UK Association for Accessible Formats **UKAAF**

UKAAF minimum standards:
Accessible PDFs For Assessment

Introduction

The UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF) sets standards for accessible formats in the UK which meet end-user needs.

The following minimum standards for accessible PDFs for use in assessments can be used as a checklist by schools and academic institutions, awarding bodies, producers and end-users, to ensure that materials are of an acceptable level of quality to meet user needs.

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Minimum standards for accessible PDFs for assessment

The expectation is that PDFs in an accessible format are provided by the school, academic institution, awarding body or producer to meet a minimum standard in advance of the assessment situation.

There is a widely divergent demographic that would benefit from using this electronic file format in an assessment situation. Therefore, there needs to be provision at different levels in order to meet the needs of candidates with varying disabilities or impairments. It is helpful to the student or candidate if the level of accessibility of the accessible PDF file is made apparent.

The following standards are therefore provided for two levels of electronic PDF versions of assessments. Level one is a PDF version of the standard assessment intended for use by sighted candidates who are print impaired. Candidates who choose to use this level of accessibility may include those with dyslexia, reading difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, dyspraxia, mild visual impairment, learning difficulties or physical disability. It should be possible to easily navigate the assessment with or without a mouse and have text-to-speech software coherently read the assessment.

Level two is intended for use by candidates who are blind or who have a significant visual impairment. The file should be suitable for candidates who cannot see the text and who rely on computerised speech to read the questions. This level of accessibility will require that the assessment has been modified by a Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI) or a suitably experienced individual to make it accessible via screen-reader software. Further information

on modifying assessments for use by candidates with visual impairment is available in the Exams Best Practice Guidance, an updated version of which will be available from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) and UKAAF in March 2015.

For both levels, there is the option for the assessment to contain on-screen answer boxes (form fields), which would also allow candidates to record their responses in the PDF file. This is not a mandatory part of the minimum standard and if answer boxes are not added, candidates must answer on a hard copy of the assessment or in a separate word processed document.

In all cases where an assessment is provided in an accessible PDF, any accompanying diagram, data or resource booklet should also be provided in the same level of accessibility. That is, if a candidate needs the assessment to Level one of accessibility, then the supporting assessment material should also be a Level one accessible PDF.

In order for candidates to be able to independently access assessments provided to these standards, they must be used to using such files in their normal academic situation. Where possible, course material should also meet these minimum standards. This is important as candidates need to have the necessary information technology skills to engage with each of the types of accessible PDF files described in this document.

These standards do not cover design or layout of assessments as many of these features cannot be edited in existing PDF files. However, accessibility issues such as typeface and font size should be considered when designing the original assessments from which accessible PDF versions are to be created.

In all cases where accessible PDF versions are being provided by the school, academic institution or awarding body, the files should be tested with a range of technologies. It will also help candidates to know what products have been used to test the files, although care may need to be taken not to endorse individual products unless that is within the remit of the organisation.

This standard applies to PDFs being read in Adobe Reader XI or later. If compatibility with additional PDF applications is required then additional checks may be required.

For the purposes of this document, the terms "text-to-speech software" and "screen reader software" have been used. Text-to-speech software refers to tools designed for a sighted user that can read aloud with synthetic speech when selected by mouse or navigated to by the user. Screen reader software refers to tools designed for users who are blind or have a significant sight loss. Screen reader software enables a user to navigate through a document using the keyboard to navigate in conjunction with audio output and for all relevant content to be vocalised.

User needs and preferences

☐ To achieve PDF assessments and resources that are accessible to the end user whilst retaining the integrity of the assessment.

Level One: Accessible PDF File for sighted candidates

☐ The Document Properties are correctly populated and set up according to the UKAAF Accessible PDF guidance.

- The correct primary language is assigned.

- All text required by the candidate (including text on images, graphs, maps, etc.) can be accessed by text-to-speech software.

- The audio output of the text-to-speech accurately reflects the text on screen.

- The document has a coherent reading order for text-to-speech software.

- The file has an appropriate navigational structure and uses heading styles consistently throughout the assessment so that candidates can easily navigate between or within instructions, questions and stimulus material.

- Lists are appropriately tagged.

- Each new Section or Question within the assessment is bookmarked.

- Where papers do not have form fields, text reflows correctly when zoom tools are used, so that all elements of a question are co-located before and after reflow.

- Any coloured text within the assessment meets colour contrast guidelines (as published by WCAG). If a page has a background colour this is of sufficient contrast to the text to meet the needs of candidates who are colour blind.

- The assessment allows the candidate to alter the colours in the PDF file.

- Standard keyboard shortcut keys are working.

- Permissions are enabled to allow clipboard reader access so that text can be selected and read out by text-to-speech software.

☐ Where mathematical and scientific notation is accessible to the text-to-speech software, the vocabulary used complies with the assessment criteria and associated regulations.

☐ The agreed security and permissions have been set.

Where Answer Boxes/Form Fields are added:

☐ Form fields are inserted at appropriate points in the assessment.

☐ Form Fields do not scroll.

☐ Each form field is unique and not a duplicate of another form field.

☐ The tab order of the form fields is set so that candidates can tab through correctly.

☐ All check boxes or radio buttons allow multiple responses to be selected.

☐ Instructions have been amended to provide centres and candidates with information on how to save and return their responses.

Level Two: Modified Accessible PDF File for candidates who are blind

☐ Level One criteria are satisfied.

☐ Reading order is structured to provide for continuous reading of the content in a logical order.

☐ Tables are appropriately and consistently tagged with row and column headers provided.

☐ Table summaries are provided where this does not compromise the assessment criteria.

☐ All necessary and informative images are allocated an alternative text description that complies with the assessment criteria and associated regulations.

☐ All mathematical and scientific notation is identified and tagged with appropriate alternative text, so that the screen reader software reads it coherently and the vocabulary used complies with the assessment criteria and associated regulations.

☐ All content not required by the candidate, such as bar codes or reference numbers, are tagged as an Artefact.

☐ Answer lines and answer boxes are assigned an alternative text description.

☐ The content of the assessment complies with the modifications supplied by a Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI) or a suitably experienced individual.

Where Answer Boxes / Form Fields are added:

☐ Form fields are inserted at appropriate points in the examination paper.

☐ Form Fields do not scroll.

☐ All form fields are clearly labelled to aid navigation.

☐ The tab order of the form fields is set so that candidates can tab through correctly.

☐ The tooltip for each form field identifies the question to which it refers.

☐ All check boxes or radio buttons allow multiple responses to be selected.

☐ Instructions have been amended to provide centres and candidates with information on how to save and return their responses.

Further guidance

Further in-depth guidance on the production of accessible formats is available from UKAAF's website: www.ukaaf.org

UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF)

Contact details

UKAAF
PO Box 127
Cwmbrân
NP44 9BQ

Tel: 0845 60 85223
Fax: 0845 60 85224
Email: enquiries@ukaaf.org
Web: www.ukaaf.org

Registered address

UKAAF
c/o Pia
Victoria Street
Cwmbrân
NP44 3YT

President: Lord Low of Dalston CBE
Registered charity number: 1126966
Registered as a company in England and Wales number: 6748900