



Using Sign Language in SQA Exams and Assessments: information for centres

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Introduction

This document contains information for centres and teachers of deaf children and young people when using sign language in any SQA assessments, including external examinations.

It explains our requirements and provides advice, templates, and checklists. It aims to remind everyone of their responsibilities when using sign language in SQA exams and assessments. This information must be read in conjunction with the *Assessment Arrangements Explained: Information for Centres*, which you can find on our [assessment arrangements webpage](#).

Where sign language is used as an assessment arrangement it is subject to the same quality assurance requirements as all other assessment arrangements, and it is important that all practitioners involved are aware of their responsibilities in this regard. See our [Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements Guidance](#) for more detail.

Overview

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 as needed.

Deaf learners may also sign their exam responses, which must be recorded, translated and transcribed before their scripts are submitted to us for marking. The sign language interpreter should not be filmed.

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 themselves; 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.

Exception

Sign Language cannot be used in, ESOL, Gàidhlig, Gaelic (Learners) and Modern Languages. In English, sign language can only be used in speaking and listening assessments but not for reading and writing assessments.

Fingerspelling

Fingerspelling is used in BSL to spell out words like the names of places or people. We do not advise using finger spelling in SQA assessments, except for the occasional use for unknown names. It should not be used for a term where the sign is known, such as technical terms.

Extra time

There are several considerations to make when calculating the amount of extra time a learner needs when using BSL in our exams:

- ◆ your learner needs sufficient time to complete their assessments and to review their signed answers
- ◆ allow yourself enough time for the technical requirements involved when learners review their signed assessment responses (this time does not count towards the time allowed for the assessment concerned)

Note

When we use the term 'Sign Language Interpreter' we mean an appropriately skilled person with sufficient skills, experience and knowledge of the subject and level of the qualification, for example a qualified teacher of deaf children and young people.

Part 1: A guide for centres

If you have a learner who will use sign language in their SQA internal assessments, or externally assessed coursework or exams, you need to be aware that there is a range of responsibilities, deadlines and procedures that everyone involved in the assessment process needs to be aware of to ensure a successful experience for the learner.

Centre responsibilities

Your responsibilities are:

- ◆ Provide a sign language interpreter who has the appropriate level of skill in sign language and who has a good working knowledge of the subject. For example, in a Higher Chemistry examination, the sign language interpreter'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.
- ◆ Prepare the learner, over time, for using this assessment arrangement. For example, the learner must be made aware that the signing support in the assessment may be different to the signing support provided to them by the sign language interpreter in teaching and learning, as no additional explanation or assistance can be given.
- ◆ Prepare the sign language interpreter for this assessment arrangement. For example, the sign language interpreter must be made aware that the signing support in the assessment may be different to the signing support provided to the learner in teaching and learning, as no additional explanation or assistance can be given to the learner.
- ◆ Make the necessary arrangements for filming the learner by, for example,
 - ensuring the learner is comfortable with, and has had practice of, being filmed.
 - preparing one film per learner per subject, and clearly labelling it with centre, learner, and subject and level details.
 - providing all the filming equipment (camera and playback facilities) and for its operation during the assessment.
 - ensuring that the submitted filmed material is able to be viewed by SQA.
- ◆ Ensure that learners, and where appropriate, parents or carers, have agreed to the filming of the assessment and are aware of how it will be used by SQA.
- ◆ Provide the necessary separate accommodation which must be suitable for filming and signing — this means that there should be adequate space and appropriate lighting to film the learner in the most unobtrusive way possible.
- ◆ Provide the necessary additional invigilation.

Translation and transcription of learners' signed responses

For all SQA assessments, a full translation / transcription, in English, of each learner's signed assessment responses as recorded must be prepared. This must be carried out within the centre by someone with the appropriate level of skill in signing.

Internal assessments

These translations / transcripts must be kept (along with any supplementary assessment material, such as graphic material) for verification purposes. You need to retain this learner

assessment evidence for National Qualifications until the end of the academic session (31 July). Assessment evidence must be stored securely, in a retrievable format and made available to the external verifier and SQA on request.

Externally assessed coursework

These translations / transcripts, along with any additional material written by the learners, must be submitted to SQA.

External examinations

These translations / transcriptions, along with any additional material written by the learners, **and the actual recording**, must be submitted to SQA within one week of the examination. If more time is needed, please contact aarequests@sqa.org.uk

All the required stationery will be provided.

Part 2: A guide for sign language interpreters

Assessing deaf learners

You need to work closely with the subject teacher who is assessing the learner.

Oral evidence

When a learner is allowed to sign a discussion or a presentation, the teacher of deaf children and young people (or sign language interpreter) in effect, provides the 'voice', allowing the subject teacher to access the content of the learner's discussion or presentation.

The subject teacher should be facing the learner and must assess the learner who is using sign language in the same way, as they would assess other learners.

Written evidence

If a learner who uses sign language wishes to write, rather than sign, their responses to a written assessment, they should do so, and it should be assessed in the same way as any other learner.

If a learner signs their responses to an assessment, this should be filmed and a translation or transcription produced for the assessor to mark (both the film and the transcription should be kept).

