



Information on Reasonable Adjustments for Qualifications regulated by Ofqual and Qualifications Wales

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2	Removed references to functional skills Amendments made to terminology	August 2016
3	General review and updating	November 2024

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Introduction

This is a guide for centres and staff who offer regulated SQA qualifications in England and Wales. By 'Regulated', we mean qualifications that are regulated under the SQA Accreditation Principles or the 'General Conditions of Recognition' of Ofqual and Qualifications Wales. This guide contains information on what to do when providing a reasonable adjustment for a disabled learner. It details:

- ◆ the principles that apply when determining a learner's need for a reasonable adjustment
- ◆ the quality assurance procedures required to ensure that the reasonable adjustment meets the assessment needs of the learner
- ◆ the reasonable adjustment procedure to be followed by centres in relation to the internal and external assessment of regulated vocational and occupational qualifications.

The guide also contains information on special considerations and the procedures to be followed by centres when considering and giving special consideration.

What is a reasonable adjustment?

Reasonable adjustments are made to an assessment for a qualification to enable a disabled learner to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding to the levels of attainment required by the specification for that qualification without compromising its integrity.

Which learners will be eligible for reasonable adjustments in vocational and occupational qualifications?

Learners have a diverse range of needs — including assessment needs. For learners who are disabled under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, a reasonable adjustment might be required to compensate for a substantial disadvantage, but other adjustments may need to be made to meet their individual needs.

Learners should be involved when any adjustment decisions are made. Reasonable adjustments must reflect the normal working practice of an individual working within the vocational or occupational area of the qualification.

SQA does not have a duty to make any adjustment to the competences being tested in an assessment. For example, it may not be possible to make reasonable adjustments where:

- ◆ an assessment requires the demonstration of a practical competence
- ◆ the assessment criteria have to be fully met
- ◆ units or qualifications confer a licence to practise

The following adaptations may be considered to facilitate access to assessment, as long as they do not impact on the competence standards being tested:

- ◆ adaptation of the physical environment for access purposes
- ◆ adaptation to equipment
- ◆ changing usual assessment arrangements
- ◆ adapting assessment materials
- ◆ providing assistance during assessment
- ◆ changing or adapting the assessment method
- ◆ using assistive technology
- ◆ extra time, such as assignment extensions
- ◆ use of a different assessment location
- ◆ use of coloured overlays, low vision aids, CCTV
- ◆ use of assistive software
- ◆ assessment material in an enlarged format or Braille
- ◆ reader
- ◆ scribe
- ◆ practical assistant
- ◆ prompter
- ◆ transcript
- ◆ assessment material on coloured paper or in audio format
- ◆ language modified assessment material
- ◆ using British Sign Language (BSL)
- ◆ use of ICT, or responses using electronic devices

Not all these adjustments will be reasonable, permissible or practical in particular situations. Learners may not need, nor be allowed the same adjustment for all assessments.

Access to assessment: the principles

SQA has a responsibility to ensure that assessment leading to certification is rigorous, equitable and fair for all learners, and that it allows learners to demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding that are required for the award.

It is, therefore, vital that SQA centres recruit with integrity. You must ensure that learners have the correct information and advice on their selected qualifications, and that the qualifications will meet their needs. You should also assess each potential learner and make justifiable and professional judgements about the learner's potential to successfully complete the assessment and achieve the qualification. Such an assessment must identify, where appropriate, the support that will be made available to the learner to facilitate access to the assessment.

Where the recruitment process identifies that a learner may not be able to demonstrate attainment and thus gain achievement in all parts of the assessment for the selected qualification, this must be communicated clearly to the learner. A learner may still decide to proceed with studying a particular qualification and not be entered for all or part of the assessment.

You are advised to ensure that learners are aware of:

- ◆ the range of options available, including any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary, to enable the demonstration of attainment across all of the required assessments

and

- ◆ any restrictions on progression routes to the learner as a result of not achieving certain outcomes

The principles that our access to assessment policy are based on are:

- ◆ Learners for whom reasonable adjustments are provided should potentially have the ability to achieve the qualification.
- ◆ You have a responsibility to ensure that your learner is entered for the qualification at the right level. Reasonable adjustments are designed to enable access to an assessment. For example, if a learner has difficulty with writing or reading, a reasonable adjustment, such as the use of ICT, or the use of BSL should alleviate this disadvantage.
- ◆ The integrity of the qualification must be maintained.

