



Assessment arrangements explained: information for centres

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August 2024	Assessment arrangements: putting the principles into practice Reference to learner agreement and discussions with parent, carer or guardian about assessment arrangements updated
August 2024	Examples of assessment arrangements List of adapted and digital question papers removed. Centres to refer to 'Requesting Adapted or Digital Question Papers: Guidance for Centres' for most up-to-date information
August 2024	Examples of assessment arrangements Digital Answer Booklets (DAB) section clarified
August 2024	Examples of assessment arrangements Numerical support in Mathematics assessments updated

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Introduction

This document contains important information and a framework for teachers and lecturers who are considering how to provide assessment arrangements for learners who have an identified difficulty. The difficulty may be physical (including medical or sensory) or behavioural, or a mental health or learning difficulty.

It sets out the principles that apply when determining a learner's need for an assessment arrangement, and how and when to request an assessment arrangement. It also describes some examples of assessment arrangements that can be provided in SQA assessments.

The purpose of assessment arrangements is to provide disabled learners and those with additional support needs with an equal opportunity to **demonstrate their attainment** in an assessment. This allows them to show the skills, knowledge and understanding they have achieved, without compromising the integrity of the assessment.

We take a needs-led approach to assessment arrangements. Learners are all individuals with different needs — even from those with the same diagnosis or difficulty. It is therefore important that you consider the individual assessment needs of your learners when considering the most appropriate assessment arrangements.

Learners do not need to have a confirmed diagnosis of a disability for an assessment arrangement to be put in place. However, there must be an identified difficulty. It is the individual learner's assessment needs that must be the basis for an assessment arrangement. This means that you have a critical role in ensuring that the process of providing assessment arrangements is fair and operates with integrity.

To determine the assessment arrangements that a learner may need, you should first identify the difficulties the learner faces when accessing coursework and assessments. You should gather evidence of the learner's identified difficulty and how this impacts on teaching and learning. Remember that we do not require evidence of a diagnosis of a disability or additional support need to support a request for assessment arrangements. Further information on assessment arrangements, including our guidance on quality assurance requirements, is available from the [Assessment arrangements pages](#) of our website.

For example:

- ◆ a learner who is profoundly deaf, and who uses sign language such as BSL may need sign language support to access an assessment task
- ◆ a learner experiencing mental health difficulties, who is very lethargic first thing in the morning due to medication, may need the start time of an assessment adjusted
- ◆ a neurodivergent learner with dyslexia who experiences difficulties with processing written text, may need a text reader and may also need extra time to complete an assessment
- ◆ a learner who has persistent difficulties in concentrating, such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), may need to undertake an exam in a separate room, or in a room with only a small number of learners.

For learners who are disabled, as defined under the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 (see **Legal context** below), assessment arrangements such as those listed above might be the 'reasonable adjustment' required to compensate for a substantial disadvantage, but there may be other unique adjustments that need to be considered to meet their individual needs. However, it is important to recognise that some adjustments may not be possible for some qualifications. It is not possible to make an adjustment to the **standard** of the qualification where this would mean that it did not provide a reliable indication of the learner's knowledge, skills and understanding.

Legal context

Throughout this document, we refer to disabled learners in line with the Equality Act 2010. This act requires that SQA make reasonable adjustments where a learner who is disabled within the meaning of the act would be at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to a learner who is not disabled.

This document also recognises the duties of centres and local authorities to provide assessment arrangements for learners with additional support needs under the [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#). This act provides the legal framework for the system for supporting children and young people in their school education. The act automatically deems that all looked after children and young people have additional support needs unless it is determined that they do not. It is therefore important that you consider whether a learner who is looked after and has been identified as having additional support needs also has an identified physical (including medical or sensory), behavioural, mental health or learning difficulty, and therefore requires an assessment arrangement.

Quality assurance of assessment arrangements

Our document [Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements in Internal and External Assessments: Information for centres](#) has recently been updated. We strongly recommend that all staff involved in the assessment arrangements process read this to make themselves aware of the changes. These include revised quality assurance criteria and examples of acceptable evidence for use during an SQA quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit. Familiarity with these changes will help you ensure that you have an effective internal quality assurance process in place to provide assessment arrangements for disabled learners and those with additional support needs.

Access to assessment: the principles

As the national awarding body for Scotland, we have 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 qualification. This is why it is important that assessment arrangements are only provided to those learners identified as having a physical (including medical or sensory), behavioural, mental health or learning difficulty that prevents them from accessing an assessment and demonstrating their attainment.

The four key principles that underpin our model for the provision of assessment arrangements focus on the need to remove barriers for disabled learners, to provide them with an equal opportunity to access their assessments.

Principle 1: Assessment arrangements are intended to enable learners to demonstrate their attainment, not to compensate for lack of attainment

Assessment arrangements make a distinction between a learner's attainment and their ability to demonstrate that attainment under assessment conditions. They are agreed before an assessment takes place, and allow disabled learners to **access** the assessment and demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding they have acquired.

For example, a learner with an identified reading difficulty may require text-reading software to support decoding written text to access a History assessment and show their skills, knowledge and understanding. However, assessment arrangements cannot be put in place for a learner who has not been physically able to develop the practical skills in a subject such as Practical Metalwork.

Principle 2: Assessment arrangement must not compromise the integrity of the qualification

Assessment arrangements must be considered in the context of the assessment standards or competence standards for each qualification. Assessment arrangements must not compromise these standards or undermine the integrity of the assessment or the credibility of the award. All relevant stakeholders, including learners, must have confidence that the qualification awarded to a learner provides a reliable indication of their knowledge, skills, understanding and competence.

For example, it is not possible for a scribe to use their discretion with spelling in the Writing component of Modern Languages. Learners are assessed on their ability to spell in the target language, so this would undermine the fundamental assessment objective of the Writing assessment.

Principle 3: Assessment arrangements must be tailored to meet a learner's individual needs

Assessment arrangements must be considered in the context of the individual learner's assessment needs in each subject area, and in different assessments within subject areas.

As part of the overall support offered to them, learners should have an assessment arrangement plan, considered across subjects and courses with similar assessment conditions and demands. Subjects and their methods of assessment may vary, leading

to different demands on the learners. This is why you must consider the individual learner's need for assessment arrangements according to the subject and its assessment requirements. You should do this in collaboration with the subject specialist, and make a judgement about the difficulties the learner will experience in each specific assessment.

This will require due consideration of the learner's needs in the subject and assessment concerned, and the extent to which the published conditions of assessment may prevent the learner from accessing the assessment to demonstrate their attainment.

For example, a learner with significant writing difficulties might not be at any disadvantage in the multiple-choice question paper in the National 5 Chemistry exam. However, the same learner might have significant difficulties producing an extended written essay in the National 5 History exam.

Principle 4: Assessment arrangements should reflect, as far as possible, the learner's usual way of learning and producing work

Assessment arrangements must be considered in the context of any ongoing support the learner needs to access teaching and learning. There should be continuity between the learner's need for support in learning and their need for support in assessment. Assessment arrangements should, where possible, reflect the ongoing support given to the learner in a learning environment.

For example, if a learner uses ICT with text reader software regularly in class to overcome specific reading difficulties, this would most likely be the assessment arrangement provided in assessments.

However, there may be situations where a particular type of support provided in a learning environment is not acceptable in an assessment.

For example, a learner who has a language and communication difficulty, and who normally has someone in class explaining words and terms, would not be allowed such support in the external exam.

