

CENMAC's Thursday Thirty – Thinking Ahead Around Exam Access

Transcript

So, I've just gone through these just very briefly, but these are the key aims of the session.

So, I'm going to look at how to apply for the assistive technology, but also look at how some of the technology can really be used as an advantage for the students and how perhaps sometimes it can be a disadvantage.

So, if we just go on to the next slide, you've got a little graphic there, which I absolutely love because I just think it really shows how there just isn't one-size-fits-all.

The same piece of technology or the same piece of support that helps one student can absolutely, sometimes not help others.

And therefore, the rules for what's permissible for one student might not be permissible for another.

So, what we're looking for with the access arrangements is to make sure that they cover all the different sorts of support and that can go all the way from human readers and scribes, extra time allocations, etcetera, etcetera, all the way through to quite complex assistive technology.

Obviously, when we throw assistive technology into the mix, it becomes even more complicated.

So, what sometimes happens is that students who've been really happily using their technology in their lessons and in their homework suddenly are asked to go back to being given a reader or a scribe when it comes to their GCSEs next slide, please.

I'm going to have the next slide.

Does it say current situation and exams context?

OK, so if you just put all of the animations on and then I'll go through it.

So, there's a, a, a huge number there, 5056 thousand, no 556,000.

Plus, pupils in school sectors require some sort of additional access arrangement, and on average 40 students in each school require a reader or a scribe.

Now, if we look at a rough average cost, and these figures are a few years old, so actually they'll be much higher than this.

If we look at the average cost to schools, we're looking at something like 16,000 lbs every year.

That is just put aside for paying for human readers and scribes.

It's a massive amount.

If we then look at what the disadvantages of using those scribes or readers are, well, the first thing is that the scribes and the readers need training and quite often this is very time consuming and therefore often doesn't really happen or certainly doesn't happen well enough.

Being a scribe or a reader isn't just sitting there being able to read for the student.

You need to be very skilled at being able to draw the right information and understand what the student is trying to say, and so without the proper training, it can be a real disadvantage for the children.

There's also a lot of research that shows that the cognitive load that is increased by adding an additional layer of processing.

If you think about it, when you're using a scribe, you're thinking about what you want to say, but normally we're sort of keeping ideas in our head as we're writing and then building on that.

Whereas, when you're using a scribe, you're having to then pass that information onto a third party while still thinking about the next thing, waiting for them to have finished writing before you can then add the next idea.

So, all of this toing and froing causes a massive increase in cognitive load and really does prevent students from being able to achieve their best.

You also have this issue of dual modalities that basically means when you are giving pieces of information in more than one way at the same time.

So, you are asking a student, sometimes students that have got real difficulties with literacy anyway and processing to be able to do two things at once effectively.

Now we all know how difficult it is for us to do 2 things at once.

All the more serious when you've got a student who is in an exam situation which is stressful anyway and has got SEN needs, so you're always going to have a much poorer performance when you were asking students to use a scribe or a reader.

You've also got the issue of anxiety being caused by the fact that you've got another person in really close proximity.

So, for some students, just having a person sitting right next to them can be really stressful, and that's going to have another negative impact on them.

And the one that I think is most important is the fact that we are removing a child's independence.

When we are giving them a reader pen or we're giving them technology that enables them to read and write it at their own pace, we're giving them independence.

We're allowing them to go back over the same piece of text several times and do it at their will when it suits them.

When we're asking them to then ask a third person to do it.

And that person isn't going to be sitting with them in later life or at college.

We're taking away that child's independence and therefore we're actually not doing them a great service at all.

Next slide, please.

So, we need to really look at what sort of assistive technology is permissible in exams and look at the way we're using technology in a student's day-to-day life.

So, they can use computers and generic assistive technology, for example, tablets, iPads, They can use text to speech programmes and these will include scanning and reading pens.

They can use voice to text or dictation software that is permissible.

They're allowed to use those in exams.

This is particularly for students with VI, but they can use visibility tools to enlarge the text.

Annabel, apparently we're one slide behind.

It should say what types of AT are permissible in exams.

Yeah. I think the problem could well be Annabel has frozen.

Have we got the slides? Yep.

On my screen it says what types of ATF permissible building exams.

