**Education Authority logo**

**Sensory Service**

# Examination Access Arrangements for Students with Vision Impairment

Access Arrangements are pre-arranged adjustments to assessment and examination conditions for candidates based on evidence of need and normal ways of working.

It is anticipated that each centre conducting assessments or examinations will have a SENCo who will determine the candidate's needs, gather evidence of the candidate's normal working practices and compile requests for adjustments to access arrangements.

It is important to replicate the way that a student is working in class with the access arrangements that are going to be available when they take the exam.

The idea of access arrangements is to remove disadvantage, not to give a student an unfair advantage over other candidates. You cannot ask for arrangements that conflict with the skills or the competences that are being assessed by a particular qualification so, for example you cannot ask for practical assistance to do things in, for example, a science exam if the students are being assessed on those specific practical skills.

## Removing barriers

It is crucial that candidates with sensory impairment are able to show what they know and can do without affecting the integrity of the assessment and that any barriers to their being able to do this are removed or mitigated.

## Entitlement

The concept of creating a level playing field by minimising the 'long term and substantial adverse effect' of a disability on a candidate's performance is clear. It is important to stress to colleagues and others not in the field that this should not be thought of as giving students 'concessions' but rather as meeting their entitlement to reasonable adjustments in the light of the effects of their disability.

Access arrangements are the principal way in which awarding bodies comply with their duty under relevant legislation to make 'reasonable adjustments'. They are intended to remove or minimise disadvantage, whilst not giving the candidate an unfair advantage. They are not granted automatically, but should be a response to the identified effects of an individual candidate's disability on their access to assessment.

## Demonstrating need

Having a vision impairment does not entitle the candidate to any specific arrangements they wish to have — it has to be shown that the candidate needs them as a consequence of their disability. This is achieved by 'painting a picture of their needs', explaining the effects of the sensory impairment on them and providing evidence to support this.

## Normal Ways of Working

A key principle of access arrangements in external assessments is that any request must reflect the candidate's normal way of working in the classroom and must not just emerge at the time of the assessment. As such, candidates should be familiar by the time of the assessment with the access arrangements they are going to use.

## Choosing courses

While the vast majority of courses will be suitable for a learner with sensory impairment who has the appropriate academic ability, it is important to understand that embarking on a course does not automatically mean that the qualification at the end of it can be made accessible. Teachers of children and young people with sensory impairment need to support these learners at all stages and not just at the time of the assessment.

This support includes ensuring that learners choose appropriate courses and that suitable forethought is given in advance to any potential barriers in the assessment process and how these might be minimised or removed.

It is important to understand what arrangements would be possible before starting the course. Not all qualifications can be made accessible to all sensory impairments. The candidate must have opportunities to practice using the access arrangement(s) prior to the first examination.

## Qualification integrity

A key aspect of the provision of access arrangements is the need to preserve the integrity of the qualification. This means that some arrangements carry greater risk than others. In particular, the use of human support to be carefully controlled to ensure that what is assessed is the candidate's own knowledge and understanding.

A high risk ‘arrangement’ might be the use of a practical assistant to support a blind candidate's access to practical assessment — the assistant must only carry out tasks which are not considered to be an integral part of the assessment itself. In such cases rigorous criteria are applied and full recording of interventions made must be provided by the centre. Such arrangements will also need to be separately invigilated and/or take place in separate rooms.

## Arrangements for vision-impaired candidates

This is not an exhaustive list and any candidate with a disability is entitled to have their needs addressed on an individual basis.

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### Supervised rest breaks

#### Rationale

Some candidates may find the amount of reading, writing and processing involved in a timed examination very tiring. In some cases it may be appropriate to allow them supervised rest breaks.

#### Description

The timing of the examination should be paused and re-started when the candidate is ready to continue.

The candidate must continue to be supervised during the rest break.

Any time taken for a rest break should be added to the end of the exam, so that candidates are not disadvantaged.

During the rest break the candidate must not have access to the question paper/answer booklet.

