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ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS: THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXAMS OFFICER

Although it would be incorrect to state that exams officers have no role to play in relation to access arrangements within their centre, it is also imperative that the role and responsibilities of the exams officer are clearly defined in this area by senior leaders.

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) regulations could not be clearer around the staff member who has ultimate responsibility for access arrangements, as detailed in its *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* publication (*Importance of these regulations, page 1*):

‘The head of centre must ensure that the SENCo has sufficient time to both manage the access arrangements process within the centre and familiarise him/herself with the JCQ publication *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*.’

It is the responsibility of the SENCo to manage all aspects of the access arrangements process.

This includes:

- a full understanding of all access arrangements and how they should be applied
- an awareness of JCQ regulations
- leading on the assessment of students
- managing the needs of students
- acquiring evidence and processing applications for access arrangements and ordering modified papers
- retaining the appropriate paperwork/evidence on file and available for inspection
- training facilitators delivering access arrangements

If the SENCo requires any support in any of the above tasks/areas, or requires any clarity of how the regulations should be implemented within their centre, they should acquire this from their senior leadership team/head of centre. Only once these steps have been taken/exhausted should JCQ be approached for clarity.

However, this does not mean that the exams officer will, or should, be excluded from involvement in access arrangements within their centre.

There are areas where the exams officer may be involved to offer support to their SENCo to reduce the workload. These include in the following five areas:

Processing access arrangements applications

If there are a significant number of approval applications to be made using *Access Arrangements Online (AAO)*, the exams officer may assist in making these applications by inputting the information into the online system as it is read out by the SENCo.

Training invigilators and facilitators

It is advisable that the SENCo and exams officer work in partnership to ensure that those facilitating access arrangements are fully trained – as required by JCQ regulations.

If an access arrangement is being facilitated on a one-to-one basis, then the facilitator is the invigilator first and foremost, and will therefore need to be trained as an invigilator and be familiar with the regulations as set out in the *Instructions for conducting examinations* publication.

Conversely, if an invigilator is in a room to observe the facilitation of an access arrangement and to supervise the candidate, they will need to be aware of the support which the facilitator can/cannot provide to a candidate.

The exams officer is best placed to train staff as invigilators and should assist their SENCo in ensuring that any staff involved in the facilitation of access arrangements for a candidate under examination conditions are appropriately trained in JCQ regulations.

Temporary/emergency access arrangements/special consideration requests

It is very likely that the exams officer will make applications for injuries sustained by students which requires a temporary access arrangement on the day of the examination.

JCQ regulations provide an example of the SENCo assuming responsibility for processing a temporary access arrangement for a candidate who has sustained a wrist injury a few days prior to their exam which requires an application for a scribe (see *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, Example 1, page 90), however, examples are also given where the exams officer assumes the role for processing special consideration applications.

Organising timetabling, rooming and seating plans

In preparation for an exams series, an exams officer will organise centre and candidate timetables, arrange rooming for examinations on each exam day, and seating arrangements (plans) for each exam room. Therefore, it is understandable – and acceptable – for the exams officer to also complete these tasks for candidates awarded access arrangements. In respect of the rooming of examinations, it may be more ‘time efficient’ for one person to have oversight across all examinations to maximise the efficient use of rooms across the centre.

Notifying candidates of their access arrangements

Notifying candidates of what they should expect in relation to their approved access arrangement(s) is a task which can be undertaken by the SENCo or the exams officer.

However, as the exams officer briefs the candidate on exam regulations and what is/is not permitted during the examination and in the exam room, it may be an appropriate opportunity to inform candidates of the approved access arrangements and/or reasonable

adjustments that have been arranged for upcoming exams/assessments. Candidates granted an access arrangement should also be informed how the arrangement(s) will be applied in exams/assessments and exceptions, if applicable, where the arrangement will not be allowed (or where different arrangements are put in place).

Conclusion

Just as the management, administration and conducting of examinations is the responsibility of the exams officer, so all matters relating to access arrangements are fall under the responsibility of the SENCo.

Although it is reasonable – even beneficial – for exams officers to be involved in certain aspects of the delivery, processing, and management of access arrangements within their centre, it should be remembered that any involvement should not detract from their day-to-day tasks. It should also be noted that exams officers should not be asked to acquire clarity over the regulations. It is the role of the SENCo to understand and implement JCQ regulations and make decisions relating to individual candidates. If a SENCo requires support, advice or guidance they should acquire this from their senior leadership team or approach the JCQ/the relevant awarding body.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (End of December 2022)