



Introduction to Assessment Arrangements for Schools and Colleges

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Introduction

This is a guide for teachers and lecturers, and it is about what to do when considering and making requests for assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those identified as having additional support needs.

It details:

- ◆ the principles that apply when determining a candidate's need for an assessment arrangement
- ◆ how to request an assessment arrangement
- ◆ the quality assurance procedures required to ensure that assessment arrangements meet the assessment needs of candidates

Assessment arrangements allow candidates who are disabled and/or who have been identified as having additional support needs appropriate arrangements to access the assessment without compromising its integrity.

Candidates are individuals with a diverse range of needs and it is important that you consider the individual assessment needs of your candidates when you submit requests. For candidates who are disabled under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, an assessment arrangement might be the 'reasonable adjustment' required to compensate for a substantial disadvantage, but there may be other adjustments that need to be made in order to meet their individual needs.

Access to assessment: the principles

As the national awarding body for Scotland, SQA has a responsibility to ensure that assessment leading to certification is rigorous and fair for all candidates, and that it allows candidates to demonstrate the skills and knowledge required for the award.

The principles that our assessment arrangements policy are based on are:

1 Candidates for whom assessment arrangements are requested should potentially have the ability to achieve the national standards, but are unable to do so using the published assessment arrangements for the particular qualification.

You have a responsibility to ensure that your candidate is entered for a qualification at the right level, given his or her general level of ability and attainment. For some disabled candidates and candidates with additional support needs, accessing the questions in an external examination, or making written responses, may not be possible. Assessment arrangements, such as the use of assistive technologies or a reader or scribe, should alleviate this disadvantage.

2 The integrity of the qualification must be maintained.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our qualifications are, by design, accessible to as many candidates as possible. This means making decisions and being clear about the essential skills and competences required for awards, sometimes in collaboration with other stakeholders. Requests for assessment arrangements must be considered in the context of the competences that must be met in each qualification.

3 Any adjustment that you request should be tailored to meet a candidate's individual needs.

The individual needs of candidates should be the basis for making a request for an assessment arrangement. As part of the overall support offered to them, candidates should have an assessment plan, considered subject by subject, with no assumption that the same kind or level of support will be required in every case. For example, a candidate with writing difficulties might not be at any disadvantage in a multiple choice question paper in a Chemistry examination. However, the same candidate might have difficulties producing a written essay in a History examination.

4 Any assessment arrangements requested should reflect, as far as possible, the candidate's normal way of learning and producing work.

The method used to facilitate access to an assessment will generally, though not always, be the method that has been used in the learning environment. For example, if a candidate with dyslexia normally uses ICT in class to overcome writing difficulties, this should be the requested arrangement. However, there may be situations where the arrangement you request is different from the way the candidate has been doing coursework. For example, a candidate might be starting to use ICT to produce work but not feel confident enough to use it in an external assessment.

Quality assurance in centres

Centres' responsibilities for internal quality assurance procedures

You have a responsibility to ensure that you have effective internal quality assurance procedures for identifying candidates' assessment needs and requesting assessment arrangements.

You should follow the four stages described in this section:

- ◆ identify the assessment need
- ◆ select an appropriate form of assessment arrangement
- ◆ verify the need for the assessment arrangement
- ◆ authorise the request

At all stages, professional dialogue is essential between staff who act as advocates for the candidate and those who are responsible for quality assurance within the centre.

In some cases, other professionals, such as therapists, specialist teachers or educational psychologists, may be involved. For example, the educational psychologist may have been involved in working with centres to identify and meet candidate needs, and may also have a role (particularly in the case of local authority schools) in verifying requests for assessment arrangements being put forward by the centre.

Stage 1: Identify any difficulties the candidate is having or is likely to have with assessment in the subject

Wherever possible, a candidate's likely difficulties in accessing the published assessment arrangements should be identified before he or she embarks on the Unit or Course, and specialist support staff informed and involved. In some cases, however, the difficulties may only become apparent during the candidate's course of study.

The need for a particular arrangement could be identified by the candidate, by staff concerned with guidance, or by the subject teacher or lecturer.

Stage 2: Work out how the candidate's assessment needs can be met, ensuring subject assessment standards will not be compromised

This is the stage where you determine whether or not assessment arrangements will be required. This could be quite straightforward, or it could require discussion with us. This should be part of your candidate's overall support plan.

The arrangements for each Unit and Course list the evidence that is needed to show that the Outcomes have been achieved. For example, candidates may be required to show that they have knowledge, practical skills, and the ability to work in a particular way. These arrangements or the specification will also set out the usual way of generating this evidence.