#### Constraints

There is no maximum time set for supervised rest breaks.

#### Evidence

Identify the candidate's established difficulties.

Confirm that supervised rest breaks reflect his/her normal way of working within the centre.

#### Considerations

A rest break is not the same as extra time because the candidate cannot use this time to answer questions. In some cases a combination of extra time (refer to separate arrangement) and rest breaks may be appropriate.

The decision must be made by the SENCo based on their knowledge of the candidate's needs and the candidate's normal way of working when placed under timed conditions.

The duration of the supervised rest break should be determined by the SENCo before the start of the examination series.

### Extra time 25%

#### Rationale

Many candidates with a sensory impairment will need extra time to complete an examination. This is because sensory impairments commonly affects an individual's speed of information processing and linguistic access, which may be unrelated to their cognitive ability. For example, it may take a candidate longer to read the text or to have it read to them.

#### Description

The candidate is given 25% extra time.

#### Constraints

There may be some tests or examinations where extra time is not allowed because completing a task in a set time is one of the skills being assessed.

#### Evidence

The SENCo must paint a picture of the candidate's normal way of working, clearly demonstrating the need for extra time.

An assessment of needs based on:

* Statement
* Evidence from an external specialist (e.g. QTVI)
* Please note that providing evidence of a standardised reading score via JCQ Form 8 is not required for candidates with vision impairment.

#### Considerations

Before requesting extra time, the use of supervised rest breaks should be considered first.

If the candidate needs extra time due to the use of a reader or scribe you should also refer to those sections in addition.

The arrangement must not only be granted to the candidate at the time of his/her examinations — there must be evidence that it is their normal way of working in examinations.

### Extra time more than 25%

#### Rationale

Many candidates with a vision impairment will need extra time to complete an examination. This is because vision impairments commonly affects an individual's speed of information processing, which may be unrelated to their cognitive ability. For example, it may take a candidate longer to read the text or to have it read to them.

The candidate may need more time to locate specific information in a modified paper in large print or braille. Extra time may also be required if a candidate writes slowly or dictates his or her answers to a scribe.

Up to 100% may be allowed for examinations involving large amounts of text or complex diagrams if sufficient evidence of need is presented.

#### Description

The candidate is given extra time.

The amount of extra time requested should be based on evidence of the candidate's normal way of working using the access arrangements e.g. in mock examinations and regular assessments. Extra time typically varies from around 25-50% of the time allowed for the standard paper; more might be allowed if sufficient evidence of need is presented.

For example, for a candidate proficient in reading braille and using a braille paper it would normally be appropriate to award no more than 50% extra time, possibly in conjunction with other access arrangements.

#### Constraints

There may be some tests or examinations where extra time is not allowed because completing a task in a set time is one of the skills being assessed.

#### Evidence

Confirmation of the candidate's disability.

Evidence of how the amount of extra time required has been determined.

Show the involvement of teaching staff in determining the need for extra time.

Confirm that without the application of extra time the candidate would be at a substantial disadvantage.

For a candidate with vision impairment it is not necessary to provide evidence of their reading speed and comprehension via JCQ Form 8 when applying for extra time.

#### Considerations

There needs to be strong justification for why more than the 25% extra time adjustment is needed.

Although extra time between 26% and 50%, and over 50% are considered 'exceptional arrangements' they are typical for candidates with significant vision impairment.

### Technology

#### Rationale

The candidate uses equipment in their normal day-to-day studies and without it would be at a substantial disadvantage when compared with other non-disabled candidates undertaking the assessment.

#### Description

The candidate is allowed to use technology if it is their normal way of working.

In principle, any technology is permissible in an examination. This includes:

* optical or electronic magnifiers
* e-book readers
* computers
* braille notetakers
* word processors
* CCTV
* Coloured overlays (physical and virtual)
* Optical Character Reader (OCR) scanners

#### Constraints

There are extensive rules concerning the use of any type of word processor, summarised as follows.