For this reason, it is very important that learners are aware of what could be permitted as support in the assessment situation, and have practice in working in this way.

Submitting assessment arrangements

This section explains examples of assessment arrangements that must be submitted to us, the systems and forms you should use, and when to contact us for advice. Not all assessment arrangements require approval from SQA — some can be provided by centres as long as the learner's need is verified and assessment standards are maintained. However, some arrangements, such as those for external exams, visiting assessments, or adapted coursework, must be submitted in advance using the appropriate process.

If you have any concerns or queries about the suitability of an assessment arrangement, or whether this would be permitted, you should contact us at the earliest opportunity. We will need time to consider each request and to discuss it with you before it is provided to the learner.

Adapted coursework assessment tasks for Administration and IT and Accounting

For learners who require specific adaptations for the Administration and IT or Accounting coursework assessment task, you must submit the learner's details and the proposed arrangements using the Adapted Coursework Administration and IT and Accounting Request Form available on SQA Secure (under NQ, then Assessment Arrangements). The form should be completed as early as possible and **before** the coursework period begins, to allow time for discussion if needed and for arrangements to be reviewed in full. Please refer to the *Key Dates* section in *Delivering National Qualifications: Guide for SQA Co-ordinators* (available on SQA Connect) for key deadline dates.

Visiting assessment in practical components

For learners who require assessment arrangements in practical performance components of subjects such as Dance, Drama, Music and Advanced Higher Modern Languages Performance–Talking, you must submit the learner's details and the proposed assessment arrangements using the Visiting Assessing Assessment Arrangements Request Form which can be found on the secure site (under NQ, then Assessment Arrangements). This should be completed as early as possible and **before** the assessment period begins to allow time for discussion if needed. It also ensures that agreed assessment arrangements can be shared with the Visiting Examiner ahead of their scheduled visit. Please refer to the *Key dates* section in *Delivering National Qualifications: Guide for SQA Co-ordinators* (available on SQA Connect) for key deadline dates.

External assessments

You must submit all assessment arrangement requests for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher external assessments using the Assessment Arrangements Request (AAR) system. Each year, in October, access details and a link to the AAR user guide will be emailed to your SQA co-ordinator. Our *Assessment Arrangements Request System – A guide for centres*, which is available on the secure website (under NQ, then Assessment Arrangements), provides instructions on how to submit assessment arrangement requests using the AAR system.

In submitting assessment arrangements on our AAR system for your learner, you are confirming that learners use these arrangements throughout teaching and learning and

in internal assessments for these courses. Please refer to the *Key dates* section in *Delivering National Qualifications: Guide for SQA Co-ordinators* (available on SQA Connect) for key deadline dates.

If you are in any doubt as to whether a particular assessment arrangement would be acceptable for a learner in the external exam or in any externally-assessed coursework, you must contact us for advice as soon as you can, and, where possible, before the learner starts the course. You must ensure that you have discussed the assessment arrangements with the learner and that they have agreed to them. If the learner is between the ages of 12 and 16 and you consider that the learner does not have a general understanding of assessment arrangements, you must also involve their parent or carer in the discussion.

All learners must be well prepared for and have had practice in using any assessment arrangement in advance of an external assessment. For example, a learner using an enlarged or modified question paper should be familiar and comfortable with the format before the exam.

You must also discuss the agreed assessment arrangements with your chief invigilator before the exams start and before the learner undertakes the assessment. The chief invigilator must be given a copy of the AAR system report, which lists the assessment arrangements in place for each learner in each exam.

Internal assessments

In many internal assessments, learners can demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways, using a range of assessment methods. This flexibility will allow many learners to achieve the standard for the qualification without an assessment arrangement.

You do **not** need to submit a request to us for assessment arrangements used in an internal assessment. You can provide the assessment arrangement as long as the learner's need has been appropriately verified and it does not compromise the assessment conditions and standards.

However, if you are in any doubt about whether a learner is allowed a particular assessment arrangement, or whether it might compromise assessment conditions and standards, you must in the first instance discuss this with your SQA co-ordinator. Your SQA co-ordinator should contact us as soon as possible, and before the learner undertakes the assessment. You should submit full details to the Assessment Arrangements Team, as follows:

- ◆ the specific assessment being undertaken
- ◆ the learner's difficulty in accessing the assessment
- ◆ the proposed assessment arrangement
- ◆ your concerns about how it might compromise the assessment conditions and standards

Examples of assessment arrangements

The guidance in this section may be shared with invigilators and others involved in providing assessment arrangements, such as scribes, readers or prompters. This is not an exhaustive list of the assessment arrangements allowed, or of potential difficulties or disabilities which might require such arrangements. Learners with similar difficulties may require different types of support. You should always consider the individual learner's needs when identifying the most appropriate assessment arrangement, rather than selecting from a fixed set of options.

Adapted question papers

We can provide a range of adapted question papers (such as enlarged print, coloured paper, braille and digital question papers) for the external exam. These should be requested from SQA using the Assessment Arrangements Request (AAR) system. Please also refer to *Requesting Adapted Question Papers and Artwork: Guidance for Centres*, which can be found on the [About assessment arrangements section](#) of our website, and the AAR system user guide, which can be found on our [secure website](#).

It is essential that you submit your requests for adapted and digital question papers as early as possible, and that the modification required is correctly identified. It is **not** necessary to wait until learners have sat prelim or formal timed assessments to submit adapted and digital question paper requests on the AAR system. Please refer to the *Key dates* section in *Delivering National Qualifications: Guide for SQA Co-ordinators* (available on SQA Connect) for key deadline dates. The adapted papers you request should reflect the materials the learner uses in a teaching and learning setting. We encourage you to send samples of modified classroom materials with the learner's details to the Assessment Arrangements Team. This will allow us to ensure that any modifications requested for external assessment materials match what the learner uses.

Note: We can also provide adapted versions of coursework assessment tasks for Administration and IT and Accounting on request. You must submit the learner's details and the proposed arrangements using the Adapted Coursework Administration and IT and Accounting Request Form, which is available on our secure website (under NQ, then Assessment Arrangements), by the published deadline date in the Key dates section of *Delivering National Qualifications: Guide for SQA Co-ordinators*.

You must ensure that your learners are familiar with the format of the adapted or digital question paper being requested, and that they have had appropriate opportunities to practise with this format in a learning and teaching environment before the exam. Examples of adapted question papers and artwork are available in *Requesting Adapted or Digital Question Papers: Guidance for Centres*, which can be found on the [About assessment arrangements section](#) of our website.

Note: Where a learner is unable to use any of the colours from our standard suite of coloured question papers, you will be asked to supply the coloured paper in the required paper size, preferably in A3.

For internal assessments, you do not need to seek approval from SQA to produce adapted assessment materials, provided the adaptations made do not change the assessment standards or competence standards. If you are concerned that a particular

adaptation may have changed the assessment standards, please contact our Assessment Arrangements Team for advice.

Assistance in listening assessments

Technological aids

Technological aids which provide better access to sound, such as radio aids for deaf learners, may be used in a listening assessment. Where learners require headphones to access the recordings in a listening assessment, you should ensure that our security requirements as detailed in the ICT Security Checklist are met.

Remember: deaf learners must not be asked to remove their hearing aids or cochlear implant speech processors during any assessment, including external exams.