Reasonable adjustments must be considered in the context of the competences that must be met in each qualification. SQA cannot make any adjustment to the competences that are being assessed. This means that it may not be possible to make reasonable adjustments where:

- ◆ an assessment requires the demonstration of a practical competence
- ◆ the assessment criteria have to be fully met
- ◆ the units or qualifications confer a licence to practise

Any adjustment that you provide should be tailored to meet a learner's individual needs.

The individual needs of learners should be the basis for providing a reasonable adjustment. For example, a learner with writing difficulties might not be at any disadvantage in a practically-based assessment. However, the same learner might have difficulties compiling written evidence for their portfolio.

Any reasonable adjustments provided should reflect, as far as possible, the learner's normal way of learning and producing evidence of competence.

The method used to facilitate access to an assessment will generally, though not always, be the method that has been used in the learning or working environment. For example, if a learner with dyslexia normally uses ICT in the workplace to overcome writing difficulties, this should be the reasonable adjustment provided.

Quality assurance in centres: responsibilities for internal quality assurance procedures

You have a responsibility to ensure that you have effective internal quality assurance procedures for identifying learners' assessment needs and providing reasonable adjustments.

You should follow the four stages described in this section:

1. identify the assessment need
2. select an appropriate reasonable adjustment
3. verify the need for the reasonable adjustment
4. authorise the use of the reasonable adjustment

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

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

Wherever possible, a learner's likely difficulties should be identified before they embark on the qualification. In some cases, the difficulties may only become apparent during the learner's programme of work. The need for a particular arrangement could be identified by the learner or by the assessor or trainer.

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

This is the stage where you determine whether or not a reasonable adjustment will be required. This could be quite straightforward, or it could require discussion with us.

The occupational standards (including National Occupational Standards, Professional and Industry standards) provide the assessment criteria that must be met for each qualification and list the evidence that is needed to show that the standards have been met. For example, learners may be required to show that they have knowledge, practical skills, and the ability to work in a particular way.

If your learner is able to achieve the standards, but is unable to do so using the suggested methods, there is often scope to propose alternative ways of generating the necessary evidence. The assessor or trainer will develop any such proposals in consultation with the learner.

Stage 3: Verify the learner's need for a reasonable adjustment

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 provide a reasonable adjustment accords with both SQA guidance and any relevant legislation.
- ◆ We need to ensure that centres have internal quality assurance processes in place for providing reasonable adjustments for learners. Evidence of your verification process, the personnel involved, and the evidence used to make your decisions, must be available to us.

Stage 4: Head of centre or delegated manager authorises the reasonable adjustment

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 providing a reasonable adjustment, your centre is acknowledging that it has met its responsibilities in terms of quality assuring the appropriateness of the adjustment.

Evidence to support a reasonable adjustment

Evidence of a learner's need for a reasonable adjustment must be available to SQA on request.

Evidence of the internal verification meeting

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

Confirmation from learners

You must provide confirmation from learners that they have been involved in discussions about, and have agreed to, the adjustments being provided for them.

You must also obtain consent from learners for their disability/difficulty to be disclosed to SQA if needed. All this information can be on one form signed by the learner.

Evidence of the learner's disability and how this affects assessment

In all cases, there should be evidence of the nature and extent of the disability or difficulty. Information from professionals — for example, medical practitioners — may be available. The evidence might include a working file containing information about the learner's disability and/or additional support needs, including, for example: reports, assessments and minutes of meetings.

Where a learner 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.

Reasonable adjustments explained

This section describes some examples of reasonable adjustments. It is not an exhaustive list. You should work from the need of the individual learner in identifying the most appropriate adjustment rather than from a fixed list of options. Again, where particular examples of disabilities are used, they are just examples and not a list of all eventualities.

Before you provide a reasonable adjustment for a learner you must:

- ◆ have (and retain) the required evidence of the learner's eligibility
- ◆ have internally verified this evidence
- ◆ be satisfied that the reasonable adjustment does not change the published assessment requirements in a significant way

Extra time

The amount of extra time given should accurately reflect the learner's assessment needs. While the learner will always have the option of using the extra time, you should monitor the overall use of extra time to check the accuracy of your assessment of need.

You only need to contact SQA to ask about the reasonableness of providing extra time in an assessment where the performance of a task in a specified time is an assessment requirement. For example, in a word-processing assessment, the number of words produced in a set time may be an assessment requirement.

Remember: too much extra time in an assessment may be tiring for the learner and may ultimately disadvantage them.

