

December 2008

Action by Recipient
Response required
✓ Note and pass on
Note — update/information only

Contact: Patricia McDonald  
Direct line: 0845 213 5558  
E-mail: [patricia.mcdonald@sqa.org.uk](mailto:patricia.mcdonald@sqa.org.uk)

Dear Colleague

### **Assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs**

This letter should be shared with staff responsible for assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs. It provides an update on some key aspects of our current work related to meeting the assessment needs of these candidates.

#### **New assessment arrangements guidance**

To assist centres in their submission of requests for assessment arrangements for 2009, we have updated our guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs on our website ([www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements)).

For further information, or if you have any comments on the guidance provided, please contact Annette Foulcer (tel: 0845 213 5559, e-mail: [annette.foulcer@sqa.org.uk](mailto:annette.foulcer@sqa.org.uk)).

#### **Assessment arrangement (AA) statistics for 2008**

The total number of assessment arrangement (AA) requests for diet 2008 was 44,356, submitted on behalf of 12,284 candidates. This represents an increase in the total number of requests (up 5%) and candidates (up 8%) on the previous year. This can be compared to the overall entries for National Qualifications in 2008 where there was an increase in candidates of 4% together with a decrease in entries of 0.8%.

The profile of AA requests by level is broadly the same as for 2006 and 2007. More than half of the requests came from Standard Grade candidates. However, this proportion has continued to drop over the past few years. On the other hand, Intermediate 1 requests as a proportion of all requests have increased. This mirrors the changing profile of overall entry numbers.

In previous years, the vast majority of requests were submitted on behalf of candidates identified as having specific learning difficulties including dyslexia and dyspraxia. In 2008 the AAR system was updated to include dyslexia as a difficulty itself. Dyslexia accounted for 43% of all requests and other specific learning difficulties for 19%.

The most commonly requested arrangements in 2008 were extra time (for 77.8% of all requests) and separate accommodation (for 58.1% of all requests). In keeping with the

trends of 2006 and 2007, requests for the use of scribes and readers are more common at Standard Grade and Intermediate levels, than for Highers or Advanced Highers. In contrast, the use of ICT is requested more at the upper levels, increasing across all levels with the exception of Advanced Higher.

For further information, contact Robbie Paterson (tel: 0845 213 5560, email: [robbie.paterson@sqa.org.uk](mailto:robbie.paterson@sqa.org.uk)).

### **Accessible digital question papers for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs**

Digital question papers were successfully piloted in both the 2006 and 2007 diet of examinations. In 2006, eight centres made requests for digital question papers on behalf of 34 candidates, for use in 111 separate examinations. In 2007, when the scope of the pilot was extended to include all centres who had been involved in the initial feasibility studies, the number of centres who made requests for digital papers increased to 12, and 80 candidates used them in 490 examinations. In 2008, 46 centres made requests for digital papers on behalf of 204 candidates who used them in 1083 examinations.

These papers are designed to help candidates with reading and/or writing difficulties and are supplied in the 'PDF' format on CD. Candidates can read the question paper 'on screen' using speech technology, where appropriate. Also where the format of the question paper is a question/answer booklet, candidates can also write/speak their responses 'on screen'.

Evaluations into the use of adapted digital question papers have found that candidates were more independent, confident and motivated using the digital question papers than with traditional methods of support such as a reader or scribe.

Not all subjects are suited to this medium. A list of question papers available in this format and the list of past papers available are available on our website ([www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements)). For further details, contact Sheila Rennie (tel: 0131 561 6805, e-mail: [sheila.rennie@sqa.org.uk](mailto:sheila.rennie@sqa.org.uk)).

### **2007 and 2008 quality assurance exercises**

In September/October 2007 and in October 2008, our Customer Support Managers visited a total of 142 schools/colleges including local authority schools, independent schools and FE colleges throughout Scotland.

As in previous years, our approach to this monitoring exercise has been to focus on working with schools and colleges to develop a consistent and fair application of our policy on assessment arrangements across all centres. Feedback from centres to date indicates that centres value these visits and see them as being extremely helpful.

Our Customer Support Managers have reported that, overall, staff in centres had been well prepared for the audit visits, were well informed about the process and welcomed the opportunity to discuss procedures and processes with a member of SQA staff. They also reported that it was clear from discussions with the staff in centres that most of the learning support staff were familiar with our documentation and understood the principles behind our assessment arrangement policy.

There was much evidence of good practice in centres and overall the Customer Support Managers reported that there has been an improvement in the gathering of information and liaison between subject staff and learning support staff. However, one area of concern has been that there is still a number of centres who do not hold any formal verification meeting. This is a fundamental requirement, SQA must be satisfied that centres have robust systems in place to verify their requests for assessment arrangements.

For more information on this or any other aspect of these quality assurance exercises please visit our website ([www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements)) or contact Annette Foulcer (tel: 0845 213 5559, email: [annette.foulcer@sqa.org.uk](mailto:annette.foulcer@sqa.org.uk)).

### **Monitoring of specific assessment arrangements**

SQA's policy on assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs allows for reasonable adjustments to be made to the published assessment arrangements for candidates when they are placed at a substantial disadvantage.

#### *Transcription with correction in English*

Disabled candidates who have difficulty in assessments in English for a reason related to their disability may have reasonable adjustments made such as the use of transcription with correction. This allows them to demonstrate their ability to compose a piece of writing which is appropriate for purpose and audience. This duty to make such reasonable adjustments arises because the disabled candidate experiences substantial disadvantage.

#### *The use of a calculator in Mathematics*

Similarly, disabled candidates who are unable to carry out simple arithmetic calculations for a reason related to their disability, may have reasonable adjustments made, including the use of a calculator. This allows them to demonstrate their ability to understand and carry out the more advanced aspects/concepts or processes of mathematics. This duty to make such reasonable adjustments arises because the disabled candidate experiences substantial disadvantage.