Extra time in the listening assessment in the external exam

Where a learner requires extra time for a listening assessment presented to them on CD, you can request a version of the 25% extra time CD with extended pauses using the CD requirements pro forma.

Live presentation of the Modern Language listening assessment in the external exam

Listening assessments for Modern Languages, which are normally presented to learners on CD, may be presented live to enable deaf learners to lip-read. Copies of the transcript for the listening assessment will be provided for the person delivering the live presentation. The live presentation should, where possible, be given by someone whose first language is the language being assessed.

The transcript can be made available to the person delivering the live presentation up to 60 minutes before the start of the exam. They should be allowed sufficient time in isolation to read through the transcript and hear the CD through. This is to enable them to match the speed and style of the recording. If required, an additional CD may be requested for this purpose. The transcript should then be read to the learner with appropriate pauses.

The contents of the listening transcript must not be communicated to any other party.

Example

Magda has a hearing impairment and lip-reads. Her school asks for a live presentation in the external assessment of listening. This is done by the teaching assistant, who is German.

Extra time

In National Courses that have timed external assessments, we recognise that some learners, due to their difficulty, may need extra time to complete these assessments. To ensure that the process of assessment is rigorous and as fair as possible for all learners in timed assessments, we must ensure that extra time is only provided to address an identified disadvantage.

Only those learners are eligible who have been identified as having a particular disability, and where there is appropriate evidence of their ongoing need for extra time. It is therefore important that you have the necessary evidence available to support the provision of extra time.

The amount of extra time required may vary according to the learner's individual needs. Evidence that extra time is used when it is given, or that a learner has not been able to complete an assessment in the given time, is in itself not sufficient evidence of the need for this arrangement. There must be evidence indicating:

- ◆ the impact of the learner's difficulty or disability on their ability to complete tasks in a specified time in teaching and learning
- ◆ that a learner is normally given and uses extra time to complete other class learning activities, tasks and assessments
- ◆ that a specific amount of extra time is appropriate support for the learner's assessment needs, based on the additional amount of time they need to complete a question, task or assessment.

You should use your professional judgement when determining the amount of extra time a learner needs — too much extra time in an assessment may be tiring for the learner and might ultimately disadvantage them.

The arrangement of extra time should not be confused with supervised breaks or rest periods. There is more information about breaks in the section [Supervised breaks or rest periods in a timed assessment](#).

Internal assessments

If you judge that a learner requires extra time in an internal assessment, you do not automatically need to seek approval from us. However, you must do this where the performance of a task in a specified time is noted as an assessment requirement in the unit or course specification. You should do this by contacting our Assessment Arrangements Team.

External assessments

The amount of extra time requested for the external exam through the AAR system should accurately reflect the learner's assessment needs. We appreciate that you may not have a set figure for the amount of extra time needed, but it is still important that you have evidence that the learner needs extra time, and how you have determined the amount they need.

For example, a learner with mild spelling difficulties reads accurately and writes fluently, and there is only evidence to support an extra time allowance of 10% to check over

spelling and punctuation. An extra time allowance of 25% for this learner could give them an unfair advantage over other learners.

Example 1

Claire has dyslexia, which affects their speed of writing. The centre requests 25% extra time for their Higher English and Higher History exams, and 15% extra time in their Higher Chemistry and Higher Mathematics. There is clear evidence of Claire's ongoing significant difficulty in completing tasks (class tasks, assignments, assessments) within the normal allocated time. There is evidence available to show that Claire needs approximately 25% extra time for extended writing subjects (such as English and History), and that approximately 15% extra time is sufficient for Chemistry and Mathematics (where less extended writing is required) to meet their needs.

Example 2

Kay experiences mental health difficulties that means that they become very anxious before their assessments and have difficulty concentrating. Based on evidence from previous class assessments, the college provides Kay with 15% extra time that is sufficient for them to complete their SQA assessments. The extra time provided allows Kay to read through the questions and any associated text carefully, giving them time to process this information and check that they are satisfied with their answers at the end of the assessment. Knowing that they have this amount of extra time available has been shown to reduce Kay's anxiety and allow them to complete the assessment.

Example 3

Jamie is blind and uses braille. There is extensive reading in the Higher History question paper, and there are many diagrams and tables to interpret in the Higher Mathematics question paper. Jamie's centre requests 50% extra time for Jamie to complete their exams in these two subjects, based on evidence that this is the approximate amount of extra time they need in class to read extended text and to interpret diagrammatical material.

Example 4

Luke has a physical disability and uses word processing software when producing his written responses. His typing speed is quite slow, so it takes him longer to complete written tasks. As Luke is undertaking National 4 courses where there are no timed external assessments, he is able to complete the assessment tasks over a longer period of time.

Extension to deadlines

Depending on the circumstances, an extension to the published deadline dates for the submission of externally-assessed coursework and internal assessment results may be permitted. Requests should be made in writing to the Assessment Arrangements Team by email to extensions@sqa.org.uk. However, it should be noted that extensions should be carefully managed to prevent additional 'bunching' of assessments and deadlines for learners over a short time period.

Example 1

Jane has experienced mental health difficulties during her time at college, and has had less time to complete her assessments. Her college has requested an extension for submitting her internal assessment marks.

Example 2

Alex has chronic fatigue syndrome. This has meant that they have been unable to complete their Higher Care project by the published submission date. Their school requests an extension to this deadline to allow them to complete their project.

Use of ICT and digital question papers

Use of ICT to type or speak responses or to read while using the conventional question paper

For many disabled learners, using ICT to type, to dictate with speech recognition software, or to read with text-to-speech software provides a more effective and independent means of communication than using human support such as a reader or scribe. Learners must be confident, competent users of the technology before it is used in any SQA assessment.

Use of the spellcheck function on ICT must only be enabled if a learner has an identified difficulty with spelling. This is particularly important where a learner is being explicitly assessed on their spelling and grammar.

You must ensure that the required technical resources (including suitable headphones) are available, and that our technical and security requirements have been met. Please refer to the ICT Security Checklist on our secure website under NQ, then Assessment Arrangements for more information.

Use of digital question papers

The digital question paper is a PDF copy of the conventional question paper. We cannot provide PDF or digital versions of adapted question papers.

Some digital question papers are presented as a 'question-and-answer' booklet, where learners would normally type their answers under each question. If a learner is referring to the questions on the printed question paper but is using ICT to type their responses, they will need to use the generic digital answer booklet (DAB), which is available from the section [Digital Answer Booklets](#) on our website.

More commonly, the conventional question paper is a question-only paper, and learners have to write their extended answers into a separate answer booklet. For question papers in this format, learners can use the paper-specific digital answer booklets. Unless otherwise indicated, these booklets (available in Word and PDF formats from the [Digital Answer Booklets](#) page) can be used by all learners using ICT both for practice and in the exam. The PDF digital answer booklets are available in both 'Spellcheck on' and 'Spellcheck off' versions. You must ensure that the 'Spellcheck on' version of the PDF digital answer booklet is only used where it is appropriate.

The list of current question papers that are 'question-only' and require a separate answer booklet can be found in the [Digital Answer Booklets](#) section of our website.

All digital question papers must be requested through the AAR system. These will be sent on CD by default. If you would prefer to receive them electronically, you must send an email to qpdelivery@sqa.org.uk after submitting your request through the AAR system. Further information about this process is issued to centres separately by email, but also in SQA News and SQA Co-ordinator Updates.

If you want to know more about SQA's digital question papers, please go to the [Digital Question Papers](#) webpage.

