

Specific Needs Policy

This Specific Needs policy replaces the previous Access Policy. It is valid from August 2023 until further notice.

A note about language

We have updated the language in this policy to be as inclusive as possible:

- 'We' refers to ABRSM
- 'You' refers to you, a candidate with specific needs or you, the applicant for a candidate with specific needs
- We have tried to make the language as clear and concise as possible
- We have explained some of the most common terms used throughout this policy below

Throughout this policy and our website (www.abrsm.org), we use a person-first approach to language. For example, we talk about 'a candidate with autism' and not 'an autistic candidate.' We recognise that not everyone will identify with this approach.

Terminology

Here are some common terms you will see throughout this policy with a short explanation.

- **Specific needs:** the term we use at ABRSM to cover any physical, sensory, cognitive or neurological disability, impairment, health condition or difficulty.
- **Fair access:** the measures we put in place to support candidates with specific needs.
- **Reasonable adjustments:** refer to something we offer to give you fair access to your exam. This might include a large print test or paper, rest breaks or the presence of a chaperone in your exam. We do not usually require supporting evidence for reasonable adjustments. This is because no changes are made to how or what we assess.
- **Access arrangements:** refer to any change we make to how or what we assess. This might include extra time for a timed test or exam, or an alternative test. We do require supporting evidence if you request access arrangements (see Section 9).
- **Supporting evidence:** a document confirming a candidate's entitlement to access arrangements (see Section 8).

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1. Introduction

1. We are committed to providing all candidates with fair access to our assessments.
2. As a UK regulated awarding organisation, we are subject to the conditions of recognition set out by our regulators¹. In accordance with these regulations, this policy sets out our approach to making access arrangements and reasonable adjustments available for our assessments and qualifications.
3. Our Fair Access Guidelines for candidates with specific needs are available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds; these are regularly updated and should be read before booking an exam.
4. Please contact us (specificneeds@abrsm.ac.uk) if you require this policy in an alternative format.
5. If your question is not answered in this policy or in our Fair Access Guidelines, please contact us (specificneeds@abrsm.ac.uk) before booking your exam.

2. Important information

1. We do everything we can to provide fair access for candidates with specific needs, but we cannot change the marking criteria. All candidates are assessed using the same marking criteria.
2. Before making an exam booking, you should consider which exam is most appropriate for you. You may find that our Performance Grades offer a more accessible option than our Practical Grades, for example. Similarly, you may wish to consider whether Grade 5 in a solo jazz subject or Practical Musicianship offers a more accessible route to Grades 6 and above. Please see our list of [prerequisites](#) for further information.
3. If your specific needs mean that you are not able to take a Performance Grade, Practical Grade or diploma exam, the Open Music Assessment may be a suitable alternative (see [Open Music Assessment \(abrsm.org\)](http://Open Music Assessment (abrsm.org))).

3. Face-to-face instrumental and singing exams, including Practical Grades and Diplomas

1. For details of reasonable adjustments and access arrangements for our face-to-face Practical Grade exams, please see the Fair Access Guidelines at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.
2. Examples of reasonable adjustments for face-to-face instrumental and singing exams are:
 - Large or modified print tests where no additional time is required
 - Tests printed on coloured paper
 - Tests printed on a separate sheet to allow you to make notes
 - Use of a coloured overlay or filter
 - Step-free access to an exam room
 - General extra time for accessing the exam venue
 - Rest breaks
 - Use of an adapted instrument
 - Minor modifications to exam music (e.g. if you have physical restrictions or disabilities)
 - Modified or simplified language used by the examiner
 - An exam appointment in the morning or afternoon

No supporting evidence is usually required for these options.

3. You may request a chaperone in line with our Fair Access guidelines available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds. No supporting evidence is required. However, you should request permission for the chaperone before booking your exam by sending an email to the Specific Needs team.
4. Examples of access arrangements for face-to-face instrumental and singing exams are:
 - Extra time for sight-reading preparation
 - Braille/large print/modified print memory test in place of sight-reading
 - Aural repetition test in place of sight-reading
 - Alternative aural tests for candidates with hearing impairment
 - Adaptations to the aural tests for candidates unable to speak or sing
 - Use of the scale book or lyrics for reference

We may ask for supporting documents the first time you make an exam booking with one of these options.

4. Digital Performance Grade and Digital ARSM exams

1. For details of reasonable adjustments and access arrangements for our digital instrumental and singing exams, please see the Fair Access Guidelines at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.

5. Music Theory exams

1. For details of reasonable adjustments and access arrangements for our Music Theory exams, please see the Fair Access Guidelines at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.
2. Examples of reasonable adjustments for Music Theory exams are:
 - A hard copy exam paper where no extra time is required (Grades 1 to 5 only)
 - Rest breaks (also known as stop the clock)
 - Step-free access to the exam venue (Grades 6 to 8 only)

We may sometimes require supporting evidence for these options.

