

NOVEMBER 2024**MANAGING SUPERVISED REST BREAKS**

As a centre-delegated access arrangement, it is difficult to acquire an accurate number of candidates who have access to a supervised rest break and, therefore, the impact of this access arrangement cannot be measured on centres and the workload of exams officers. However, based upon feedback gathered at face-to-face training events and conferences, and the number of email queries received from exams officers relating to the management of supervised rest breaks, there is little doubt that not only are a large number of candidates awarded a supervised rest break(s) during an examination/assessment, but there is also confusion in a significant number of centres about how these breaks should be managed and administered.

It is very likely that the number of supervised rest breaks has increased in recent years since JCQ regulations have required centres to explore and trial the option of supervised rest breaks through timed internal tests and/or mock examinations before making an application for 25% extra time for candidates who have an impairment other than a learning difficulty.

Supervised rest breaks have particular significance for exams officers as they directly impact upon the exams officer role as these candidates must be roomed and seated appropriately within the exam room, and then managed by invigilators to ensure that these breaks are delivered in accordance with the instructions issued by the SENCo and in line with JCQ regulations.

Below are some of the areas which an exams officer should consider/be aware of in relation to supervised rest breaks.

Awarding of supervised rest breaks

A supervised rest break may be awarded to candidates who have a range of difficulties including cognition and learning needs, communication and interaction needs, a medical condition, sensory and physical needs or social, emotional and mental health needs.

The SENCo must only award a supervised rest break to a candidate where:

- they are satisfied that the candidate has an impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect, giving rise to persistent and significant difficulties (the candidate is disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act)
- there is a genuine need for the arrangement
- it is the candidate's normal way of working within the centre

The candidate's difficulties must be established within the centre and known to a Form Tutor, a Head of Year, the SENCo and/or a senior member of staff with pastoral responsibilities.

The role of the SENCO

It is the responsibility of the SENCo to understand the *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* document and/or the relevant section of the *Instructions for conducting examinations* publication and make relevant decisions in line with the regulations.

The SENCO must make decisions relating to candidates who require a supervised rest break as they will have a working knowledge of an individual candidate's needs and how their difficulties impact in the classroom and/or in timed assessments.

It is the responsibility of the SENCo to make appropriate and informed decisions based on the JCQ regulations, this includes ensuring that the purpose of a supervised rest break is for a break from the examination and not a break used for 'thinking time'.

Duration

The duration of the supervised rest break must be determined by the SENCo based on their knowledge of the candidate's needs and the candidate's normal way of working when placed under timed conditions.

The SENCo must also consider the timing of breaks if the candidate has more than one examination during the day.

The statement that there is no maximum time set for supervised rest breaks has been removed from the regulations.

A single supervised rest break should be no more than 30 minutes in duration, although, in most cases, a supervised rest break will often be shorter than this.

A supervised rest break will not normally be required within the first 10 minutes of an examination but may be thereafter.

Frequency

The SENCo will confirm the number of supervised rest breaks permitted for a candidate.

Candidates cannot be given as many supervised rest breaks as they like for as long as they like.

The role of the candidate

Although candidates cannot dictate the duration and frequency of their supervised rest break(s), the SENCo will advise whether the candidate has a difficulty, illness or disability which only the candidate can see emerging during an examination and, therefore, request a supervised rest break when required.

The role of the invigilator

The invigilator must be informed of the location of the supervised rest break(s) – whether this will take place inside the exam room, or if the candidate will need to leave the exam room accompanied.

Regardless of the location of the supervised rest break, invigilators must ensure that during the supervised rest break the candidate must not have access to the question paper/answer booklet.

Conclusion

It is the role of the SENCo to consider in advance of the examination(s) how many breaks a candidate might need, the duration of the supervised rest break, the frequency of the break and where the break(s) will take place.

An exams officer must be made aware of these decisions to allow for adequate preparation to be undertaken, such as relevant rooming, seating and invigilation arrangements to be put in place and ensuring that sufficient staff are available to facilitate the rest break(s).

A supervised rest break must only be awarded to candidates with a difficulty, illness, impairment or disability as defined by JCQ in its *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* document and the Equality Act.

Centres must also be aware that if a supervised rest break(s) is awarded to a candidate for 'thinking time' and without a genuine, evidenced need and it is not the candidate's normal way of working, then they are engaging in malpractice, which, if exposed/confirmed, will lead to further repercussions.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (October 2024)