



**Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)
Exams Access Working Group**

Exams Access Guidance for Young People
Who Rely Upon AAC

Functional Skills, T-Levels, BTECs, GCSEs and A-Levels

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For the academic year 2025/26



Foreword

This document has been created to support the access to examinations of students using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

The document will be reviewed annually.

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Introduction

This document is suitable for parents, guardians, and professionals as well as classroom teachers, SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) and Exams Officers in schools.

This guidance has been developed by the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Exams Access Working Group and **must** be used in conjunction with individual exam board guidance documents.

The aim of the document is to provide an overview on how best to support a person who uses Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) to appropriately access formal testing and exams.

The setting must put forward evidence of the Normal Ways of Working by the student for the exam boards and the access arrangements for the examinations must be agreed with the exam board in advance of the examination and in-line with the timescales outlined in the exam board 's criteria.

What is the Exams Access Working Group?

A group of professionals, parents/carers and suppliers of AAC equipment from across the UK, who have experience of AAC exams access arrangements for a range of key-stages.

The group meets 2-3 times annually to discuss best practice and to develop guidance for parents/carers and educational settings on requesting exams access arrangements for those young people using any form of AAC for communication and to access the curriculum.

You can find out more information and join the discussion at our website:

<https://aac.examsaccess.group/>

Why is the Working Group Needed?

Every young person should have the right to demonstrate their academic ability using the most suitable access method.

Students using AAC may require independent access to tests and exams using a variety of access adaptations. The adaptations required will be unique to each individual student, may be complex and must reflect their Normal Ways of Working in the classroom.

This working group has begun to look at how these needs should inform exams access provision under the JCQ access arrangements and reasonable adjustments.

The group is considering all other national testing guidelines and the impact they have on the young person on the access to all exams and testing from Key Stage 1 (KS1) onwards for students who rely on AAC.

What is AAC?

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) supplements or replaces speech or writing for communication. AAC can take the form of paper-based communication systems such as pen and paper, objects, signing and books with pictures or symbols.

High-tech communication systems include systems that need some sort of power to work, for example, single or multiple message devices that you can record on to, as well as other devices such as computers and tablets that can convert symbols, text, signs or pictures to a voice output.

AAC is the tool to support communication and access to the curriculum. An AAC user may have other needs or disabilities such as;

- A physical impairment
- A learning difficulty
- Communication and Interaction needs (ASD)
- A sensory impairment (e.g. MSI, hearing or visual impairment)
- Social, emotional and mental health needs
- A degenerative condition

An AAC user may have all or none of the above.

Some examples of conditions that may require AAC may include but are not exhaustive: Cerebral Palsy, Motor Neurone Disease, Autism Spectrum Condition or an Acquired Brain Injury.

What Should be Considered when Supporting a Person Using AAC to Access Exams?

- A robust and accurate Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) from as early on in the person's academic career as possible
- Established and documented Normal Ways of Working for that individual throughout their education and starting as early as possible. For more information on Normal Ways of Working please refer to that section within this document.
- Normal Ways of Working and adaptations need to ensure that the integrity and security of the examinations are not affected.
- Training and up-skilling of support staff in modifying approaches to enable the person to access the curriculum. This may also include training those staff to invigilate examinations that the person will be taking. This will apply to all ages right from Early Years onwards to ensure that Normal Ways of Working are established for the young person. Transitions between settings are particularly important to ensure any new staff are upskilled as quickly as possible in providing the adaptations needed for the young person.

- Education Health and Care Plan to be reviewed often in light of the training staff have taken, taking into consideration the preferences of the student around their normal ways of working.
- Relevant therapists and professionals working with the person to review the physical environment that the exams will be taking place in. This will ensure things like the table height, light, acoustics and positioning of any equipment is thought out and planned for in advance. This must include practical accommodations such as a room with sockets to plug in communication aids, or enough light for a device to pick up the eye movements of a student using eye gaze technology. Although not exhaustive, some examples of therapists that may be involved with supporting adaptations to the environment may include condition-specific specialists (such as professionals with knowledge in Autism), Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Speech and Language Therapists, AAC professionals and professionals with knowledge in physical impairments.
- Consideration needs to be taken around having spare communication aids and other IT equipment on standby for the timing of the examination. This would mean there would be 'back up' device available for that student should something go wrong with the equipment they are using during the examination.
- Requests for the exams access arrangements as part of the Normal Ways of Working for the person and that all timelines to submit the access arrangements are followed in accordance with individual examination board's defined timescales.
- Evidence gathering around Normal Ways of Working and adaptations that may need to be requested by the setting. Gathering evidence may require timing the young person during mock tests, measuring their energy levels and gaining evidence from professionals around accommodations. Please see the appendix of the document where you can find an 'Exam Observation Form' that will guide your evidence collection.
- Reasoning given for why a reasonable adjustment is not being made in reference to the Equality Act.

It's never too early to begin thinking about and planning for access to examinations!

Normal Ways of Working 4.2.5

“The arrangement(s) put in place must reflect the support given to the candidate in the centre, for example:

- in the classroom (where appropriate);
- working in small groups for reading and/or writing;
- support in lessons;
- intervention strategies;
- in internal school tests/examinations;
- mock examinations.

This is commonly referred to as ‘normal way of working’.”

Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ) Adjustments for candidates with disabilities and learning difficulties, Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments (2025) page 32

Normal Ways of Working as detailed above apply to all key-stages and may change over time due to changes in needs of the person as well as changes in access to technology. Normal Ways of Working include reasonable adjustments as required by the Equality Act (2010).

Normal Ways of Working must be established as early in advance of the examinations as possible. The centre must put forward evidence of the Normal Ways of Working for the exam boards and the access arrangements for the examinations must be agreed with the exam board in advance, and be in line with the individual exam board criteria.

Evidence will include:

- An introduction or summary of the person’s needs. This may include pictures, videos and transcripts
- Summary of mock examinations including;
 - What adaptations were used
 - What extra time was needed for the person to complete the paper at their own pace
 - What breaks were needed such as food or comfort breaks
 - Where the examinations were conducted/what physical considerations were needed for accommodation
- Reports from professionals detailing any special considerations needed for the person (e.g. reports from occupational therapist on positioning, doctors’ advice on medical needs etc.)
- Results from standardised tests (if relevant) such as reading speed of the person, that will inform exam access arrangements

The person’s EHCP must be up-to-date and relevant and include normal ways of working, reasonable adjustments and exams access arrangements. Each reasonable adjustment and Normal Ways of Working is individual to that student and needs to be reflected in the ECHP accurately.

Care needs to be taken with who will support the person in their examinations in order to access their normal ways of working. A familiar and qualified person must be identified well in advance

and given chance to learn the person's normal ways of working. This may include supporting the young person with their communication, becoming a scribe, or being a practical assistant (such as turning the page of the paper copy of the paper). They must be extremely confident with any technology the person is using in case of problems with the technology during the examination.

Where possible the person should be supported to complete the exams as independently as possible, and so the staff supporting the person in the examination must be confident with and trained in exams regulations as well as using this approach as Normal Ways of Working before the examinations. The person should also have good subject knowledge, where appropriate, so that they understand the student's work. It is a useful suggestion that the adult supporting the young person in everyday lessons is not the scribe in exams but rather a second familiar person takes up this role in exam conditions. This is to ensure that the familiar adult does not unknowingly give non-verbal prompts to the young person, which could jeopardize the examination.

Quality and consistency of the team around the person is needed. This is to ensure that more than one person is trained up to support during examinations in case of illness or unforeseen circumstances.

Exam Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments for Students Who Rely on AAC

The full guidance for access arrangements can be found on the JCQ website at www.jcq.org.uk for examinations of GCSE and equivalent. The guidance is updated annually, usually in late August for the following academic year. It is important to look at the correct academic year guidance as changes are made each year.

In respect of GCSE exams and equivalent the following is relevant to the needs of students who rely on AAC, all taken from the Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* (September 2025).

The Equality Act and Examinations

The exam boards have a duty under the 2010 Equality Act to ensure that no person with a disability is disadvantaged.