Is that not able to be seen?

Oh, that's fine. That's fine. That's good.

You froze for a moment, but I think you're back. OK.

OK, simple reading aids such as coloured backgrounds and overlays.

Things are really helpful for students that have got dyslexia or Irlen Syndrome or other reading

difficulties and other sorts of modified equipment, including adapted keyboards, for example, for students unable to use a normal keyboard and perhaps need one that is one handed or other types.

OK, so looking at this in a little bit more detail using the laptops, that's the next slide.

Annabel, have you got that?

Yes.

So, students can use their laptops as a website, or it can also be useful as a reading device, screen readers, magnification.

The Joint Council for qualifications, the JCQ basically say that they are enabled, they're allowed to use all of this, providing it reflects a candidate's normal way of working.

What we've seen happens often is a student who is used to typing all of their work will be then asked to either handwrite or use a scribe in the exam.

And this is taking us back to what we were just saying about the disadvantages of doing that.

Next slide please.

If they are using a laptop, chances are, especially if they're CENMAC students, they will have been given access to a huge amount of accessibility software.

So, on screen at the moment are just two that we use regularly, something like TextHelp Read and Write and allows students in an exam to use the screen masking tools and the read aloud functions.

They can also use what's called the screenshot reader, which enables them to read a small section from a PDF ie from an exam paper and they can use it for highlighting.

Textaid, which is a slightly, it's a very similar but slightly different programme, also allows them to use a dual screen and they can write directly onto exam papers using that using little word boxes.

The joy of these is that they can easily be switched over to have an exams only function and that is password protected. So, it can only be done by a teacher or by the exams officer. There's no risk of students being able to switch back and forth.

Next slide, please.

So, Reader Pens is something that we often give to our students and there's a variety of different types.

You can see quite a few of different ones on the screen there.

There's also an orange one you can see there on the top right.

That's an exams only reader pen.

Now, one of the experiences that we have is that schools will quite often purchase some of these for their students and then they expect them to be able to use them in an exam.

And often students just reject them because they're not used to using them. They find it quite stressful to use them.

This is something that students really need to become familiar with.

We have CENMAC students who are using these on a regular basis, and we have trained them and trained the adults who work with them to be able to use them.

They will then be able to use these in an exam.

But often what has happened is because teachers were concerned about the technology not working and just found the whole thing too risky, we'll just say, Oh yeah, but you won't be using that in an exam, you'll be having a human reader.

And that's massively taken away that students' independence again, we need to get to the position where students are able to use their readers confidently in exams and this is practise.

This means they have to use them for all internal assessments, they need to use them for their mocks, they need to get used to having access to them for all at all times.

Next screen we're looking at Voice-to-Text.

Now many of the students may well have become really confident at using Microsoft Voice to Text or Google Voice to Text and they've got used to the commands and they use it quite confidently for all their work.

Unfortunately, these can't be used under exam situations because they rely on the Internet and that would not be allowed.

So, Dragon that you can see on the screen, there is a stand-alone piece of voice to tech software that we offer to our students at CENMAC.

We will quite often start them off by using something like Microsoft or Google Voice dictation, but once they're used to using it, switch them over early, say in Year 9 to start using Dragon.

Because it's virtually impossible for a student to try and start using a dictation piece of software really close to the exam if they've never been confident at using it before.

And as a result they'll reject it and it won't work.

Now one of the questions we do get asked often with regards to these words to text pieces of software is will that influence their SPAG mark? Yes it will. They will lose their SPAG mark, but so would they in a human reader situation. So, it's actually no different.

So, on the next slide, there's just a little sort of run through really of what applications can be used in exams for assistive technology.

I'm not going to go through that in any length because we haven't really got time, but just to say that they're on the slide and the slides will be sent out.

The important thing is the very last little bit on there that says that iPads, laptops can be used in exams, but internet connection would not be acceptable and would be seen as malpractice.

So, schools often will keep a separate laptop that they just use, for example, purposes that has been cleaned down, has no access to Internet, has no student work on it. That's actually quite a nice way of doing it.

Possible problem with that though, is that if a student has sensitivity issues, and they've got used to typing on a very specific keyboard, one that CENMAC has offered them, sometimes switching to a different type of keyboard can actually really throw them.

