



ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS IN PUBLIC EXAMS

Completing a Form 8 application

Access arrangements (AA) in public examinations, such as GCSE, BTech Diploma and A Levels, are special arrangements which are agreed prior to the exam series, and put into place to avert a candidate from being placed at a substantial disadvantage when compared to their peers. They are, in essence, a reasonable adjustment for candidates who experiences substantial difficulties or disabilities. They must not advantage a candidate but are implemented to provide a level playing field where a candidate has a specific area of difficulty which would otherwise create a barrier to demonstrating their true potential.

The Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ) are the Regulatory body for authorising applications for AAs and publish new Regulations every year in September. New applications must be based upon the most recent Regulations.

There are a wide range of AA which can be implemented, and each arrangement should be considered according to the individual needs of the candidate, on a case-by-case, subject-by-subject basis.

Pearl Barnes looks at how to complete a Form 8 application for access arrangements in public examinations such as GCSE, BTech Diploma and A level to ensure that they are compliant with the current Regulations

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In most instances, applications are made online, following the gathering of evidence and completing of a Form 8. However, not all applications require processing online and not all applications require the gathering of evidence.

No application or evidence needed

The following access arrangement do not require an application online or evidence to be held on file:

- separate invigilation within the centre
- CCTV
- coloured overlays
- low vision aid/magnifier
- amplification equipment
- colour naming for a candidate who is colour blind
- coloured paper or enlarged paper
- optical character reader
- bilingual translation dictionaries.

No application needed; evidence is needed

The following access arrangements do not require the completion of a Form 8, but do require substantiating through evidence:

- use of a word processor/laptop
- supervised rest breaks
- prompter
- read aloud
- sign language interpreter
- alternative accommodation/site
- bilingual translation dictionaries and ten per cent extra time.

In each case, evidence for the reason the arrangement is applied must be held on file, and the substantial and long-term impact of any SEN and/or disability upon the candidate's working provided.



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Application online needed and evidence needed

Access arrangements should be processed online for the following arrangements:

- 25 per cent extra time
- extra time between 25 per cent and 50 per cent
- over 50 per cent extra time
- reader or computer reader
- scribe/speech recognition technology
- oral language modifier (OLM)
- practical assistant.

There is usually a requirement for a specialist assessment by a specialist assessor, as the candidate would usually have cognition and learning needs which call for the access arrangements to be implemented.

Where an application is processed online, a Form 8 must be completed. This should be treated as an application form and essential information is required. The Form 8 is essentially a working document which summarises all the information regarding the candidate's needs.

Evidence of need and normal way of working

In all cases, when making a judgement about whether an access arrangement is necessary, there should be clear evidence of need, and the arrangement should be the candidate's normal way of working. For instance, for a candidate with a visual impairment who uses text-to-speak software, this is their normal way of working as without this concession, they would not be able to access the exam papers.

Completing the Form 8 has become much more complex over the years. There are three sections: A, B and C. It is the responsibility of the SENCO or specialist assessor to complete the Section A before the specialist assessment takes place and in collaboration with the candidate's teachers. This requires gathering information from the teachers relating to: the candidate's persistent difficulties; how these difficulties have impacted upon teaching and learning within the classroom; and the candidate's normal way of working within the setting, including the support which is routinely given and any reasonable adjustments which are routinely made for the candidate to access the environment.

Completion of Form 8 Section A

Section A is a pen portrait of the candidate's needs and requires the gathering of evidence before being completed. It is recommended that the SENCO keep a document wallet for each candidate and gather the following information, where available, before completion:

- KS2 SATs results
- screening test results, such as CATS and MidYIS
- comments regarding the candidate's normal way of working in class
- details of intervention strategies and approaches
- the candidate's IEP/ILP demonstrating the support provided in the past or present
- comments and observations from support staff, including learning support assistants or teaching assistants
- the current arrangements made in internal tests, including the use of the concession where it has been applied
- the candidate's view and self-reported difficulties
- information regarding the diagnosis, such as former assessment reports.

The following questionnaires should be used to gather the evidence required to complete the Section A:

- teacher and support staff questionnaire, to obtain the views of the candidate's teachers, evidence of need for concessions and the candidate's normal way of working/adjustments that need to be made in class
- feedback on exams questionnaire, to obtain evidence of use of the concession in each subject; this should detail the use of the concession and the impact it has made upon performance
- student questionnaire to obtain their views of the need for, and use of, the concession.

It should be noted that there is no requirement to obtain the views of parents, but it is advisable that the centre considers its own policy of consulting parents about their views.

Form 8 Section A must:

- be completed either by the SENCO or the specialist assessor working for the centre.
- be completed before an application for exam concessions is made and before a referral for specialist assessment
- paint a history of need and a picture of current need
- be completed following consultation with the candidate's teachers, demonstrating a need for the concession and how it is used
- demonstrate clearly a need for the exam concession being applied for
- demonstrate that the candidate is at risk of being placed at a substantial disadvantage if they are not granted the concession
- make reference to the candidate's IEP/ILP or use within internal exams and tests.