‘The duty for an awarding body to make a reasonable adjustment will apply where assessment arrangements would put a disabled candidate at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to somebody who is not disabled. The awarding body is required to take reasonable steps to overcome that disadvantage.’ (Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025)

Substantial Impairment – Evidence of Need 5.2.3

It is likely that students who rely on AAC will fall into JCQ’s category of substantial needs. It is important to note that a student’s needs may not be addressed in the guidance and there is provision for this as follows:

‘A reasonable adjustment may be unique to that individual and may not be included in the list of available exam access arrangements’

‘Each application will be considered individually. The response will relate primarily to the effect the requested adjustment might have on the competence and ability being tested in the qualification, as well as the reliability and validity of the assessment. (Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025) page 24

Professional Judgements in Sitting Examinations

“3.1 The centre must assess each prospective learner and make justifiable and professional judgements about the learner’s potential to successfully complete and achieve the qualifications. Such an assessment must identify, where appropriate, the support that will be made available to the learner to facilitate access to the qualifications.”

(Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025) page 28

Recording Normal Ways of Working

As detailed in this document and in the Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* (2025) document, ‘Normal ways of working’ must be fully embedded in the young person’s routine.

“4.2.4 Access arrangements/reasonable adjustments should be processed at the **start** of the course. Schools, for example, should be able to process applications at the start of or during the first year of a two-year GCSE course having firmly established a picture of need and Normal Ways of Working during Years 7 to 9.”

Page 32

We recommend that access arrangements are recorded and refined as early on as possible in the young person’s academic career. This is to ensure the young person is confident with the access arrangement and to ensure there is sufficient evidence to submit when the access arrangements are required to have been reported to the exam board.

“4.2.5 The arrangement(s) put in place **must** reflect the support given to the candidate in the centred for example:

- in the classroom (where appropriate);
- working in small groups for reading and/or writing;
- support lessons;
- intervention strategies;
- in internal school tests/examinations;
- mock examinations.”

(Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025) page 32

Extra Time 5.2, 5.3, 5.4

Page 40 of the document Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* (2025) refers to a speed of writing assessment 5.2.2 which will be crucial in establishing the extra time a student who relies on AAC requires. If a pupil is required to have extra time during an examination, evidence must be submitted to prove this is the case during normal practice.

Extra time over 50% will be considered only in 'very exceptional circumstances' (Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025). Many students who rely on AAC will have very exceptional circumstances and may need up to 600% extra time as it takes much longer to use AAC as it would do with verbal or written methods. This will need justifying and schools/assessment centres will need to demonstrate that fatigue will not be a detrimental factor if a student is given substantial extra time. Frequent rest breaks are allowed, and the time taken in rest breaks will not be counted in the extra time provided. All tests and mock exams should be timed with a note made on the paper of the point which the student had reached at the normal time allowed for the paper. This demonstrates the extent to which the time allowed disadvantages the student.

Computer Readers 5.5

Many centres believe that computer readers cannot be used. This is a myth. Page 52 (of the document Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* 2025) specify that a computer reader (not a reader in the form of a person reading) can be used for all of the GCSE English papers, reading sections of modern foreign languages papers and in Functional skills English except in the Reading paper.

The table on page 57/60 of the document clearly outlines when a computer reader and a human reader can be used.

Please be aware that not all PDF documents and computer readers are compatible, and this will need to be checked well in advance of the examination.

Scribe, Word Prediction and Speech Recognition 5.7.2

The use of word prediction and examinations is often misunderstood. Word prediction can be used in most examinations, if it is used as normal way of working. Section 5.7 of the document *Joint Council for Qualifications Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments (2025)* covers the facility to use word prediction and spell checking in all but modern foreign languages.

The student will lose marks for spelling in examinations when using word prediction, but this will often be preferable to the marks likely to be lost without this facility.

Where the centre has approval for the use of a scribe and where it reflects the candidate's Normal Ways of Working within the centre, as appropriate to his/her needs, the candidate may alternatively use:

- a word processor with the spelling and grammar check facility enabled; (NB This arrangement will not be permitted in ELC, GCSE and GCE AS and A-Level Modern Foreign Language specifications. See paragraph 5.7.5)
- a word processor with predictive text/spelling and grammar check facility enabled; (NB This arrangement will not be permitted in ELC, GCSE and GCE Modern Foreign Language specifications. See paragraph 5.7.6.) A scribe or speech recognition technology software will not be allowed if a candidate's literacy difficulties are primarily caused by English, Irish or Welsh not being his/her first language.
- speech recognition technology with predictive text when the candidate dictates into a word processor. Software (a screen reader) may be used to read back and correct the candidate's dictated answers; (NB This arrangement will not be permitted in ELC, GCSE and GCE Modern Foreign Language specifications. See paragraph 5.7.4)
- computer software, producing speech, which is used to dictate to a scribe. However, the candidate will not have access to marks awarded for spelling, punctuation and/or grammar unless he/she has independently dictated spelling, punctuation and/or grammar, and this has been recorded on the scribe cover sheet.

It is advisable for students to have back-up systems available, such as an additional device pre-loaded with the examination, in case of technology failure at the time of the examination.

5.7.12 "The rules – the use of a scribe

- must type or write accurately, and at a reasonable speed, what the candidate has said;
- must draw or add to maps, diagrams and graphs strictly in accordance with the candidate's instructions, unless the candidate is taking a design paper, in which case a scribe will only be permitted to assist with the written parts of the paper;

- must abide by the regulations since failure to do so could lead to the disqualification of the candidate;
- must write or word process a correction on a typescript or Braille sheet if requested to do so by the candidate;
- must immediately refer any problems in communication during the examination to the invigilator or examinations officer;
- must not give factual help to the candidate or indicate when the answer is complete;
- must not advise the candidate on which questions to do, when to move on to the next question, or the order in which questions should be answered;
- may, at the candidate's request, read back what has been recorded."

(Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025) page 67

Students chosen means of communication need to be available at all times during the teaching time and during the examination.

Prompting 5.10.1 -2

"A candidate may be assisted by a prompter who can keep him/her focused on the need to answer a question and then move on to answering the next question." (Joint Council of Qualifications, *Instructions for conducting examinations*, 2025) page 71

It is common for students who rely on AAC to have difficulty with sense of time, loss of concentration and/or be affected by obsessive behaviours leading to them continuing to revise a question rather than moving on. A prompter would be able to support the student with focus and time management.

Language Modification 5.11

Page 38 of the Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* (2025) describes the role of a language modifier who is able to modify the language of the exam paper but NOT explain technical terms nor subject specific terms. Their role is to provide support to students who have 'persistent and significant difficulties in accessing and processing information'. An oral language modifier must have completed the relevant qualification, and there are strict instructions on what they can or cannot say in an examination. The instructions around what a language modifier can do is set out in section 5.11 with an additional appendix in the same document which can be used as a memory aid.

It is to be noted that when language modification is needed in examinations, there also needs to be an invigilator present. Before the examination series, the language modifier for the candidate needs to be familiar with the candidate and a trial of the examination with the language modifier

present needs to be completed. Language modifiers need to provide a cover sheet which describes, in detail, any changes that they have made to wordings in exams.

Practical Assistant 5.14

Section 5.14 of Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* (2025) outlines the role of a practical assistant who is able to take instructions from the learner and carry out physical tasks as instructed by the learner, provided the exam component is NOT testing a physical skill. A practical assistant is not a reader or scribe.

A student may qualify for a practical assistant in addition to other adult-supported access arrangements such as a reader or a scribe. This may be the same person in the exam but each individual regulation for each role must be adhered to.

A practical assistant is an arrangement that needs to be negotiated with the exam board. A practical assistant is not usually permitted in some examinations that have an examined practical element to them such as a music examination or a design technology examination.

“5.14.7 The Rules- The use of a practical assistant:

- **must** perform practical tasks as **approved by the awarding body** and according to the candidate’s instructions, unless the skill to be performed is the focus of the assessment, (in which case the practical assistant **will not** be permitted) or the procedure would be unsafe;
- **must** immediately refer any problems in communication during the assessment to the invigilator or examinations officer;
- **must abide by the regulations since failure to do so could lead to the disqualification of the candidate;**
- must ensure the safety of the candidate and those around him/her;
- **must not** give factual help to the candidate or indicate when the task is complete;
- **must not** advise the candidate on which questions to do, when to move on to the next question, or the order in which questions should be answered;
- **may** ask the candidate to repeat instructions where these are not clear.”

(Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025 page 79)

The JCQ in their document *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments, 2025* give some examples of students and the allowance of practical assistants.

SENCOs and subject teachers need to be aware that practical assistant cannot be used in examinations that are testing a student's practical skills, and therefore thought needs to be taken around which examinations in that subject will be taken by the student.

