



Speech Recognition Software in SQA Examinations and Assessments

Introduction

This guidance document provides detailed information on using Speech Recognition Software in SQA's external examinations. This information must be read in conjunction with the *Assessment Arrangements Explained: Information for Centres* (Publication code: FA4378) on the Assessment Arrangements webpages.

The use of speech recognition software in SQA's internal and external assessments is regarded as an assessment arrangement and as such any centre requesting its use for a candidate must follow SQA's principles. The software can be used by candidates who are disabled, and/or who have been identified as having additional support needs.

Speech recognition in examinations and assessments

Speech recognition can be a suitable assessment arrangement for learners with writing or spelling difficulties, visual impairment, or physical disability. However, candidates must be confident, competent users of the technology before it is used in an assessment or examination.

Can speech recognition be used in any examination?

Speech recognition can be used in all examinations and assessments (including [National 3 and 4 Literacy](#) units and National courses in English) apart from assessment of writing in Modern Languages and Gaelic (Learners). In these assessments, it is 'the overall quality of the written language, including spelling accuracy that is being assessed' and therefore use of speech recognition (which never makes spelling mistakes) would compromise the integrity of the assessment.

Requesting an assessment arrangement to use speech recognition in an exam

Where a candidate is using speech recognition software along with the conventional question paper in the external examination, centres should request this using the SQA Assessment Arrangements Request (AAR) system. Centres should select the

'Use of ICT' option and insert more information in the 'Other' field, for example, 'Dragon NaturallySpeaking' and/or text reader.

Where a candidate is using speech recognition software along with a digital question paper, centres should select the **Digital Question Paper** option and insert more information in the 'Other' field, for example, 'Dragon NaturallySpeaking' and/or Text reader.

There is no need to ask permission from SQA to use speech recognition in internal assessments.

Security

SQA's policy on the use of ICT in an examination requires that the candidate should not be able to access the internet or the school/college network, files on the computer, or any other digital data that might provide assistance in the examination. Communication ports and mechanisms such as CD/DVD drives, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth should not be available to the candidate. USB ports can be made accessible for keyboards, mice and USB sticks — memory sticks must be checked by the centre to ensure they are blank before use.

In an exam, candidates can either use their normal laptop or tablet or a 'clean' device with no stored files, provided by the centre.

If the candidate's normal laptop or device is used in the exam it should be configured and checked by centre staff to ensure that it is secure and that files cannot be accessed by the candidate. This can be done by first creating a new Windows User Profile and importing the student's Dragon Profile, and then securing and password-protecting the original Windows User Profile so it cannot be accessed during the exam.

If a 'clean' laptop or device is being used, the candidate's voice profile should be saved from their usual laptop and imported into the centre laptop. This is because the voice profile will have been developed and refined over time and will be more accurate and include specific vocabulary required for the examination.

However, it is recommended that the candidate's normal computer should be used for the examination or assessment. While it is technically possible to export and import voice profiles, this increases the risk of technical problems and could add significant anxiety for the candidate (and for centre staff). Also, centres require sufficient licences to install the speech recognition software on the clean centre laptop, and to install and test it on the machine.

Regardless of which approach you take, the speech recognition system must be checked by the candidate before it is used in the examination. You must also ensure that the required technical resources are available and that SQA's technical and

security requirements have been met. Please refer to the SQA Co-ordinator's Guide on SQA Connect.

Macros and abbreviations

With some speech recognition software, phrases or passages of text can be stored under abbreviations or macros. Therefore the centre must check that macros or abbreviations are not stored in the candidate's speech recognition voice profile.

Spellchecker

It is not necessary to disable any spellcheckers as speech recognition does not make spelling mistakes.

Correction of speech recognition errors

Speech recognition is never 100% accurate, and so there will always be some degree of misrecognition of the text dictated by the candidate. Some candidates can identify and correct misrecognitions, but other candidates with literacy or visual impairments may have difficulty. Candidates can use text-to-speech software to read out the dictated text, and this may help to proof read and check responses. However, it may be that a member of staff will need to be available to support the candidate to identify and correct recognition errors. The way in which this will be carried out, based on the individual needs of the candidate, must be discussed and agreed with the Assessment Arrangements Team in advance of the assessment.

Extra time

While speech recognition is usually a much faster method of generating text than typing or handwriting, it still requires the candidate to read and interpret questions and plan and compose answers. In addition, the candidate may require time to proof read and correct recognition errors. Therefore, the use of extra time should be considered following the standard SQA assessment arrangement principles.

Separate accommodation

Separate accommodation should be requested in order to prevent the candidate's spoken answers being overheard by other candidates.

Contingency Arrangements

The contingency arrangements that apply in all examinations apply also to candidates using the speech recognition software. In the event of any technical difficulties occurring during the examination, the designated teacher/technician may be allowed into the examination room to repair or provide another machine or to advise on the software to enable the candidate to complete the examination. An additional allowance of time equal to the time lost will be made available to the candidate, and the candidate should be advised of this at once to allay anxiety.

If the repair or change to another machine, and the allowance of additional time, resolves the problem, the matter should simply be reported to SQA by the Invigilator. In any case where a fault results in the spoiling of, or changing of the candidate's work, a brief report should be prepared by the Invigilator and countersigned by the SQA Co-ordinator. This should be sent to the Assessment Arrangements Team. The report should indicate the name of the centre and the candidate's name.

Remember: in the event of any technical difficulties, it is expected that a reader and/or scribe is available if the candidate requires this type of support. You do not need to record this on the AAR system.

CALL Scotland has some excellent advice on speech recognition software.

www.callscotland.org.uk/information/speech-recognition