

MARCH 2024

ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS: THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXAMS OFFICER

One of the most frequently asked questions by exams officers concerns their role within the access arrangements process within their centre and the areas in which their SENCo should be taking the lead. The answer is provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) regulations on page 1 of their *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* publication - Importance of these regulations (note that the term 'SENCo' used throughout this document refers to the person appointed by the head of centre to coordinate the access arrangements process within the centre):

'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 document Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments.'

The SENCo, or an equivalent member of staff within a FE college, fully supported by teaching staff and members of the senior leadership team, must lead on the access arrangements/reasonable adjustments process within his/her centre.

Teaching staff and members of the senior leadership team must support the SENCo in identifying, determining and implementing appropriate access arrangements and reasonable adjustments.

The SENCo must work with teaching staff, support staff (such as Learning Support Assistants and Teaching Assistants) and exams office personnel to ensure that approved access arrangements/reasonable adjustments are put in place for internal school tests, mock examinations and examinations.'

This guidance could not be clearer – it is the responsibility of the SENCo (or equivalent role) to manage all aspects of the access arrangements process which 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 those facilitating access arrangements for candidates under examination conditions

If the SENCo requires any support in the tasks/areas listed above or further clarity on how the regulations should be implemented within their centre, they should acquire this from the relevant members of their senior leadership team/head of centre. Only if the senior

leadership team/head of centre are unable to provide clarity should JCQ be approached for a response.

Whilst the SENCo must lead on the management, administration and implementation of access arrangements and adjustments, this does not mean that the exams officer does not have a part to play in the access arrangements process within their centre.

There are five specific areas where an exams officer may be involved:

1. Processing applications for access arrangements and adjustments

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.

Ideally, the SENCo and/or the assessor working within the centre will process the applications on-line, and should be present when the application is being processed to ensure that all questions are answered accurately and to confirm that the legal statements have been read and accepted.

It is also the responsibility of the SENCo to ensure that all necessary documentation is in place before an application is made. Exams officers should note that an access arrangements application should not be processed unless all documentation is in place, including:

- a signed candidate personal data consent form
- a completed *Data protection confirmation by the examinations officer or SENCo* form
- appropriate evidence of need (where required)
- evidence of the assessor's qualification (where required)

It is the responsibility of the SENCo to retain a copy of the candidate's approved application and any other relevant documentation – either in electronic or hard copy paper format.

2. Training invigilators and facilitators

The SENCo and exams officer should work in partnership to ensure that those facilitating access arrangements for candidates under examination conditions are fully trained in line with 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 also 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 supervising an exam room and observing the facilitation of an access arrangement, they will need to be aware of the JCQ regulations relating to the support which the facilitator can/cannot provide to a candidate.

The exams officer is best placed to train invigilators, whilst the SENCo – with the support of the exams officer - should lead on the training for those who will be facilitating an access arrangement during an examination series.

3. Temporary/emergency access arrangements/special consideration requests

It is very likely that the exams officer will manage the process in the event of a candidate requiring a temporary access arrangement on the day of the examination.

Although 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* publication, Example 1, page 93), in many centres, the exams officer would take the lead and complete all necessary tasks in the event of a similar situation.

Also on this page of the publication, two examples are given where the exams officer assumes the role for submitting special consideration applications in the event of candidates whose performance in the examination is materially affected by temporary illness or accident/injury at the time of the assessment.

4. Organising timetabling, rooming and seating plans

In preparation for an exams series, a key role undertaken by an exams officer is to organise centre and candidate timetables, arrange rooming for examinations on each exam day, and seating arrangements (plans) for each exam room. Therefore, it is acceptable – and possibly maximising time efficiency – for an exams officer to also complete the timetabling, rooming and seating for candidates awarded access arrangements. In respect of the rooming of examinations, if one person is overseeing all rooming requirements, this may help to maximise the use of all rooms across the centre.

5. 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, if the exams officer will be briefing candidates on the regulations which apply in the examination room, and any other centre specific arrangements, it may be more appropriate for the exams officer to also issue this notification to candidates.

In addition to generic exam day/room regulations as detailed in the *Instructions for conducting examinations* publication, candidates will also need to be made aware of the approved arrangement(s)/adjustment(s) that are in place, how these will be applied in their upcoming examinations/assessments and any exception(s) where these will not be allowed (or where a different arrangement will be 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 the responsibility of the SENCo.

Although it may be reasonable – and at times, appropriate – for the exams officer to be involved in certain aspects of the delivery, processing, and implementation of access arrangements, it should be remembered that any involvement should not detract from their day-to-day tasks which must be delivered as part of their core role as exams officer. It should also be noted that exams officers should not be asked to answer queries relating to access arrangements or acquire answers/clarity over JCQ regulations. It is the role of the SENCo to understand and implement JCQ access arrangements and reasonable adjustments regulations and to manage 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 or the relevant awarding body/bodies.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (End of February 2024)