* There must be no student's work or any other subject content on the machine.
* Spell check, grammar check, automatic facilities such as AutoCorrect and predictive writing software must be rendered inoperative.
* There must be no network link to intranet or Internet.

#### Evidence

Confirmation that the candidate has a substantial and long term impairment (within the meaning of the Equality Act) which has an adverse effect.

Confirm that the arrangement is the candidate's normal way of working within the centre

#### Considerations

For computer readers refer to the section below.

### Modified papers

#### Rationale

Modified papers in accessible formats are an essential access arrangement for many candidates with vision impairment. The awarding bodies recognise and provide a range of 'standard' modified formats in the hope that these will meet the needs of most candidates

#### Description

The candidate is given an alternate examination paper.

The 'standard' modified formats available are:

* **Coloured/enlarged paper** — centres should submit an application on AAO to open papers 90 minutes early and to copy them onto coloured or A3 paper as required. No changes may be made to the content or layout of the original paper.
* **Modified enlarged paper** — these papers are intended for candidates who cannot read a standard examination paper. The layout and presentation of the standard paper is modified to remove elements of visual complexity without changing the demands of the assessment.  
  Pictures and diagrams are often re-drawn to make them more visually accessible. In some cases pictures may also be replaced or supplemented with a written description. The standard formats for MEP papers are:
* 18 point bold print on A4 paper
* 24 point bold print on A4 paper (new in 2018)
* 24 point bold print on A3 paper
* 36 point bold print on A3 paper (this option may not be available in all subjects).

The usual font is Arial but this may not be true for all papers.

**Braille paper** — the standard format is contracted Grade 2 braille in Unified English Braille (UEB). Uncontracted braille and other specialised formats, such as tactile diagrams with print rather than braille labels, are available on request.

#### Constraints

Modified papers need to be applied for in good time according to the guidance and deadlines provide by JCQ and those of individual Awarding Organisations.

The paper must not be further modified by the centre.

#### Evidence

The candidate must be deemed to have persistent and significant difficulties when accessing and processing information

Awarding bodies do not require evidence of the candidate's difficulties when a 'standard' modified paper is requested.

#### Considerations

For the adjustment to be effective, the candidate must have had appropriate opportunities to practice using an awarding body's past modified papers before his/her first examination.

Modified large print and braille papers should be produced in line with [Best Practice Guidance produced by the UK Association of Accessible Formats](https://www.ukaaf.org/) (UKAAF). Centres should follow this guidance to make sure they are producing their own internal assessment materials in a similar format wherever possible.

### Electronic papers

#### Rationale

Electronic PDF files of standard print papers may be suitable for some candidates with a mild vision impairment who prefer to read papers on screen.

This format is also used for candidates wishing to use a computer reader.

#### Description

The candidate is given a non-interactive electronic question paper in PDF format. The centre is responsible for installation and presentation to the candidate.

The paper can be read on-screen.

#### Constraints

The PDF paper cannot be typed into.

Centres may also be able to request electronic versions of modified enlarged papers to be read on screen, but these cannot be ordered via AAO and should be requested directly from the Awarding Organisation concerned.

It is important to note that examination papers in electronic formats will not necessarily be fully accessible when zoomed or read with screen magnification software or a screen reader.

The paper may not be further modified. It may not be converted to another format eg MS Word.

Availability of these electronic versions means that there is no necessity for the centre to scan-in any papers.

#### Evidence

Confirmation that the candidate has a substantial and long term vision impairment and prefers to read on-screen, rather than on paper, as part of their normal way of working.

#### Considerations

It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that the PDF provided by the Awarding Organisation is fully compatible with their chosen software package.

UKAAF has developed minimum standards and guidance on producing exam papers in accessible PDF format. It is important to note that Awarding Organisations are at different stages in implementing this in practice. Centres should therefore contact the Awarding Organisation concerned to check details for individual papers and request samples for students to practise with.

### Individually modified papers

#### Rationale

Under the Equality Act 2010 candidates with vision impairment have a legal right to have their needs met on an individual basis. However, a balance has to be drawn by the Awarding Organisation between the candidate's needs and what is considered to be reasonable in terms of time, cost and the security and integrity of the examination.