ICT

For many disabled learners, computers and other forms of assistive technology (including screen readers, speech recognition or voice-activated systems) provide an effective means of communication. It is important, however, that where ICT is used, it is appropriate to learners' needs and that there has been sufficient time and training to ensure that they are able to use it effectively.

Your centre's responsibilities

It is your responsibility to:

- ◆ Ensure that there has been sufficient time and training for the learner to use ICT effectively. The arrangements for the use of ICT should usually reflect the learner's usual way of working.
- ◆ Make the necessary arrangements for the provision of ICT. Remember to ensure that, where possible, contingency arrangements are in place to deal with any technical problems.
- ◆ Make sure the learner's word-processed work is printed out and kept for verification purposes.

Remember: The use of ICT must not compromise the validity of the assessment. If you are in any doubt, please contact us for advice.

Adjustments for learners with visual impairment

There are a range of arrangements suitable for visually-impaired learners, including the use of ICT, adapted print and formats. They include:

- ◆ printing on a specified colour of paper
- ◆ large print
- ◆ different fonts
- ◆ use of coloured overlays
- ◆ use of low vision aids
- ◆ use of CCTV
- ◆ use of braille
- ◆ speech to text software
- ◆ text to speech software

Adjustments for deaf learners or those with a hearing impairment

There are a range of arrangements suitable for hearing impaired and deaf learners including:

- ◆ use of lip reading
- ◆ speech to text software
- ◆ text to speech software
- ◆ use of BSL

When you have a learner who uses BSL in their assessments, there are certain procedures you should follow:

- ◆ Making the necessary arrangements for providing an appropriately skilled sign communicator.
- ◆ Making sure that both the learner and the sign communicator are advised of, and sufficiently well prepared for, this arrangement.
- ◆ Ensuring that the sign communicator has the right level of technical knowledge and skill in sign language. The sign communicator's skills need to be sufficient to reflect the learner's breadth of knowledge and ability.
- ◆ Preparing a translation/ transcript in English of the learner's signed responses for verification purposes. This translation/transcription should be carried out by someone with the appropriate level of skill in signing.

Guidelines for sign communicators: what to do (and what not to do)

Preparation

It is very important that you:

- ◆ Have had previous practice in working with the learner, and that both of you are well prepared for working together under the assessment conditions that will apply.
- ◆ Are an appropriately skilled sign communicator, and have had the opportunity to prepare for signing the assessment.
- ◆ Are able to communicate effectively with the learner.
- ◆ Have a good working knowledge of the area you are being asked to sign.

You must not:

- ◆ take the lead or initiative
- ◆ give any additional explanation or assistance

Guidance for learners: working with a sign communicator

You should have had previous practice in working with your sign communicator, and both of you should feel well prepared.

You must:

- ◆ Clearly indicate to your sign communicator which parts of the assessment you wish to have signed.

You may:

- ◆ Ask for parts of the assessment to be signed again as often as necessary, but the sign communicator cannot suggest or choose which parts.

Applying for a reasonable adjustment

This section outlines the reasonable adjustment procedure you should follow in relation to the assessment of regulated vocational and occupational qualifications.

Reasonable adjustments must not affect the reliability or validity of assessment outcomes, nor must they give one learner an assessment advantage over other learners.

You only need to contact SQA to request a reasonable adjustment in an assessment if the arrangement changes the published assessment requirements in any significant way. For example, you should contact SQA to request the use of a scribe in a unit assessment which directly assesses written communication. Please send the completed form https://www.icq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Form-VQ_IA.pdf to qualification.development@sqa.org.uk

If you have any doubt as to whether a particular reasonable adjustment significantly changes the assessment requirements, contact SQA or discuss the matter with your external verifier for the units concerned. This should be done as soon as possible, and before the learner undertakes the assessment.

You must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments made and keep this on file for verification purposes. You can use this form: https://www.icq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Form-VQ_IA.pdf

Special consideration

What is a special consideration?

Special consideration is a process applied to a learner who has temporarily experienced illness, injury or some other event outside of their control at the time of the assessment. It is applied when the issue or event has had, or is reasonably likely to have had, a material effect on a learner's ability to take an assessment or demonstrate their normal level of attainment in an assessment.

Special consideration can go some way to assist a learner affected by a potentially wide range of difficulties, emotional or physical, which may influence performance in their assessments. It cannot remove the difficulty faced by the learner. This means that there will be some situations where learners should not be entered for an assessment.

Where long-term circumstances have prevented the learner from reaching the competence standards, it may not be possible to make an adjustment.

