

# The Use of Practical Assistants in Exams

## Can the practical assistant be the candidate's TA or teacher?

Yes. Section 4.2.10 of the JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments (JCQ AARA) document clarifies that "... where the candidate's own subject teacher, Learning Support Assistant or teaching assistant is used, a separate invigilator **must always** be present."

An example in section 5.5.10, on p.59, highlights that the person acting as reader, scribe, or practical assistant for a candidate with vision impairment should be familiar with their normal way of working:

"A blind candidate in A-level Mathematics and Further Mathematics examinations requires a combination of reasonable adjustments. The centre orders Braille papers and tactile diagrams. An application for a practical assistant, a reader and a scribe is subsequently approved by the awarding body having been automatically rejected by the online system. The reader will enable the candidate to identify diagrams correctly. The practical assistant will guide the candidate's hand under instruction to the tactile graphs. The scribe will draw a straight line between the points the candidate has plotted independently on the tactile graphs. The same person will act as a reader, a scribe, and a practical assistant. The supporting adult should be familiar with the subject being examined and the candidate's normal way of working."

Section 4.2.10 also sets out the responsibility of the head of centre to "ensure that the person appointed is a responsible adult, is appropriately trained and fully understands the rules of the access arrangement(s)/reasonable adjustment(s), as detailed in the JCQ guidance."

## Applying for a Practical Assistant

When making an application for a practical assistant as an access arrangement on access arrangements online, the application will be automatically rejected and referred to the relevant awarding body. Detailed information must be provided listing the tasks which the practical assistant would perform. This will allow the awarding body to ensure that the assessment objectives are not compromised.

## Guidance

There is no specific guidance for tasks which a practical assistant may perform in exams, as this depends on the specific needs of the candidate and the assessment criteria of the exam.

JCQ AARA 5.14.3 says that “*A practical assistant must not be allowed to carry out physical tasks or demonstrate physical abilities where they form part of the assessment objectives.*”

JCQ AARA includes a memory aid for a reader and scribe in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. There is no memory aid for a practical assistant because the tasks completed by the practical assistant will be specific to each candidate and their normal way of working for each subject.

## General information on use of a practical assistant:

Rules for the use of a practical assistant include:

- must perform practical tasks as approved by the awarding body and according to the candidate's instructions, unless the skill to be performed is the focus of the assessment, (in which case the practical assistant will not be permitted) or the procedure would be unsafe.
- may ask the candidate to repeat instructions where these are not clear. must ensure the safety of the candidate and those around them.
- must not give factual help to the candidate or indicate when the task is complete.

(JCQ AARA, Section 5.14.7)

## Examples tasks a practical assistant can carry out

- A candidate with severe vision impairment may need his or her hand to be guided to the relevant page or section of text in a paper. Care must be taken not to direct the candidate to the answer.
- A Blind candidate may require a practical assistant to record the position of points or lines indicated on a tactile graph by means of pins and elastic bands.

## Further examples (not VI specific)

- A candidate has severe cerebral palsy with no use of his hands. He wants to be entered for a GCSE Design & Technology course but cannot perform any design making skills. His teacher helps him

during the course. As he will not be able to be credited with any marks for skills performed by a practical assistant, it is decided that he should complete the course without being entered for the specification.

- A candidate studying GCSE Physical Education is a wheelchair user. She can demonstrate her performance skills in track and field events in athletics. She does require the help of a practical assistant to set up her wheelchair and other equipment to maximise her performance. The input from the practical assistant is not deemed to give her an undue advantage and is therefore permitted.

## **Factors the centre must consider**

- A practical assistant is not a reader or a scribe. The same person may act as a practical assistant, a reader, and/or a scribe if permission has been given for these arrangements. The regulations for the use of each arrangement must be strictly adhered to.
- The practical assistant must be made aware, prior to the examination, of the task(s) he/she will be performing as specifically approved by the awarding body.

## **Practical subjects**

Statement 5.14.3 in JCQ AARA says “The role of a practical assistant will be more limited in subjects such as Art & Design, Design & Technology and Music.” This is because the ability to carry out specified practical skills is being assessed so a practical assistant would not be able to carry out these skills for the candidate.

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With thanks to the RNIB education team.

Any comments, updates or suggested improvements are welcome. Please email [cypf@rnib.org.uk](mailto:cypf@rnib.org.uk) with Education FAQs as the subject heading.