The exam board will reject an application for a practical assistant when the examination is testing a practical skill that the student needs practical help with such as the practical element of a Design Technology course that requires the student to perform specific practical tasks within the examination.

Alternative Sites for Examinations 5.15

Section 5.15 of Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments (2025)* outlines alternative sites for examinations. Examinations can be taken at an alternative site such as a residential address or a hospital for reasons such as a long-term or short-term illness or severe difficulties in accessing the examination centre. Within the Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments, 2025* document, there are instructions on what the centre or setting needs to do when requesting an alternative location.

"5.15.1 The candidate will be sitting his/her examination(s) at a residential address or at a hospital which is a non-registered centre due to, for example:

- a medical condition which prevents the candidate from taking examinations in the centre; or
- social, emotional and mental health needs.

The candidate has:

- an impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect giving rise to persistent and significant difficulties; or
- a temporary illness or injury at the time of the examination(s).

The SENCO, or a senior member of staff with pastoral responsibilities, must:

- be satisfied that the candidate is able to take examinations;
- produce written evidence confirming the need for an alternative site arrangement to a JCQ Centre Inspector upon request."

(Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments, 2025* section 5.15)

The AAC Exams Access Working Group have known of several examples where students have been permitted to take their examinations in an alternative location.

Other arrangements 5.16

Section 5.16 provides examples of arrangements that can be made to accommodate students with specific disabilities.

“For the arrangements detailed below, there is not a requirement to process an application using Access arrangements online. No evidence is needed to support the arrangement for inspection purposes.

- Alternative rooming arrangements, e.g. a room for a smaller group of candidates with similar needs (formerly known as separate invigilation)
- Amplification equipment
- Blank sheet of paper for doodling, where a candidate has persistent and significant concentration difficulties.
- Braille
- Colour naming by the invigilator for candidates who are colour blind
- Coloured overlays (this would also include reading rulers, virtual overlays and virtual reading rulers)
- Examination on coloured/enlarged paper
- Fidget toys and stress balls
- Low vision aid/magnifier
- Non-electronic headphones
- Optical Character Reader (OCR) scanners
- Timer on a candidate’s desk – a small countdown clock, a small analogue or digital clock, digital timer
- Squared paper for visual spatial difficulties.”

(Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025 page 81)

Exemptions 5.17

5.17 provides for disabled candidates to miss a component or components of the exam. An indication placed on the candidate’s certificate to show that not all assessment objectives were accessible.

“An exemption must:

- not undermine the integrity of the qualification.
- only be granted as a last resort when no other arrangement is available.

- only apply to whole components.
- only apply where the candidate cannot demonstrate any of the skills;
- make up no more than 40% of a linear or unitised GCSE or GCE qualification. For unitised GCE A-level qualifications at least one A2 unit must be completed.
- only apply in general qualifications (see Chapter 1, sections 1.6 and 1.8 for the list of general qualifications covered by equality legislation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

An exemption will not be granted if an alternative and accessible route through a qualification is available to the candidate.”

(Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, 2025 page 83)

Timetable Variations Requiring Overnight Supervision for a Candidate with a Disability 5.21

For students that require significant extra time due to their needs, consideration should be made regarding timetable variations. This is particularly important as the student will need to be supervised between examinations when the subsequent examination has already been taken by the student’s peers. Whilst timetables can be varied so that students can take the next examination at a later time, the student, family and setting must work together to show that the integrity of the examination is not jeopardized.

“5.22.2 An application for a timetable variation may be processed where a candidate has:

- a formally diagnosed medical condition; or
- a physical disability; or
- social, emotional and mental health needs; or
- a visual impairment.

Formal evidence must be available to confirm the candidate’s impairment.

The SENCo must complete Form 9 confirming the candidate’s disability and the need for a timetable variation.

Access arrangements online will approve applications where only one examination in the series is being transferred from the published afternoon session to the following morning.

The centre will be required to confirm that the candidate and their parent(s)/ carer(s) will adhere to the requirements for overnight supervision. A completed overnight supervision declaration form must be completed and be available for inspection.”

Modified Papers 6.1

Chapter 6 of Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* (2025) outlines the arrangements that can be made for modified papers. Exam boards can provide modified papers except in circumstances where substantial modification is required. Modifications that may be needed for a young person using AAC may include a non-interactive PDF version of the paper, so that the pupil can view the paper electronically. This section also explains other considerations that AAC pupils may need in addition to their AAC needs such as a paper in another language or enlarged print.

There is a significant lengthy timeframe to follow, to allow for the exam boards to modify upcoming papers. For example, in the summer of 2019, an exam board provided a pdf version of an 'online only' exam, this took 8 weeks to prepare.

The SENCo and Exams Officer need to be mindful that the deadline for an application for modified papers is much earlier than other access arrangements.

If a student is unable to access an exam in the original formats, it may be added to the student's specialist software if negotiated with the exam board and the right evidence has been submitted. This needs to be part of their Normal Ways of Working and is deemed as an exceptional circumstance.

Please refer to the latest Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* for timings on submitting requests for modifying papers.

Alternative Assessments 1.7.3

Page 18 of Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* (2025) covers the situation which arises when reasonable adjustments cannot provide the candidate to sit their exams where a candidate is disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010.

“For an awarding body to determine grades using alternative assessment evidence, the candidate **must** have undertaken a course of study which has allowed the demonstration of the knowledge, skills and understanding as required by the awarding body's specification. All suitable

reasonable adjustments **must** have been considered and exhausted by the centre. There must be no other reasonable adjustments which would allow the candidate to sit their examinations.

The centre **must** have securely retained suitable alternative assessment evidence which is a sufficient representation of the requirements of the awarding body's specification **and** can be compared to the resulting national standard for the examination series to allow the awarding body to determine a grade. The centre will be required to confirm to the awarding body that the alternative assessment evidence submitted is the candidate's own unaided work. The awarding body will determine a grade that aligns with the national standard set for examinations and other formal assessments, and not the candidate's teacher."

Joint Council for Qualifications *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* (2025) pg 20.

Access Arrangements Examples

To the AAC Exams Access Working Group's knowledge, there have been several access arrangements agreed across England for candidates who rely on AAC that fall outside the scope of what is described in the JCQ document; *Adjustments for Candidates with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*.

These included:

- Exam papers being written into vocabulary software to facilitate access and recording of answers
- Up to 600% extra time
- The use of symbol-based vocabularies
- The inclusion of quotes for English Literature on the student's AAC device (although randomised so that the student still has to identify the appropriate quote)
- The use of sentence starters and key words (provided that they do not provide an unfair advantage)
- The provision of reduced time demand through special consideration. This means that the exam board agrees to a shorter paper being provided which still tests the required skills to pass the examination without loss of marks.

New accommodations are being requested and developed each year for individuals and so this list of accommodations for exam access will grow over time.

A student who relies on AAC will need to use all of the language on their device in order to not be at a substantial disadvantage.

Roles and Responsibilities of People Involved

Various professionals should be involved in ensuring the young person can access examinations, and at various points in the young person's academic career.

Figure 1. Shows a list of professionals that could be involved in supporting the young person's access arrangements.

Figure 1.

Access to Exams for Students Who Rely on AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication)

The People Involved.

Home	Day to day in School	School Management	External	Supporting Exams
Student	Student	Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)	Educational Psychologist (EP)	Practical assistants
Parents	Peers	Exams Officer	Speech and Language Therapist (SALT)	Invigilators
Extended family	Teaching assistants (TA)	AAC teacher coordinator	Occupational Therapist (OT)	Reader
Professionals supporting in the home	Subject teachers	Specialist advisory teacher/AAC coordinator	Suppliers of AT (Assistive Technology) and AAC devices	Scribe
Personal assistants in the home (PA)	AAC teacher coordinator		Exam Board representative	Prompter
Private tutor			Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)	Communication professional
			Assistive Technology (AT) specialist	
			Relevant professionals from the Local Authority (LA)	

Figure 2 shows the roles and responsibilities of those professionals involved with AAC exams access and considerations that may need to be made from an early stage.

Figure 2.

