

Special examination arrangements for candidates with specific learning difficulties

This paper is intended to inform parents and pupils of the procedures that the School follows to determine whether an individual pupil requires special examination arrangements.

SQA allows special arrangements to be made where a specific barrier of some kind might otherwise prevent candidates showing their true level of attainment in an examination.

These arrangements most commonly involve use of a reader and/or scribe or use of wordprocessor where there are literacy difficulties, or extra time where there is a processing speed difficulty in respect of writing and/or reading.

These arrangements are not intended for candidates who simply find one or more subjects difficult. They are intended for candidates at *any* level of ability who would do significantly better if some specific barrier were removed. Thus, special arrangements may apply to a candidate who is performing at A grade standard at Higher as well as one who may be likely only to pass at C grade.

Uptake nationally has (approximately) doubled in recent years, both for SQA examinations and across higher education in general.

A rigorous process has to be followed before such arrangements may be requested from SQA. At Watson's it is as follows:

- ◇ If a specific difficulty is suspected, referral is made to the Learning Support Department for investigation. The request may come from parents, teachers, or the pupil. The key factor is that the pupil is performing significantly less well in timed and written examinations than would be expected from the understanding and ability shown in class. (A number of pupils join the Senior School with a specific difficulty already identified by an external educational psychologist.)
- ◇ Initial assessment is carried out, combining some standardised psychometric tests (usually the Dyslexia Screening Test and the WORD tests of basic reading, spelling and reading comprehension). Background medical and developmental information is gathered, as well as information from and the professional opinions of the pupil's subject teachers.
- ◇ If this initial picture suggests it, more extensive assessment is recommended. This involves a wide range IQ test (WISC-IV UK), and any other tests or instruments suggested by that pupil's profile, as it emerges.
- ◇ When the report is discussed with parents, and if a specific learning difficulty has been identified, ways of addressing the difficulty are agreed, as well as any examination arrangements that might be appropriate.
- ◇ If arrangements are considered, psychometric evidence is not enough in itself. The possible entitlement is reported to all the pupil's teachers, and each teacher must then confirm that it is a factor in his/her subject, or that it is not.
- ◇ Arrangements are finally requested from SQA only when the psychometric evidence is validated, subject by subject, by each teacher who has to be confident that the candidate, in his/her subject, would perform significantly less well in written and timed examinations than would be predicted from abilities demonstrated in the classroom.

Our procedures and arrangements have been audited by SQA and scrutinised by independent external assessors. Moderation confirmed these procedures; and that requests finally made are valid and conform fully to SQA's guidelines.

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