### English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

**Linguistic support as an assessment arrangement in reading and writing assessments**

#### Introduction

This guidance contains information for teachers and lecturers who are delivering National Qualifications in ESOL to disabled learners. It provides details of the types of linguistic support[[1]](#footnote-1) that can be considered as an assessment arrangement for a disabled candidate in the assessment of reading and writing skills.

Assessment arrangements, such as linguistic support, must be considered in the context of the distinction between a candidate’s attainment in ESOL and that of their ability to demonstrate their attainment under the assessment conditions for ESOL. Assessment arrangements are not designed to compensate for a candidate not having acquired the essential skills, knowledge and understanding of the ESOL qualification.

SQA has a responsibility to ensure that assessment leading to certification is rigorous and fair for all candidates, and that it allows candidates to demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding required for the ESOL qualification. This is why it is important that assessment arrangements, including linguistic support, are only provided to disabled candidates whose difficulties prevent them from accessing an ESOL assessment and demonstrating their attainment. The very slight advantage conferred by arrangements, such as linguistic support in the assessment of reading and writing in ESOL, is only acceptable when it is balanced against a disabled candidate’s substantial disadvantage.

This means that any form of linguistic support in ESOL assessments must only be requested or provided as a reasonable adjustment for a disabled candidate who has been identified as having difficulties that have a substantial and long-term adverse impact on their ability to access or produce written text independently. At the same time, the use of any form of linguistic support must reflect the support normally provided to the candidate on an ongoing basis to access teaching and learning for the duration of the ESOL course.

**The assessment of reading skills**

##### Use of a text reader

The use of a text reader (such as a reading pen or a computer with text-to-speech software) can be considered as an assessment arrangement for a disabled candidate who has an identified reading difficulty with reading accuracy and/or reading speed. The candidate may require the text reader to fully access written text and show their understanding of language written in English. The text reader may be used to support their reading of a text and/or questions, or to support their reading back of their own written responses. For many disabled candidates, using a text reader to support their reading provides a more effective and independent means of communication than using a human reader.

##### Human reader

However, the use of a human reader can also be considered as an assessment arrangement for a disabled candidate who has substantial reading difficulties and who cannot access the reading assessment by any other more appropriate means, eg the use of a text reader[[2]](#footnote-2)

A human reader reads out text verbatim in an assessment to enable the candidate to access it. This may involve reading out all or some of the text as directed by the candidate. Candidates may also ask that their written responses be read back to them. Readers **cannot** explain any words or phrases and should not use emphasis or intonation to convey nuance or meaning.

**The assessment of writing skills**

##### The use of ICT

The use of ICT to (either type with a spellcheck function or use voice recognition software) can be considered as an assessment arrangement for a disabled candidate who has an identified writing difficulty with writing accuracy and/or writing speed to support them in demonstrating their ability to produce written English using language to convey meaning. For many disabled candidates using ICT provides a more effective and independent means of communication than using human support such as a scribe.

##### Scribe

However, the use of a scribe can also be considered as an assessment arrangement for a disabled candidate who has substantial writing difficulties and who cannot access the writing assessment by any other more appropriate means, eg the use of ICT[[3]](#footnote-3).

A scribe records a candidate’s dictated responses. This may involve scribing all the candidate’s responses, or the candidate may request that only certain questions or words are scribed. The scribe **cannot** enhance or refine the candidate’s dictated responses or change grammar, but can use their discretion with regard to the correct spelling of a word and, where necessary, the correct punctuation.

For full guidance on readers/scribes and the use of ICT, including what is allowed and what is not, see: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/AssessmentArrangementsExplained.pdf>

1. ‘Linguistic support’ is a general term that covers a number of arrangements which are designed to overcome a disabled candidate’s substantial difficulties in reading (for example, reading accuracy and/or reading speed) and in writing (for example, spelling, handwriting speed and/or legibility) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Under normal circumstances, SQA would expect that candidates with such reading difficulties would use a text reader.

The reason for this is that assessment arrangements should reflect the candidate’s normal way of working and best practice is that candidates with such difficulties should be supported throughout their course to work independently. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Under normal circumstances, SQA would expect that candidates with such writing difficulties would use ICT. The reason for this is that assessment arrangements should reflect the candidate’s normal way of working and best practice is that candidates with such difficulties should be supported throughout their course to work independently. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)