

## **Policy on the use of Reader Pens in School National Examinations**

### **1. Rationale**

The use of assistive technology devices when sitting for examinations is a positive move aimed for students to take exams independently. The use of the reading pen can be considered as one of various assistive technology devices that may be used during examinations where, by simply running the pen across printed questions, students can instantly hear them read aloud. The use of this device means students who have reading difficulties, such as dyslexia, can independently take exams knowing they can easily access written material thus facilitating the understanding of text.

The use of reader pens in examinations supports students and stakeholders in the following ways:

- Reduces exam anxiety and boosts self-confidence;
- Promotes inclusivity amongst peers;
- Supports multiple languages (albeit not Maltese);
- Improves student attainment;
- Promotes independence;
- Saves schools the need of human resources to act as examination assistants, as human Readers are not needed for students using the reader pen.

### **2. Eligibility**

#### **2.1. Primary School students**

Primary school students will be allowed use of a reader pen if:

- a) recommended by an Education Psychologist/Dyslexia Specialist in the report following assessment.
- b) the class teacher/subject teacher can confirm/provide written documentation that the student is well accustomed in using a reader pen in the normal classroom situation and will therefore be able to use it confidently and profitably for the purposes of school national examinations.

Moreover, should there be reference to a Reader but no reference to a reader pen in the professional's report, students are encouraged to contact the Educational Assessment Unit (EAU) with the required confirmation from school administration

indicating that the student is able to use the reader pen confidently and would benefit from its use during school-based and national exams.

## **2.2. Middle School students**

Middle School students will be allowed use of a reader pen if:

- a) recommended by an Educational Psychologist/Dyslexia Specialist in the report following assessment.
- b) the subject teacher can confirm/provide written documentation that the student is well accustomed to use the reader pen in a classroom situation and will therefore be able to use it confidently and profitably for the purposes of national school examinations.

The final decision as to whether a student should have a human reader or reader pen is that of the student, subject teacher and parent. Once a decision is taken, the school administration needs to be informed accordingly for logistical purposes.

## **2.3. Secondary School students**

The same criteria that was adopted by MATSEC (2019) will be applied for national school examinations. Students will qualify for the use of a reader pen in language subjects if a professional report states that:

- a) the student's standardised score on the locally standardised test of English Reading Comprehension (Suffolk) is  $< 70$  (2 SD below the mean); or if,
- b) a student did not qualify on the basis of (a) but the assessor considers that the student may need a reader due to weak reading skills. Additionally, the assessor should assess the student on the NARA II Reading Accuracy. Students will qualify for a reader if their standardised score on the English Reading Comprehension Test is  $< 85$  and, additionally, their age-equivalent Reading Accuracy score on NARA II is  $< 10.00$  years.

Students are only allowed to use the reader pen in national school examinations, if the school administration could confirm that the student has used the reader pen throughout the year for classwork, and consequently this has become his/her normal mode of working.

Students are to use their own reader pens (preferably the one used during their learning process) as the EAU does not provide reader pens.

### **3. Role of School Administration**

Schools are to seek authorisation from the Educational Assessment Unit for students to use reader pens during annual national examinations. This is to be done by sending an email request to [EAU@ilearn.edu.mt](mailto:EAU@ilearn.edu.mt) attaching a scanned copy of the professional report which recommends the use of a reader pen in the learning process of the student, together with a confirmation from the school administration that this has become a student's normal mode of working.

School personnel are to ensure that the student had been using this reading device for a minimum of one year prior and has developed competence in its use, to applying for such permission.

Requests are to be sent at least **three months** before the examination session.

### **4. Procedural measures**

#### **4.1. Permissible pens**

The reader pen to be used during examinations should not have any in-built dictionary, thesaurus, or data storage facility.

If the pen has these functions, then it is necessary to ensure that the pen has an Exam Lock and for the pen to be locked on exam mode, so that these facilities are not accessed during the examinations.

All pens must be checked by a member of the School Leadership Team (SLT) before the examination to ensure they comply with these requirements.

#### **4.2. Examination subjects**

A reader pen is allowed in all non-language subjects. In language subjects a reader pen is allowed however, the certificate will be endorsed (that is, it will be stated that a reader pen was used).

#### **4.3. Before the examination**

Students must ensure the following:

- Reader pen is fully charged.
- Reader pen is set to the right- or left-handed (as appropriate).
- Reader pen is set on the longest Auto Shut Down option. This promotes focus on the examination.

- The Mode should be set to Append, so that the pen will append each text line after the previous one to build up full sentences or paragraphs.

#### **4.4. During the examination**

- Students using the reader pen can be with their peers in the same examination room.
- Students using the pen are to bring their own in-ear headphones to use with the reader pen so as not to disturb other students taking the examination. The ear headphones are intended to provide discreet use.
- It is the duty of the student to ensure that the reader pen is fully charged before the examination. During the examination, charging the reader pen is not permissible.

### **5. Student Malpractice**

#### **5.1. In the case a student does not bring the earphones to connect to the reader pen during an examination**

In such a situation, the school is not obliged to accommodate the students in a separate room. However, if the school can find an alternative arrangement and accommodate the students in a suitable area where they can use the device without disturbing other students, then this can be resorted to.

If the school cannot provide a separate physical space nor the human resources needed to supervise the student, then the student would not be allowed to use the reader pen.

#### **5.2. In the case of a student caught using non-permissible reader pen functions during an examination**

The invigilator is to retrieve the reader pen from the student and leave it in a safe place, whilst the student is asked to continue the examination.

The invigilator is to immediately inform the School Leadership Team about this. The invigilator will ask the corridor supervisor to call a member of the SLT to the examination room and the invigilator is to explain what happened passing over the evidence retrieved.

The SLT member should write a short report, stating the facts: date; time; subject of examination; invigilator's name; invigilator's statement of what happened; and the evidence. The Head of School should be notified immediately.

Once the student finishes the examination, s/he is to be accompanied to the Head's office. In the meantime, the Head of School is to contact the student's parents/guardians and inform them that their son/daughter was caught using non-permissible functions of the reader pen during the examination and therefore a zero (0) mark will be given.

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