

The Young ME Sufferers Trust

School Examinations and ME



We all know only too well that examinations and ME do not easily mix, because of 'brain fog'. However, they are a part of educational life and, like all education, they can be modified to suit the needs of children and young people with ME. *The first step* for all students is to speak with their exams officer and SENCO and plan well in advance of the exam dates.

There are two main aspects...

1 Access Arrangements

This is the term used for making arrangements in advance of the exam, to ensure that all students are on a level playing field, irrespective of disability.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) defines the intention of Access Arrangements as 'to meet the particular needs of an individual candidate without affecting the integrity of the assessment.'

The idea is that, whilst it would be unfair for a pupil to gain advantage over others, no pupil should be disadvantaged by exam arrangements. Similarly, arrangements must not mislead anyone about candidates' attainment, and should not reduce the validity and reliability of the assessment - in other words, the test must test what it is meant to test. So, in a history exam, it might be possible to have the questions read out and for the candidate to dictate the answers, but this could not apply to an English exam meant to test reading and writing.

Arrangements may include, but are not limited to:

- rest breaks
- extra time
- a scribe
- a reader
- coloured overlays
- use of computer
- taking exams later in the day or at home
- permission to eat and drink during an exam
- exams may also be moved to the next day

Access Arrangements should be requested as a matter of course for children with ME (or "CFS"), well in advance if possible. However, there is no cut-off date by which the application has to be made. ME severely disadvantages pupils in exams, due to the fatiguability of the brain. Access

Arrangements can help to reduce that disadvantage, thus maximising the chances of a good mark.

Some Access Arrangements can be granted at the exam centre's discretion but others can be granted via the school applying to the relevant exam board(s), with a doctor's letter as proof of disability.

An examination board has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate a pupil's disability (a legal duty set out in the Equality Act 2010).

The relevant information on available Access Arrangements can be obtained from The Joint Council of Qualifications at jqc.org.uk - 'Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration' under the Exams Office menu.

Remember that if the pupil is suddenly much worse on the day, *Special Consideration* (see below) can be applied for after the exam.

2 Special Consideration

Special Consideration is a post-examination adjustment to a candidate's mark or grade to reflect temporary injury, illness or other indisposition at the time of the examination/assessment.

If a student is unable to take or complete an exam, due to illness, the school's examinations officer may apply for an aggregate grade, if the student has previously completed sufficient minimum requirements. This can be invaluable in securing a grade for a candidate.

For further information see 'A guide to the special consideration process' (at the bottom of the web page described above).

Some words of advice:

Experience shows it is best not to assume that by the time the exam comes along, the illness will have

receded and that no special exam provision will be required. There is, unfortunately, no really reliable prognosis in ME and revising is exhausting even for healthy pupils. Plan well ahead, according to the student's present needs. Explain that, not only is ME very long lasting, it is highly variable and extra effort tends to make symptoms worse, or can cause them to return, just when everyone assumed they were over.

Children and young people with ME may be well advised not to attempt tests such as those which are used to compile school league tables (SATS) for the purposes of comparison between schools. They do not confer any qualification and given that the energy used in preparing for and taking tests may well affect health, and that the student needs to conserve energy for healing and other activities, it may be advisable to take only those exams that confer external qualifications.

Don't Panic!

If a pupil is too ill to sit or finish an exam, then an **aggregate** grade can be applied for on the basis of previous work.

If the exam has to be cancelled, it is not the end of the world. There is no specific timetable by which any particular qualifications have to be obtained, although many people assume that there is. The procedure is open-ended and there is no such thing as 'too late'.

It is also worth considering that the Open University can take students who have been unable to get qualifications such as GCSEs or A levels. The process of obtaining a degree may take more years than 'going to university', depending on how much study the student is able to do per year but you can study at home, take full account of your health, vary the amount you study in any one year, take a year out, and by the time you are around the same age as those leaving university you too could have a degree.

Good luck in your exams.

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