For SQA qualifications regulated by Ofqual and Qualifications Wales, we would expect our reasonable adjustment process to be used in most cases. Should it be evident that the learner is ill, distressed or impaired in any other way, we recommend that assessment is rescheduled to a more suitable time, where this is possible. Should there be a need for special consideration, please see the information that follows.

Which learners will be eligible for special consideration in vocational and occupational qualifications?

Learners may be eligible for special consideration if they have been fully prepared and have covered the whole course but performance in the assessment is affected by adverse circumstances beyond their control. These include:

- ◆ temporary illness or accident/injury at the time of the assessment
- ◆ bereavement at the time of the assessment
- ◆ domestic crisis arising at the time of the assessment
- ◆ serious disturbance during an assessment
- ◆ accidental events at the time of the assessment such as being given the wrong assessment paper, or failure of practical equipment

Learners will not be eligible for special consideration if preparation for, or performance in the assessment is affected by:

- ◆ long-term illness or other difficulties during the course affecting revision time, unless the illness or circumstances exacerbate what would otherwise be a minor issue at the time of the assessment — that is, difficulties over and above those that previously approved access arrangements would have alleviated
- ◆ bereavement occurring more than six months before the assessment, unless an anniversary has been reached at the time of the assessment or there are ongoing implications such as an inquest or court case

- ◆ domestic inconvenience, such as moving house, lack of facilities, taking holidays at the time of the assessment
- ◆ minor disturbance in the assessment room caused by another learner, such as momentary bad behaviour or a mobile phone ringing
- ◆ the consequences of disobeying the centre's internal regulations
- ◆ the failure of the centre to prepare learners properly for the assessment for whatever reason
- ◆ quality of teaching, staff shortages, building work or lack of facilities
- ◆ misreading the timetable or failing to attend at the right time and in the right place
- ◆ misreading the instructions of the assessment paper and answering the wrong questions
- ◆ making personal arrangements such as a wedding or holiday arrangements which conflict with the assessment
- ◆ a disability or learning difficulties (diagnosed or undiagnosed) unless the disability or circumstances exacerbate what would otherwise be a minor issue at the time of the assessment — that is, difficulties over and above those that previously approved access arrangements would have alleviated
- ◆ failure by the centre to process access arrangements by the published deadline.

SQA's decision to award special consideration in vocational qualifications will be based on various factors, which may vary from learner to learner and from one assessment to another. These factors may include the severity of the circumstances, the date of the assessment and the nature of the assessment.

It is important to note that it may not be possible to apply special consideration where:

- ◆ an assessment requires the demonstration of a practical competence
- ◆ the assessment criteria must be fully met
- ◆ units or qualifications confer a licence to practise

Where an assessment has been missed or is in the form of an on-demand test, such as an electronic test set and marked by a computer, you should offer the learner an opportunity to take the assessment at a later date.

Applying for special consideration in vocational qualifications

Applications for special consideration must be made on a case-by-case basis and must be applied for at the time of the assessment. Separate applications must be made for each learner. The only exception to this is where a group of learners have been affected by a similar circumstance during an assessment, such as a fire alarm. A list of learners affected must be attached to the application.

All applications for special consideration must be supported by evidence — for example, a statement from a member of centre staff or any other appropriate information.

The head of centre must authorise all applications for special consideration prior to submission to SQA.

During the special consideration application process, SQA will only liaise with the centre. —If a learner has concerns, they must approach the centre about this.

Special consideration will not be granted once the learner's achievement has been certificated.

Lost or damaged work (internally assessed work)

When work has been lost or damaged due to events outside of the learner's control, SQA may grant an application for special consideration. In all cases, the centre must be able to verify that the work was done and that it was monitored whilst it was in progress.

The centre is required to maintain assessment records independently of the learner's portfolio. Therefore, in the case of a lost portfolio, these records, together with fully documented question and answer sessions or written statements, as appropriate, can be used to confirm a learner's competence. If a portfolio is re-created, because evidence has been lost, it should be internally verified.

Appeals

You can appeal on a learner's behalf if your head of centre disagrees with SQA's decision on approving assessment arrangements in internal and external assessments.

Full details on SQA's Appeal Processes can be found at [on our website \(sqa.org.uk\)](https://www.sqa.org.uk).

Further reference

This information is based on *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* and *A guide to the special consideration process – General and Vocational qualifications*, published by the Joint Council for Qualifications. These can be accessed at [Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](#)

These publications contain more information on reasonable adjustments and special considerations.