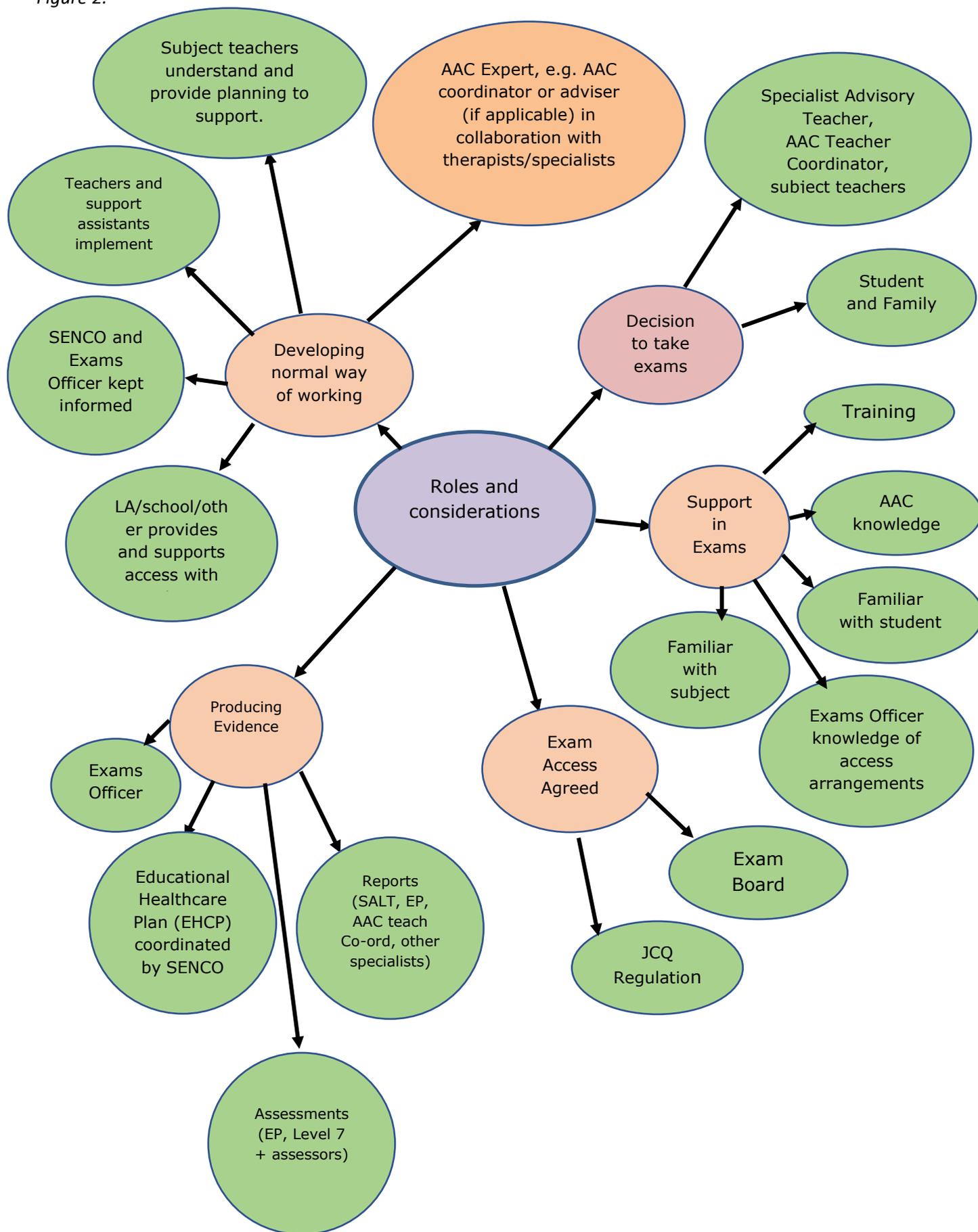
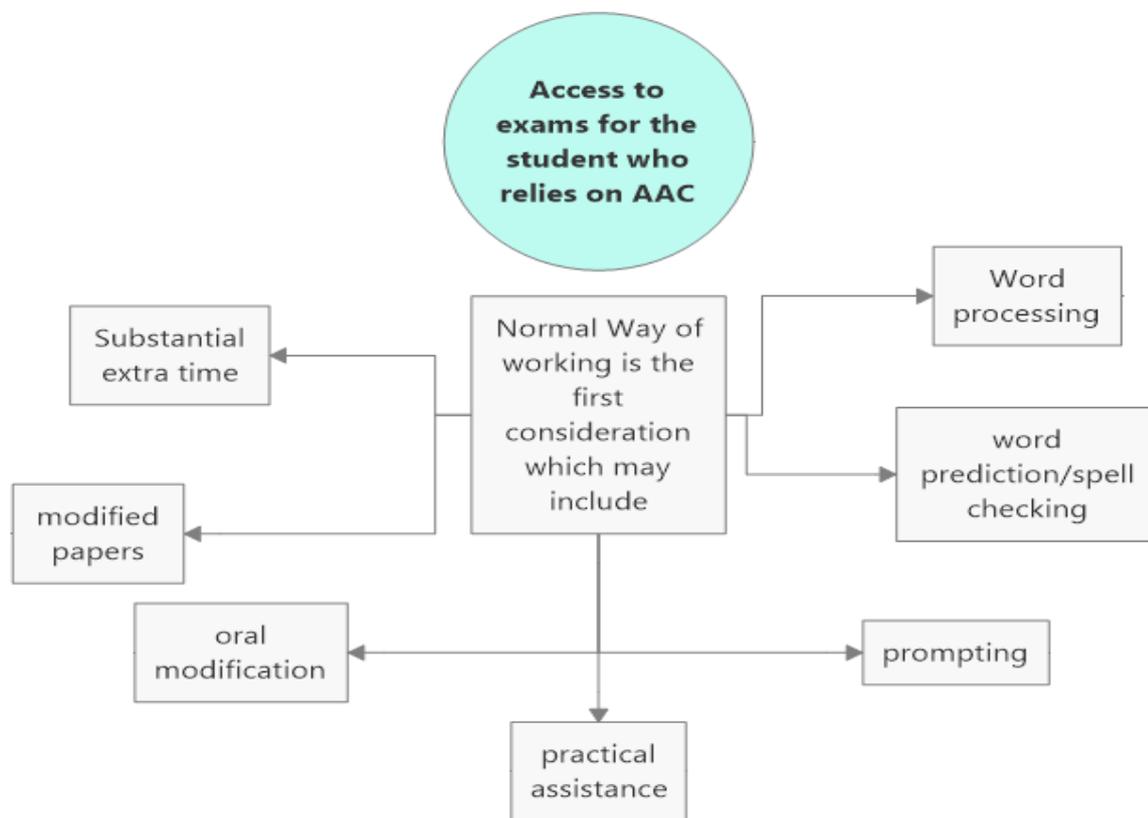


Figure 3 shows some of the access arrangements that can be requested for young people who rely on AAC.

Figure 3.



References

Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments for candidates with disabilities and learning difficulties, (2024) Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ)

Joint Council of Qualifications, *Instructions for conducting examinations, 2024*

Further Information and Guidance

Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Pupils: Guidance for Schools in England, Equality and Human Rights Commission (2015) www.equalityhumanrights.com

Instructions for Conducting Examinations, Joint Council for Qualifications, (updated annually) www.jcq.org.uk

AAC Exams Access Working Group, contacted via aacexamaccess@gmail.com and meet several times a year to review this guidance document.

Communication Matters, www.communicationmatters.org.uk

Appendix 1 Monitoring and evidence collection form

This form can be used by the student’s teachers to record the support the student needs in their lessons. There is a space for observations made. This document would be useful for evidence collection when used across multiple subject lessons.

Monitoring Form – Teacher Feedback

Date returned by:

Student Name			
Subject		Teacher	

Please use X to indicate answer.

<u>Additional Needs</u>		No concerns	Requires occasional support	Requires continuous support	Not applicable
Concentration: Staying on task, ignoring distractions, focusing on the teacher, remembering instructions etc.					
Organisational Skills: Physical organisation of self and equipment, planning ahead with work, thinking about consequences before actions etc.					
Speech and Language: Understanding their first spoken language, acquiring new vocabulary, ability to express themselves clearly in sentences etc.					
English / Literacy	Reading: Ability to read a paragraph or more with ease and fluency.				
	Spelling: Ability to consistently spell common words and make a good attempt at unfamiliar words.				
	Extended Writing: Ability to write a correctly punctuated paragraph or more with ease and fluency.				
	Handwriting: Ability to write legibly, with ease and at a pace equivalent to peers.(If needs support, complete the Handwriting Legibility Scale (HLS) form and speak to class OT)				
Word Processor: Does the pupil need/use a computer for typing during regular lessons?					
Numeracy/Maths: Demonstrating a basic grasp of number, algebra, data, shape / space and measure etc.					
Physical/Hearing/Visual: Ability to access all activities despite physical, hearing or visual difficulty etc.					
Social: Forming and maintaining positive relationships, conforming to social norms etc.					
Emotional: Showing awareness of own feelings and that of others, managing feelings, confidence etc.					
Homework/Coursework: Ability to study independently, to produce work to deadlines etc.					
Exams: Ability to prepare for and sit an exam without close adult support.					

