Exam Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments/Disability and Exams

1. Positional Statement

1.1 STCG is committed to creating a non-discriminatory and supportive environment for all students. A reasonable adjustment is any action that helps to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty which places the student at a severe disadvantage. STCG Colleges will ensure that students who are eligible for exam access arrangements (EAAs) are identified and assessed in the required manner with the consequent recommendations being made. Following approval, whether from the relevant awarding body or centre delegated, EAAs will be put in place by Exams for any exams or assessments taken by the students concerned.

1.2 The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the colleges not to discriminate against students with learning difficulties/disabilities in terms of either admission to courses or provision of education and support services.

1.3 Students are encouraged to disclose any difficulties/disabilities that may affect their learning in order to enable the colleges to make reasonable adjustments to meet their needs and enhance their learning. This includes adjustments where appropriate to facilitate access to examinations/ assessments. The information will be treated in such a way as to ensure that it meets the colleges' guidelines on confidentiality.

2. Responsibilities of STCG

2.1 To comply with the Equality Act 2010 the colleges are committed to making 'reasonable adjustments' to learning environments and programmes to enable all students to take advantage of the learning opportunities on offer. Staff receive relevant training and attend specialist events on subjects relating to disability and learning difficulties.

2.2 To provide learning support wherever possible for learners who have requirements as a result of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability), for example physical disability, visual or hearing impairment, ill-health or a specific learning disability.

2.3 To enable learners to be fully integrated into FE and HE programmes at all levels according to ability by providing appropriate support.

3. Categories of Learner Needs

3.1 Reasons for a learner to require support include but are not limited to:

Medical:	Asthma, hay fever, eczema, diabetes, epilepsy, arthritis, illness requiring constant medical care and possibly regular periods in hospital
Sensory and physical needs:	Deaf, Vision Impairment (VI), Multi Sensory Impairment (MSI), Physical Disability (PD)
Congenital Conditions:	Cerebral palsy, spina bifida, scoliosis
Loss of or injury to limb(s):	Whether congenital or as a result of an accident

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Cognition and learning needs	Learning difficulties or specific learning difficulties (such as Dyscalculia and Dyslexia)
Social, Emotional and mental health needs:	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), , mental health conditions
Communication and interaction needs	Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASK), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

3.2 Many of these are permanent conditions. In the majority of cases, learners know what their requirements are in order to cope and be successful, and have received appropriate support during previous education.

4. Confidentiality

4.1 Learners have the right to request that details of a disability be kept confidential and for agreed information to be passed only to those who are actively involved in providing support appropriate to the disability.

4.2 In every instance, the learner has the right to expect appropriate support and sensitivity, which obviously varies according to individual need.

4.3 Learners who require specific action in case of an emergency, and have agreed that this information may be shared, will have their individual requirements agreed and made known to appropriate staff.

4.4 Learners must be informed that an application for access arrangements will be processed using *Access arrangements online*, complying with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Art 2018. A signed candidate personal data consent form and Data protection confirmation by the examinations officer of AAA form are no longer required.

5. Specialist Assessment

5.1 Access Arrangement Assessors (AAAs) and Inclusive Learning (IL) are responsible for the assessment of students' learning support needs. The term SENCo, used in JCQ documents and elsewhere, applies to the person appointed by the Heads of Centre to coordinate the access arrangements process within the Group.

5.2 AAAs must have the required level of competence and training i.e. successful completion of a post-graduate course in individual specialist assessment at or equivalent to Level 7 **or** hold a current SpLD Assessment Practising Certificate as awarded by Patoss, the Dyslexia Action or BDA and listed on the SASC website. The AAA must undertake regular CPD, such as attending an annual update course. Checks that these qualifications have been achieved are made by HR during recruitment and specified in the job description. Assessors are given sufficient time to both manage the access arrangements process and familiarise themselves with JCQ's document 'Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments', as well as new documentation when required. It is the responsibility of AAAs alone to make appropriate and informed decisions based on the JCQ and other awarding bodies' regulations.

5.3 The AAAs and IL staff must work with teaching, support (such as Learning Mentors) and Exams staff to ensure that approved EAAs are put in place for internal (mocks) and external exams and assessments.

5.4 Working with senior management, support, teaching and Exams staff, the AAAs and IL team ensure a whole centre approach to access arrangements. Failure to comply with JCQ regulations, i.e. putting in place EAAs which are not approved, permitting EAAs that are not supported by appropriate evidence or, failing to provide full and detailed information when referring an online application to an awarding body; have the potential to constitute malpractice, and will be reported to the awarding body. Any such actions may impact candidates' results.

6.   Access Arrangements for Examinations and Assessments

6.1   Some learners with support needs may be eligible for EAAs in their examinations or assessments. Access arrangements are applicable for candidates with the required knowledge, understanding and skills but who are unable to demonstrate these in an assessment in its normal format due to a difficulty or disability. EAAs are not intended to give an unfair advantage. They should reflect the students' normal way of working, for which there is evidence of need.

