

## Exams for pupils with M.E.

*January 2021*

This Action for M.E. factsheet is aimed at children and young people with M.E., their parents, teachers, and other professionals supporting them.

### **Page Contents**

2	Exam accessibility
3	Exam special consideration
4	Standard Attainment Tests (SATs)
4	GCSEs and A-levels
5	Useful contacts

## Exam accessibility

Exams can be stressful, which is likely to have an impact on the symptoms of a young person living with M.E. So, it's a good idea to have accessibility plans in place, even if the young person doesn't need them on the day.

Exam accessibility (also referred to as special arrangements) refers to arrangements made prior to an exam on behalf of a candidate that has particular needs. These can include arrangements such as modified papers, extra time and taking exams at home – see below.

The aim of exam accessibility arrangements is to give young people an equal opportunity to demonstrate their ability in the skills being assessed when standard arrangements may make this difficult for them. These may include giving them extra time to complete the paper, a scribe or even in extreme cases taking exams later in the day or at home.

Remember that all requests for exam accessibility arrangements need to be supported by a medical letter. If possible, the letter should name the requested accessibility arrangement and give reasons why they are required, being as clear and specific as possible. This will all need to be arranged with the school's exams officer. If the exams are in the period May to June, you should start these conversations in January.

Examples of access arrangements, from the Disability Rights UK website ([www.disabilityrightsuk.org/adjustments-disabled-students](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/adjustments-disabled-students)):

- You may need extra time if you have difficulties with memory and processing information. This gives you more time to read the exam paper and understand fully what is required of you, or take a little longer to complete the exam.
- Supervised rest breaks during exams. This allows you to walk around and stretch during your exam or do some gentle meditation/breathing exercises.
- You may need exam papers in your preferred format.
- A scribe/amanuensis – this is where someone will do your writing for you – it is essential that you practice this technique in advance of your exams.
- A reader, where someone will read the questions for you.
- Use of a laptop or adaptive technology, useful if you cannot write for long spells – again make sure you practise beforehand. This may be considered and would need justification (they will not allow you use of spell check though!) This is something you should have access to if you already use it in class.
- You may need to use a separate room so that you're not disturbed by other candidates, and they are not disturbed by you. This can allow you to concentrate and avoid interruptions when other people are leaving the exam room. Make sure you are happy with the room you are offered; is it too noisy, too light/dark, right temperature etc. Checking the room in advance of the exam date would help you decide its suitability.
- Exam papers printed on coloured paper or printed in ink other than blue or black.
- Use of coloured filters or overlays. This is useful for those with visual problems.
- Change time of exam – for example, exams scheduled may be rearranged for a slightly later time.

## Exam special consideration

Special considerations (sometimes called concessions) can be made after an exam by the awarding body, to adjust a candidate's mark, making allowance for adverse circumstances such as illness.

Generally speaking, examination boards are more than happy to support young people with a medical condition. Even if their guidelines don't mention a specific type of accessibility or concession, it's a good idea to ask. Start by finding out from the exams officer which exam board is being used.

Details of different exam boards, exam accessibility and special considerations can be found in the table below.

Exam board	Exam accessibility	Special considerations
AQA	<a href="https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/special-requirements/access-arrangements">https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/special-requirements/access-arrangements</a>	<a href="https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/special-requirements/special-consideration">https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/special-requirements/special-consideration</a>
Cambridge International	<a href="https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/exam-administration/cambridge-exams-officers-guide/phase-1-preparation/access-arrangements/">https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/exam-administration/cambridge-exams-officers-guide/phase-1-preparation/access-arrangements/</a>	<a href="https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/exam-administration/cambridge-exams-officers-guide/phase-5-exam-day/special-consideration/">https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/exam-administration/cambridge-exams-officers-guide/phase-5-exam-day/special-consideration/</a>
OCR	<a href="https://www.ocr.org.uk/administration/cambridge-technical/preparation/access-arrangements/">https://www.ocr.org.uk/administration/cambridge-technical/preparation/access-arrangements/</a>	<a href="https://www.ocr.org.uk/administration/general-qualifications/assessment/special-consideration/">https://www.ocr.org.uk/administration/general-qualifications/assessment/special-consideration/</a>
Pearson	<a href="https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/exams/special-requirements/access-arrangements.html">https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/exams/special-requirements/access-arrangements.html</a>	<a href="https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/exams/special-requirements/special-consideration.html">https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/exams/special-requirements/special-consideration.html</a>
WJEC	<a href="https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/administration/special-requirements/#tab_0">https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/administration/special-requirements/#tab_0</a>	

## **Standard Attainment Tests (SATs)**

SATs are normally taken when a young person is in Year 6 at school (typically aged 11 years old). The aim of SATs is to help measure pupil progress and see whether or not they need additional help in certain areas. They are also used to see how the school is performing compared to other schools.

If the child or young person with M.E. is due to take SATs, parents and carers can withdraw them from the exams so the focus is entirely on improving their health/managing symptoms.

SATs are in the following subjects:

- English; grammar, punctuation and spelling
- English; reading
- Mathematics; reasoning
- Mathematics; arithmetic

## **GCSEs and A-levels**

In year 11 most young people will take GCSE exams or similar qualifications. The exam board will set the exam times, and sometimes different subjects will be on the same day. Taking even one exam, let alone two in one day, may be really challenging for a young person with M.E., and for some impossible. Concentrating for long periods of time can be difficult.

When revising it can be mentally challenging as the young person might be finding it hard to recall facts. There is a range of things that might help.

- Consider which qualifications will help move the young person on to post-16 education. It may be decided, with advice and support from teachers and parents/carers, that certain qualifications aren't necessary.
- Ask the consultant or medical professional involved in the young person's care to detail how M.E. affects them so it can be forwarded on to the exam board for special consideration, such as extra time or breaks within the exam.
- Occasionally arrangements can be made for pupils to take their exams at home. This often takes careful planning by the school or education provider as they will need to ensure the exam papers, an appropriate space in the home to take exams and an invigilator are in place. January is not too early to start planning if the exams are in June.
- Maintain contact between school and family during absences so there is a sound understanding of how M.E. is affecting the young person, and the exams officer at your school can be kept up to date and is aware of any changes.

## Useful contacts

### Action for M.E.

42 Temple Street, Keynsham BS31 1EH

Tel: 0117 927 9551 (Mon to Fri 10am to 4pm)

Email: [questions@actionforme.org.uk](mailto:questions@actionforme.org.uk)

[www.actionforme.org.uk](http://www.actionforme.org.uk)

@actionforme

### Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions

Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies in England, published December 2015 by the Department of Education

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions)

### Independent Parental Special Education Advice

Book a helpline appointment online

[www.ipsea.org.uk](http://www.ipsea.org.uk)

### Disability Rights UK

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org>

Disabled Student Helpline: 0330 995 0414 (Tue and Thu 11am to 1pm)

Email: [students@disabilityrightsuk.org](mailto:students@disabilityrightsuk.org)



If you have found the information in this factsheet helpful, please consider making a donation to help us reach more children and families living with M.E. Visit [www.actionforme.org.uk](http://www.actionforme.org.uk) or call 0117 927 9551 to donate now. Thank you.

Copyright Action for M.E. January 2021. Registered charity in England and Wales no. 1036419 Registered in Scotland no. SC040452. Company limited by guarantee, registered in England no. 2906840