Overall, how well is this student progressing in your lesson/s? (please include Functional skills/ GCSE targets & current attainment where possible)

If you wish to recommend this pupil for a specific access arrangement, please complete the 3 observations on 3 different dates/ times of day (if possible):

Observation 1: Date: _____ Time: _____

Observation 2: Date: _____ Time: _____

Observation 3: Date: _____ Time: _____

Case Study 1 - Student H

Accessing GCSE Exams

Brief description of needs/abilities

H has a diagnosis of Athetoid Cerebral Palsy, affecting her whole body with continuous movements of her limbs. For exams, she uses a voice-output communication aid in the form of a large computer screen, with a mount that sustains the screen on her desk. The screen is a touchscreen and H writes using a large cells keyboard with word prediction. H is not an eye-gaze user, and she needs physical support to be accurate when touching the screen. This is because H has significant uncontrolled movement making it very difficult for her to make intentional selections in any access method. H's preferred way to communicate is a low-tech spelling board however this is only used for validation (H can independently select yes/no and single letters on the board), and informal conversations. In lessons, H has a GridPad which is carried in a backpack to each class. H attended mainstream lessons, and the resources were adapted in Grid3 for her to be able to access. The support staff H has can help her to type. In this way, H can interact with teachers and peers and complete tasks assigned during lessons.

Since H was in year 9, AAC TAs and AAC teachers have been gathering evidence of H's normal way of working. This consisted of recording the duration of a test (how long H needed to complete an assessment), duration of breaks, and number of breaks as this varied depending on the subject; for example, a maths test required fewer breaks because the physical effort was considerably less than an English or History assessment.

The Normal Ways of Working included the way the assessment and mock exams were adapted on Grid3. H used keywords, sentence starters, quotes, literary techniques, formulas, and extra pictures to help her working memory issues. All these reasonable adjustments had been agreed with H's classroom teachers throughout the years, and this allowed H to obtain from the different exam boards the Exam Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments we asked for her GCSEs.

Negotiations with Exam Boards

H had different exam boards depending on the subject and ultimately, we negotiated with four.

We provided the evidence we gathered in three years to the SENCo, who brilliantly managed the negotiation with the exam boards. We were involved in the process only if more evidence was required.

H obtained 600% of extra time to complete each paper. She had been allowed sentence starters, key words, quotes, literary techniques, formulas, and extra visual information as H is unable to physically scribble (this was vital in a Mathematics test). H had a separate room from her peers, and invigilators came in and out without notice while testing.

The exam boards (History and English) initially rejected our proposed timetable however they agreed on splitting the exam over two days, applying for special consideration as a disadvantaged candidate after the exam. H had been exempted from parts of English and History without compromising her marks.

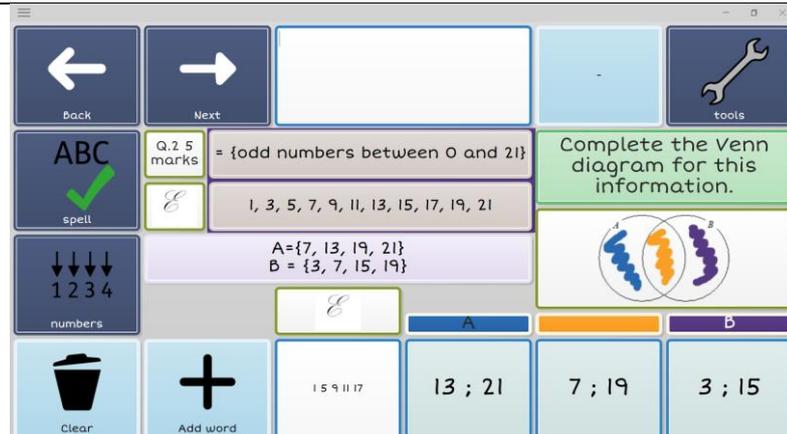
Teachers planning the adaptation for H had been advised to strike a balance between overloading H with too many quotes to choose from and with uploading so few that you are supplying answers for her to use. To be able to adapt and upload the exam papers on Grid3, teachers could open the papers 24 hours prior to the starting time.

H took almost 7 weeks to complete English, History, Maths, and Science. She worked 4 hours a day, 5 days a week, with a week of half term after the second week of exams.

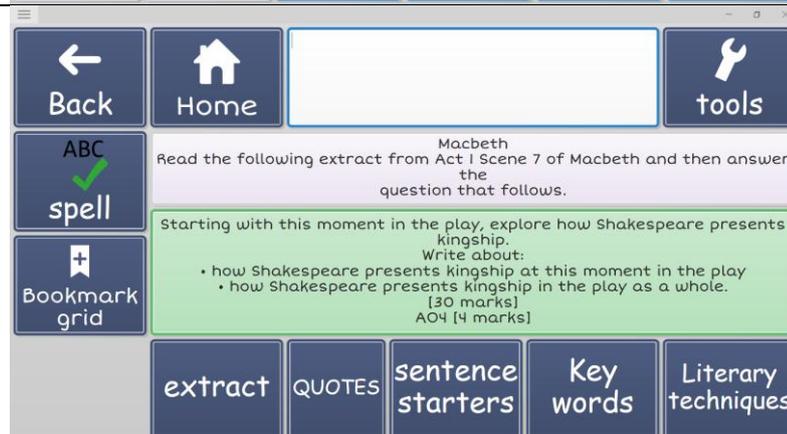
Access arrangements put in place (Assistive Technology/Communication)

Low-tech board was used only for validation.

Mathematics: a Venn diagram question.



English: an example of the index page.



Time Management Strategies

H was granted 600% of extra time. When applying for extra time, we provided evidence of the length of the breaks she needed and the number of breaks during the day, taken from practice papers and conditions.

Room Requirements

H uses VOCA, therefore, was allowed a separate room from her peers. This is also because of her concentration issues (she gets very easily distracted and very scared by sudden noise). H was taken to the communal area during breaks for food and toilet breaks. During this time, she was supervised by members of staff to avoid any interaction with her peers (H's classmates were ahead with their exams compared to H).

Outcome of Assessments

H achieved a 6 in Maths (Higher option), a 5 in English literature, a 3 in English language, 5 in History and 43 in Science.

Thanks to this, she is now attending 6th form in a mainstream college and would like to attend university next.

We are again in the process of applying for exam arrangements for her Year 13 exams.

Key Lessons Learned

Evidence of the student's Normal Ways of Working has to be gathered well in advance. The more details you have, the highest chances are that you will obtain the special arrangements you are asking for.

Unforeseen events can happen; however, mock exam sessions and simulations can really help to arrive on the day of the official examination well prepared.

Case Study 2- Student D

Accessing GCSE Exams

Brief description of needs/abilities
Student D has CP affecting all four limbs and speech as well as resulting some specific learning difficulties including short term and working memory difficulty. He uses eye gaze to access his curriculum using a Grid Pad 12 supplied by a local hub. He has attended mainstream school since Y3 and has had specialist AAC support throughout this time.
Negotiations with Exam Boards
I was asked to be involved with negotiations with exam boards in January of Y11 in addition to the SENCo and Exams Officer involvement. I visited the student to observe him accessing curriculum and assessments as part of his Normal Ways of Working. I contributed to the reports sent to the exam boards by the setting. I also answered specific queries from the exam board.
Access arrangements put in place (Assistive Technology/Communication)
Exams adapted and put into blank templates in Grid 3.
Early access to exam papers Exams to be opened at 7am on the day of publishing for converting into the accessible format using accessible software. <i>Excerpt from Exam Board communications:</i> “... if you need earlier access to the PDF exam paper at 7.00am to give you more time to upload onto Student D’s device. In the latter case, we can arrange to have the papers securely emailed to you... Access to the paper must be kept to essential persons only.”
Extra time agreed <i>Excerpt from Exam Board communications:</i> “Each session must be treated as a separate exam so that on the second day, the student cannot be allowed to go back over any pages that they have already seen in the previous session, even if they left some of this work unfinished at the end of the first session. Care must be taken to protect the integrity of the exam at all times. To ensure that the student does not have an unfair advantage over any other student, they must only have access to the section of the paper that they will be completing in each session. If the student has access to a whole question/section and only completes part of it on day one, he would not be able to continue with that question the following day. Instead, he would have to move on to the next question. If the student does complete either paper on the scheduled date the same principle applies. He must be given section A in the first session and section B in the second session and cannot continue with a partially completed question after a substantial rest break. Shorter rest breaks within a session are subject to normal JCQ regulations.”