Extra time

As you begin to work with your learner (in some cases from S1 onwards), you will start to understand their individual needs. As this process continues you will also be able to gather appropriate evidence from class work, class assessments, to help you determine how much extra time will be needed in any SQA internal assessments, externally assessed coursework components, and external examinations.

Note

It is important to remember and to explain to your learner that your role in interpreting in an assessment is different to how you would normally help and support the learner in the classroom. In any SQA's assessments you must take great care when signing a question or task (further guidance is available on the 'Using sign in our exams' page of [our website](#)), however, unlike in class, no additional explanation or assistance can be given.

You must also

- ◆ have the appropriate level of skill in sign language and a good working knowledge of the subject being signed, your skills need to be sufficient to reflect the subject-specific language and the learner's breadth of knowledge and ability
- ◆ be sufficiently well prepared for this arrangement
- ◆ produce and retain the transcription/ translation according to SQA requirements as outlined in Part 1

Guidelines for those acting as a sign language interpreter

Preparation

It is very important that you have had the opportunity to prepare for using sign language in any assessment. Such preparation should be done well in advance of the examination through the use of SQA past papers, prelims, coursework and class tests.

Please note that for the external examination you can (under supervision of an invigilator) access the external examination question paper up to one hour before the start of the examination, this must be negotiated with SQA beforehand. This is to allow you to prepare the best translation of the question paper and to check and identify any problematic vocabulary or contexts. During this preparation time you may consult with another sign language interpreter, or consult resources.

Remember, you can also practice by accessing past papers and specimen question papers in the subject and level concerned.

Re-signing

You may start to sign a question and realise that a more accurate sign interpretation is possible. If this happens, please re-sign and note it on the Filming Schedule for Exam Transcription (Appendix 3) or similar as, for example, 'question re-signed'.

In an external examination

You must:

- ◆ be able to communicate effectively with the learner.
- ◆ only sign the questions to the learner — you cannot explain or give any additional assistance.
- ◆ have a good working knowledge of the subject you are being asked to sign.
- ◆ only sign under instruction from the learner — this instruction can be any indication or signal agreed between you and the learner. Remember not to sign anything unless asked to.
- ◆ allow the learner to study and interpret any reference maps, diagrams, graphs independently, but you may sign any labels or text connected with such material.

You must not:

- ◆ take the lead or initiative in terms of directing the learner
- ◆ give any additional explanation or assistance

You should 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.

Further information on using BSL in English listening and talking assessments can be found [on our 'Using sign language in exams' page.](#)

Liaising with the exam invigilator

You may find it helpful to use the sheet on the next page to provide the chief invigilator with information on individual learners. The 'other relevant information' box can be used to give the invigilator information about the conduct of the exam, for example:

- ◆ that the learner may ask for the recording to be stopped and restarted in order to review their answers
- ◆ details of the early opening of an exam question paper, if approved by SQA

Before the exam, discuss with the invigilator what your role is. Highlight any issues that you think may concern them — for example, you may have to repeat a question several times if asked to do so by the learner.

Take the time to prepare your learner so that they are aware of the invigilator's role.



Exam arrangements information sheet

You may find it helpful to use this to give the chief invigilator information on individual learners. The 'Other relevant information' box can be used to give the invigilator information about the conduct of the exam.

Learner details

Extra time

Other information

Filming learners

1. The room must be well lit and large enough for the filming to take place. Be aware of the sun and, if necessary, close curtains or blinds to prevent glare.
2. Check you fully understand how to operate the camera — for example, knowing how to switch on and off, load and unload recording media — and that you have enough tape/disk space for the duration of the assessment.
3. The use of a tripod will prevent shudder and loss of focus.
4. The ideal position of the camera should be 4–5 metres from the learner. Before the start of the assessment, you should check the learner is in focus and fits the frame. No one else needs to be in the frame.
5. Background noise should be reduced to a minimum. Walls ought to be plain, with no distracting information.
6. Key information — learner's name, Scottish Candidate Number, centre name and number, subject, level and paper should be visible for example, using a clapperboard — should be presented to camera at the start of each exam (see example in Appendix 1). If the label on the DVD later becomes detached, this is an effective way of identifying both learner and assessment.
7. If an audio technician is available, they should check the equipment before the assessment starts. If it is at all possible, they should be on standby in case the equipment breaks down.

Translation/transcription

Instructions for the translator or transcriber

During the exam, some pupils may want to see a rough transcription to give them an idea if they have missed something major.

The transcript you send to SQA must:

- ◆ be completed by someone with an appropriate level of skill in sign language.
- ◆ Be a full translation from sign language into the most reasonable and accurate English in the context of the subject. No additional information must be added. If you need to let the reviewer know something about the signing, please use a form similar to that in Appendix 4.
- ◆ Only transcribe when the assessment is finished. Only in exceptional circumstances should it be done during an exam.
- ◆ Correct any spelling errors —for example, if a word is finger-spelled wrongly, transcribe it correctly.
- ◆ Annotate on the question paper if there is a break in the recording, such as for a learner rest break, toilet break, fire alarm.
- ◆ Complete the flyleaf, detailing who acted as the sign language interpreter and who completed the transcription. If the transcription cannot be completed the same day as the assessment, the film and assessments must be securely stored overnight.
- ◆ Not involve the learner in any way with the transcription.
- ◆ Not make or keep copies of the films or the transcripts produced for the external exam.