Contingency arrangements

The following contingency arrangements apply also to learners using ICT. In the event of any technical difficulties occurring during the exam, the designated teacher or technician may be allowed into the exam room to resolve any technical issues, and repair or provide another machine to enable the learner to complete the exam. The invigilator should ensure that an additional allowance of time, equal to the time lost, is made available to the learner, and the learner should be advised of this at once to alleviate any anxiety.

If the technical issue is resolved, and the learner has been given an allowance of additional time, the invigilator should report the matter to SQA.

In any case where a fault results in the spoiling or changing of the learner's work, an invigilator report should be prepared by the invigilator and countersigned by the chief invigilator.

In the event of any technical difficulties, it is expected that a reader and/or scribe should be available as a contingency arrangement if the learner requires this type of support.

Example 1

A centre requests the use of ICT for Atif, who has significant writing difficulties. He is allowed to use word processing with spellcheck software for all his external exams.

Example 2

Gill experiences severe anxiety difficulties and finds it difficult to handwrite their responses in their assessments. Their college allows them to produce their answers on their laptop for all their internal assessments.

For further guidance on using speech recognition software, please see section [Screen readers and speech recognition software](#).

Numerical support in Mathematics assessments

Some learners may be identified as having a specific difficulty with number manipulation, calculation, or long-term or working memory, although this does not need to be formally identified. These learners can, as a reasonable adjustment, be allowed to use a number square or number line, multiplication square or basic calculator in non-calculator mathematics assessments.

Note: The calculator must be a **basic, four-function calculator**, capable of basic multiplication, division, addition and subtraction only — **no other function is allowed**.

This type of basic numerical support is permitted as a reasonable adjustment for disabled learners to remove their substantial disadvantage and allow them to demonstrate their attainment of the required mathematical operational and reasoning skills.

A learner who is identified with a numeric difficulty may be characterised by difficulties in processing number concepts and mastering basic numeracy skills. We require centres to have appropriate evidence that a learner has been identified as having a particular difficulty with numbers and that this places them at a substantial disadvantage in demonstrating their attainment.

You must have evidence that the learner's identified level of difficulty means that they require appropriate numerical support, and that this is not caused by a lack of ability, prior knowledge or motivation. As with any request, the evidence would support the need for an appropriate assessment arrangement, which meets the individual learner's needs and reflects classroom practice.

Learners who use any form of numerical support should be encouraged to write all of their working, even if this is simply recording what they are entering into the calculator, to ensure they can access the full range of marks available for each question in the assessment.

Example

Samira was diagnosed with a number sense difficulty in primary school. She has used various forms of support throughout teaching and learning, including a number line and later a basic calculator, as she finds mental arithmetic difficult. Using the calculator allows Samira to access higher-level maths skills such as geometry and solving contextual numerical problems.

Practical assistant

A practical assistant is someone who carries out some tasks, for example in a practical assessment for health and safety reasons, at the learner's explicit instruction. This is permitted for learners who have physical or visual difficulties that prevent them carrying out practical assessments safely and independently. This arrangement can also be used to support learners in written assessments, for example by turning the page or holding drawing equipment steady. Approval to use this type of arrangement depends on the type of assessment, the competence and assessment standards for the assessment and the degree of assistance that is needed by the learner.

Guidelines for centres

It is your responsibility to:

- ◆ make the necessary arrangements for providing a practical assistant
- ◆ ensure that the learner is clear about what the practical assistant can and cannot do
- ◆ ensure that the learner has had practice with this arrangement in teaching and learning, and is trained in how to work effectively with the practical assistant in an assessment situation
- ◆ prepare clear instructions for the practical assistant on the assistance they are permitted to give to a learner in a particular assessment — for invigilated assessments, a copy of these instructions must be available for the invigilator

Information for practical assistants: what to do (and what not to do)

You should:

- ◆ be familiar with the requirements of the subject and assessment
- ◆ be clear on the limitations to your role. If a learner is being assessed on their ability to demonstrate a particular skill, you are not permitted to carry out that task on their behalf
- ◆ carry out instructions exactly as the learner gives them, unless to do so would cause a hazard. (Do not give factual help or make suggestions about what the learner is required to do. If you do not understand the learner's instructions, you may ask for clarification)

Remember: Assistance may not be required throughout the whole assessment — there may be parts of the assessment that the learner can complete without help. A practical assistant should be made available for the full assessment, but the learner may also choose not to use this support — this is the learner's choice.

Any problems arising during a practical assessment must be referred immediately to the teacher or lecturer in charge.

Example 1

Drew has hemiplegia affecting their left side. They are right-handed. They need a practical assistant in their HND in Chemistry to hold equipment steady while they undertake the practical tasks. Drew is able, with the aid of the assistant, to demonstrate the practical skills that are being assessed and meet the competence standards for this qualification.

Example 2

Eva has a severe tremor in both hands and requires a practical assistant to allow her to take part in class activities in the National 5 Practical Woodwork course. Eva is unable to independently demonstrate the key practical skills required for this qualification. The school discussed this with Eva and her parents, and agreed that, as she is unable to meet the assessment standards for the assessed practical activity, Practical Woodwork would not be a suitable course for her to undertake.

Prompters

Learners who require support to help keep them on task can be prompted in several ways: by use of verbal or physical cues (such as tapping on the desk), or written or visual cue cards.

A prompter is someone who can be present during an assessment to ensure that a learner stays on task. A prompter may be required where a learner has little or no sense of time or has significant concentration difficulties. The prompter may sit beside the learner to keep their attention on the assessment.

There is also the option to use verbal, written or visual prompts (in the form of cue cards), but the purpose of this arrangement must only be to keep the learner on task — the prompter cannot provide any support in relation to the production of exam work. Copies of any verbal, written or visual cue cards must be submitted to the Assessment Arrangements Team for consideration as soon as possible, and before the learner undertakes the assessment.

Guidelines for centres

It is your responsibility to:

- ◆ make the necessary arrangements for providing a prompter
- ◆ ensure that the prompter is someone the learner is comfortable with, and who is familiar enough with the learner to know the difference between a real attention lapse and, for example, periods of thinking
- ◆ ensure that the learner and the prompter are clear about the limitations of the prompter's role in an assessment situation

In the context of the external exam, it is your responsibility to:

- ◆ fully inform the invigilator beforehand of how the learner will be prompted — methods can include verbal prompts, the use of cue cards, or any other appropriate or familiar prompts, such as a tap on the desk
- ◆ email the content of any verbal prompts or cue cards to the Assessment Arrangements Team as soon as possible, and in advance of the exam, for consideration. You **must** do this before submitting the request via the AAR system.
- ◆ provide separate, suitable accommodation to ensure other learners are not disturbed — remember to take account of the need for any additional invigilation

Information for prompters: what to do (and what not to do)

Normally, you will be familiar enough with the learner to know the difference between a real attention lapse and periods of thinking.

Before the assessment you should:

- ◆ agree with the learner where you should sit, and the method you will use to bring back their attention, for example, a light tap on the desk, use of a verbal phrase or showing them a cue card
- ◆ ensure that the invigilator is aware of how you intend to prompt the learner in an external exam

During the assessment you should only draw the learner's attention back to the assessment task. You must not provide the learner with any advice or suggestions on how to complete the assessment. You do not need to be in a position to read the learner's responses.

Remember: In an external exam, the SQA-appointed invigilator is there to ensure that the correct procedures are followed, and that the required exam conditions are met. The invigilator should be fully informed of the method you will use to regain the learner's attention.