Exams to be sat over two concurrent days

Excerpt from Exam Board communications:

“On each occasion a timetable variation has been agreed, Student D must remain under centre or parental supervision from 9.30am on the day they start each exam until he finishes the exam the following day. At the end of day one, the paper and partially completed script must be kept securely overnight as must the papers completed by the rest of the cohort. They should all be sent off together once the candidate has completed his exam and his script has been added to those of the rest of the cohort.”

Time Management Strategies

- Asked for and granted special consideration for 3 combined science papers, this meant that he started all exams with cohort
- Regular rest breaks
- Prompting

Room Requirements

- Individual room with no distractions at movement times.
- Ground floor room because of ongoing problems with lift in school
- Room/equipment to do physio

Outcome of Assessments

- Exams completed in summer 2023 – awaiting results
- Hoping to go in to 6th form to study BTEC Media

Key Lessons Learned

- Start early – in Y7 or earlier if possible
- Be consistent in delivery of assessments and exams in the student’s Normal Way of Working
- Keep a file of evidence on the student’s ability to access the practice papers
- Follow guidance about how to prepare exams for the student
- Recommend purchasing ABBYY FineReader PDF Reader to convert exam papers from pdf format into a word document on your local machine for ease of adapting the exam into Grid 3. You need to ensure you keep this system secure when converting the format.

Exam help and glossary pages added to existing grids and used as part of Normal Ways of Working.

Instructions to instruct an adult for equipment or to use equipment when needed.

Back		Rest eye gaze			
Evaluate	Examine	Explain	Explore	Give	Give reasons
How?	How far? How successfully?	Identify	Illustrate	Interpret	Justify
List	Modify	Name	Outline	Persuade	Predict

Back	up	left	draw point	rub out
Rest eye gaze	down	right	draw line	start again
maths symbols	use a protractor	use a pair of compasses	measure angle	measure length
superscript	use a ruler	use a whiteboard	number line	count in
tools	blank number line	write numbers	count on	count back

Record kept of time taken and rest breaks for future reference and to show the exam boards if requested.

All text to be read out loud – even in English reading papers

Time Management Strategies

- Regular rest breaks, practiced and refined in terms of timings during practice sessions
- Prompting to keep on task/start next question

Room Requirements

- Individual room with no distractions at movement times
- Room allowance as student uses a VOCA. (Voice Output Communication Aid)

Outcome of Assessments

Functional Skills English

- Entry Level 2 achieved February 23
- Entry Level 3 achieved May 23

Functional Skills Maths

- Entry Level 2 achieved Jan 23
- Entry Level 3 achieved April 23

Having achieved the above the student will be moving to a new setting in September 23 to study BTEC Media, Level 1 English and Maths

Key Lessons Learned

- Start early- student has benefitted from having clear and consistent layout in Grid 3 for all assessments, which is designed to meet their access needs in the best possible way.
- Keep records of times needed during practice questions and full assessments.
- Be consistent with approaches within the classroom that will translate and be used in the examinations.

Case Study 4 – Student M

Accessing GCSE Exams

Brief description of needs/abilities

M has a diagnosis of dystonic quadriplegia (a four-limb affected type of cerebral palsy) and associated gastro-oesophageal reflux. M's muscle tone is generally low and often increases with intentional effort, excitement, or frustration. M presents with severe and significant problems with speech sound production with features of both dysarthria and dyspraxia. His cerebral palsy also impacts on his executive functioning and processing.

M's Normal Ways of Working uses a mixture of technology, which he accesses through eye gaze with head switch, joystick, dictating to a familiar adult who understands his speech and scribes onto a computer, AAC Device (mounted in a way that it is accessible when working at a table, alongside his laptop), iPad for display of resources and Immersive Reader and 2 maths software Splash!2 and EfofEx.

M can use eye gaze effectively and quickly however in a mainstream school he often chose not to move his eye gaze laptop/camera around as it took time to set up. He used a joystick as an alternative as it was immediate to set up. M used his eye gaze for over learning in the learning support base, attached to a large screen.

Negotiations with Exam Boards

The Exams Officer (EO) is very experienced and has completed the process for lots of young people however never for such a complex case, it was a challenge to get agreements from the exam boards.

The school has been slowly gathering evidence over the years about M's normal way of working. Regularly documents and information were saved about how he accesses recording and learning. Regular Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings with outside agencies supporting with technology and advice for exams. SENCO worked closely with the EO to gather information about his exams access.

All the information for the application to the exam board is done online, and then once an application is declined there is a system of emails. Requests that go beyond the norm (e.g. 25% extra time) are rejected as a matter of course, this flags it as a unique case. Then the EO has to complete an online form to write more details about the request and has a chance to explain why M needs the particular arrangements. Once this happens then the conversation can continue via email.

If phone calls are made, is it helpful to understand that the first person answering the phones doesn't have the knowledge/authority to answer more specific and complex questions. It's important to talk to the right person such as the 'Special Requirements Department'. You need to get a named person to write to. A quote from the Exams Officer: 'you will get there eventually you just have to keep on'. The Special Requirements Department might be called something slightly different depending on the board. If you do phone up, she advised always put everything you discuss back to the named person in an e-mail so there is a paper trail, if you get inspected you will need to show this.

It's useful to work as a team, each person has their own expertise, EO to work very closely with the SENCo and the teaching assistants (TAs) supporting the young person as well as the teachers who have knowledge of what papers the young person should be taking. Advice from outside teams (in this case County Advisory Teachers) is useful to help support applications, giving useful detail about the reasons for the Normal Ways of Working. It was also useful to get reports from therapists, particularly Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy, to support aspects of the exams such as rest breaks and extra time and the reasonings for this.

The request for Exams Access Arrangements was adapted and updated as more information was known, ideally we would use his stats at the end of Y9, however because of COVID lockdown this process was delayed. Evidence was kept of timed exams including extra time needed, how long the exam over ran, how much work was completed in the time, tasks the young person did and what task the teaching assistants did as a scribe / practical assistant, how the software and how eye gaze equipment was used. Filming the facilitation helped with documenting the normal way of working. TAs had scribing training and facilitation training.

Initially when the school asked for splitting the papers overnight, the Exam Board declined to split the paper. After the mocks it became clear that M did not have enough time to complete the exam in one day, it was recorded and was clear that he did not have enough energy to complete the exam in one day, the exam questions would have to be split overnight if he was to succeed in answering the paper.

The exams timetable had been published and the timetable meant the exams were very close together. There were eight solid days of exams. The Exams Officer went back to the Exam Board to ask the question via e-mail about splitting the papers.

Meanwhile in February the SENCO also wrote to the Exam Board and raised the Disability Act, that they should be changing the exams to enable the young person to achieve his potential. There then followed some good discussions about what was possible.

The Exam Board responded to the school and suggested that M could have an adapted exam timetable where he could drop some papers but still achieve his GCSE's and split them over night.

There was a meeting between the teachers, the student and his parents to talk about whether dropping a paper was a good solution, initially the parents were very concerned, because they felt it might impact on his end grades if he was only going to be assessed on two papers rather than three. In the end it was decided that the number of papers M would be adjusted.

His teachers were involved in the decision making, it was decided that he would sit one English Language paper, sit the maths calculator paper, the physics afternoon paper, which was also brought forward to the morning started at 10 on the same day. They also decided to enter M into the foundation paper physics paper, as splitting the higher-level paper would have been very challenging as the harder questions would all be on the second day.

Overnight supervision: there was a meeting with the family and the school to discuss how overnight supervision would need to be implemented. There was an agreement made that there would be no contact with peers during the overnight between the first and second parts of an exam.

Clear evidence was gathered using a timing sheet for an exam detail of everything, time stopped, length of work, length of rest break extra time, details are all needed and evidenced from exams and work were gathered. Wordlists for his communication aid was applied for, it required having specific words but also having extra choice words, so it wasn't just a list of keywords

Rest breaks: These were allowed, and he could have as much as he wanted but there was a limit to how long you could have before the day becomes too long and tiredness stops you doing the exam.

