

Getting support in SQA exams: young people's experiences

There are more disabled young people and/or additional support needs

Information from the [Scottish Government](#) shows that there are more young people each year who are assessed or declared disabled, or have additional support needs. The amount of support provided to these young people is also going up.

Support for disabled young people

Some learners may need support when accessing an exam or other assessment. There are many different reasons why a learner might need support, but it could be because of a physical difficulty (including medical or sensory difficulty), a behavioural or mental health difficulty, or a learning difficulty.

We can make adjustments to give disabled learners, and those with additional support needs, an equal opportunity to show what they know and can do. These adjustments are called 'assessment arrangements'. There's information about this on [our website](#).

SQA's research aims

We wanted to hear from disabled young people and/or those with additional support needs to understand their experience of getting assessment arrangements. This information helps us to learn what worked well, and what we could do to improve this experience for young people who need assessment arrangements.

We first invited young people to answer questions in a survey about their experience with getting support in class and exams. We also invited young people to speak with us about their experiences in an interview. They could be accompanied by someone they felt comfortable with in the interview if they wanted this support.

What did the research show?

50 disabled young people and/or those with additional support needs responded to our survey. We also interviewed four children or young people. The main themes that they shared with us are:

- ◆ Schools, colleges or training providers discussed the young person's needs with them, but some young people did not know what support was available or what they could ask for.
- ◆ Some young people felt they and/or their parent, carer or guardian needed to follow up with their school, college or training provider to put the support in

place. Sometimes, there was a long time between asking for the support and getting it.

- ◆ When things went wrong, some young people had to speak up instead of their school, college or training provider checking in with them to make sure everything was going well.
- ◆ Extra time, a separate room for them on their own or with a small group of their peers, or use of a device such as a laptop or tablet, were the most commonly used arrangements.
- ◆ Many young people thought the assessment arrangements which were provided were Very or Extremely Helpful
- ◆ Young people want to be able to access the assessment arrangement information that schools, colleges and training providers submit using SQA's system. When asked about this in the survey, young people welcomed this if the option could be developed in the future system used by the new qualifications body that will replace SQA.

What happens next?

We have identified some areas we can work on, with the support of our partners, to improve the process schools, colleges and training providers use to provide assessment arrangements for disabled young people and/or those with additional support needs. These include:

- ◆ Sharing the research with partners, such as Scottish Government, Education Scotland and local authorities, to make sure everyone is clear about what young people want.
- ◆ Reviewing the information we share with schools, colleges and training providers to make sure it's clear.
- ◆ Finding opportunities to work with our partners to deliver joint public information events to make sure information is always consistent, to avoid any misunderstanding.
- ◆ Ensuring that the needs of children and young people are at the heart of any changes to existing processes.
- ◆ Make suggestions for improvements to the process for the new qualifications body. This includes looking at whether giving young people access to their assessment arrangement information is a feature that can be built into the system used by schools, colleges and training providers.