

DYSLEXIA, EXAMS and REVISION

SATs EXAM CONCESSIONS

Assessments (known informally as SATs) are administered at the end of Key Stage 1 at 7 years, KS2 at 11 years, and KS3 at 14 years. Dyslexics are allowed certain concessions and schools now have guidelines on what concessions they can make.

Local Education Authority (LEA) schools wanting to make special arrangements for pupils must notify an LEA representative who monitors the situation. Non-LEA schools should contact QCA. An Educational Psychologist assessment is not needed for special arrangements for the tests.

Copies of booklets on Assessment and reporting arrangements are available free of charge from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) ☎ 08700 60 60 15

Email: info@qca.org.uk Web: www.qca.org.uk

Remember, however that the SATS are partly to identify areas of difficulty both for the school and nationally, so in some ways it is a test of the level the child is working at under normal circumstances.

GCSE, GCE 'A' levels and NVQ EXAM CONCESSIONS

The need for exam concessions should normally be considered during year 9. Parents, teachers, the candidate and the psychologist should discuss together whether special provision is necessary for the student. This decision will be based on the degree of the pupil's dyslexia, the nature of his or her difficulties and how they relate to the specific exam subjects chosen. Some students may also decide they do not want any special provision.

The joint forum for GCSE and GCE has now approved Dyslexia Trained Teachers to prepare reports on candidates with dyslexia seeking special provision. Also Heads and Principals of Centres are empowered to grant

additional time up to a maximum of 25% of examination time, and/or rest breaks, to examination candidates with special requirements, having seen appropriate evidence of need, without reference to the exam boards.

Other Concessions

It is up to the school or other examination centre to apply for special arrangements to the individual exam board. The boards should be notified early on if special provision will be required throughout course work, otherwise they should be informed early in the second year of the course. It is important to note that a pupil does **not** need to have a statement of SEN to be considered for special provision. What will be needed is a recent report by an Educational Psychologist or dyslexia trained teacher, made within a period of up to two years prior to the exams and preferably as near to the exam as possible so it can be based on up to date information.

The report needs to contain information to an agreed format but basically it will look at historical evidence of difficulties, details of the degree of difficulty and evidence that the diagnosis of dyslexia or specific learning difficulties was reached as a result of recognised tests. The report will therefore look at such things as reading ability, spelling ability and speed of working, and also at the student's normal way of working for example use of a computer. Depending on the results of this assessment and the exam being taken, the following are possible concessions that may be allowed.

A reader to read out the questions.

Extra time, up to 25%.

A transcript of the candidate's paper, either to correct poor handwriting or in the case of an interpreted transcript to correct spelling. (Thus allowing the examiner to read the answers clearly).

The use of a word processor or typewriter. (In the case of a word processor the spellchecker must be disabled and any relevant software removed).

Use of an amanuensis (person to take dictation). Dictation of response onto tape will only be allowed in very exceptional circumstances.

Supervised breaks or rest periods, in or outside the examination room.

The duration of the break will not be deducted from the time allowed for the exam.

Making the Best use of Exam Concessions

It is important that a decision about what concessions will be allowed should be made as early as possible, so the student is clear what allowances they are getting and can practise exam techniques with whatever is offered e.g. extra time or dictation etc. Obviously it would be extremely helpful if the student is allowed the same concessions in their mock exams.

When it comes to best use of extra time it is well worth sitting down with your child and going through each exam paper and working out how best to use this time. (Copies of previous exam papers can usually be obtained from school or direct from the exam boards - see end of article).

Endorsements on Certificates

You may also want to take into account that when an amanuensis is used, the final certificates may be endorsed since the candidate's ability to spell, punctuate or use grammar cannot be assessed. Also there is now a set criteria for the marking of spelling, grammar and punctuation and this means that a mark of between 0-5 is awarded under these criteria (equivalent to 5% of the marks). It is felt that many dyslexics might gain some marks with this criteria and the worst that can happen is that no marks would be awarded, but there would be no endorsement of the certificate which would happen if this exemption was granted.

Differences with Concessions in English Language Exams

It is also worth noting that in the case of the English Language exam no allowance is normally given if such provision would affect the assessment of the skills being examined. Therefore it's unlikely that a reader or transcript would be allowed and exemption from the marking of spelling, punctuation and grammar would also not be permitted. In the case of English Literature however this is treated as for other exams and these concessions may be allowed.

Booklet on GCSE Exam Special Arrangements

It's probably worth getting a copy of the booklet on GCSE exam special arrangements produced the Joint Council for GCSE Qualifications ☎ 02076 38 42 25 or www.jcqq.org.uk . This is updated annually and there are sometimes changes. You will need to be as well informed as possible yourself so that you can arrange to meet with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) at school and check that all the appropriate arrangements are being made.

Making Sure you have the Timetable

As the exams draw close make sure your child has a timetable detailing exactly what allowances they have for each exam. This is important because if extra time is given, start or finish times may differ from other candidates or if a reader or amanuensis is used it will be necessary for the candidate to be in a separate room.

REVISION

To help your child with revision you can contact the exam boards for each subject (you'll need to find these out from the school) and get copies of past papers, syllabuses and even course work samples, all of which can be very useful.

OCR (GCSE)	☎ 01223 55 39 98
OCR (NVQ)	☎ 02476 47 00 33
AQA (NEAB)	☎ 01619 53 11 80
AQA (AEB SEG)	☎ 01483 50 65 06
Edexcel	☎ 08702 40 98 00

Both Channel 4 (☎ 08701 24 64 44) and BBC (☎ 0870 8 30 80 00) produce catalogues of their educational programmes on the television. Many of these are worth videoing so your child can use them as a revision aid by for example going over a specific area in geography or in science. See also,

BBC Bitesize Revision www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/

BBC revision guides www.bbc.co.uk/schools/revision/

There are several books around on helping dyslexic students to study and in particular Tony Buzan's books on *mind mapping* are very useful.

www.buzanworld.com He also produces videos, audio cassettes and computer programs which focus on how to use *mind maps* instead of writing notes for revision. The Science Co-ordination Group produce a very good series of revision guides for GCSE, on a wide range of subjects, which use lots of coloured pictures and small amounts of text. ☎ 08707 50 12 32 www.cpgbooks.co.uk

If you have a computer especially one with a CD Rom there are now a variety of programs available on GCSE revision topics and many contain guides to help plan revision, video and sound clips to aid visual and auditory memory and exam type questions to practise. Some make rather grand claims-"Pass your GCSE or your money back!", but if you can afford it some of these might be worth a try. (REM produce quite a detailed catalogue of educational programmes ☎ 01458 25 36 36, there are also quite a few available at W H Smith).

An Internet search using the topic "GCSE revision" will also produce a wide range of publications and websites to help with study skills and revision.

Sarah Wright (CDA Chairperson)