And what I would say at this stage is please do connect with your CENMAC link teacher because one of the things we can often do is provide a secondary exam only laptop just for the exam. So that the student can have exactly the same sort of device as they've been used to using at any other time.

Next slide, please, Annabel.

So, the JCQ regulations, which I'm sure everyone has seen many, many times when writing their access arrangements.

This is where we can check how to upload and how to find out about the sorts of equipment that's useful and allowed.

However, on that link there, by the way, is in the chat.

So, if you haven't seen this, you'll be able to pick that up at a later stage.

However, next slide, please. There is no definitive list of equipment or software that students are allowed to use.

JCQ will not say yes, they can definitely use one piece over another.

The way they will interpret whether a student's allowed to use it is - is it their normal way of working?

You will see that phrase all the way through that piece of legislation.

This is the way that a student would normally access their work, so if typing on a laptop or using a reader pen is the way that they would normally access their curriculum, then they can use their equipment in the exams.

The key though is that the exams officer is responsible for having evidence to show that this is in fact a student's normal way of working, and I'll be talking a little bit more about that in a second.

This doesn't have to be uploaded anywhere or sent off anywhere, but it needs to be stored as evidence in the event of an inspection visit to show that the student is in fact entitled to use their equipment.

So next slide, some different types of evidence of normal ways of working.

I've listed a whole load of things on there.

Just be aware that having photographic evidence or pieces of work that a student has used is all useful evidence and this can start being stored all back from Year 7.

Some schools will provide each pupil with an individual plan and it will specifically say on there that assistive technology is their normal way of working and that's the way they use it in classroom.

You will also have assessments and reviews from CENMAC that specify how the students' use our equipment.

They can all be used as evidence of the students normal way of working and quite a few of the pieces of technology themselves.

Some of the reader pen companies are now producing checklists that they will provide that you can print off and use & off to add as evidence as well.

So, there's various different things that you can use, a few ideas on there and obviously plenty of others.

On the next slide is an example of a pupil support plan that is used in one of the schools that I work with.

They have these all the way from Year 7 all the way through and it shows how they are using their equipment and it's got key information on there. So, it acts as an ongoing the way their technology.

On the next slide is a checklist.

This is one that I've taken from the Internet, but there are various other ones you could find or you could use your own school.

One that shows that there is a reason why this pupil needs extra time or needs a reader or needs to have the ability to type their written work.

So yeah, on the next screen then I've started a sort of a timeline, because what you could do is go through the regulations on that yellow document, but there are something like 63 pages of small type and it's quite long.

So, this timeline, I've tried to sort of do it in terms of the academic year, what you should be doing at any one time.

I always say to start literally right as soon as you come back in September, you should be starting to prepare your students and getting them ready, working out who you think is likely to need access arrangements and start gathering evidence and make sure that your school policies are updated so that they summarise this too.

And then right now, right at this moment of time, we should be starting to do our initial assessments and conducting screenings to make sure we have definitive information on each individual student.

It might be that we need to have some formal assessment.

For example, if a students' going to be given some technology because they have, for example, dyslexia, you may well need to have an external assessor come in to assess that, to have proper evidence of that.

Chances are you would already have that throughout the school, but at this stage you need to start gathering those formal assessments if you haven't already done so.

So, then the application process itself will start anytime really from now.

There's a Form 8 and you can see more information on that in that huge documentation.

Each student that requires access arrangements will need a separate Form 8 and that's normally completed by the SENCO in conjunction with the exams officer.

And if there is a specialist assessor that is brought in for a specific disability, then they would complete Section C And obviously the evidence compilation carries on access arrangements online, the AAO can begin now.

So, it's really useful, important to have all of that evidence ready before you actually start uploading.

Next slide. So, the next thing to do really is to submit those applications.

And I've just gone through in there a little bit of detail of what that involves through February and April is where you'll start implementing that.

So, making sure that if you are going to ask for an extra laptop, perhaps from CENMAC or set up an extra laptop in school, that that's starting to happen as early as February.

So, it's all there and ready. We talked about training those invigilators or training your scribes and readers.

That really needs to start happening as early as February because it's something they can then use in mock exams or internal assessments and practise sessions just to familiarise students.

