



Prepare your student

In preparing your autistic student for exam(s), develop deep understanding of how the student learns best and personalise their provision to take account of this. Strategies you could use for example:

Reducing anxiety:

- “Oops” sessions when there are changes to the timetable; social stories to help students cope with tricky situations; schedules, cue cards and comic strips used instead of verbal communication at times of stress.

Accepting change and feeling relaxed when working:

- Vary seating plans and work partners enabling students to cope better with changes to their learning environment.
- Provide a staffed homework club and revision club for students who cannot/will not work at home.
- Vary the content of practice questions to give students the opportunity to apply their knowledge more widely.
- Access arrangements must reflect the student’s normal way of working. These arrangements should be used routinely in school exams so that the student becomes familiar with them and the school can assess their effectiveness.

Preparing for exams:

- Provide explicit teaching of how to decode exam questions so that students understand what they mean, what is expected of them and how to link it to their subject knowledge.
- Use subject specific vocabulary and “exam jargon” in class to familiarise students with the language used in exam papers. Ensure students are familiar with the layout of their specific exam paper(s).
- Provide opportunities for students to widen their experiences, for example by learning how to play card games using a standard deck. Cards are often the context for GCSE probability questions. Students lacking this experience may be disadvantaged.
- Explain the importance of showing working out. Share mark schemes with students when appropriate so they can see what/how much explanation is expected. Teach how to set out an answer in a logical way so that someone else can understand what they were thinking.
- Give students advance warning of where the exam will take place, how it will be conducted and how it may feel; which adults will be there etc. Ideally mock exams will replicate the exam experience in all respects.

- Explain that their exam will not be exactly the same as any of the past papers they have done; that there may be questions that are unlike any they have done before; they may find some of the questions difficult and that's normal (and ok).
- Students may need training in how to manage their time and how/when to move on to the next question, particularly when they become "stuck".
- Show students how to draw up a revision timetable which is realistic and includes planned breaks and changes of activity (such as exercise or a snack).

School preparation for exams:

- Care must be taken when writing practice questions to ensure that the language used is precise and unambiguous so that autistic students are not disadvantaged.
- Risk assessments should take into account the individuals taking the exam and the rooms to be used, including the possibility of sensory overload.
- Flexibility and sensitivity should be applied to exams within the JCQ guidelines. For example, one student was so anxious about a GCSE exam that he felt unable to attend. The situation was resolved by allowing the student to sit the exam in a room by himself (with an invigilator who also acted as his reader) and for his father to sit outside the exam room.
- Students are entered for exams early if appropriate. This may reduce anxiety as the students know that they can have another go at a later date.
- Wherever possible, exam readers/scribes should be adults with whom the students are familiar and comfortable. Tell students well in advance who their reader/scribe will be and what the adult can and cannot do. Readers and scribes must be given appropriate training. The impact on staffing for the rest of the school cannot be underestimated and this needs to be planned well in advance.



On the day of the exam

Before the exam:

- Consider how to help your autistic students cope with their day. This may be by keeping to familiar daily routines or by holding a breakfast club where students can share their anxieties and ask any last minute questions.
- Always give your students information about what happens next to their papers and the timescale for getting results.

After the exam:

It might be helpful for your autistic student to talk about the exam afterwards. This might already be good practice in your school and can be incorporated into your usual post-exam debriefing. However, for some autistic students it might be beneficial to provide an opportunity for them to have a 1:1 debrief straight after or the next day. This is particularly beneficial if they found a paper difficult so that the experience can be discussed and anxieties lessened before sitting another paper during the exam period.

Students with autism often lack insight into their own functioning or their insight is affected by anxiety, but reviewing an exam can become a really positive alternative to anticipating things that are still unknown. Reviewing an event such as an exam with someone else can make the process of reflection more positive and focused.

A post-exam debrief breaks the experience of exams into smaller parts, making it easier to see how they are connected and how they may have affected the outcome such as:

- Thoughts going into the exam and during the exam
- Understanding and managing anxiety and emotions involved
- The sensory experience of the moment and the environment

'Everyone had huge expectations and that put me under so much pressure' (Shane)



On Results Day

Results Day can be a challenging time for students with autism and in order to support students with the outcomes of their exams you may want to consider the following:

- Preparation for differing outcomes to lessen the impact of disappointment in an eventuality that they don't achieve the expected outcome.
- Provide appropriate support or a countdown to Results Day if the waiting period is going to be challenging for your autistic student.
- On Results Day, consider the room they will be receiving the results and whether a separate space can be made available and appropriate support for the autistic student provided so that the emotion of other students and the sensory impact of coming into school for results are managed in a way that is sensitive to your autistic student's needs.

AET Young Person's Panel quotes:

'Don't like that everyone opens them at the same time.' (Jack)

'(There) should be the option to have your results given to you privately.' (Jack)

Summary Checklist:

This is a summary of the key steps of good practice to support the implementation of exam accommodations for autistic students as a quick reference guide.

Area:	Checklist:	Tick:
Understand your student's needs	Do you understand your student's needs and how their autism will impact on their ability to demonstrate their academic ability, knowledge and skills in an exam?	
	Have you considered the strategies that enable your student to achieve the most in their regular lessons and how this will apply to your planning for exam accommodations?	
Implement the JCQ Access Arrangements	Do you have a copy of the current JCQ Access Arrangements document?	
	Are you familiar with the current JCQ Access Arrangements?	
	Have you considered which access arrangements will be required by your student?	
	Have you applied for particular access arrangements as per the JCQ requirements by the JCQ deadline?	
Preparation in relation to the specific exam(s) to be taken	Are there particular subject specific requirements that you can prepare your autistic student for in relation to their individual needs?	
	Are you familiar with the layout of the exam paper for the particular examination board and how you can prepare your autistic student accordingly?	
	Has your autistic student sat mock exams with past exam papers with the relevant access arrangements in place?	
	Have you analysed their completed mock exam papers for common issues that you can incorporate into your teaching to support their exam preparation?	
	Have you prepared a checklist or 'top tips' for your autistic students to refer to when working on past papers that can then be incorporated into revision guides?	
Preparation for the exam	Have you developed a deep understanding of how the student learns best and personalised their provision to take account of this?	
On the day of the exam	Have you considered how to help your autistic student cope with their day?	
After the exam	Have you planned how and when to debrief your autistic student after the exam?	
On results Day	Have you considered how to best support your autistic student on results day?	
Reflect on the exam process	What has gone well and what could have been better?	