



SCENARIO-BASED PROFESSIONAL EXAMS (OSCEs) & STAMMERING

BACKGROUND

People who stammer may be disadvantaged in scenario based healthcare exams, often called OSCEs (Objective Structured Clinical Examinations). The short time limits in many OSCEs can prevent people who stammer from saying everything they need to say. Also, misunderstanding of stammering and prejudices against those who stammer do exist, and examiners may be more likely to (incorrectly) view candidates who stammer as unsure or less competent than fluent speakers. In addition, people who stammer may find the exam situation particularly challenging as the high stakes, the observers, the actors, and typical exam nervousness can all make stammering more frequent or intense.

For these reasons and more, it can be difficult for people who stammer to show examiners what they are capable of within OSCEs.

Discrimination against stammering – related to both how the exam is set up and how it is marked – is covered by the Equality Act (Great Britain) and the Disability Discrimination Act (Northern Ireland). This applies where (as is very often the case) the stammering meets the legal definition of 'disability'. This gives people who stammer the legal right to request adjustments to exam procedures so that their clinical skills and competencies can be evaluated fairly. Such adjustments are known as 'reasonable adjustments'.

Disclaimer: This document provides a general guide and should not be used as a substitute for legal advice.

The guidance is produced by [STAMMA](#) and the [NHS Stammering Network](#).

We will continue to develop and refine this document based on individuals' experiences. We'd love to hear how you find this guidance and how your request for adjustments was received by the examining body. Please let us know at employmentsupport@stamma.org.

WHAT SORT OF ADJUSTMENTS?

Adjustments are tailored to the individual and are agreed between the candidate and the examining body. Here are some examples that people who stammer have requested previously:

- Prior to the exam, examiners and actors should be given information about stammering in general, the individual candidate's particular pattern of stammering, and advice on how listeners can helpfully respond.
- Additional time for each clinical scenario.
- Breaks between scenarios.
- Additional preparation time prior to scenarios.
- Spread the exam over more than one day.

Outlining the specific adjustments you would like and the reasons for them is a great way to initiate the conversation. Even if you can't think of a specific adjustment for the way the exam procedures put you at a disadvantage, tell the examining body about it. That way, they can consider what steps they can reasonably take.

You may or may not be comfortable calling your stammering a 'disability'. However, a stammer is very often a disability under the terms of the Equality Act (Great Britain) or of the Disability Discrimination Act (Northern Ireland). Within these Acts, characteristics which meet the legal definition of disability are protected from discrimination. For this reason, you will likely need to use the term 'disability' in your correspondence if you want to access the benefits that reasonable adjustments can bring.

GETTING ADJUSTMENTS

Step 1: Clarify the process for requesting

Look on the examining body's website, or phone or email them to get clear, written guidance on what information they need from you. You should also clarify in what order and when they require certain actions. For example, must you register for the exam first and then apply for reasonable adjustments? Or apply for reasonable adjustments and, once these are secured, register for the exam?

Step 2: Understand the exam process

Make sure you understand how the standard exam process works. Think about which aspects of the process might be challenging for you in relation to stammering. For example, are you concerned that the time allowed for each scenario isn't sufficient because stammering means you need a bit longer to speak? Or that you are expected to use particular terminology but those words are hard for you to say? Or are you concerned you'll become exhausted as the exam progresses due to the physical effort you put in when you're stammering a lot? The issues are likely to be individual, so think about how your stammering works and how this might interact with the exam processes. Give this information to the examining body and use it to help you work out what adjustments you want to request.

Step 3: Provide the 'evidence'

Most examining bodies require some sort of medical certification or 'evidence' of the 'disability'. A Speech & Language Therapist, specialised in stammering, is best-placed to provide such documentation, but this may not always be an option. Here are some suggestions:

- Find out whether the Speech & Language Therapy department at your local NHS Trust offer support for adults who stammer. If so, they may be able to provide the relevant documentation.

You may be able to self-refer or need a GP referral to get an appointment. Check what the waiting time is to get an appointment with the Speech & Language Therapist as this may affect what you choose to do.

- If you are at university or college, contact your student health support service, disability service, or department administrator to ask how they can help you get the 'evidence' to support your request. They may be able to organise an assessment for you or cover the cost of an assessment from a private Speech & Language Therapist.
- If you are employed, contact your Occupational Health (OH) department, and ask if they have sufficient experience with stammering to organise an assessment and report for you. OH departments typically conduct their own specialist OH assessment for workplace adjustments and this may extend to evidence for adjustments to professional exam procedures if they have experience with stammering. Alternatively, they may refer you to a Speech and Language Therapist (preferably one specialising in stammering) for an assessment and report.
- Book (and cover the cost of) an appointment with a private Speech & Language Therapist yourself. See the "Find an SLT" function on the website www.asltip.com.
- Ask your GP if they can provide the necessary documentation. Use this option with caution, as GPs are not specialists in stammering and the experience of some suggests that GP reports may not always be helpful.
- If none of these options can provide the documentation for you within the required timeframe, contact STAMMA at employmentsupport@stamma.org for support from their Employment Service.

Step 4: Make sure the documentation includes what you need it to

See the companion document, *Supporting a request for reasonable adjustments in exams for healthcare professionals*, for an example. The 'evidence' or documentation generally needs to include:

- Your name
- Reference to the fact that stammering can be considered a disability under the terms of the Equality Act (Great Britain) or Disability Discrimination Act (Northern Ireland)
- Information about your particular pattern of stammering
- In what ways the standard exam procedures put you at a disadvantage compared with candidates who don't stammer. For example *not being able to say as much within the time limits, difficulty using certain terminology, exhaustion, stammering being mistaken for uncertainty, etc.*
- Specific details about the reasonable adjustments you can think of that would be beneficial

Some examining bodies require that your registration or exam number is also included.

Step 5: Submit your request in good time

Submit your request for adjustments well in advance of the exam date. Where agreed, some adjustments require considerable effort on the part of the examining body (for example, creating separate circuits for candidates granted extra time for scenarios), and they need time to get these into place. Also, in cases where an examining body initially refuses some or all of your request, you need to have sufficient time for negotiation and discussion.

GET SUPPORT

We are eager to support anyone who feels they are being discriminated against for the way they speak. If you have any questions or concerns regarding reasonable adjustments for professional exams, or if you're unsure whether your stammering meets the definition of disability, please contact STAMMA's Employment Service at employmentsupport@stamma.org or www.stammeringlaw.org