

New Ofqual guidance on making assessments accessible for students

Students are to benefit from updated Ofqual guidance on how to make exams and other assessments as accessible as possible to all.

The [new guidance](#) is published today following a [12-week consultation](#), in which there was strong support from respondents, students and their representatives, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

A range of SEND groups responded to this consultation. They include the Autism Education Trust, British Dyslexia Association, National Deaf Children's Society, National Autistic Society, the Royal National Institute of Blind People and BATOD (British Association of Teachers of the Deaf).

Ofqual received 163 responses to this consultation. Of the 125 online respondents, 111 agreed or strongly agreed that the draft guidance will help awarding organisations to design and develop assessments that are as accessible as possible for learners.

The guidance supports awarding organisations to design assessments to meet rules on accessibility.

The [guidance published today](#) explains that, in their exams and assessments, awarding organisations should:

- use accessible and appropriate language
- use clear and consistent layout
- use source material, context, images and colour in ways that do not disadvantage students
- consider how Reasonable Adjustments could be made to the exam or assessment to make sure disabled students are not disadvantaged

Today, the [decisions following consultation](#) are published. These explain that a qualification that requires candidates to have a command of complex language must continue to test students on this. For example, an English exam might test use of complex sentence structures, or analogy, inference and allusion. Conversely, maths papers testing numeracy should not contain overly complex text.

Ofqual Chief Regulator Dr Jo Saxton said:

It's crucial that assessments in every subject have integrity and are accessible, to give all students a fair opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do, and to achieve results which reflect this.

Exams and assessments must remain rigorous but must not unfairly

disadvantage any student because of poor design or presentation.

This isn't about making exams and assessments easier, but about breaking down the barriers that stop young people achieving their true potential and making sure that exams actually test the things they are designed to test.

If an exam is intended to assess understanding of complex language, then of course the questions will use complex language. But if an exam is assessing numerical skills, it does not need to include complex language which could get in the way of some students showing those skills.

This will be particularly important for students with SEND, but actually it matters for all students. If students know their subject matter and are well-prepared, they should be able to get on and demonstrate what they know and can do in their assessments, so that the examiner can assess it. This requires questions and tasks in all subjects, however demanding they are, to be framed clearly and unambiguously.

Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said:

We welcome these decisions which affect the regulation of written exams. It is right that exams are as accessible as possible for everyone, and it is therefore good that Ofqual is supporting exam boards to make papers more accessible. Questions should not rely on learner's cultural capital, nor should they be overly wordy, but should test the knowledge or skill that is being assessed. This should help to make exam results more valid in the future.

Caireen Sutherland, Royal National Institute of Blind People Head of Education, said:

It is very important that exams, as a crucial part of the education system, are fully accessible if all children and young people with vision impairment are to achieve their full potential. We work closely with Ofqual and in previous consultations they have taken on board RNIB advice and reflected it in their guidance. This included involving Qualified Teachers of Vision Impairment (QTVIs) in reviewing exam grades. We were pleased to have the opportunity to provide feedback as part of their recent consultation.

Paul Simpson and Teresa Quail, co-National Executive Officers from BATOD (British Association of Teachers of the Deaf), said:

BATOD has for many years had a strong and productive relationship with Ofqual and has found all colleagues receptive to our concerns and willing to do what is possible while maintaining the integrity of the examinations. For this reason we warmly welcome the publication of the accessibility guidance.

The Autism Education Trust said:

The Autism Education Trust welcomes and supports the Ofqual Accessibility Guidance to make exams and other written assessments more accessible for children and young people with special educational needs.

This is a positive step towards creating a more inclusive education system that recognises that adjustments must be made to support the needs of all autistic children and young people to reach their potential and receive a fair chance to demonstrate their skills and abilities in exams and assessments.

This new guidance will also support students, including those from other countries, for whom English is an additional language.