Example 1

David has autism and loses sense of time. In the Higher Mathematics exam, the prompter sees that David is staring out of the window and has stopped working. The prompter taps on the desk to bring David's attention back to the question paper.

Example 2

Taylor has mental health difficulties and their condition results in them spending extended periods reading and re-reading their assessment task. The college provides them with a prompter who uses a variety of agreed cue cards with instructions to keep them on task.

Reader

The use of a human reader can be allowed to meet the needs of disabled learners who have **substantial** difficulties with reading text and who cannot access the assessment material by any other more appropriate means, for example by using a text or screen reader.

A human reader reads out text verbatim in an assessment to enable the learner to access it. This may involve reading out all written instructions and questions to the learner, or only certain questions and words as directed by the learner. Learners may also ask that their written responses are read back to them.

It should be noted that where a human reader is used by the learner in normal teaching and learning, the reader's role may be different in an SQA assessment. For this reason, it is important that learners are aware that the reader in the assessment situation will be restricted to reading verbatim the text in the assessment and is not permitted to provide any further clarification or explanation of the text.

Administration and IT

In the practical tasks for Administration and IT assessments, a reader must not interpret any manuscript corrections. The learner must study and interpret any manuscript corrections, only referring to the reader to read out any text associated with the correction verbatim.

A reader may read text contained within questions or tasks and e-files, for example rubrics, instructions, questions or tasks, and information (both printed and handwritten).

For more information on use of a digital screen reader in Administration and IT, refer to the section [Screen readers and speech recognition technology](#).

English for Speakers of Other Languages

There are restrictions on the use of readers in National 2 and National 3 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) units where the learner's independent reading skills are being explicitly assessed. You can find guidance and information on other, more appropriate, assessment arrangements on the [Subject specific resources page](#) of our website.

Scientific and mathematical notation

A human reader can read out any scientific or mathematical notation in an assessment where the learner is unable to do so.

Guidelines for centres

It is your responsibility to:

- ◆ make the necessary arrangements for providing a reader
- ◆ ensure that the reader does not have a personal interest in the success of the learner, and is not a relative or the learner's teacher or lecturer of the subject. There may be exceptions to this, but you must contact us in the first instance to discuss this, in advance of the assessment date.

- ◆ ensure that readers are able to read accurately, intelligibly and at a reasonable rate. The reader must have sufficient knowledge of the subject to read technical terms effectively, including place names, names of characters in literary texts, or text in a modern language, and scientific or mathematical notation and formulae.
- ◆ ensure that the learner has had previous practice in working with the reader and they are both well prepared for working together in an assessment situation.
- ◆ provide separate, suitable accommodation when a reader is used in an external exam to ensure other learners are not disturbed. Remember to take account of the need for any additional invigilation in the external exam.

Information for human readers: what to do (and what not to do)

You should ensure that the learner is clear about your exact role in the assessment. For example, before the external exam starts, you might say:

- ◆ 'I can only read what you ask me to read.'
- ◆ 'I cannot explain any words or questions to you, but I can read words and questions as many times as you like.'

Before you start, you should decide, with the learner, which side you will sit on so that you are both comfortable.

You must only:

- ◆ read as requested by the learner (learners will indicate to you the instructions, questions, passages (including those written in a modern language), or parts of questions or passages, they wish to have read. You can also read out a learner's exam responses (or parts of these) at their request, including those written in a modern language. When a dictionary is allowed, you may consult this at the learner's request and read out entries).
- ◆ read the exact wording (instructions and questions) of an external exam question paper — you must not give meanings of words, or rephrase or interpret anything.

You must **not**:

- ◆ give any advice on which questions the learner should answer, which order the questions should be answered in, etc.

Learners have the option of reading some parts of the assessment themselves and having other parts read to them.

Although the learner should study and interpret any diagrams, graphs, formulae, equations or pictorial material themselves, they can ask you to read out any scientific or mathematical notation or any text associated with such material.

An SQA-appointed invigilator must be present when a reader is used in the external exam, and the invigilator may need to be positioned alongside you. You should discuss this with the invigilator before the start of the assessment.

You must refer any problems during the external exam to the invigilator.

Example 1

Charlie has a visual impairment and their centre requests an enlarged question paper for their Higher Modern Studies exam. By the time of the exam, their vision has deteriorated and Charlie has very little sight left. The centre requests a human reader to read the question paper to Charlie, as there has been insufficient time for them to become comfortable with a screen reader before the exam.

Example 2

Lyle has mental health difficulties and finds it difficult to concentrate sufficiently to read their unit assessments thoroughly. Their college provides them with the option of using a human reader or text reader for their graded unit assessment. As Lyle does not feel confident using ICT, Lyle needs to use a human reader in their assessment to maintain their attention on the assessment text.

Example 3

Anna has a severe physical disability and has difficulty focusing on texts. She normally has her support assistant read text for her in class as she finds it very difficult to use a text reader. She uses her support assistant to read for her in all of her assessments, both internal and external.

Referral of a candidate's scripts to the principal assessor

In certain external exams where extended written responses are required, and the learner has substantial difficulties with written communication, centres can request that the learner's scripts be referred to the principal assessor (PA).

Referral to the PA may be requested for learners whose exam scripts may be difficult for a marker to interpret. The purpose of referral is to ensure that no undue penalty has been imposed by a marker.

All learners' scripts are marked against set criteria, and referring a script to the PA does not change this. All learners will be subject to the same marking instructions, regardless of their particular difficulties. For example, if a learner is being marked on their spelling and grammar, they will still be marked against these criteria — no allowances can be made.

The list of exams where this arrangement is allowed is available in the Assessment Arrangements Request (AAR) system user guide for centres which can be accessed from our secure website.

Note: the list of exams eligible for referral to a PA is subject to annual review.

Example 1

Blake is deaf and does not use sign; they have an idiosyncratic use of English that means a marker might have some difficulty in understanding their written responses.

Blake's school decides that the most appropriate assessment arrangement is to refer their Higher Modern Studies scripts to the PA to ensure that their marked script is checked to ensure the marker has not, in any way, over-penalised their written responses.

Example 2

Jo's teacher noticed that in class tests and prelims, she describes colour and tone in an unconventional way. The school suspects that Jo may be colour blind but the waiting time for an NHS appointment is six months.

Concerned that the marker may have difficulty marking Jo's script due to her description of colour, the school requests that her National 5 Art and Design script is referred to the PA to ensure that Jo is not penalised for her interpretation of the colours used in artwork that appears in the exam.

Screen readers and speech recognition technology

Learners who use ICT in assessments may also need assistive technology to allow them to access the assessment independently. Learners with reading, writing or spelling difficulties, a visual impairment or a physical difficulty may find it difficult to work with a human reader or scribe and prefer to do this using assistive technology. The most common types of software used by learners are screen readers, text-to-speech software and speech recognition technology.

In all instances, the learner must check the system to ensure it is working correctly before it is used in the external assessment. You must also ensure that the required technical resources are available and that our technical and security requirements have been met. Please refer to the SQA Co-ordinator's Guide on SQA Connect.

Screen reader and text-to-speech software

Digital reading software and applications can be used by learners who are using ICT and a digital question paper.

Text-to-speech software allows the learner to highlight text that they would like to be read aloud (this can be a sentence, a paragraph or the entire passage) and for this to be converted into audio.