If your candidate is able to achieve the Outcomes, but is unable to do so using the published assessment arrangements, there is often scope to propose alternative ways of generating

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the necessary evidence. The subject teacher, lecturer or trainer will normally develop any such proposals in consultation with learning support staff and the candidate.

Stage 3: Verify the candidate's need for an assessment arrangement

This is a key stage in your internal quality assurance procedures. Verifying the need is extremely important for two reasons:

- ◆ You need to be assured that the decision to request, or not to request, a particular assessment arrangement accords with both SQA guidance and any relevant legislation.
- ◆ We need to ensure that centres have internal quality assurance processes in place for requesting assessment arrangements for candidates. Evidence of your verification process, the personnel involved, and the basis for your requests, must be available to us.

Stage 4: Head of Centre or delegated manager authorises the arrangement request

This final stage can be carried out by the Head of Centre or the person who has responsibility for your centre's internal quality assurance systems. In submitting a request, your centre is acknowledging that it has met its responsibilities in terms of quality assuring the appropriateness of the request.

Evidence to support a request for an assessment arrangement

Please also read the additional guidance on evidence requirements in the Quality Assurance document.

Evidence of a candidate's need for a particular assessment arrangement must be available to SQA on request.

Evidence of the verification meeting

This might be minutes or notes of the verification meeting where all relevant information and evidence is considered prior to submitting the request to SQA.

Confirmation from candidates

You must provide confirmation from candidates that they have been involved in discussions about, and have agreed to, the arrangements being requested on their behalf, and that they intend to use them. You must also obtain consent from candidates for their disability/difficulty to be disclosed to SQA. All this information can be on one form signed by the candidate. You may wish to involve parents in this discussion.

Evidence of the candidate's disability and/or additional support needs and how this affects learning or assessment

In all cases, there should be evidence of the nature and extent of the disability or difficulty and how it has impacted on teaching and learning in the classroom. Information from professionals (eg therapists, specialist sensory impairment teachers, subject teachers and educational psychologists) may be available. The evidence might include a working file containing information about the candidate's disability and/or additional support needs, including for example: reports, assessments, minutes of meetings, notes of case conferences, on-going consultations on the current teaching support and assessment arrangements used.

Where a candidate has recently changed centre, there should be a transfer of information from the previous centre wherever possible. This information will inform assessment planning, and will be part of the evidence base.

In colleges, the identification of need and/or the collection of evidence may come much later, while the candidate is on the course. In this case, an assessment by the specialist (extended learning support) staff member, in consultation with subject lecturers, will be acceptable. External specialists could also contribute to this process.

This evidence could include a working file which contains a personal learning and support plan and current assessment of need, together with prior assessments and information from previous centres where available.

Evidence of the candidate's need for a particular assessment arrangement

If a particular assessment arrangement is being requested, additional information/evidence of the need for the particular arrangement is required to support the request. For example, if a scribe is being requested, this evidence might include: speed, accuracy and legibility assessments by the specialist teacher/lecturer; spelling assessments; speed (wpm) for production of free, dictated, or word-processed work; and samples of work produced with and without a scribe. For candidates who are unable to produce any written work at all, written confirmation of this from a specialist teacher/lecturer will be acceptable as evidence.

Quality assurance by SQA

We have a responsibility to ensure that our centres follow consistent procedures in requesting assessment arrangements, and that the assessment arrangements being requested are appropriate. To this end, we include these procedures in our general quality assurance of centres.

We also monitor requests for assessment arrangements in external examinations using our Assessment Arrangements Request software (AAR), which records details of the requests received.

Our Quality Enhancement Manager will visit and monitor a sample of centres each year to ensure that they have effective internal systems and procedures for requesting assessment arrangements.

If your centre is selected for a visit, you will receive feedback and advice from your Quality Enhancement Manager and, providing he/she is satisfied with your systems, all your requests for assessment arrangements will be processed as normal.

If your Quality Enhancement Manager is not satisfied that your centre's systems and available evidence meet our requirements, you will receive further guidance and advice. A follow-up visit will be organised after which — providing your systems and evidence now meet our requirements — your requests will be processed as normal.

In the unlikely event that, after the second visit, your centre still does not meet our requirements, you will be asked to submit the evidence for all your requests. We will consider each request and supporting evidence and make a decision on the requests on a case-by-case basis.

Note: Appeals against decisions involving assessment arrangements are covered in our general guidance on appeals, *The Appeals Process: Information for centres* (publication code: FF5480, January 2011).