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The role and responsibilities of exams officers in the management and administration of access arrangements

In this article, Jugjit Chima, highlights the role that exams officers may play in the management and administration of access arrangements.

One of the most frequently asked questions received by The Exams Office from exams officers concerns their role in managing and administering access arrangements¹.

The answer is quite simple. Although there is a role for exams officers to perform in relation to access arrangements, it is the responsibility of the SENCo (or the equivalent member of staff within the centre) to lead on all matters relating to access arrangements. Decision making, and tasks such as acquiring and collating candidate evidence prior to processing applications, must not be devolved to the exams officer. If the SENCo is unsure of the regulation and therefore what action to take, it is their responsibility to acquire an answer from the relevant authorities.

This view is supported by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). As stated on page 1 of JCQ's *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* publication, 'the SENCo (or equivalent member of staff within an FE college) ... must lead on the access arrangements/reasonable adjustments process within his/her centre'. The JCQ also states that 'the SENCo must work with...exams office personnel to ensure that approved access arrangements/reasonable adjustments are put in place for internal school tests, mock examinations and examinations.'

Although it is the SENCo who should lead on all matters relating to identifying, determining and implementing access arrangements, that is not to say that an exams officer should be removed from all aspects of the access arrangements process within a centre.

There are specific areas where the expertise and experience of an exams officer can be used to support the process and, more importantly, the candidates who require and have been granted an access arrangement(s). It is also the case that there are some tasks which are ideally undertaken by an exams officer once an access arrangement has been approved/awarded, these include those listed below.

Processing applications for access arrangements and adjustments with the SENCo present

The regulations clearly state that the responsibility for processing applications lies with the SENCo.

However, if a significant number of applications have to be submitted, an exams officer may provide support in order to save time. In such circumstances, the SENCo may read out the relevant details for each application as the exams officer types the information in the *Access Arrangements Online* (AAO) tool.

However, it is imperative that it is the SENCo who:

- logs into AAO (as this will confirm that they have verified and approved the evidence for

¹ Reference to access arrangements refers to access arrangements/reasonable adjustments

each application)

- ensures that all required evidence and a signed candidate personal data consent form is available at the time of the application
- answers all questions which the system may ask in response to the information provided for each application
- confirms the 'Read and accept malpractice consequences statement'
- ensures that all application deadlines are met

Arranging logistics

Once confirmation has been acquired of those candidates with access arrangements and the arrangements awarded, it is very likely that the exams officer (in consultation with the SENCo/SEN staff) will lead on the logistical arrangements for each examination – including areas in which they possess experience and expertise such as timetabling, rooming and seating arrangements:

- Timetabling – it may be that candidates who have been granted extra time and/or supervised rest breaks may be taken beyond the time threshold which results in a timetable clash and an examination(s) being moved. This may also apply to candidates who have been granted the use of a reader and/or scribe and require extra time.
- Organising rooms – confirming if access arrangement candidates will be seated with the main cohort or separately in smaller groups, or in a room on a one-to-one basis. The latter may be particularly appropriate for candidates requiring the use of a reader or scribe (so they cannot be overheard) or those granted extra time and/or supervised rest breaks. There may also be circumstances where a candidate needs to be seated – and invigilated – separately away from other candidates. If candidates are using word processors, they will likely need to be in a room which has an adequate number of power sockets to ensure word processors remain charged and there is the availability of appropriate printing facilities. Such arrangements may also require separate accommodation for the candidates concerned.
- Seating – an exams officer will be aware of the process to ensure that candidates are seated appropriately within the examination room. For example:
 - Extra time candidates should be seated where they cannot be disturbed as other candidates leave the room at the end of the examination
 - Candidates using a word processor should be seated in such a way that other candidates are not disturbed and cannot read their screens (if they are seated in the main examination room(s))
 - Candidates may need to be seated near an exit or require additional support (e.g. resting a broken leg)

Separate invigilation within the centre

It is the responsibility of senior leaders, relevant centre staff (e.g., head of year/pastoral staff) or the SENCo to determine which candidates are granted separate invigilation within the centre.

This arrangement can only be granted if this reflects the candidate's normal way of working in internal school/college tests and mock examinations as a consequence of a long-term medical condition or long term social, emotional or mental health needs. The only exceptions to this might be

a temporary illness/injury which is clearly evidenced, or if an issue is identified by the head of year/pastoral staff which prevents a candidate from being seated with the main cohort or other candidates within their year group.

However, if separate invigilation is granted, then an exams officer may be involved in the following areas:

- Invigilators - ensuring that there are sufficient invigilators for separately accommodated candidates and that invigilators are made aware of any issues relating to the candidate
- Rooming - an additional exam room(s) will be required which must be set up in line with the regulations
- Timetabling – managing separate invigilation for candidates and determining whether this will be required for the remainder of the exam series

Training invigilators and facilitators

The SENCo and exams officer must discuss and agree on the training for staff associated with the invigilation and facilitation of access arrangements. The key areas to consider are:

Facilitators

A facilitator supports a candidate who is granted a particular access arrangement(s) and will therefore need to be familiar with the regulations set out in the *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* publication on the rules of the arrangement(s). They must be clear over what they can/cannot offer in terms of support during an examination to a candidate granted a particular access arrangement. The support offered in the classroom on a daily basis may not be permitted, and if provided during an external examination, may constitute malpractice.

