

Joint statement on alternative assessment arrangements for summer 2021 in Northern Ireland

Following the announcement to cancel GCSE and A-level exams this summer, we have drafted a set of recommendations for consideration by the Department of Education and CCEA that we believe will help ensure deaf learners and those with vision impairment or multi-sensory impairment are not disadvantaged by the new arrangements for grading.

We believe that without strong direction and messaging from the Department of Education and CCEA on the responsibilities of centres and awarding bodies, that learners with sensory impairment are at risk of unfair grading.

Our recommendations are as follows:

- Access arrangements must be put in place for any short exam papers where required including provision of extra time, language modified papers, VI modified papers and rest breaks
- Centres must consider whether evidence used for grading were from situations that were fully accessible. If situations were not fully accessible then this must be noted and factored into grading decisions
- Centres are strongly recommended to seek advice from qualified Teachers of the Deaf , Qualified Teachers of Children with Vision Impairment and Qualified Teachers of Multi-sensory Impairment, or another specialist supporting the learner (e.g. specialist teaching assistant, intervenor or communication support worker) on the evidence used for grading
- Centres must record the specialist advice received for internal and external quality assurance purposes
- JCQ's guidance on access arrangements must be followed for any classroom tests or mock exams that are used for grading
- Learners must be permitted to appeal if they suspect that they have been disadvantaged by the choice of evidence used for grading, or if advice was not sought from a qualified Teacher of the Deaf, Qualified Teacher of Children with Vision Impairment, Qualified Teacher of Multi-sensory Impairment or another appropriate specialist
- The above recommendations are promoted to centres by CCEA, the Department of Education and awarding bodies

We believe the above recommendations are also applicable to vocational qualifications. Where assessments have to be adapted or alternative evidence is used, a specialist teacher as above or other specialist working with a learner (e.g. specialist teaching assistant, intervenor or communication support worker) should be consulted.

Even with the above recommendations in place, we remain very concerned for learners with sensory impairment who have struggled to access remote learning this year. We believe that is imperative that the UK Government's expert advisory group on lost learning recommends

suitable mitigations for these learners to avoid the pandemic impacting on their life chances. It will be important that the Department of Education then considers how these recommendations should apply within Northern Ireland. With a high percentage of deaf and vision impaired learners experiencing difficulties in accessing remote learning, we request that the advisory group include experts from the sensory impairment sector.