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Resources to support autistic pupils with exams

Exams can be a stressful for all students, particularly for autistic children and young people who may struggle with revision and the exams themselves. We have put together a number of articles and resources for school staff on how to best support autistic pupils with exams.

Network Autism have published various articles on supporting autistic students with exams:

[Preparing autistic children and young people for exams:](#) this is a practical article on supporting students with GCSE exams

[Supporting autistic pupils with exams:](#) gives practical advice on special arrangements and on preparing students.

[How do autistic children access tests in mainstream primary schools?](#) Rebecca Wood, by Rebecca Wood, Research Fellow: Autism, Education and Inclusion, University of Birmingham looks at how children access tests in mainstream primary schools and how inclusion can be improved. Rebecca also gave Network Autism her [Top 5 autism tips for professionals: helping autistic children access tests in mainstream primary schools](#)

The National Autistic Society [Exam guidance for parents and education professionals](#) explores some of the particular challenges autistic pupils and students might face during exams, and what may help, looking at:

- the difficulties for autistic young people
- making appropriate exam choices
- exam preparation and revision planning
- support strategies
- special arrangements for exams.

Author: Nathalie Dick, Information Officer, Network Autism
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Sunderland Autism Outreach Team has produced this [advice for staff, parents and students](#).

Blogs

There are various blogs giving insight on the difficulties of sitting exams for autistic students:

- [How to support children with autism with exams](#), this is a blog from a SEN teacher who also has a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome.
- [Testing times – what it’s like to sit an exam as an autistic child](#) is another article, by Rebecca Wood
- [Aspergers and Exams](#): is a blog from an autistic person on their experience of exams
- Special Needs Jungle: [Exams Access Arrangements: what are they and who gets them](#)

Main exam boards access arrangements

The Equality Act 2010 (Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland) makes it unlawful for responsible bodies, for example schools and authorities, to discriminate against disabled pupils and students. Discrimination includes a failure to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils or students to allow them to fully participate in their education, including exams.

Below are links to the access arrangements pages of the main exam boards in the UK:

- Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ): [Access arrangements, Reasonable adjustments and Special Consideration](#) and AAO: [Access arrangements online](#)
- Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA): [Access Arrangements & Special Consideration](#)
- AQA: [Access arrangements](#)
- Edexcel: [Exams special arrangements](#)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA examinations (OCR): [Access arrangements](#)
- University of Cambridge International Examinations: [Access arrangements](#)
- Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC): <http://www.wjec.co.uk/exam-officers/special-requirements>
- Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) - [Assessment arrangements](#):

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Music exam board ABRSM has specific information for [candidates with autistic spectrum disorders](#) and there is downloadable [fair access information for candidates with autistic spectrum disorders](#)

Further and higher education

The Equality and Human Rights Commission offers [guidance on avoiding discrimination of disabled students](#). It explains the distinction between making reasonable adjustments to exam arrangements, but not making them to competence standards, such as the admission criteria required to get onto a particular course, or a pass mark to an exam:

- 5.39 The duty of FE and HE institutions to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students does not apply to a provision, criterion or practice that constitutes a competence standard.

Competence standards para 7.33-7.38, including: 7.38:

- Although there is no duty to make reasonable adjustments to the application of a competence standard, such a duty does apply to the process by which competence is assessed. So although an education provider has no duty to alter a competence standard, it needs to consider whether or not a reasonable adjustment could be made to some aspect of the process by which it assesses a competence standard.
- *Example: When assessing the competence standard of a person's ability to read French it would be a reasonable adjustment to provide a visually impaired student with text in large font (if that was the adjustment the student required).*

Competence standards (8.)

- The application of a competence standard is not a provision, criterion or practice for the purposes of the reasonable adjustments duty and therefore a qualifications body does not have to make reasonable adjustments to the application of a competence standard.
- The application of a competence standard to a disabled person is not disability discrimination unless it constitutes indirect discrimination.

Access Arrangements:

- Access Arrangements allow candidates/learners with special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries to access the assessment without changing the demands of the assessment.
- A reasonable adjustment for a particular person may be unique to that individual and may not be included in the list of available Access Arrangements.

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- How reasonable the adjustment is will depend on a number of factors including the needs of the disabled candidate/learner. An adjustment may not be considered reasonable if it involves unreasonable costs, timeframes or affects the security or integrity of the assessment.

(Thanks to Andrew Cutting, Specialist Exclusions & Alternative Provision Advice Coordinator for the National Autistic Society for the information on competence standards and access arrangements of this section.)

Autism & Uni

Autism & Uni is a European-funded initiative to help autistic students navigate the transition from school to university. It has a specific section on [how to manage exams](#). This is primarily aimed at students, but would be useful for staff too. Universities can also download an [online toolkit](#) and [best practice guides](#) to support students.

Education Resources

We have also collated more general resources for education professionals to help support autistic students: [Back to school: autism resources for school staff](#)

Network Autism education groups

The following Network Autism groups are for professionals working in nurseries, primary and secondary schools. You can view resources added by other professionals and share in discussions on various topics.

Group content is only available to Network Autism members. It's free and quick to register:

- [Nursery autism resources](#)
- [Education professionals in primary schools](#)
- [Education professionals in secondary schools](#)