6.2   Approval of EAAs is either centre delegated or subject to approval from the awarding bodies. In all cases approval must be obtained within set deadlines and to comply with requirements for evidence of need and normal working practices. Applications are only processed where they are supported by the colleges and the candidate meets the published criteria for the arrangement with the full supporting evidence in place. At STCG an EAA is only officially approved when it has gone through the established process and is logged in the Needs section of EBS by Exams. This is the only reliable source of such information.

Curriculum and IL staff must not provide EAA support in lessons and/or mock exams unless it is an approved EAA as above.

The internal deadline for completion of the assessment for **all** access arrangements within the Group is **31 January** every year, or the nearest working day**.** This is a hard deadline, and all students who may be eligible (self-declared or teacher recommended) will be invited for assessment three times before this date. If they **fail to attend after the third invitation**, it will be assumed they do not wish to be assessed for access arrangements, and it will not be possible after this date for access arrangements not already approved to be granted. It is the student's responsibility to make sure they have been through the EAA assessment process.

The deadline for assessment of access arrangements for the November GCSE Maths and English resits is 30 September, and for January BTEC exams and set tasks 21 October. These dates, or the nearest working day, also apply every year,

It is not always feasible to complete all assessments within such a tight timeframe and it cannot be guaranteed that previously awarded EAAs that have not been approved at STCG will be applied during November resit exams or January BTEC exams. Students will be advised, either at enrolment, via email or through information published on STCG's website, of the possibility that they may not be given EAAs for early exams.

Exams teams will only accept late assessments in exceptional circumstances.

Late applications and where an existing approved application will expire prior to or during the June 2026 examination series

6.3   The Exams teams have responsibility during the planning of exams or assessments for checking whether candidates have approved access arrangements and for putting them in place when required. Examples of access arrangements are:

1.   Extra time for written or online exams
2.   Reader, scribe, prompter, practical assistant
3.   Use of a word processor
4.   Rest, movement or toilet breaks
5.   Enlarged or modified exam papers
6.   Coloured overlay (candidates bring their own)
7.   Use of a communicator or sign language interpreter

8. Provision of alternative or, in rare cases, separate rooms for candidates who satisfy the criteria
9. Timetable variation within the exam day for a candidate with a disability
10. Listening to music/white noise due to a substantial impairment
11. Individual supervision inside the exam room if a candidate habitually uses a mobile phone to check a medical condition

6.4 It is important that AAAs consider and, where appropriate, implement access arrangements that will prepare candidates for the workplace. 25% extra time may not always be the most appropriate arrangement. AAAs should instead consider alternative arrangements, such as assistive technology, listening to music/white noise, supervised rest breaks or a timer

6.5 Alternative rooming is an available access arrangement as defined in the JCQ regulations. It is an arrangement where a candidate with an established difficulty may be eligible to take exams in a smaller environment away from the main exam room.

Alternative Rooming is no different from other access arrangements and will need to have documented evidence for the arrangement to be approved. A centre-based decision will be made on the need for alternative rooming for any student between the AAAs, Exams - who may highlight issues such as room availability and the need for additional invigilation - and curriculum staff.

Criteria when these arrangements may be considered and granted for a candidate at STCG comply with JCQ regulations and are:

• the candidate has a substantial and long-term impairment which has an adverse effect (such as a long-term medical condition, psychological, social, emotional and health needs – these needs must be well-established)
• It is the candidate's normal way of working within the centre
• the proposed arrangement does not unfairly disadvantage or advantage the candidate

Nervousness, low level anxiety or being worried about exams are not sufficient grounds for alternative rooming within the centre. Where a candidate simply panics on the day of an examination or becomes anxious, then they will not be offered alternative rooming, but be seated more appropriately within the main exam room whenever possible

6.6 Alternative rooming arrangements will be considered where the arrangement would prevent a candidate from being placed at a substantial disadvantage, and where the following conditions are met:

• The candidate has an established difficulty as defined in section 5.16 of the JCQ's Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments publication
• The candidate's disability is established within the centre and known to relevant staff or a senior member of staff with pastoral responsibilities
• Alternative rooming arrangements reflect the candidate's normal and current way of working in internal tests and mock examinations

When such arrangements are in place, the regulations and guidance set out in the JCQ's Instructions for Conducting Examinations will be strictly adhered to, particularly in relation to accommodation and invigilation arrangements.

At STCG a smaller room is categorised as either a classroom sized room (i.e. not the main room, Sports Hall or otherwise) of maximum 25 candidates, or a small room of maximum 15 candidates. The AAAs will decide on which sized room is most suitable in each case, and Exams will seat candidates accordingly as far as resources allow.