Given that both these arrangements impact on the assessment criteria, SQA must ensure that centres only request these arrangements where there is robust evidence of the candidates' significant difficulties and evidence that the candidate is placed at a substantial disadvantage.

To this end, SQA will monitor all requests for transcription with correction in English and the use of a calculator in Mathematics for diet 2009. Further information on the use of these arrangements will be available on our website ([www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements)). For further information, please contact Robbie Paterson (tel: 0845 213 5560, e-mail: [robbie.paterson@sqa.org.uk](mailto:robbie.paterson@sqa.org.uk)).

## Review of adapted question paper (QP) requests — 2008

As you are aware SQA produces external examination question papers in a variety of different formats to meet the needs of candidates with a visual impairment. Some of these adaptations require Desk Top Publishing (DTP) reformatting, which has significant resource implications.

The number of question papers (QPs) requiring DTP reformatting has increased in 2008. The table below shows the number of requests received for the years 2006 to 2008. The number of requests in 2008 represents a 26.67% increase from 2007 and a corresponding increase in the work involved in producing and distributing these papers.

### *Requests for adaptations by year*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>
2006	836
2007	836
2008	1059

The published deadline date for requesting adapted QPs is 31 January of the year of the examination, but a significant number of requests were received after this date in 2008.

As you can see from the table below, a total of 807 requests, representing 29% or the total number of adapted QP requests were received after the deadline date.

### *Number of requests for adapted QPs received after 31 January 2008*

	No of new requests for all adapted QPs (% of total)
<b>Total</b>	<b>807 (29%)</b>
Feb	308 (11%)
Mar	320 (11.5)
April/May	179 (6%)

All late requests present both a significant challenge to the QP teams involved in the production of adapted QPs and an unsustainable burden, introducing real risks to the

- ♦ production and distribution of the number and variety of question papers requested in the time available
- ♦ ability to respond to late changes in requests, and
- ♦ quality of the adapted QPs.

From the above, I am sure you can appreciate how important it is that we receive requests for adapted QPs by 31 January. In order to minimise these risks, it is intended that from 2009, we will contact all centres making late requests which have resulted in significant work for SQA to discuss the situation and to agree on solutions for the future.

### **2008 moderation of the translation/transcription of candidates' signed responses**

SQA undertakes a quality assurance exercise every year to ensure that a candidate's signed response has been accurately translated and transcribed. In 2008, a total of four schools submitted transcriptions on behalf of 11 candidates. SQA's team of deaf reviewers reviewed all of the translations/transcriptions submitted from each centre alongside the video evidence. From this year's moderation exercise, it is clear that schools/colleges continue to have a very professional approach to both the conduct of the examination and in the preparation of the translations/transcriptions.

While the translations/transcriptions submitted were identified as being either accurate or mainly accurate, two generic issues were raised:

- ◆ some of the transcripts did not contain the transcriber's signature. Please remember that this is a requirement of SQA
- ◆ in some places it was noted that the translation/transcription was a transliteration. Please remember SQA requires the transcription to be a full translation into English

While 40 requests were made for candidates to sign their responses in the 2008 diet, we were surprised to receive only 16 scripts where sign had actually been used. While it is the candidate's right to choose whether to use sign on the day of the exam or not, we decided to investigate further and ask centres why their candidates opted not to use sign.

The responses we received assured us that candidates were being allowed to complete their examinations in their preferred mode of communication. In most cases, the candidates were comfortable writing their responses in English but knew that they could also use sign for any part of the examination if required. Candidates most commonly chose to write their answers in examinations where the majority of questions only required a short response, but chose to sign their responses in those which required extended responses.

We also looked into the grades achieved by these candidates and found that their decision not to use sign did not have a detrimental effect on their performance. The majority of candidates who chose not to sign their responses achieved or exceeded their estimated grades. We will continue to investigate this by issuing a short candidate questionnaire prior to the 2009 diet.

For more details on the use of sign in examinations, please visit our website ([www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements)) or contact Annette Foulcer (tel: 0845 213 5559, e-mail [annette.foulcer@sqa.org.uk](mailto:annette.foulcer@sqa.org.uk)) or Robbie Paterson (tel: 0845 213 5560, e-mail: [robbie.paterson@sqa.org.uk](mailto:robbie.paterson@sqa.org.uk)).

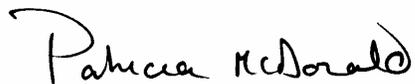
## **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)**

As the national awarding body for Scotland, we have the responsibility to ensure that our qualifications are made as accessible as possible. Any potential barriers for disabled candidates contained in the assessment objectives must be removed for all candidates, unless they can be justified. We also have the responsibility to identify where and how any reasonable adjustments can be made to the published assessment arrangements. Any reasonable adjustments made must balance meeting the needs of the disabled candidate **and** maintaining the integrity of the qualification. Disabled candidates must be assessed according to the same level of competence as the generality of candidates and the rigor of the competence standard should not be affected by the granting of reasonable adjustments. This is necessary to ensure that the credibility of the qualification is maintained for all candidates.

We will work collaboratively with all key stakeholders, including disability groups, to ensure that there is clarity for candidates and centres about what adjustments can be made to the published assessment arrangements, including considering alternative evidence and whether, as a reasonable adjustment of last resort, it is possible to exempt a disabled candidate from any of the assessment objectives.

For further information contact Patricia McDonald (tel: 0845 213 5558, e-mail: [\*\*patrica.mcdonald@sqa.org.uk\*\*](mailto:patrica.mcdonald@sqa.org.uk)).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Patricia McDonald  
Project Manager  
Policy and New Products Team