3. Examples of access arrangements for Music Theory exams are:
 - Braille/large print/modified print exam paper with extra time
 - Extra time to complete the exam
 - A separate room (Grades 6 to 8 only)
 - Use of a scribe or reader

We may ask for supporting documents the first time you make an exam booking with one of these options.

6. Passing additional information to the examiner

1. Our examiners have access to general information about the most common sensory, cognitive neurological, and physical difficulties, and how these may impact you in your exam.
2. You are welcome to highlight any information that will help the examiner or invigilator to support you as sensitively as possible. This is particularly relevant where:
 - You have two or more specific needs that impact on the exam

- You require adjustments that are not obvious from the option you selected when booking your exam

3. Please email the Specific Needs team when you have made your exam booking.

7. How do I request reasonable adjustments or access arrangements?

1. When booking an exam, you will be asked if you have access needs. Ticking this box will present a dropdown list from which you can choose the most relevant option.
2. The options will be different for each type of exam. We recommend reading our Fair Access Guidelines at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds for full details before you make your exam booking.
3. Some of the options describe a particular access arrangement or reasonable adjustment, such as 'rest breaks' or 'aural repetition test in place of sight-reading'. Other access options are more general, such as 'autism' or 'ME/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome'.
4. You can only select one option. If none of the options adequately describe your specific needs, please prioritise selecting the option which relates to any additional test materials you require, such as large print or alternative tests. You should complete the exam booking and then email the Access Coordinator immediately to explain your specific needs in full. We will then write to the examiner and make any other necessary arrangements.
5. You must select the relevant option each time you make an exam booking. You must do this even if you have received access arrangements or reasonable adjustments previously.
6. The option you select should reflect your usual way of working.
7. You can search by key word, such as 'dyslexia' or 'large print'.
8. It is not possible to change or amend a specific needs option once you have completed the exam booking. If you are a teacher or parent, it is important to be aware of the candidate's specific needs before booking their exam. See Sections 9 and 10 below.
9. It is not possible to select a specific needs option for one candidate as part of a larger group booking. In this instance, please make a separate booking for any candidate who has access requirements.
10. If your needs are not met by any of our standard arrangements, please contact the Specific Needs team before booking your exam.

8. Supporting evidence

1. We require supporting evidence the first time you request access arrangements for an exam (see Sections 3 to 6).
2. We do not require supporting evidence for reasonable adjustments. If you are unsure whether you need to provide supporting evidence, please contact the Specific Needs team (specificneeds@abrsn.ac.uk).
3. You should send supporting documents by email to supportingdocuments@abrsn.ac.uk. You will receive an auto response, but we do not respond to enquiries sent to this address. Please send any questions to specificneeds@abrsn.ac.uk. Please see section 11 for further details on how we handle your personal and sensitive data. You can also see our Privacy Policy at www.abrsn.org/policies.
4. We retain supporting documents for up to six months from the exam date. After that, we retain only brief details of the access arrangements to which you are entitled. We update your customer record to show that you have sent supporting documents.
5. You can send supporting documents at any time before you book your exam. We encourage you to discuss your access requirements with the Specific Needs team in advance of making your exam booking.
6. Where we do not hold a record of supporting evidence, the examiner will offer the access arrangement selected with the exam booking. However, we may not issue the exam result until we have received the supporting evidence.
7. Obtaining suitable supporting evidence can take time and should ideally be arranged well in advance of booking an exam.
8. Failure to submit appropriate supporting evidence may be considered maladministration in accordance with our Malpractice and Maladministration Policy, available at [Malpractice and Maladministration Policy \(abrsn.org\)](http://abrsn.org)
9. We can accept the following documents as supporting evidence:
 - A letter or email from a Head Teacher or Principal
 - A letter or email from a SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator)
 - A letter or email from the Disability Support Unit at a Further or Higher Education establishment

- A letter or email from a suitably qualified healthcare professional, A report from an Educational Psychologist or other suitably qualified assessor

10. The supporting evidence should:

- Be dated
- State the author's job title and contact details
- Give the candidate's full name and date of birth
- Confirm the candidate's specific needs and include details of any formal assessments
- Provide details of reasonable adjustments allowed for statutory exams, where possible
- Outline the candidate's usual way of working

11. If you do not have access to the supporting evidence listed above, for example if you are an adult and have never received a formal diagnosis, you should contact the Specific Needs Team (specificneeds@abrsm.ac.uk) to discuss an alternative.