Access arrangements put in place (Assistive Technology/Communication)

Modified Papers

Exam papers - modified papers were used larger so that they were visually accessible, we didn't have them for him on the computer, he had them on his desk on a stand, these had to be ordered by the 31st of January for all subjects.



Touch Screen Laptop

M uses a touch screen laptop, he accesses it by using the equipment below;

Joystick connected by Bluetooth to the laptop. Controls the mouse pointer and is mounted on the left side of his wheelchair. It also drives his Powerchair.

Bluetooth switch and receiver - acts as a right click on the mouse

Eye Gaze Camera

This image shows M with (from right)

AAC communication Aid
Laptop
iPad
External keyboard and mouse.
Bluetooth switch (red) is mounted on his head rest, red edge just visible.

Out of shot are his CJSM2 joystick mounted on the left side of the chair.

His Eye gaze camera is not in use in the lesson for this image.

There is software on the computer which allows the camera to read M's eye movements and translate that into movements of the mouse. This is an alternative to the Joystick which he uses for some lessons. Having both access methods allows him to use the best one for the task.

Eye gaze was used for precise work such as marking a point on a graph or drawing tasks in iMedia

Software used for Examinations:

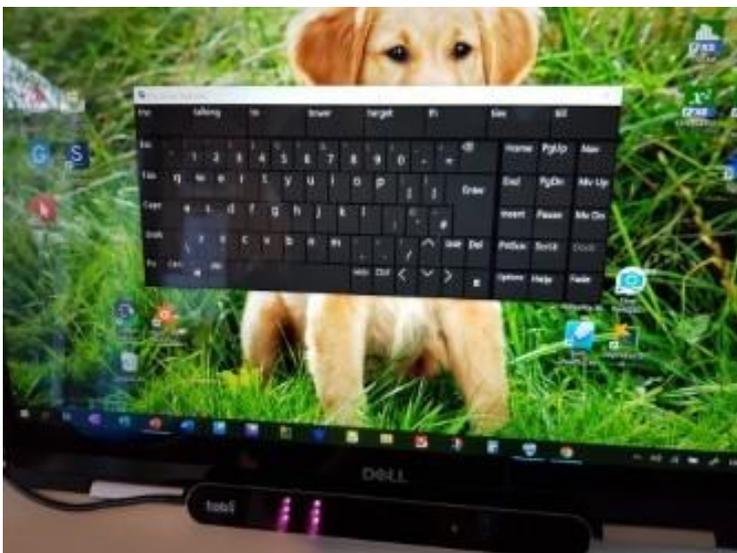
- EFOFEX with adaptations set in exam mode with answer features disabled such as graphs
- Splash!2 for some drawing and maths tasks

iPad which is used as a second screen to access resources e.g. PowerPoints from the Teacher, Exam questions, Source documents.

He used the iPad for formula sheets and with word lists

External keyboard with mouse pad for scribe

External mouse for scribe



On Screen Keyboard

Windows on screen keyboard with 5 cells of word prediction.

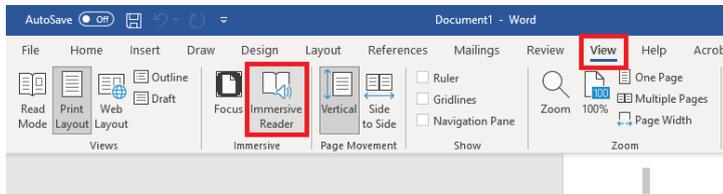


VOCA (Voice Output Communication Aid)

The electronic communication aid acts as a voice for M. He has a Grid Pad with Grid 3 software and uses the Fast Talker grids. He accesses it by EyeGaze using the in-built camera.

He can type unique messages on it which will then speak it. The qwerty keyboard has 5 predictive cells, this acts as M’s voice and is not part of his assessed answers.

M can also select from pre-banked phrases to direct his practical assistant.



Immersive Reader

M uses Immersive Reader to read longer pieces of writing. He has it read aloud with highlighting at the same time. This supports his tracking across the screen and reduces fatigue.

Immersive Reader also increases the text size and line spacing to make onscreen reading clearer

This was agreed with special permission as it works online.

Time Management Strategies

- Additional time for exams was agreed at 400% extra time: the extra time was agreed as M needed extra time for processing and thinking about the answers to questions, it takes him longer and with a lot of effort to say the answers, it takes longer for him to use his eye gaze to complete questions
- M had to have more rest breaks, the rest breaks were put in for: toilet, drinking, eating and movement breaks.

Room Requirements

- The exam board were not particularly interested in the room he was using as much as the exam conditions he was examined in
- He had a familiar room in learning support, where he had room to manoeuvre in his power chair, this was close to the accessible bathroom

- The room was a quiet space where all the technology could stay set up, he was able to dictate, use his eye gaze, have breaks when he needed
- M had a known adult supporting his answers, and one extra person as the invigilator

Outcome of Assessments

- D* for iMedia
- 6 Maths
- 4 English Language
- 5 Physics
- M now is at a local college and studying Gaming level 2. They have immediately accepted all the exam concessions that he had at school for any exams in college

Key Lessons Learned

- People who answer the phones for the exam board are just the first port of call they don't have any answers or any specialist knowledge
- Always e-mail the board so that you have a paper trail
- Start gathering evidence from Year 7 onwards
- Work together as a team: you will need advice from the Exams Officer(EO), SENCO, TAs and teachers that support the young person, advice about technology and reasons for its use from outside agencies or school technicians. Therapists can give support for extra time by explaining why it is needed.
- Always link with the key person for the school at the exam board
- Useful to have the school IT department on board, as they can help explain any disabling of features that are needed, and this can be reassuring for the exams officer and the exam board as they understand the software
- Apply for everything that you need even if it's only for a small amount of the exams
- Mocks are useful for fine tuning the process and detailing the Normal Ways of Working
- You are a team, gather the information and make decisions together, regular meetings and support each other especially for the EO who has to go back to the board, its hard work.
- The exams officer was very honest and said she was initially very nervous about getting the exams access arrangements for him, it was important that she'd got to know him and understand the way he was working so she could go back to the exam board with clear information
- You can start applying at the end of Year 9 and an application can be changed as his Normal Ways of Working involves it's important to get why a young person is using particular software and needs a particular access
- Apply for everything you could possibly want to use, even the smallest thing
- The IT Technician was invaluable, being onsite everyday and happy to support with all items of technology. She also helped to set up a spare laptop with all required software and settings as a backup for the exam period. Although she did not take part in applying for the EAA, she understood the EAAs and supported the team through the exam period.

Case Study 5 – Student G

Accessing AS and A-Levels

Brief description of needs/abilities

G has Cerebral Palsy affecting all four limbs. Eye gaze doesn't work for this YP. Her speech is not clear, and she gets fatigued very easily

Negotiations with Exam Boards

The initial application for exam access arrangements started in year 12. Once the request was made to the exam board the negotiations began. The Schools Specialist Teacher and Assessor (STA) at the school was the key person liaising with the exam board. The STA made sure that she had a named person to liaise with via email, the phone and Microsoft Teams. All phone calls and Teams meetings were followed up with an email confirming the information that had been discussed.

The school collected evidence together including timed examples of exams, mock exams evidence and class work, including annotations of how the work had been done and the facilitation required. The team needed to make an assessment of the amount of extra time she would need to sit the exam papers including rest breaks and we also needed to calculate how long the young person could work between rests.

Through Teams meetings with the exam board the extra time was agreed first. Using the evidence from schoolwork so far.

Initially the exam board agreed:

- Enlarged bold print copies of the exam papers
- A separate large screen for English and maths
- G will need to give detailed instructions to her practical assistant when using the calculator

The request for overnight splitting of exams, was taken back to the exam board seniors and was agreed with appropriate supervision in place over night.

Once the exam timetable was published, the English paper 1 clashed with the Maths paper 1, so although 500% extra time had been agreed it was impossible for G to sit both English and maths exams, on the same day and as it was also 2 days before half term. The Exam board absolutely refused to moving the exam forward for the student.

Through negotiation the exam board agreed that G could be assessed for her English paper 1 and sit her Maths exam over two days. So in lock-down-style the school were allowed to present evidence of G's ability from the teacher evidence and course work she had already completed in class and during the timed mocks.