If none of the 'standard' modified formats meets the particular needs of a candidate then the centre should make a more detailed case for the format they require.

#### Description

If approved, the awarding body will produce a customised paper for the candidate to use.

The need for individually modified papers can typically arise where a candidate has multiple difficulties that cannot be met by a single standard modified paper. For example, a candidate may need language modification in addition to enlargement.

#### Constraints

An adjustment will not be approved if it involves unreasonable costs, timeframes or affects the security or integrity of the assessment.

The paper must not be further modified by the centre.

#### Evidence

Make a detailed case for the specific format they require, based on evidence of the candidate's individual needs and normal way of working.

#### Considerations

Centres are advised to be aware of the standard range of modified papers and to encourage their students to work with these wherever possible.

Where a candidate requires question papers in an alternative format the centre must discuss his/her particular requirements at the earliest opportunity with the relevant awarding body's Modified Papers Unit, ideally at the start of the course.

Obtaining similar papers for the candidate to practice with may be an issue.

### Readers/computer readers

#### Rationale

Candidates who are unable to read independently or quickly enough in an examination context may need the support of a reader.

Under the same arrangements as those which apply to a reader, a candidate who uses a computer reader as his or her normal way of working should be able to use the computer to read text in an examination.

#### Description

The reader may be in the form of a human reader or a computer reader.

As well as reading the text of questions, a reader may help a candidate with a vision impairment to identify diagrams, graphs and tables.

#### Constraints

The reader must not explain or clarify the questions or text, or advise on timing or the choice or order of questions.

Readers are not usually allowed in sections of papers which are testing reading, as candidates cannot be granted marks for a skill that they are unable to demonstrate.

A reader is not approved if the difficulty is related to the candidate's first language not being that used in the examination.

Readers are normally not allowed to decode any symbols (e.g. mathematical, musical, scientific) and unit abbreviations. However, the JCQ guidance states that:

‘Where a candidate has a significant visual impairment and cannot access a Braille or modified enlarged paper, and cannot independently decode symbols and unit abbreviations, an on-line application for 'Other' should be processed. The centre must set out a compelling rationale as to why the candidate needs symbols and unit abbreviations decoded for him/her by a reader.’

From September 2020 the following new arrangement relating to readers has also been introduced:

‘Readers may decode symbols and unit abbreviations in Maths and Science examinations for candidates who require this arrangement in order to access the assessment and where it reflects the candidate’s current and normal way of working within the centre.’

#### Evidence

For a candidate with vision impairment it should not be necessary to provide evidence of their reading speed and comprehension when applying for this arrangement. Evidence of the impairment should be documented.

The arrangement, whether for a reader or a computer reader must reflect the candidate's normal way of working in internal school tests and mock examinations.

#### Considerations

A computer with screen reader software may be used in place of a human reader, but the same rules apply as making application for a reader.

Centres wishing their candidates to access papers via ICT should check that the access technology they intend to use will work with the formats available from the Awarding Organisation.

Where an application for a computer reader is approved, it is strongly recommended that the centre orders a non-interactive electronic question paper. Ideally, the Awarding Organisation would supply the paper in a suitable electronic format. Where this is not possible it may be necessary to ask permission (as part of the advance approval process) to open the paper 90 minutes early in order to scan it and set the computer reader up.

A candidate who uses a reader must be accommodated separately within the centre.

An important point to note is that a computer reader is permitted in exams testing reading, while a human reader is not. The difference is explained by the fact that a candidate accessing the paper using a computer reader is working independently, whereas a candidate with a human reader is not.

### Scribes

#### Rationale

A candidate with a vision impairment who is unable to write or type independently or at sufficient speed may benefit from dictating his or her answers to a scribe

#### Description

The candidate dictates his or her answers to a scribe, who will write (or word process) word-for-word as the candidate dictates.

A scribe must strictly follow the candidate's instructions to draw or add to maps, diagrams and graphs.