12. We are not able to accept supporting evidence sent in hard copy.

13. We are unable to accept JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) forms or confirmation from JCQ of reasonable adjustments as supporting evidence. This is because such documents rarely contain the detail we need to ensure that our provision is appropriate. ABRSM is not currently a member of the JCQ.

14. Examiners and stewards cannot accept supporting evidence on the day of the exam.

9. Late notice requests for access arrangements and reasonable adjustments

1. You must request all access arrangements and reasonable adjustments when you book your exam. It is not possible to add or change access arrangements and reasonable adjustments after you have completed your booking.
2. If you are a teacher or parent, please ensure you obtain full details of the candidate's access requirements before making the exam booking
3. If you did not select a specific needs option at the time of your booking, or your specific needs have changed, you have two choices:
 - Continue without the access arrangement or reasonable adjustment,
 - or cancel the exam and request a refund at [Withdrawals, Non-attendance and Fee Refund Policy \(abrsm.org\)](#)

4. If your access requirements change between booking the exam and the exam itself, please contact the Specific Needs Team (specificneeds@abrsm.ac.uk) to discuss the most suitable option.

10. Changes to face-to-face exam bookings

1. It is possible to change an exam booking, for example, by selecting a new date, time, or venue.
2. If you change your booking, the specific needs option will be moved to the new appointment, including any additional time.
3. However, any materials requested will not be carried across to the new booking. This includes large print tests, alternative tests, or any information you requested to be passed to the examiner in advance.
4. If you have selected access requirements and you wish to make a change to your exam booking, you have two choices:
 - Continue without the access arrangement or reasonable adjustment, or
 - Cancel the exam and request a refund (see [Withdrawals, Non-attendance and Fee Refund Policy \(abrsm.org\)](https://www.abrsm.org/withdrawals-non-attendance-and-fee-refund-policy))

11. Special Consideration

1. Special consideration may be requested in the following circumstances:
 - You are diagnosed with an illness that will affect your attendance at the exam
 - You missed part or all of your exam due to circumstances beyond your control
 - A sudden malfunction of your instrument immediately before the exam
 - You could not complete your exam due to circumstances beyond your control.
2. Our Special Consideration policy can be found at www.abrsm.org/policies

12. Data Protection

1. We recognise that you may need to disclose personal and sensitive information. We are committed to handling this information discretely and confidentially.
2. You can read our Privacy Policy at www.abrsm.org/privacypolicy.

3. We retain supporting evidence in a secure mailbox, with restricted access, for a maximum of six months after the exam date.
4. For compliance purposes, we retain confirmation of receipt of supporting evidence as well as brief details of your access arrangements and reasonable adjustments. This is kept as part of your electronic record. Only ABRSM staff working directly on specific needs can access this information.
5. We only use supporting evidence to determine your eligibility for access arrangements. We do not share details of supporting evidence with examiners or invigilators, other than where requested and where they are directly relevant to the exam.
6. We may share details of your access arrangements and reasonable adjustments, as appropriate, with the relevant Honorary Local Representative (HLR) or international representative, stewards, examiners, or invigilators. We will only share additional information about your specific needs where you have requested this (see Section 6).

13. Feedback and complaints

1. We hope that the support we put in place for you meets your needs. However, we recognise that there may be rare instances where your expectations are not met.
2. If you have feedback or suggestions about this Specific Needs Policy, our Fair Access Guidelines or the access arrangements and reasonable adjustments we offer, please email the Specific Needs Team (specificneeds@abrsm.ac.uk) in the first instance.
3. If you are not happy with the access arrangements or reasonable adjustments that have been suggested for your exam, you can appeal this decision by emailing the Specific Needs Team (specificneeds@abrsm.ac.uk). Please include specific details, including any supporting evidence as part of your appeal. Please submit your appeal within 14 days of receiving the initial decision, and where possible, before the exam takes place.
4. If you feel that the access arrangements or reasonable adjustments agreed with ABRSM were not delivered correctly during the exam, please follow the process to submit an exam delivery concern. You can find details of how to do this at www.abrsm.org/contact-us/send-exam-feedback
5. For appeals, an additional stage is in place to refer the matter to an independent reviewer who is not an internal member of staff or examiner.
6. In addition to the options outlined above, you are welcome to submit exam queries or feedback via our page at www.abrsm.org/contact-us/send-exam-feedback. You

may also use this link to query a result, send feedback about an exam venue, or provide positive exam feedback.

14. Further information and contact details

1. Contact details for the Specific Needs Team are as follows:

Specific Needs Team

ABRSM

4 London Wall Place

London

EC2Y 5AU

T +44 (0)20 7467 7342

E specificneeds@abrsm.ac.uk

Our exam regulations can be found at www.abrsm.org/examregulations