The exam board said no to a human reader for English and the STA had to go back several times to request this and present evidence. The English teachers gave additional information about the exam and the STA was able to make a case which was agreed:

- An e-reader cannot pick out and read the handwritten elements within a photograph which a human reader could

- e-readers cannot accurately represent these conventions aloud
- The e-reader in Microsoft Edge cannot read the symbols of the IPA and, as far as I can tell, neither can Adobe.
- Since the student is entitled to use of the English Phonemic Reference sheet contained on the exam paper, not being able to access this part of the exam paper nor to have her own use of these symbols read back to her from her written work would put her at a significant disadvantage compared to her peers.

The technology G used was negotiated, she was not allowed to use the tablet, but she was allowed to use the visualiser. She was able to point to key formula on a list and at the beginning of the exam the formula written down.

Just before the exams started there was a problem with the interactive paper for Maths, the exam board decided that it is not possible to provide it as they have decided that they can't split it. There was a bit of a communication blip here when the email from exam board wasn't received. They used the visualiser instead.

Access arrangements put in place (Assistive Technology/Communication)

<p>German A level:</p>	<p>She was exempt from German speaking test, as although she could speak German, the speaking part of the exam also tested a YP knowledge of current affairs and the YP would have been at a disadvantage because of her limited knowledge of the world and the extra processing required.</p> <p>She was allowed to dictate without spelling</p> <p>She was allowed a human reader, who read the paragraph twice, but she could have had repeats as many times as she wanted. As the recording was too quick</p>
<p>English A level: 500% extra time and over night splitting</p>	<p>Lap top set with use of PDF editor (Adobe Acrobat) for note making during the English exam annotating questions or reading the paper. Making notes in different colours.</p> <p>Comments were added to the document using the PDF system e.g. colours allocated to different types of notes</p> <p>The familiar TA had an external keyboard and G scribed</p> <p>External screen set up</p> <p>TA trained and this set up was practised at home and at school.</p> <p>Split screen with one side pdf/exam paper and one side she could record answer</p> <p>Exemption from paper 1, replaced with evidence from continuous assessment as there was a clash of exams and timing.</p>

<p>Maths AS level: 400% extra time over night splitting</p>	<p>Student A will also have correctly enlarged paper copies and a standard pdf paper on one of the monitors for the Maths exams Exam papers opened on laptop Opened Microsoft word on a large external screen where G dictated answers. Font size, background colour was preprepared Handwritten answers on enlarged paper using the visualiser They were allowed to use Efofex software The visualizer was used, provided the same functionality that the graphics tablet allowed with an interactive paper</p>
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Set up for exams showing access to the laptop and visualiser.

Time Management Strategies

- 400% extra time for AS maths
- 500% extra time for A level English
- 400% extra time for A level German

Room Requirements

- Room on her own, she had it set up before the exam and she knew and was familiar with the room
- Large room for wheelchair near to accessible toilet see photos below

Outcome of Assessments

- German A level grade A*
- English A Level predicted grade A
- Maths AS level predicted grade A
- G is having a year off and will then look to apply for university place in future.

Key Lessons Learned

- You need to know the demands of the exam papers and what they are examining to put the case clearly to the exam board for requesting Normal Ways of Working e.g. human reader in English A level
- You need to work as a whole team to get the information together in the detail that the exam board need to help justify and evidence the request. Including timed work examples, details of Normal Ways of Working so the exam officer at school understands it thoroughly, work already completed to show level if exempt from exam or section of the exam

Case Study 6- Student J

Accessing GCSE Exams

Brief description of needs/abilities

Student J is at mainstream secondary accessing GCSE exams. They have 4-limb cerebral palsy and Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI). They have flip laptop (HP Spectre 360) in an envelope mount, on a Deassy desk stand which is accessed via a mounted PointIt Joystick with two spec switches situated either side of it, which they control with their chin. They use Mind Express software with Amego and an onscreen high contrast keyboard, with DocsPlus for alternative pen for written recording as well as Microsoft word. They have some intelligible speech which is affected by breath control and posture, their AAC is a backup for when they are not understood.

Their Normal Ways of Working in class is to go between scribing and using DocsPlus with word bars, sentence starters and writing frames. During mocks they were achieving a Level 4-5 at GCSE level, with a reduced timetable and catch up sessions. Work is presented to them either on A3 paper with text size of more than 20-point font, or an ipad which is at eye level in front of them so that they can see lesson objectives and don't need to see the interactive whiteboard. They scribe to an adult, who documents this digitally on the laptop, this is then given to the student who adds the punctuation, grammar themselves. This was their choice. Due to difficulties with working memory, they would get their ideas down quickly in this manner, then concentrate on SPAG.

Negotiations with Exam Boards

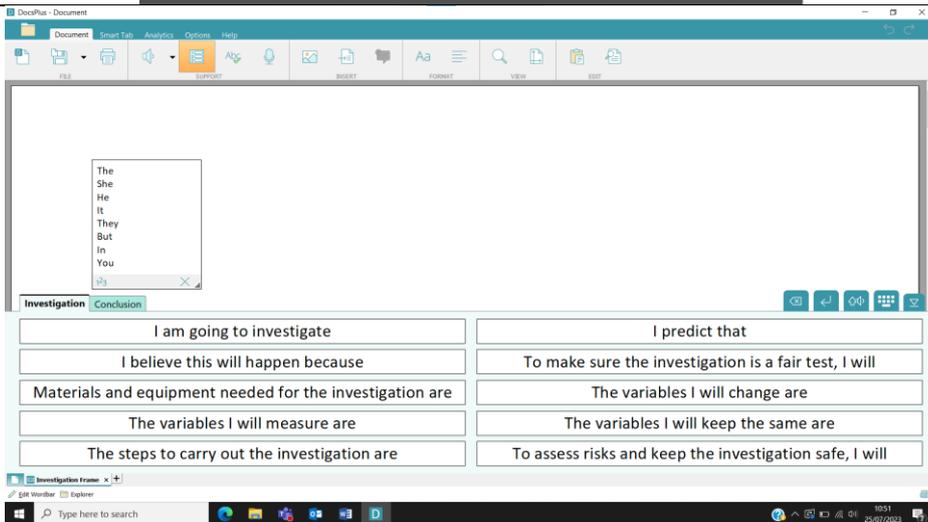
Exam boards were happy to accept 100% extra time, own space, rest breaks and stop the clock. They had use of DocsPlus in exam mode, under word processor, reader and scribe rules. In English Language the computer reader within DocsPlus was agreed, as well as in English Literature. English Literature was completed a year early, so that there was less to do in Year 11. French however was more difficult, it was agreed that student J would be disallowed from the speaking and listening and the grade would be given for the written part. As a result they got a grade 5 at GCSE. Papers for all exams were requested in digital PDF format so that they could be used with a screen reader, this took away the need for them to be enlarged as this could be done independently onscreen.

Exam boards also agreed to a scribe under JCQ guidance, where student J was able to dictate answers to questions in the exam to a responsible adult onto computer software. The adult wrote exactly what the student said onto the computer, this was then given back to the student who added SPAG, including paragraphs and additional information. As part of this 'normal ways of working' were demonstrated and sent to the exam board who agreed on first response.

Access arrangements put in place (Assistive Technology/Communication)



Screenshot of Amego keyboard, high contrast settings, this was set to use over DocsPlus instead of the standard DocsPlus keyboard. QWERTY was the student's choice of layout.



Screenshot of DocsPlus writing frame for science discussion; using exam mode prediction was agreed alongside word bars as has been normal way of working.



Bluetooth Version

This is a stock photo to indicate the type of set up used, a cup for chin, with two switches either side. Student J has theirs in a bespoke casing, to support saliva management.

Time Management Strategies

- 100% additional time was agreed as student has been assessed that they take longer to complete a question in comparison to their non-disabled peers
- Stop the clock was awarded as were rest breaks for care and drinks.

Room Requirements

- Student was in a separate room with the invigilator and scribe, with their laptop with room to move their wheelchair. The room was near to the accessible toilet that has their hoist and toilet chair in.

Outcome of Assessments

- Student has spent the following year on from GCSE's taking the higher papers as they wanted to try to get above level 5. They intend to move onto A-Levels after that.

Key Lessons Learned

- DocsPlus has been fairly straightforward for the exam boards to grant access to, as it has the exams mode already installed. It may have been easier, given that the student began to want to use Word over DocsPlus as they moved through Secondary, to use a program such as ReadWrite over Word.

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