Information on Reasonable Adjustments for SVQs and alternative competence-based qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation

This content is valid.

Important: From 1 February 2026, Qualifications Scotland becomes fully operational, replacing SQA and becoming the new national awarding body. This document will remain current and you can continue to use it. It will be updated in the style of Qualifications Scotland when it's next due for review.

Version 2.1

Publication date: January 2025
Publication code: DB7152

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DQ Lowden, 24 Wester Shawfair, Dalkeith, Midlothian EH22 1FD
www.sqa.org.uk

The information in this publication may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications. If it is reproduced, SQA should be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be used for any other purpose, then written permission must be obtained from the Communications team at SQA. It must not be reproduced for trade or commercial purposes.

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2025

For an up-to-date list of prices visit the **Publication Sales and Downloads section** of SQA's website.

This document will be produced in alternative formats, including large type, Braille and community languages. For further details telephone SQA's Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000.

SQA is committed to using plain English. We will try to make our publications as easy and straightforward to understand as we can, and will try to avoid all unnecessary jargon. If there is any language in this document that you feel is hard to understand, or could be improved, please write to Editor, Communications team, at the Glasgow address above or e-mail: **editor@sqa.org.uk**.

Contents

Introduction 1

What is a reasonable adjustment? 1

Access to assessment: the principles 3

Quality assurance in centres: responsibilities for internal quality assurance procedures 4

Stage 1: Identify any difficulties the learner is having or is likely to have with assessment in the subject 4

Stage 2: Work out how the learner's assessment needs can be met, ensuring the standards will not be compromised 4

Stage 3: Verify the learner's need for a reasonable adjustment 4

Stage 4: Head of centre or delegated manager authorises the reasonable adjustment 5

Evidence to support a reasonable adjustment 6

Evidence of the internal verification meeting 6

Confirmation from learners 6

Evidence of the learner's disability and how this affects assessment 6

Reasonable adjustments explained 7

Extra time 7

ICT 8

Adjustments for learners with a visual impairment 8

Adjustments for deaf learners or those with a hearing impairment 8

Appealing SQA's decision about reasonable adjustments 9

Introduction

This is a guide for centres and staff who offer SVQs and related qualifications and it is about 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 learner's assessment needs

What is a reasonable adjustment?

Reasonable adjustments are adjustments 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 are individuals with a diverse range of needs — including assessment needs. For learners who have additional support needs, there are a range of possible assessment arrangements. For learners who are disabled under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, a unique reasonable adjustment might be required to compensate for a substantial disadvantage, but this should be agreed with SQA beforehand.

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

The legislation does not impose a duty on SQA 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 practice

The following adaptations may be considered to facilitate access, 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 material
- 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
- British Sign Language (BSL)
- Use of ICT or responses using electronic devices

Not all of 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 and fair for all learners, and that it allows learners to demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding required for the award.

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

1: 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.

2: 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

3: 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.

4: 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:

- identify the assessment need
- work out how the learner's assessment needs can be met
- verify the need for the reasonable adjustment
- 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 he or she embarks 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.

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 national occupational standards provide the performance 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. Additional range statements may suggest ways of gathering this evidence.

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 or 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 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

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

Centres only need to contact SQA to request a reasonable adjustment in an internal assessment if the proposed arrangement changes the published assessment requirements in any significant way. For example, centres should contact SQA to request the use of a scribe in a Unit assessment which directly assesses written communication.

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

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

If you are in any doubt about whether the reasonable adjustment significantly impacts on the standards, contact us for advice as soon as possible, and before the learner undertakes the assessment. You should submit full details of the learner's disability, the proposed reasonable adjustment, and the details of the qualification and level, to:
qualification.development@sqa.org.uk

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 in 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 speech-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 a 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 or 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 both of you should be well prepared for working together under the assessment conditions that will apply.
- Are an appropriately skilled sign communicator and that you 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.

Appealing SQA's decision about reasonable adjustments

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

You can find full details on SQA's Appeal Processes at Appeals Process: Information for Centres.