Section A currently consists of three questions/requirements.

Section A Part 1: Provide relevant information/evidence of the candidate's persistent and significant difficulties (i.e. what is the candidate's history of difficulties?)

To complete this section, you need to include the following information:

- the diagnosis/specific areas of difficulty; for example dyslexia
- the history of need; for example how the difficulty was first identified and when, what support was put into place and what has happened over the years as a result of the identified need
- the support that has been provided in the past, such as at primary school
- baseline tests, SATs, CATs and any screening results
- previous specialist assessment results
- any other relevant background information available.

Section A Part 2: Show how the candidate's disability/difficulty has impacted on teaching and learning in the classroom (i.e. what are the candidate's current difficulties in the classroom, tests and examinations?)

Complete this section in collaboration with those who support the candidate on a daily basis, such as the teaching and learning support staff. Include the following information:

- current barriers to learning; for example slow reading speed
- comments from the candidate's teachers relating to what they find difficult in class; for example, the candidate may persistently struggle to complete their work in time, and maintain focus and concentration, requiring regular breaks or prompts
- comments from the candidate themselves regarding what they struggle; for example, the candidate may find they struggle where there is a lot of background noise
- comments from any support staff working with the candidate regarding what the candidate finds difficult; for example, the candidate may continue to struggle to read accurately, leading to mis-reading and mis-interpreting subject-specific vocabulary
- anecdotal evidence from previous exams/tests regarding the persistent difficulties; for example, the candidate persistently runs out of time or struggles with anxiety, taking time to calm down.



The Form 8 is essentially a working document which summarises all the information regarding the candidate's needs

Section A Part 3: Detail the candidate's normal way of working within the centre, the support given and how this relates to the proposed arrangement(s). (i.e. what support and adjustments are in place for the candidate in the classroom, tests and examinations?)

This section relates to what the candidate needs in order to overcome their substantial barriers to learning. The support provided in exams must reflect the differentiated and tailored support provided within the classroom. This section needs to be completed in collaboration with teachers and support staff. Include:

- notes and comments from teachers regarding what they do differently to support the candidate, such as allowing them longer to complete a task
- notes and comments from support staff; for example, they usually read the questions for the candidate
- notes and comments from the candidate
- evidence of support provided in recent exams and tests
- any other support which is regularly provided, such as additional support groups.

Completion of Form 8 Section C

Following completion of the Form 8 Section A, the candidate will need an updated assessment by the specialist assessor for the centre, which must take place after the start of Year 9. The Section C is then completed, which must comply with JCQ regulations in the following ways:

- all assessments must be appropriate for the assessment criteria itself; for example, assessment of reading accuracy must be an untimed single word test
- all assessments must be the most recent editions of the tests which are nationally standardised; for example, GORT5 not GORT4
- the candidate must be within the age-limits of the test; for example, the DASH cannot be used for 17 years+; the DASH 17+ must be used
- the assessor must be qualified to Level 7 or equivalent in assessment
- the assessor must conduct all the tests themselves in a one-to-one environment
- the assessor must sign and date the Section C themselves
- the assessor cannot use previous test results to complete Section C
- the assessor cannot be a student studying for an assessment qualification; they must already be qualified
- where a test has been discontinued or abandoned, test scores must not be quoted
- screeners cannot be used for Section C completion, but can be used as supporting evidence
- the assessor must uphold the integrity of the assessment process and conduct the tests with integrity and honesty.

The best time to conduct the assessments is probably at the end of Y9/beginning of Y10 when there has been time to gather the evidence of need and the candidate has chosen their course of study.

Form 8 Section B

This section is completed by the SENCO after the specialist assessment and in collaboration with the specialist assessor. The SENCO details the access arrangements to be applied for, based upon all the evidence from the history of need, the candidate's teachers and the specialist assessment.

The goal

The goal for the candidate should always be independently working to reflect everyday life, and any arrangements considered should facilitate this. For example, a candidate with poor reading accuracy may benefit from the use of a reading pen or text-to-speech software rather than a reader.

It is the role of the SENCO, senior leadership team and governing body to familiarise themselves with the entire contents of the JCQ Regulations, relating to access arrangements in order to ensure their setting complies with the national standards; it is their role to make the final decision over the access arrangements being applied for.

Access arrangements are an essential mechanism for candidates who would otherwise struggle to demonstrate their true, academic potential and consideration of the most appropriate arrangement should be given for all candidates with SEN and disabilities.

Further information

Pearl Barnes is an SEN consultant and specialist assessor and a former president of nasen:

www.sendiss.co.uk

Information on access arrangements for JCQ members (the eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK) can be found at:

www.jcq.org.uk