Screen readers can convert typed text into audio or braille and can also read any descriptive alt text for images, web pages or documents.

Administration and IT

It is possible to request a digital question paper for practical assessments in National 5 Administration and IT exam and assignment, and for the Higher assignment. These will work with a screen reader. However, some of the skills being assessed in these papers may not be covered by the software. For example, a screen reader may not:

- ◆ identify capital letters, specific punctuation or new paragraphs in questions or tasks that require learners to key in information
- ◆ be able to repeat specific details of manuscript corrections.

We would recommend that, in addition to a screen reader, a human reader also be made available for learners to identify capital letters, punctuation, new paragraphs, or to repeat specific details of manuscript corrections during the assessment, if this is needed.

Speech recognition technology

Speech recognition (or speech-to-text technology) transcribes a learner's dictated response into typed text. It can be a suitable assessment arrangement for learners who use ICT. Learners must be confident, competent users of the technology before it is used in an assessment or exam. Further information is also available in our Speech Recognition Technology in SQA Exams and Assessments guide available from the [About assessment arrangements](#) page of our website.

Speech recognition can be used in all exams and assessments (including [National 3 and 4 Literacy](#) units and National Courses in English) apart from assessment of writing in Modern Languages (including ESOL) 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 software (which always uses correctly spelled words) would compromise the integrity of the assessment.

With some speech recognition software, phrases or passages of text can be stored under abbreviations or macros. You must check that macros or abbreviations are not stored in the learner's speech recognition voice profile. As speech recognition does not make spelling mistakes, it is not necessary to disable any spellcheck facilities.

Speech recognition is never 100% accurate, and there may be some degree of misrecognition of the text dictated by the learner. Some learners can identify and correct misrecognitions, but others with literacy or visual impairments may have difficulty doing so. Learners can use text-to-speech software to read out the dictated text, and this may help to proofread and check responses. However, it may be that a member of staff will need to be available to support the learner to identify and correct errors. The way this is done, based on the individual needs of the learner, must be discussed and agreed with the Assessment Arrangements Team before the assessment.

While speech recognition is usually a much faster method of generating text than typing or handwriting, it still requires learners to read and interpret questions and plan and compose answers. They may require time to proofread and correct recognition errors. You should consider whether the use of extra time and separate accommodation is also needed for this.

Scientific and mathematical notation

Learners are permitted to use screen reader software to read out, or speech recognition software to produce, typed, scientific or mathematical notation in an assessment where the learner is unable to do so.

Note: In the event of any technical difficulties during the assessment, the contingency arrangements detailed in the section Use of ICT and digital question papers also apply to use of software.

Example

Juno is blind and uses braille. Juno accesses the exam using their BrailleNote device with a digital question paper and screen reader software. The software converts the content of the question paper into braille which Juno finds more accessible to use. Juno also uses their BrailleNote device to produce their exam responses using their braille keyboard that converts their braille responses into English for marking.

Scribe

The use of a scribe can be allowed in assessments to meet the needs of disabled learners who have **substantial** difficulties with writing and who cannot produce their written responses by any other more appropriate means, for example by using appropriate ICT.

A scribe records a learner's dictated responses, either by hand or using ICT. This may involve scribing all the learner's responses, or the learner may request that only words or responses to certain questions are scribed. The scribe cannot enhance or refine the learner's dictated responses, but can use their discretion with regard to the correct spelling of a word and, where necessary, the correct punctuation.

In a number of assessments, subject-specific answer booklets are available for the scribe to use and can be downloaded by the centre in advance of the assessments from the [Digital Answer Booklet page](#) of our website. We recommend that the scribe should use these subject-specific answer booklets in the external exam.

Scientific and mathematical notation

A human scribe can record any scientific or mathematical notation in an assessment at the learner's instruction.

English for Speakers of Other Languages

For National 2 and 3 ESOL units, learners whose first language is not English develop the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking in English. In the writing assessments, learners must demonstrate their ability to write technically accurate texts as described in the outcomes and assessment standards for each unit. Guidance and further information on other, more appropriate, assessment arrangements can be found on the [Subject specific resources page](#) of our website.

Modern Languages and Gaelic (Learners)

In the assessment of both Reading and Listening for Modern Languages and Gaelic (Learners), the learner dictates their response in English and they are not required to spell out any words. The scribe can use discretion with regard to spelling when writing down the learner's dictated responses in English. This is because spelling is not being assessed in Reading and Listening.

However, the scribe **cannot** use discretion with regard to spelling when writing down the learner's dictated responses in the Writing assessment for Modern Languages and Gaelic (Learners). It is the overall quality of the written language, including spelling accuracy, that is being assessed. For example, the spelling of a word in French can indicate a particular tense, grammatical person or gender. The French word *passer* sounds the same as *passez*, *passé*, and *passée*.

When a scribe is used in the assessment of Writing, the learner dictates their response in the target language and is required to spell each word, ensuring that the technical accuracy of the language used is still being assessed. The learner is still demonstrating the ability to produce a piece of writing with technical accuracy, which differentiates the skill of writing from speaking. The physical capability to write is not the purpose of the assessment of writing.

Guidelines for centres

It is your responsibility to:

- ◆ make the necessary arrangements for providing a scribe
- ◆ ensure that the scribe does not have a personal interest in the success of the learner, is not a relative or the learner's teacher or lecturer of the subject. There may be exceptions to this, but you must contact us in the first instance to discuss this before the assessment date.
- ◆ ensure that the scribe is able to produce an accurate record of the learner's dictated responses. They must be able to write legibly or type at a reasonable rate, spell correctly and have sufficient knowledge of the subject to be able to accurately record technical terms, including place names, names of characters in literary texts, or diacritics and scientific or mathematical notation and formulae.
- ◆ select appropriately skilled scribes on the basis of their ability to work effectively with learners
- ◆ ensure that the learner has had previous practice in working with the scribe and that both the learner and the scribe are well prepared for working together in an assessment situation
- ◆ ensure that the learner and the scribe are clear about the limitations of the scribe's role in an assessment situation
- ◆ provide separate, suitable accommodation when a scribe is used in the external exam to ensure other learners are not disturbed. Remember to take account of the need for any additional invigilation.

Information for scribes: what to do (and what not to do)

You should ensure that the learner is clear about your exact role in the assessment. For example, you might say:

- ◆ 'I can only write down or type what you dictate to me.'
- ◆ 'I cannot explain anything to you, but you can tell me to change anything I have written.'

You must:

- ◆ ensure you are familiar with any technical terms the learner is likely to use (including place names, names of characters in literary texts, diacritics and scientific or mathematical notation and formulae). For Modern Language and Gaelic (Learner) writing assessments, you cannot use your discretion with the spelling of words in the language being assessed.
- ◆ record responses exactly as the learner dictates them. The learner may choose to write some responses and dictate others — it is entirely their choice whether they wish to write their responses independently or dictate them to be scribed.
- ◆ use your discretion regarding spelling — except in the assessment of writing in Modern Languages and Gaelic (Learners) — and, where necessary, punctuation.
- ◆ read back what you have written when asked to do so by the learner.

Before you start, decide, along with the learner, which side you will sit on so that you are both comfortable.

An SQA-appointed invigilator must be present when a scribe is used in the external exam, and may need to be positioned beside you. You should discuss this with the invigilator before the start of the assessment.