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6.7 A <u>separate room</u>, where the invigilator or exams support person is 1-2-1 with the candidate, is given only in rare circumstances, which may include:

- A candidate with scribe, 1-2-1 prompter or reader, or read aloud as an access arrangement
- A candidate who has a condition such as epilepsy or Tourette's Syndrome, who may cause disturbance to other candidates
- A candidate with diabetes who may require privacy to manage it (this can also be done in the main exam room, under supervision)

The above list is not exhaustive and each case will be carefully considered before a 1-2-1 separate room arrangement is approved. Such consideration must be supported by evidence from a medical consultant or relevant specialist.

6.8 Arrangements for seating candidates in alternative rooms may occasionally be put in place in other circumstances, such as an accident, injury or medical condition which comes to light during the exam session, and/or where, for safeguarding reasons, it is considered in the interests of the candidate or other candidates for a candidate to sit examinations in an alternative room.

6.9 Candidates have ample opportunity before exam days to query their access arrangements. It is not the Group's normal practice to change arrangements on the day of the exam itself, and such issues can only be considered pre or post the exam. In cases of genuine need or emergency, consideration can be given to amending access arrangements on the exam day itself but this must always be in consultation with the Heads of Exams, whose decision is final.

7. Learner Needs' Support Process

7.1 Students 'self-declare' SEND or other needs on application and during enrolment. The AAAs/ IL teams monitor declarations and contact students for assessment. Exams check past year against current year enrolments and that approved access arrangements are still valid.

7.2 Teaching and IL staff identify, observe and refer students for assessment. They also provide evidence of 'normal way of working'.

7.3 The AAAs/ IL teams carry out testing as appropriate, collect evidence of need, determine the level of support required and access arrangements if appropriate and complete a report (usually JCQ Forms 8/9).

7.4 IL set up folders (electronic) where all documents relevant to EAAs for each student in each academic year are stored, carrying forward year by year when necessary. These folders must be complete at all times should AAAs be required to produce relevant documents in the event of a JCQ inspection.

7.5 Exams apply for EAA approval by published deadlines and add copies of the approval forms to the folders. Exams enter details on EBS, which is the official record of an approved arrangement.

7.6 Applications for bi-lingual dictionaries are processed by Exams. The criteria which allow the use of a bi-lingual dictionary in exams are very strict. Dictionaries are not allowed for all subjects, most notably English Language, nor all qualifications. The granting of 25% extra time, which is intended to compensate for time used to look words up, is similarly strict and few exam candidates will qualify for it. Extra time can also be granted for subjects where a dictionary is not allowed, to compensate for not having the use of a dictionary for students who qualify. Teaching staff who make referrals to Exams must consider whether applications, especially for extra time, are in line with the criteria, as well as the requirement for access arrangements to underpin the' level playing field' concept rather than advantaging some students over others. Students are required to provide their own printed bi-lingual dictionaries in the correct 'word for word' format and bring them to their exams. Exams staff check and stamp the dictionaries as compliant and also not annotated in any way in advance of the exams.

Students must comply with Exams' deadlines for this process. Invigilators re-check dictionaries in the exam room.

7.7 Exams apply EAAs as appropriate by booking scribes, readers, prompters (provided IL) as needed and any special exam accommodation such as alternative or separate rooms. Care is taken to ensure appropriate staff are booked for 1-2-1 support who cannot normally be the candidate's own subject teacher or teaching assistant.

7.8 IL staff receive training or refresher training at least annually to qualify them to provide support during exams within the regulations.

7.9 All those involved in the EAA process are aware of and comply with internal STCG deadlines which allow time for the necessary planning for access arrangements to be put in place during all major exams series throughout the year.

8. Appeals regarding decisions relating to Access Arrangements

This may include decisions not to make/apply for a specific reasonable adjustment in circumstances where a student does not meet the criteria for, or there is no evidence/insufficient evidence, to support the implementation of an access arrangement.

Where a decision is made in relation to the access arrangement(s) that apply for a student:

- If a student who is the subject of the relevant decision (or the student's parent/carer) disagrees with the decision made and reasonably believes that STCG has not complied with its responsibilities or followed due procedures, a written request setting out the grounds for appeal should be submitted to the Head of Inclusive Learning. This should be done within 10 working days of the decision being made

- The Head of Inclusive Learning will instruct the Lecturer, Inclusive Learning to investigate and written feedback should be provided within 5 working days of receiving the appeal

To determine the outcome of the appeal, the Head of inclusive Learning will consult the current JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments document to confirm that STCG has complied with the principles and regulations governing access arrangements and followed due procedures.

The appellant will be informed of the outcome of the appeal no later than 5 working days after submission of the appeal in writing.

If the appeal is upheld, STCG will proceed to implement the necessary arrangements/submit the necessary application.

Where a learner is dissatisfied with the way in which the appeal has been dealt with, they may complain in writing to their College Principal who will review the investigation and provide a written response to the complainant within 20 working days. The response will provide a written explanation and information on how the Group will deal with the matter if the appeal is upheld.

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