You may also:

- ◆ Get a colleague to help with the transcription. One of you must be the subject specialist who has been working with the learner.
- ◆ Send a cover letter with the transcript if the learner has specific signing skills — for example if they use initials a lot of the time — this is incredibly helpful to SQA’s reviewers.
- ◆ A filming schedule for the assessment is incredibly helpful, for example, a list of the questions in a question paper that are signed. There is an exemplar in Appendix 4.
- ◆ Liaise with the head teacher regarding additional time needed to transcribe.

SQA’s Sign Translation Review Group

SQA’s Sign Translation Review Group is made up of practising staff in the field of deaf education who are fluent in BSL and English and can translate accurately from as wide a spread of geographical locations as possible. They have the appropriate skill and level in signing for the subject and level they review.

The remit of the group is one of quality assurance. They:

- ◆ provide an impartial review of the translation or transcription to ensure the learner is being fairly assessed.
- ◆ ensure the learners are not disadvantaged by any mistakes in the translation or transcription of the exam.
- ◆ provide feedback, including any good practice, to centres.

After the diet of exams, learners’ translated answers are sent out to SQA’s teams of markers with all other learner scripts.

Once they are marked, the transcribed answers are sent to the team of reviewers, who review the translations or transcriptions from each centre alongside the recorded evidence, to ensure that signed responses have been accurately transcribed, and no marks are missed.

Where concerns are raised by a reviewer about the transcription, such as if the transcript has missed out some pertinent points, this is noted and the scripts are sent to the appropriate principal assessor for further consideration and, where appropriate, marks are amended.

Further information

For help and information on assessment arrangements for deaf learners, contact the Assessment Arrangements Team either [by](tel:03452136890) phone (0345 213 6890) or e-mail (aarequests@sqa.org.uk).

Appendix 1: Checklists

Accommodation

- 1 Is the room being used for the assessment large enough?
- 2 Is the room well lit?
- 3 Can the curtains/blinds be drawn to avoid sun/glare?
- 4 Are there enough chairs and tables for all personnel?
- 5 Are the walls plain and free from distracting information?
- 6 Is the camera clock set at zero?
- 7 Is an 'Assessment in progress' sign attached to the door?
- 8 Is the appropriate clapperboard available, and does it match the assessment?
- 9 Is the distance from camera to learner about 4–5 metres?
- 10 Is the distance from learner to sign communicator about 1–2 metres?

Camera operations

In some centres the audio technician will set and check equipment prior to the examination starting. However, not all centres will have this option available.

- 1 Are you familiar with the on/off controls of the camera?
- 2 Have you enough memory space?
- 3 Do you have the right memory for your recording?
- 4 Have you double-checked that the camera works prior to the start of the assessment?
- 5 Have you set the camera on a tripod?
- 6 Do you know where to plug in or charge the equipment?
- 7 Do you have extension cables and safety pads (if you need them)?
- 8 Have you set to record in 'long play', if available?
- 9 Have you set the tape counter to zero?
- 10 If you are using batteries, do you have spares? (Avoid using old batteries)
- 11 Is the appropriate clapperboard available?

Learner preparation

Has your learner:

- 1 Practised signing to camera?
- 2 Signed the declaration sheet (see over the page)?
- 3 Practised reviewing their responses to camera?

Does your learner

- 4 Know their Scottish Learner Number?
- 5 Know the dates and times of their assessments?
- 6 Know the location of their assessments?
- 7 Know the main people involved in the assessment, e.g. examination invigilator?
- 8 Have the correct equipment for the examination?

Have you

- 9 Checked that the clapperboard contains the correct information?
- 10 Checked that your learner understands the procedure for requesting questions to be signed?

Appendix 2: Assessment Arrangements learner form



Learner:

Scottish Candidate Number (SCN):

Subject(s):

Assessment arrangement(s):

As part of the process to request your assessment arrangement(s), we need to share information about you and your assessment arrangement with SQA.

We will share the following information with SQA:

- Your name
- SCN
- Centre
- Date of Birth
- An indication of your disability or identified difficulty
- Details of the assessment arrangement(s) you need

SQA will only use your information to process your request for assessment arrangements. This information is not shared with anyone outside of SQA and is only kept for as long as it is needed to support the request process.

I confirm that I have been involved in discussions about and agree to the assessment arrangements being requested and intend to use them.

Print name:

Signature:

Date:

Parent's/Carer's countersignature
(if applicable)

Further details about how SQA uses your information is available in their Privacy Statement <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/45397.html>

Appendix 3: Filming resources

On the next two pages, you will find:

- ◆ Clapperboard (This should be filmed along with the learner's piece of work in case the film label becomes detached)
- ◆ Filming schedule for exam transcription

Name

SCN

Centre name

Centre number

Assessment title

Level

Date

