate tests for themselves, rather than accept the random testing. Once they did so, students were able to focus their revision effectively.

Clearly, as with any such software, a greater number of questions would always be a bonus, but I suspect these will be forthcoming and easy to add.

Once questions have been attempted, the software gives feedback and model answers. This is always fraught with difficulties, as students may have been taught a perfectly valid way to attempt a question, which may be rather different from the method the model answer uses. This caused some confusion, though may be a difficult issue to iron out.

In conclusion, despite being less than pleasing to look at, and requiring some detailed knowledge to install fully, this is a potentially very effective piece of software that will add another dimension to students' revision programmes.

Science review by Paul Miller

Although dropping information from our database to set up user logons was a little tedious, getting the students started was really easy – two clicks and they were in.

There was a reasonable spread of to-the-point, accurately-levelled, good-quality questions offering a wide range of knowledge and understanding for students to access.
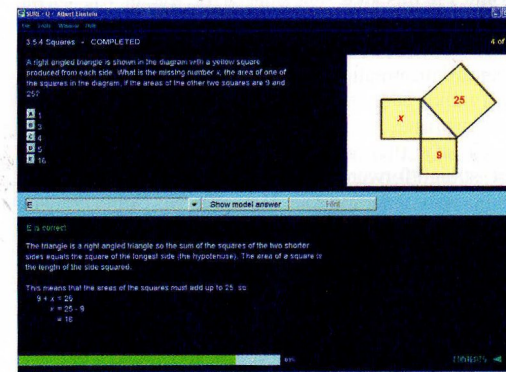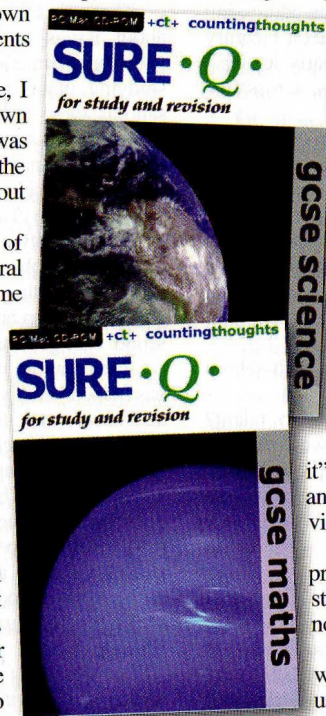
Although students of all abilities did access the SureQ shortcut, my most able students did use it most. Students used the programme more frequently as a plenary to lessons or as a revision aid.

Two features I particularly liked were the student log and the model answer information. The student log made it easy for users to see what they could tick off their, "done that and know it" list, what they needed think about again, and what understanding needed to be re-visited or checked with the teacher.

The model answer information also provided useful comments and examples students could add to their own revision notes.

Also very helpful is the user manager which enables the teacher to look at student use and provide a host of information including last date used and correct answer details via the error categories function. Although I never really got to grips with the "tampered" facility I instinctively feel this could be useful when checking or encouraging individual student work.

One student, who got a double A grade, said: "At the important time of exams, it is often difficult to find different methods of revision to suit the needs of everyone. It can be hard to decipher between each method and decide which is the best for you. My personal preference is computer methods such as Sure Q and BBC Bitesize. This is because they give you instant feedback. They help you to work out at an independent level, whereabouts you need to put extra work in. It even notes for you where these places are and this allows you to go back through and try again.

"Having tested SureQ out, I found that it really helped my learning and revising because of the range of different questions available. I would definitely use it again, and any other programmes of a similar nature."

Our technician added: "This program runs from an executable rather than under internet explorer. Therefore for the pupils to be able to use it at home they would need a copy to install on their home PC assuming they have one. Also for the same reason it cannot be run under the VLE which is obviously internet explorer based."

And one of our parents said: "I was glad my son had something he could use to help him with his science revision that gave me a model answer I could use to help me help him."

Cost

- GCSE maths: Foundation tier site licence: £265
- GCSE maths: Higher tier site licence: £265
- GCSE maths: Two tier site licence: £350
- GCSE science: Site licence: £175
- Home licence: £12
- Site licence holders can obtain home licences for £3 each

Further information:

Details and free demonstrations are available online at www.countingthoughts.com and for more information, email sales@countingthoughts.com