Where permitted by the regulations, if the facilitator is conducting the access arrangement(s) on a one-to-one basis with the candidate, they are also the invigilator and therefore must also be familiar with the relevant contents of the *Instructions for conducting examinations* publication.

Invigilators

Those invigilating an access arrangement must not only be trained to act as an invigilator but must also be familiar with the regulations relating to specific access arrangements.

'Roving' invigilators

Where the invigilator additionally acts as a facilitator (as a practical assistant, a reader and/or a scribe) a 'roving' invigilator must also be deployed. The 'roving' invigilator will enter the room at regular intervals in order to observe the conducting of the examination, ensure all relevant rules are being adhered to and to support the practical assistant/reader and/or scribe in maintaining the integrity of the examination.

Therefore, as the facilitator, invigilator and roving invigilator must be aware of the regulations relating to the access arrangement which is being conducted (and be trained as an invigilator if facilitating on a one-to-one basis) it is imperative that agreement is reached over who will train these members of staff and the content of training.

When devising training, centres should note the following JCQ regulation (*Instructions for conducting examinations*, section 12.3):

A training session on these current regulations [Instructions for conducting examinations] must be held for any new invigilators and those facilitating an access arrangement for a candidate under

examination conditions. An annual update meeting must be held for the existing invigilation team so that they are aware of any changes.

Centres must ensure that the testing of invigilators' competence and their understanding of these regulations is rigorous. This must also extend to those facilitating an access arrangement.

A record of the content of the training given to invigilators and those facilitating an access arrangement for a candidate under examination conditions must be available for inspection and retained on file until the deadline for reviews of marking has passed or until any appeal, malpractice or other results enquiry has been completed, whichever is later.

Temporary access arrangements

It is very likely that an exams officer will play a significant part in managing temporary access arrangements (also referred to as an emergency access arrangement or very last-minute indisposition). However, there is also a role for the SENCo to play in such instances, as detailed on pages 89- 90 of JCQ's *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* publication.

Temporary access arrangements apply to candidates with a temporary illness, a temporary injury or other temporary indisposition at the time of the assessment which is clearly evidenced. For example, a candidate may arrive for their examination with a broken arm or leg. In such cases, the SENCo and exams officer must confirm the roles and responsibilities for dealing with the issue, taking the following steps to ensure that the candidate can access their examination with minimum disruption and disadvantage:

- If the candidate has a broken arm, ask if they are right or left-handed
- If required, organise an appropriate member of staff (trained as a facilitator) to act as the scribe
- If required, organise appropriate invigilation
- Address rooming/seating arrangements (either separate invigilation, or if a candidate needs to rest a broken leg, they may need to be seated near an exit or require additional support)
- Allow the candidate to start the examination in the normal way
- Organise supervised rest breaks, if required
- Apply for temporary access arrangement(s) using AAO where approval is required – e.g. the use of a scribe, extra time
- Collate appropriate evidence for the SENCO's file to support the application
- When able/once recovered, ensure the candidate signs the candidate personal data consent form to confirm consent for the AAO application
- Complete the data protection confirmation by the examinations officer or SENCo
- If appropriate, apply for special consideration

Conclusion

In most centres, exams officers will very likely play some part in the access arrangements process. This is perfectly reasonable as there are many access arrangement-related tasks and areas which

are familiar to exams officers in their everyday role in the management, administration and conducting of examinations. It may also be the case that by asking another member of staff (who does not have an in-depth knowledge of the examination system) to undertake these tasks, it would not only take them longer to complete, but there is an increased likelihood of an error being made.

Exams officers possess a range of skills, expertise and technical knowledge which can be invaluable to a centre beyond the management, administration and conducting of examinations alone. Access arrangements is such an area where exams officers can provide invaluable support. However, if an exams officer is involved in the administration and logistics of access arrangements, they must be managed and directed by the SENCo (or equivalent member of staff). As the regulations state, it is the responsibility of the SENCo to lead on access arrangements, including decision making, performing key tasks, and acquiring answers to questions relating to specific candidates within their centre from the relevant authorities. JCQ require the head of centre, members of the senior leadership team, the SENCo/assessor and where relevant the SEN Governor to familiarise themselves with the entire contents of the *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* publication, and therefore, it is unacceptable for those named to be unaware of the regulations and to turn to the exams officer to acquire answers to questions relating to an access arrangements query.

Exams officers should, wherever possible, support colleagues and candidates within their centre, but not at the risk of leaving them with responsibility for areas beyond their knowledge, expertise, remit and pay grade, as not only is this unfair on the exams officer, but it could also lead to errors and potential malpractice.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of writing (September 2022)