

Supporting Parents Factsheet - Summer Exams 2021

Introduction

This factsheet has been produced in response to questions and concerns raised by parents to the team on the BDA Helpline. It aims to answer the most frequently asked questions about access arrangements for GCSE, AS Level and A Level Teacher Assessed Grades which will be awarded in August 2021.

Vocational qualifications will also be awarded teacher assessed grades. Guidance should be published by the end of March. It is expected that it will largely mirror the processes and guidelines set out for GCSE and GCE qualifications.

What is a Teacher Assessed Grade?

Exams have been cancelled this summer and will be replaced by teacher assessed grades. These will be based upon evidence of a child's performance taken across different elements including classwork, coursework, and formal assessments.

Schools and colleges have been given flexibility in deciding how to collect this evidence to help them make their assessment. It is expected that each school will publish how the percentage of marks will be allocated across the different elements of classwork, coursework and formal assessments used to evidence the grade.

Will Access Arrangements be available this summer?

Children will be entitled to receive exam access arrangements as normal, and schools and colleges will continue to use the set criteria to assess who is eligible and make an application in the usual way.

When does Access Arrangements testing usually take place?

Testing children for access arrangements and making applications to the Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ) is the responsibility of your child's school or college. Most children are tested in the summer term of year 9.

For most children taking GCSE, AS Level and A Level qualifications this summer, testing and applications for Access Arrangements will have taken place in the summer term of Year 9, which was prior to the pandemic.

If you or your child is unsure whether this happened, please contact your school SENCo. There is still time to apply; the deadline for applications has been extended until 31 March 2021 and online applications will continue to be accepted after this.

Will Access Arrangements be considered during the process of deciding on how to allocate the Teacher Assessed Grades?

Teachers will need to consider any access arrangements or personal circumstances as part of the process of determining the child's grade. Access arrangements should be in place for all formal assessments.

How will schools collect evidence to demonstrate this is my child's normal way of working if she has been working remotely from home?

It is recognised that the amount of evidence to paint a picture of needs and demonstrate the normal way of working may be more limited than in previous years as many children will not have been in school with face-to-face learning over the last 12 months.

There are various ways in which schools can collect this evidence. They can ask individual subject teachers; they can also ask the child to complete a questionnaire and they can ask for comments/observations from parents.

Who decides what kind of access arrangements are granted?

Schools and colleges are responsible for collecting evidence for children who need access arrangements. This evidence needs to show that this is their "normal way of working". This would include the support they would normally have in class, any intervention strategies, support required in school tests and for mock exams and external exams.

The SENCo leads on the access arrangement process, working with teaching staff, support staff and the exams office staff. They may also work with specialist advisors, assessors or medical professionals if required. They must follow the regulations from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)

Further guidance for schools on Access Arrangements will be published at the end of March.

Do all dyslexic children get Access Arrangements?

Access arrangements are based on evidence of need and normal way of working. They allow children with specific needs to access the assessment and show what they can do without changing the needs of the assessment. Not all dyslexic children will need adjustments such as extra time to demonstrate their knowledge. Access arrangements cannot be given to a dyslexic child where they would give the child an unfair assessment advantage over other children. A school SENCo should be able to explain why an individual child may not be entitled to access arrangements.

Does my child need a formal diagnosis of Dyslexia to get access arrangements?

A formal diagnosis of dyslexia is not required and cannot be used as evidence for access arrangements. For children to receive access arrangements, schools will need to be able to provide evidence of need and demonstrate that this is the child's normal way of working. Schools will carry out their own access arrangement testing where they need to supply specific test scores as evidence of need.

What can parents do if they don't agree?

Talk to the school SENCo about your concerns to understand the basis upon which the decision has been made. If you still have concerns this can be escalated to the Head of Centre and the Governor responsibility for Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Can children with Dyslexia just be assessed on course work and formal assessments?

All children within the school must be assessed on the criteria that the school has agreed. It is expected that most schools will gather evidence from a mix of classwork, coursework and formal assessments.

My child has been told he will have to use an electronic reader rather than a human reader and this is not his normal way of working.

Schools are being encouraged to get children to use technology rather than human based support as this enables a more independent way of working which is better preparation for Further Education, Higher Education, and the workplace. Some children have had to adopt this approach as part of their home learning, and this might now be their normal way of working.

The access arrangements put in place must reflect a child's "normal way of working" and the child must have had appropriate opportunities to practice using the technology. If you have concerns that your child has not had enough time to get used to using an electronic reader, please talk to the school SENCo. Human readers can still be specified as an access arrangement.

Can my child do the access arrangement testing online as he is shielding?

Talk to the SENCo. JCQ have advised that remote assessments can be undertaken where necessary, if they are in accordance with the professional guidance given by the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) and within the test publisher's guidelines.

My child moved to college last September. The college say there's not enough evidence to give him his Access Arrangements he had at school.

This can be a challenge for FE colleges where there has been insufficient face to face contact to gather evidence to support online application for access arrangements. The college is advised to talk to the previous school, even where there may not be an established working relationship, the school is encouraged to assist the college by sending a copy of a fully completed Form 8.

The learning support team in the college can use this evidence to help them determine whether the access arrangements are still appropriate, practicable and reasonable, and then process a new online application for access arrangements.

Additional Needs/Learning Support Teams will need to check that the Form 8 is in order before making a new online application.

Further Questions?

Call our helpline team on 0333 405 4567

- Tuesday 10am-1pm
- Wednesday 10am-1pm
- Thursday 1pm-3pm

Or email your questions to: helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk

Ask your individual questions to our panel of experts at our free webinar for Parents on Friday 9th April at 7pm - no need to register, simply join the link from our website on the night.

Useful resources

Content and assessment for 28 subjects. Help your child learn, retain, and recall information for GCSE: www.gcsepod.com

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) Download a full guide to Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments 2020/21: www.jcq.org.uk

Here you can see a YouTube video that looks at what access arrangements are available and how to apply for them:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hgRcGVwn4g>