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To whom it may concern,

Re: ADHD and a Separate Exam Room.

This letter specifically addresses the challenges individuals with ADHD may experience under exam conditions and talks to the value a separate exam room can have.

ADHD is legally recognised disability¹ and as such individuals with ADHD are legally entitled to reasonable accommodations under the 2010 Equality Act. This letter aims to support a request made under the Act for the accommodation of a separate exam room.

ADHD is underestimated by many in its severity and impact. The challenge of ADHD is expressed by the significantly increased risk of suicide. 1 in 10 men or boys with ADHD will at some point try to take their own life. 1 in 4 women or girls with ADHD will at some point try to take their own life². Until recently the majority of funds to this charity were donated from parents whose children had taken their own life. This letter is not saying that the person about whom this letter is about is in such a situation. The inclusion of these statistics to inform you of how hard having ADHD can be. Alongside those individuals are a substantial number not in a place of considered suicide but finding life extraordinarily difficult.

There are a significant number of people with ADHD having issues with exam conditions. Those issues can then have a negative grade, and consequently lifelong impact. The challenge of ADHD is substantial and long-term. It is therefore essential we don't add to that burden, and the life consequences, by failing to provide effective exam accommodations.

Individuals with ADHD can find it extremely difficult to focus, to control their focus, and to regain their focus once lost. They can have issues of hyperactivity (a need for movement) and impulsivity.

Exam halls offer a number of unique challenges for someone with ADHD. Exam conditions are generally unfamiliar situations, with high stress, and with (usually) large numbers of individuals in them. All those present (those sitting the exam and invigilators) provide their own individual opportunity for distraction to someone with ADHD. Consequently, for someone with ADHD, exam halls would not commonly be considered low-distraction environments.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the impact of the behaviour of others presents potentially catastrophic consequences for the focus of individuals with ADHD. Distractions that are innocuous to individuals without ADHD may result in someone with ADHD losing their focus and their ability to answer questions. More serious distractions – such as a disruptive pupil – are more obvious to all but the assumption that the pupil with ADHD can then quickly and easily regain their focus is patently false.

¹ Definitions of disability under the Equality Act 2010. <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

² The Dark Side of ADHD. Archives of Suicide Research. 2020. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13811118.2020.1856258?journalCode=usui20>

No invigilator team or school have absolute control of the examinees or the situation. It is not possible to predict everything every individual will do nor the impact those actions will have on someone with ADHD. That can mean common exam conditions can be seen as gambling with the future of someone with ADHD based on the assumed behaviour of others.

Individuals with ADHD can often benefit from being able to move, even while seated. This is a common coping strategy for many with ADHD to help them focus and refocus when concentration is lost. However, this movement is usually against the exam hall rules. We often see pupils using one or more bathroom breaks as a forced (and sub-effective) coping strategy for them to vent their energy or to use movement to help them re-focus. It can be significant to provide a setting for individuals with ADHD that allows some freedom of movement; movement with shorter lost time than a bathroom break and that doesn't risk distracting others. Repeated bathroom breaks can also bring accusations of cheating or anxiety of such accusations.

In consideration of the above issues we strongly suggest that the only way to successfully fulfil the obligations under the 2010 Disability Act for Reasonable Accommodations with regards to ADHD is to provide a separate exam room for an individual with ADHD. The risks and consequences of not doing so represent a significant potential lifetime cost to the individual with ADHD.

Organisations do have the right to refuse such a request under the Disability Act 2010; however, the onus is on them to provide evidence that it is not a reasonable accommodation. That evidence can then be challenged within a legal process.

Please note that this is a separate discussion to any extra time discussion. We do specifically note that the issues mentioned, and in particular the varying duration and impact of those issues, mean that time alone cannot ameliorate them.

We are passionate in our view that a separate room is a reasonable accommodation for an individual with ADHD. We, therefore, do offer our backing to request and appeal any such request. We would also offer support in any legal challenge should any individual, parent, or caregiver be minded to pursue such an avenue.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Kind regards,

ADHD UK.

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FEEDBACK

We strive for all we do to be the best it possibly can. If you have any comments on this document. Any ways it can be better. Please contact us on hello@adhduk.co.uk or call us on 020 3984 9679