#### Constraints

A scribe should only be used where the candidate is not competent in using a word processor themselves.

There may be limitations to the use of a scribe in Modern Foreign Language papers and also in English, where full marks for spelling and punctuation may not be available unless the candidate dictates all his or her responses in full.

#### Evidence

The SENCo must demonstrate that the candidate has an impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his/her writing and that using a scribe is the candidate's normal way of working.

Show the involvement of teaching staff in determining the need for a scribe.

Confirm that without the application of a scribe the candidate would be at a substantial disadvantage.

#### Considerations

Where a candidate dictates answers to a recording, the answers must subsequently be scribed

A scribe is not a reader, prompter or practical assistant. Those arrangements should be requested additionally if needed.

### Practical assistant

#### Rationale

*Written examinations*

A practical assistant may be needed for written examinations to, for example, guide the candidate to the correct passage of text on a page, or to hold a ruler in the correct place for a line to be drawn. Blind candidates 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.

*Practical examinations*

There may be safety issues related to a candidate with a vision impairment being involved in the practical assessments for a science examination. In such situations a candidate would be credited with all the marks except thosegiven for skills which have been performed by the practical assistant.

*Colour naming*

In some examinations, for example geography and science, the recognition of colours may be central to the focus of the assessment. Where a candidate is visually impaired and/or colour blind, a practical assistant should be allowed to name colours for them as long as this is compatible with the assessment objectives of the qualification.

#### Description

Where approved, the practical assistant will carry out practical tasks at the instruction of the candidate.

There are detailed rules in the JCQ guidance as to what the practical assistant can and cannot do.

#### Constraints

Generally speaking a practical assistant is unlikely to be permitted in assessments testing practical skills. However, if the practical assistant will be carrying out only minor tasks, it may be appropriate to ask for this arrangement.

A practical assistant is not automatically a reader or scribe. Although the same person may end up carrying out those functions, each arrangement would need to be approved.

#### Evidence

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.

Confirmation that the candidate uses a practical assistant in their normal work and that to be without one would substantially disadvantage the candidate.

#### Considerations

The use of a practical assistant always requires approval from an Awarding Organisation to avoid the risk that the candidate may be credited with marks for work done on their behalf.

The practical assistant cannot carry out any tasks where the skills are those being assessed.

### Separate accommodation

#### Rationale

Some access arrangements may necessitate the provision of separate accommodation, for example the use of a reader or scribe, where their work could be overheard by other candidates or the sound would distract other candidates.

Candidates with vision impairment who require specific forms of lighting to maximise their access to examinations may also need to be accommodated separately.

#### Description

The candidate sits their examination in a separate room.

#### Constraints

Separate accommodation will in turn require separate invigilation.

All other regulations and instructions for the conduct of the examination should be carried out.

#### Evidence

Justification is normally based on the use of another access arrangement.

#### Considerations

Where other arrangements have been approved, the invigilator may also be acting in another capacity e.g. a practical assistant. It is important to distinguish these roles and for the person concerned to understand what they may and may not do.

### Transcripts

#### Rationale

Any answers written in braille need to be transcribed by the centre.

This arrangement is delegated to the centre, there is no need to make an application for external approval.

**JCQ guidance**

Refer to the [JCQ guidance, section 5.9 on page 53](https://viewweb.org.uk/exam_access/activities/AAregs2019-2020.pdf#page=59)

#### Description

The candidate's answers are transcribed into print before being sent off for marking.

#### Constraints

***Braille***

All braille scripts must be transcribed by the centre before sending for marking.

***Illegible handwriting***

Although a candidate's handwriting may be illegible due to an impairment, it is not permissible for the centre to transcribe the script. Centres should seek to make use of a Word processor arrangement. If this is not appropriate then the centre should consider the use of a scribe access arrangement.

#### Evidence

No evidence is needed to support the transcription of braille into print.

#### Considerations

The centre must have someone with the relevant expertise on hand to carry out transcription in the limited time allowed.

Candidates are responsible for producing legible writing.