

INFORMATION SHEET – ASSISTIVE SOFTWARE FOR EXAMS 2022

Dyslexia students now allowed to use 'Speech to Text' and 'Text to Speech' software in exams

Referring to the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) 'Adjustments for candidates with disabilities and learning difficulties' guidance covering the Summer 2022 examinations, Helen Boden, CEO of British Dyslexia Association, said:

"This announcement is great news for young people with dyslexia and schools. It is simpler whilst maintaining standards and is more reflective of the world of work.

Being able to use computer technology more easily in exams we hope will see it become more mainstream, embedding technology in all educational settings leading to greater equality and higher attainment levels for those candidates with learning difficulties like dyslexia

The removal of the need for assessment evidence and the completion of Form 8 for this access arrangement is a sensible and pragmatic approach by JCQ that will encourage schools and education providers to maximise their use of technology, levelling the playing field for dyslexics in education.

It is hoped that the change will encourage more schools to invest in providing laptops for dyslexic pupils, establishing text-to-speech technology as part of their normal way of working. This will mean the dyslexic pupil can take advantage of these changes, reducing the administrative burden on the school and the cost of providing a human reader. Using such technology enables the pupil to gain independence and reduces the stigma of having to rely on others to access the written word.

It will also mean the pupil will get used to working in a way that is reflective of the workplace, where text-to-speech software is mainstream."

Specifically, the JCQ guidance says: "The SENCO must produce a short concise file note on centre headed paper, signed and dated, confirming the nature of the candidate's impairment and that the use of a computer reader and/or a reader reflects his or her normal and current way of working within the centre."

A computer reader is allowed in English Language GCSE exams, as opposed to a human reader, because a computer reader does not use intonation which can help infer meaning.

What are the benefits for the school and pupil?

- It reduces the administrative burden on the school.
- It saves money by reducing the need for a human reader.
- It enables pupils to gain independence and reduces the stigma of having to rely on others to access the written word.
- The pupil will get to work in a way that is reflective of the workplace, where text-to-speech software is mainstream.

Exam time can be a stressful period for any student, but especially for students who struggle with reading and writing.

'Read & Write' software is approved for use as a computer reader and as a replacement for a scribe in GCSE and A-Level exams. The annual price per pupil for schools is around £1.82

Exam boards are now committed to providing the digital versions of the exam papers, providing schools have requested them.

Actions parents need to take

There are important actions that parents may need to take in the light of this new examination access arrangement:

- Ensure that a proper reading assessment has been completed within 24 months of the examination;
- Demand that the school provides the means to use text-to-speech as the candidate's "normal way of working"
- Ensure that the request for this access arrangement is submitted to examination boards in time;
- Press for text-to-speech and digital examination papers to be available and effectively managed in the examination by the examination centre.

JCQ guidance for the use of computer reader

The following is the guidance issued by JCQ in relation to computer readers/readers (the first part of section 5.5 of the JCQ document).

Processing applications

5.5.1 For those qualifications listed within the Deadlines section, an application for a computer reader/reader must be processed using *Access arrangements online*. Appropriate evidence of need must be available at the centre for inspection (see paragraph 5.5.5).

For a candidate with a disability or a learning difficulty, a computer reader may allow them to demonstrate their attainment more effectively and independently than would be possible with a reader. However, a computer reader must be appropriate to the candidate's needs. There must be sufficient time and training to ensure the candidate is able to use a computer reader effectively.

A computer reader

5.5.2 Computer software which accurately reads out text, (including synthetic speech software stored on a memory stick) but does not decode or interpret the paper, may be used as a computer reader.

It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that the computer used does not contain any software that the candidate can access and which might assist him/her with the examination. Failure to do so may constitute malpractice.

A computer reader will be allowed in papers (or sections of papers) testing reading.

In cases where a computer reader is unable to recognise and thus read an individual word, a reader may read out the word to the candidate.

Where an application for a computer reader is approved, the centre is permitted to open the question paper packet in the secure room within 90 minutes of the awarding body's published starting time for the examination. This is specifically to scan the hard copy question paper into PDF format. Any infringement has the potential to constitute malpractice.

However, where an application for a computer reader is approved, it is strongly recommended that the centre orders a non-interactive electronic question paper (see Chapter 6, section 6.7).