And that's where a lot of extra money is often saved by schools because they don't have those human scribes in there doing that.

So, that's another reason why it's much more costly and far more beneficial for them to use their technology at this stage.

The final checks should be ready and happening by about April because any later than that, you're sort of running into exam time and all the confirmations will need to be arranged by then.

Make sure your equipment and resources are all ready and also make sure you've got a backup.

So, if you are preparing laptops for students, make sure your IT team is ready to come and sort them out, set them up if, if something goes wrong and that you have extra ones available if necessary.

Next one, next slide please.

So, during the exams themselves, it's just a monitoring process.

It's making sure that all the arrangements that you've so carefully set up are actually correctly implemented during that exam.

And in terms of day-to-day support, it just means, particularly with assistive technology, somebody has to be responsible for making sure that all of those laptops have been plugged in and they're properly sourced and that everything's working well.

So, it's useful to have an IT support person available on the mornings of exams just to double check that everything's ready to go.

And then the final sort of section really on there is the end of year review and going back and seeing what went well and what can be done better next time and updating school policies as and when.

We have had situations where schools have tried to use technology, and they hadn't really followed all the preparations, and it didn't go well on the day and a student ended up having to hand write or have a scribe at the last minute.

That's the kind of thing that you think, OK, now we know that that's an issue.

We need to have that ready for next time.

Next slide please.

So, I've summarised that on there, and this PowerPoint slide will be sent out, so you can go back and check all the different bits.

But what I've tried to do there is to sort of summarise in not too much detail what's in that yellow booklet.

This can then be used in conjunction with that yellow booklet to fill in all the gaps and get all the key information as necessary.

In terms of deadlines on the next slide, when you're doing your online applications, these are the deadlines to follow in terms of what JCQ would argue, and you've got some clear dates there to make sure that you've done those things.

So, for example, if you are going to be applying for some modified papers, for example, enlarged or in Braille, that all needs to be done by the end of January.

So, those preparation phases leading up to that point really need to be in place so that you don't miss any of those key deadlines.

OK, next slide please.

Key Stage 2 SATs are similar but if anything are slightly easier because the schools don't need to apply for as much beforehand.

Many of the arrangements can be used without any prior approval providing they reflect normal classroom practise what they do, do as well, which is fantastic.

They don't do this for Key Stage 4 exams, but for Key Stage 2 exams the primary assessment gateway do have a message us inquiry where you can just go online and you can ask questions.

I've got a student who wants to use this, can you give me any advice?

And that's a really useful place to get extra help if you need to.

The last couple of slides are specifically for arrangements for VI students.

You can get Braille transcripts in Word to accompany the Braille papers, and there are places where you can download some of the modified papers.

It's very difficult to get extra past papers in Braille to use, for example, in mocks.

So, some of the accessible revision guides or some of the modified papers that are on that website could be used instead of or as well as past papers.

And I think that's it. I think that's the last slide. But the last slide, yes, it is.

So, all of those links that I've put on there are all in the chat.

Annabel very kindly added them.

That's the last slide, but obviously we have a couple of minutes I believe if anyone has any quick questions.

What I would really urge you to do though, is make sure you are, throughout this whole process keeping in touch with your CENMAC link person because often you know, we can answer questions and put your mind at rest very quickly.

And if we are going to provide extra resources, we need some time to get that set up.

So, if anyone would like to ask Maureen a question that you could either type it into the chat or you can unmute yourself.

Everyone's very quiet, Maureen.

So anyway, Maureen's session has been recorded. So, we will put it onto our website.

I shared some links earlier there in the chat and yes, it will, it will be up on our website probably by the end of next week, but feel free to email us if you have any questions at all.

That's no problem. We will endeavour to answer them.

Are you going to be PowerPoint on on the website as well? Because the links are actually on there as well.

So, if anybody wants to go back through it and actually get those links, Yeah, Yeah, they will be there, too.

Yes.

All right.

Well, Maureen, I think we should go because I think, oh, hang on.

What's Carly saying?

Just thank you.

That's the same.

Thank you. Yes.

All right, Fab, Thank you, everybody, for joining us.

And sorry about our slight technical hitch, but we seem to have got past it in the end.

Thank you.

Thanks to Kathryn.