In subjects where there is a multiple-choice-question answer grid in the question-and-answer booklet, for example in National 5 Biology, it is important that you ensure that all assessment materials are placed behind the question-and-answer booklet that contains the learner's responses to the multiple-choice questions. Please do this before passing the assessment materials to the invigilator at the end of the assessment.

You must refer any problems during the assessment to the invigilator.

You must not:

- ◆ give any advice on which questions to answer, which order the questions should be answered in, and so on
- ◆ enhance or refine the learner's dictated responses
- ◆ use your discretion with the spelling of words in a modern language — in these assessments, learners are required to spell each word in the language being assessed for you to record
- ◆ produce any diagrammatical or graphical material — if the learner is unable to draw maps, graphs, diagrams, etc, you may be allowed to assist, but this must have been agreed beforehand with us.

Example

Steven has cerebral palsy. They have no use of their hands and have very indistinct speech, which prevents them using voice recognition software effectively. In their external exams, they use a scribe who works with them on a regular basis and who understands their speech.

Separate accommodation

Separate accommodation is an assessment arrangement for learners who need to complete an assessment in a separate room. This is particularly important for learners who have other assessment arrangements, such as a prompter, reader, scribe or signed response, where dialogue may be required and may cause a disturbance for other learners. This arrangement can also be requested as a standalone assessment arrangement, depending on the learner's needs.

There are two types of separate accommodation: individual accommodation and small group accommodation. It is important that you consider the most suitable type of accommodation for learners, based on the availability of rooms for assessment purposes, and the level of disruption to other learners.

Remember: In each case, you must ensure that your learners are clear about what to expect on the day for each exam. This should mirror the arrangement (and where possible, the room) they are provided with in class tests, prelims and other internal assessments. You must also obtain their agreement (and where required, from their parent, carer or guardian) to this type of accommodation.

Individual accommodation

Individual accommodation should be used where the assessment arrangement requires dialogue between the learner and a support assistant, such as a prompter, a reader or scribe, or when a learner's assessment environment is different from that of other learners, for example using sign language to communicate. A learner with extreme anxiety and who is unable to complete their assessment in a room with others may also need to be in individual accommodation.

Individual accommodation can also be used to support learners who need access to other amenities during an assessment, for example learners who are diabetic and need to check blood sugar levels or take food and drink into an exam, or those who are coeliac.

Small group accommodation

Small group accommodation may be suitable for learners who find the main hall overwhelming due to anxiety or stress but are able to complete an exam in a small group setting. This type of accommodation may also be suitable for learners using noise cancelling headphones or noise reduction earplugs, or headphones or earphones to listen to background music or to access software such as a screen reader or text-to-speech software on ICT. You should ensure that, where headphones or earphones are used, requirements detailed in our ICT Security Checklist are met. It is important that you consider the maximum number of learners that can be accommodated in each room to minimise disruption to other learners as much as possible.

To protect the integrity of our external assessments, this arrangement must not be considered where the assessment arrangement requires dialogue between the learner and a support assistant, for example a prompter, a reader or scribe, or when a learner's assessment environment is different from that of other learners, for example using sign language to communicate.

Using sign language in SQA assessments

With the exception of English, ESOL, Gàidhlig, Gaelic (Learners) and Modern Languages, deaf learners may have the instructions and contents of a question paper or assessment task signed to them by a sign communicator in any external assessment. The learner can ask for this to be repeated if necessary.

Deaf learners may also sign their exam responses, which must be recorded, translated and transcribed before their scripts are submitted to us for marking.

Using sign language is a very flexible arrangement: a deaf learner can ask for some parts of the question paper to be signed and may want to read other parts; they may wish to sign some responses and write or complete tables or draw other parts.

You do not need to seek approval from us to sign the content of internal assessment materials to a learner, or for them to sign their responses, unless to do so changes the assessment criteria.

Where a sign communicator is used, separate accommodation will be necessary. The accommodation must be suitable for signing and video recording. This means that there should be adequate space and appropriate lighting to film the learner in the most unobtrusive way possible.

- ◆ You should prepare one video per learner per subject/level and clearly label it with centre, learner, and subject and level details. The learner must be comfortable with, and have had practice of, being videoed.
- ◆ A transcript in English of each learner's signed assessment responses as recorded should be prepared. This translation/transcription should be carried out within the centre by someone with the appropriate level of skill in signing.
- ◆ As learners may also supplement their signed responses with additional written or graphic material, these must also be submitted to us along with the transcript of the signed assessment responses for marking.

It is important that the learner is aware of, and has been prepared to work within, the time constraints of the external assessment (including any agreed extra time allowance).

We require the transcriptions, any additional material written by the learners, and the recording, to be submitted within seven calendar days of the assessment date. We will provide all the required stationery, such as envelopes for submitting the media containing the video recording, and the learner consent form.

Further information is available from our [Using Sign in SQA Assessments](#) on our website.

Guidelines for centres

You are responsible for:

- ◆ providing sign communicators who have the appropriate level of skill in sign language and a good working knowledge of the subject. For example, in a Higher Chemistry exam, the sign communicator's skills need to be sufficient to reflect the

subject-specific language of the question paper and the learner's breadth of knowledge and ability.

- ◆ making sure that both the learner and the sign communicator are advised of, and sufficiently well prepared for, this arrangement
- ◆ providing all the filming equipment (camera and playback facilities) and for its operation during the external assessment
- ◆ ensuring that the submitted material is able to be viewed by us

As part of your quality assurance procedures, you should ensure that learners, and where appropriate, parents or carers, have agreed to the filming of the assessment and are aware of how we will use it.

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

It is very important that you have had the opportunity to prepare for signing in any assessment. This preparation should be done well in advance of the exam, using past papers, prelims, unit assessments and class tests.

You should be allowed (under supervision of an invigilator) to have access to the question paper or assessment task up to 60 minutes before the start of the assessment. This is to allow you, if necessary, to scan the question paper to check and identify any problematic vocabulary or contexts. (If you think you may need more time for a particular paper, this must be negotiated with us beforehand. The centre's SQA co-ordinator can contact us to discuss this.) During this preparation time you may consult with another sign communicator if you are uncertain, or if you have any concerns about any aspect of the signing of the assessment.

Remember: You can also practice by accessing past papers and specimen question papers for the subject and level concerned.

To carry out the role of sign communicator successfully, you must:

- ◆ be able to communicate effectively with the learner
- ◆ have a good working knowledge of the subject you are being asked to sign
- ◆ only sign under instruction from the learner — the learner can ask for parts of the assessment to be signed again as often as they need to
- ◆ allow the learner to study and interpret any reference maps, diagrams or graphs independently, but you may sign any labels or text connected with such material
- ◆ discuss with the invigilator what your role is as the sign communicator and highlight any issues you think may concern them
- ◆ take time to prepare your learner so that they are aware of the invigilator's role.

You must not:

- ◆ take the lead or initiative in terms of directing the learner, including suggesting which parts of the assessment to sign again
- ◆ give any additional explanation or assistance.

You can also contact our Assessment Arrangements Team for further support.

Supervised breaks or rest periods in a timed assessment

Rest periods and supervised breaks are permitted to allow the learner to stop working during a timed assessment. This arrangement may be appropriate for learners who need breaks due to a physical difficulty, or, for example, learners with anxiety. The time taken for the break does not count towards the time allowed for the assessment.

Learners may require extra time as well as rest periods or supervised breaks as a result of their difficulty. It is important that you carefully consider the type of assessment arrangements needed to ensure the learner will not become fatigued by a long assessment.

