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EXAMINATION ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS FOR CANDIDATES WITH MULTI-SENSORY IMPAIRMENT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 **Access Arrangements** allow candidates/learners with special educational needs and disabilities, in this case a multi-sensory impairment (MSI) to access the assessment without changing the demands of the assessment. A variety of arrangements exist which ensure that awarding bodies comply with their duty under the Equality Act 2010¹ to make ‘reasonable adjustments’.
- 1.2 What are reasonable adjustments? The Equality Act requires an awarding body to make reasonable adjustments where a disabled person would be at a substantial disadvantage; that is a disadvantage that is more than minor or trivial, in undertaking an assessment.
- 1.3 A reasonable adjustment for a particular person may be unique to that individual and may not be included in the list of available access arrangements – see list a) below.
- a) supervised rest breaks, extra time, scribe/speech technology, word processor, prompter, Braille transcript, language modifier, communication professional, practical assistant, timetable variation
- 1.4 How reasonable the adjustment is will depend on a number of factors, including the needs of the candidate/learner. An adjustment may not be considered reasonable if it involves unreasonable costs, timeframes, or affects the security or integrity of the assessment. There is no duty on the awarding bodies to make any adjustment to the assessment objectives being tested in an assessment.
- 1.5 There is no MSI-specific exam guidance or MSI-specific access arrangements. Instead, it is anticipated that the access arrangements which are available for candidates with vision impairment, or who are deaf, will be suitable and meet the needs of those with MSI. The list in 1.3a) above may be helpful, but experience tells us that often, arrangements required are not actually in the list of available arrangements, and this can at first seem daunting.
- 1.6 An up-to-date list of published available access arrangements can be found and downloaded directly from the JCQ website². The document is updated at the start of each academic year.

¹ Equality Act 2010: See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

² JCQ Website: See <https://www.icq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/forms/>

2. Sample Case Studies:

2.1 The following case study examples are based on real scenarios. Please note the use of these is for illustrative purposes only and does not mean the examples cited are available as standard. Applications are considered by awarding bodies on a case-by-case basis.

3. Candidate A

3.1 The following access arrangements were applied for:

- a) test papers at font size 24
- b) paper copy of the exam paper with permission to record answers digitally – see note below.
25% extra time
- c) a quiet room
- d) rest breaks

3.2 Specialist equipment used:

- e) enlarged protractor and ruler
- f) graph paper with larger squares and darker lines. (n.b. With additional permission, the student plotted a graph on this enlarged paper and grid rather than the answer paper – with prior agreement with exam board this was acceptable).

3.3 Note: The candidate's normal way of working is to read from an enlarged paper copy and to record answers on an identical, but electronic version.

3.4 JCQ access arrangement states in section "6.7 Non interactive electronic (PDF) question papers

6.7.1 Non interactive electronic questions papers are in PDF format. They can be read on screen but cannot be typed into."

3.5 As above, electronic (PDF) versions are provided from exam boards on request but are not interactive. In order to match normal way of working, the student received enlarged paper copies and had permission to record answers on a word processor/computer. Evidence of normal way of working in the lead up to exams was required to support the application.

4. Candidate B

4.1 The following access arrangements were applied for:

- a) standard modified enlarged paper: 36 point bold on A3 paper
- b) electronic papers of 36 font, modified large print (MLP) version (pdf)
- c) extra time 100%
- d) supervised rest breaks
- e) reader (or computer reader)
- f) technology – laptop / iPad / speech recognition software
- g) magnifier
- h) use of radio aid during any spoken element of an exam

4.2 The above arrangements are fairly typical in their requirements with the exception of the request for PDFs and the last point re radio aid.

4.3 Please note regarding ordering 36 font on PDF, the exam officer must order the papers on the online system, but send a separate request to each exam board requesting the papers are provided as PDFs.

4.4 Regarding the use of a radio aid, JCQ access arrangements state in 4.1.3

Candidates with sensory and physical needs may require for example...

...and goes on to list numerous specialist requirements. A radio aid is not listed specifically but should be considered standard within amplification equipment. It is worth clarifying with the exam board directly that a radio aid will be used during the exam.

5. Candidate C

5.1 The following example is Modern Foreign Language (MFL) specific. The following access arrangements were applied for:

- a) 50% extra time across all aspects of the exam (It is important that how this extra time is to be applied to the listening exam should be clarified directly with the exam board.
- b) supervised rest breaks
- c) blue paper -shade to be agreed and consistent across all exams. (n.b. Please note the required coloured paper will not be provided by the exam board but should be provided by the exam centre with 60 minute early opening of the paper to enable print/copying onto the required coloured paper.
- d) listening exam:
 - 1) one live speaker (tested/agreed in mock exams to ensure lip pattern etc accessible)
 - 2) in room away from background noise
 - 3) live speaker stands in a position suitable for lipreading
 - 4) live speaker holds up cards to indicate the character being spoken
 - 5) permissible to request for phrases to be repeated as many times as she needs, and live speaker will provide this repetition.
 - 6) extra time between questions
 - 7) rest-break between listening and other exams
- e) Other exam elements:

a small group room or individual room, well-lit, quiet and away from background noise

5.2 Many of the arrangements above are very specific, and so required clarification with the exam board directly.

5.3 It is worth noting that even with the above exact provision and planning, additional liaison with the board was required when the live speaker was not available on the date of the exam.

An application for timetable variance at the last minute was made and approved, but this did cause additional stress and pressure just before the exam for all involved.

Special consideration could also potentially be applied for in this situation.

5.4 Special consideration must be applied for, usually within seven days of the last exam of the series. Exact dates are published by JCQ in their key dates document online. Applications must be made within the timeframe and made online by the exam centre (school), direct to the relevant awarding body (exam board). Please note the candidate must have completed the entire course.

6. Key considerations for candidates with MSI:

- 6.1 It is advisable that all specialist teachers involved (QTMSI, QTVI and QToD) work together with the candidate, family, school and exam officer to ensure the correct applications are made. Applications for exam access must be made by the exam centre (school/setting) with the correct supporting evidence from all other professionals involved.
- 6.2 In order to apply for an access arrangement, evidence of normal way of working is required. It is essential that there is evidence of this from previous tests/exams.
- 6.3 Due to the very individual nature of MSI and thus access arrangements, it is important to consider the overarching range of access options, but also to then focus on the individual needs and normal way of working. Additional specific individual applications are likely to be needed.
- 6.4 It is important additionally to consider the nature of the MSI and whether it is progressive, and therefore, whether ability to access the course content and also access requirements may vary over time. This may be particularly applicable in practical subjects such as P.E. where a change in sports or focus may be required.
- 6.5 There are advised timelines for access arrangements. These vary slightly year-on-year.
- 6.6 It is vital that these are checked at the start of each year in JCQ guidelines, and that applications are made in plenty of time.
- 6.7 In order to be prepared for applications and to meet the deadlines, a normal way of working and access arrangements should have been trialled and established in previous tests/mocks, with evidence of need gathered and documented.
- 6.8 A meeting between candidates, professionals and the exam centre is recommended at the very start of the year in which the courses start, this would be in Year 10 for GCSEs to be taken in Year 11.

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