Rest periods

Rest periods are breaks taken in the room where the assessment is being conducted. This may be suitable for learners who are in separate individual accommodation, or for those in the main exam hall who do not need to leave their allocated exam desk.

Supervised breaks

Supervised breaks may be more suitable for learners who experience anxiety and need to leave for fresh air, or those who need access to other amenities during an assessment — for example, learners who are diabetic and need to check blood sugar levels or consume food and drink, or those who are coeliac. It is your responsibility to ensure that a member of centre staff is available to supervise the learner when they leave the assessment room. This is not the invigilator's responsibility.

Example 1

Amar experiences mental health difficulties. He has increased anxiety levels, difficulties with concentration, and his condition also involves ritualised behaviour. He sometimes spends extended periods checking and rechecking work. This means that he has limited time within an assessment to produce answers. Having carefully considered his assessment needs, his college does not provide him with extra time because, for Amar, an extended assessment period exacerbates his concentration difficulties and increases the amount of time he spends checking and rechecking work. Instead they provide rest periods, or 'stop the clock breaks' during the course of the assessment. This is the most appropriate arrangement for Amar.

Example 2

Sunny has diabetes. Sunny's centre informed the invigilator of their condition. Sunny can have hypoglycaemic attacks, which means they need time to bring their blood sugar levels back up before they can continue with the assessment. The centre requests that Sunny be allowed separate accommodation (individual), and access to food and drink — if Sunny has low blood sugar, their cognitive ability may be affected and they will need time to recover. The centre has requested rest periods in individual accommodation and for Sunny to indicate to the invigilator if they will be well enough to continue with the exam. If Sunny has a hypoglycaemic attack, the invigilator will confirm whether Sunny is well enough to continue with the exam, and, if this is possible, ensure that they are given the full amount of time lost.

Transcription with correction of spelling and punctuation

The key purpose of transcription with correction is to remove the illegibility or the 'unreadability' of a learner's written responses because of a difficulty with spelling and/or punctuation. This arrangement aids in the marking of the learner's script in an external assessment.

This arrangement can be requested for learners who have been identified as having substantial difficulties with writing. In particular, it is useful where a learner's written work is illegible due to the very high frequency of spelling and/or punctuation errors, and where a marker would have difficulty in deciphering the learner's intended exam responses.

Note: Transcription with correction is **not** permitted in assessments where the overall quality of the written language, including spelling accuracy, is being assessed (for example, in the writing assessment in Modern Languages and Gaelic (Learners)) or in skills-based practical assessments (for example, the National 5 Administration and IT exam).

The transcriber must be familiar with the learner's handwriting and is only allowed to correct errors of spelling and punctuation. The transcript must otherwise be an **exact copy** of the learner's original script. It is important to note that where it appears a learner may have recorded a word that does not fit the context, but there is no error in its spelling, the transcriber **must not** correct this. The transcriber cannot enhance or refine the learner's written responses.

In a number of external exams, subject-specific answer booklets are available for the transcriber to use and can be downloaded by the centre in advance of the exam from the [Digital Answer Booklet](#) page of our website. We recommend that the transcriber should use these paper-specific answer booklets in the external exam.

Guidelines for centres

- ◆ The transcriber should be familiar with the learner's handwriting and the correct spelling of any technical terms (including, for example, place names, or names of characters in literary texts) they are likely to use.
- ◆ The transcriber should be clear on their role and the limitations to this. They must not correct any words that have been spelled correctly (even if it is not used in the right context) and they cannot enhance or refine the learner's written response in the transcription.
- ◆ The learner must not be present when the transcript is being produced, and the transcript must be produced under secure conditions as soon as possible after the assessment.
- ◆ In an external exam, an invigilator does not need to be present when the transcript is being produced. Where there is a delay in producing the transcript, the learner's exam scripts must be secured overnight and completed the following morning.
- ◆ The transcript may be handwritten or word-processed. If the transcript is to be handwritten, the transcriber must have legible handwriting. In either case, the transcriber must be able to correct spelling and punctuation accurately.
- ◆ Diagrammatical material must not be transcribed unless we have given specific permission. Assessment of such material will be based on the learner's own work.

Remember: The transcript must be produced separately and be a full word-for-word transcription of the learner's script, with only spelling and punctuation errors corrected. For external assessments, typed transcription pages should be placed as loose-leaf sheets behind the learner's answer booklet. If a separate answer booklet is used, this should be placed behind the learner's answer booklet. In the external exam, both the transcript and the learner's script must be passed to the chief invigilator for despatch in the normal way. The transcriber must not sign the transcript or mark the learner's script in any way that informs the marker of the reason why a transcription was necessary.

For internal assessments, the transcript should be attached to the learner's original work and retained for verification purposes.

Modern Languages, Gaelic (Learners), National Literacy units and National 2 and National 3 ESOL units

Please remember that, because writing (including spelling accuracy) is being explicitly assessed in these subjects, transcription with correction is **not** permitted for the writing assessment.

Example

Sarah has Asperger's syndrome and is both dysgraphic and dyslexic. They are unable to use ICT and insist on handwriting their responses in their Higher History and Higher Psychology exams. Learning support staff believe that a marker who is unfamiliar with their handwriting would struggle to decipher their handwritten responses. Their extremely poor spelling also makes their responses very difficult to understand. The college requests transcription with correction for both of their Higher external exams.

Transcription without correction

This arrangement is designed to meet the needs of those learners who have illegible handwriting as a result of an identified difficulty, and who are unable to use appropriate ICT. The purpose of this arrangement is to produce a full, legible copy of the learner's responses, **without** corrections to spelling or punctuation.

In a number of exams, subject-specific answer booklets are available for the transcriber to use and can be downloaded by the centre in advance of the exams from the [Digital Answer Booklet](#) page of our website. We recommend that the transcriber should use these paper-specific answer booklets in the external exam.

Guidelines for centres

It is your responsibility to ensure that:

- ◆ any errors of spelling and punctuation are **not** corrected — the transcript must be an exact copy of the learner's original work in full
- ◆ any diagrammatical material is **not** transcribed — assessment of such material will be based on the learner's own work
- ◆ the transcriber is familiar with the learner's handwriting
- ◆ the learner is not present when the transcript is being produced
- ◆ in an external exam, the transcript is produced under secure conditions as soon as possible after the exam. An invigilator does not need to be present. Where there is a delay in producing the transcript, the learner's scripts must be secured overnight and completed the following morning.
- ◆ the transcriber does not sign the transcription of the external exam script or mark the learner's script in any way that informs the marker why a transcript was necessary

The transcript may be handwritten or word-processed — if it is to be handwritten, the transcriber must have legible handwriting.

Remember: The transcript must be produced separately and be a full word-for-word transcription of the learner's script, including any spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors. For external assessments, the typed transcript pages should be placed behind the learner's answer booklet. If a separate answer booklet is used, this should be placed directly behind the learner's answer booklet. In the external exam, both the transcript and the learner's script must be passed to the chief invigilator for despatch in the normal way.

Who to contact for more information

If you have a query about a particular assessment arrangement, please contact the Assessment Arrangements Team on 0345 213 6890 or email them at aarequests@sqa.org.uk.

For further up-to-date information on assessment arrangements, please visit www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

If you have a general enquiry about SQA or its qualifications, please call our Customer Contact Centre on 0345 279 1000 or email them at customer@sqa.org.uk.