

## EXAM ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY PARENTS

This page provides information and advice relating to access arrangements in public exams, including: GCSE, A Level, BTEC Diploma, City and Guilds, Entry Level, AEA, Essential Skills, Functional Skills and EPQ.

Below you will find some frequently asked questions and answers related to access arrangements applications.

#### What are access arrangements?

Access arrangements or exam concessions are special arrangements that can be applied for and allow candidates with special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries to access public examinations.

Access arrangements are reasonable adjustments, as defined by the Equality Act (2010), and are specific to the individual candidate. They enable a level playing field to be provided, by overcoming a potential substantial disadvantage when they are applied. They must not provide an unfair advantage and hence applications must be based upon a rigorous evaluation of need and are heavily regulated by the JCQ and the Exam Boards themselves.

Access arrangements must be based upon identified need and normal way of working. For instance, if a candidate normally has a break after 30 minutes because they have concentration difficulties, this is their normal way of working and an application for a supervised rest break can be made based upon need.

Each application must be considered carefully and individually and may vary from exam to exam.

#### Who is eligible for access arrangements?

Anyone with a special educational need or disability may be eligible for access arrangements in public exams. They can also be considered for candidates with temporary injury. The JCQ outlines 4 areas of need, including:

##### 1. Cognition and Learning:

- Specific learning difficulties such as: dyslexia and dyspraxia,
- candidates must be assessed by a specialist assessor who is level 7 qualified

##### 2. Communication and Communication Need:

- candidates with autism
- candidates with speech and language needs
- Candidates must be assessed by a speech and language therapist, clinical specialist or specialist assessor
- Any difficulty must be within the candidates first language

##### 3. Sensory and/or Physical Needs:

- candidates with visual impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI) or other sensory need



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- candidates with physical disability, such as cerebral palsy Candidates must be assessed by a specialist clinician, such as a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or other clinician
- Candidates must be assessed by a specialist teacher for VI and/or HI where there are sensory needs

#### **4. Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs:**

- candidates with ADHD/ADD and anxiety-related conditions
- Candidates must be assessed by a specialist clinician, such as a neurodevelopmental paediatrician or clinical psychiatrist

### **Can a candidate have an exam concession without a diagnosis?**

The short answer is yes. A candidate does not necessarily have to have a diagnosed learning difficulty or disability to be allowed an access arrangement. However, there must be evidence of need and normal way of working, in addition to other criteria, such as below average performance (below standard score of 85) in certain skills.

If a candidate has a specific diagnosis, there is still a requirement to provide evidence of need and normal way of working before an application can be made.

There is no automatic entitlement to access arrangements for a student who is disabled or experiencing special educational needs. Each application has to be made on its own merit. For some students a reasonable adjustment may not remove their barrier to achievement, whereas for another student it may.

Access arrangements are intended to increase access to exams but cannot be granted where they will directly affect performance in the skills that are the focus of the test.

### **What are the most common types of need for an access arrangement?**

Most applications for access arrangements are for candidates who experience difficulties in areas such as:

- slow and/or inaccurate reading
- maintaining attention and/or concentration
- very slow and/or illegible handwriting
- weak memory
- speech and language difficulties
- visual perception and/or visual tracking
- visual impairment or hearing impairment
- slow rate of working
- anxiety

### **What is the difference between an access arrangement and special consideration?**

Special consideration is an adjustment to a candidate's mark or grade to reflect temporary illness, injury or other indisposition at the time of the assessment. It may be applied for a candidate if the Centre has failed to put permitted access arrangements into place during



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the exam series. It can only be provided when all the correct procedures have been followed and it is clear that the candidate was eligible for arrangements at the time of the exam. Access arrangements are alterations or adjustments to the delivery of the external exams themselves, based upon evidence of need.

### **What are the most common types of access arrangements?**

There are a number of different arrangements which can be made according to the individual needs of the candidate. All applications must be personalised to the individual and based upon a rigorous evaluation of need through specialist assessments by the appropriate professional.

The most common types of access arrangements are:

- extra time
- separate invigilation/small group room
- word processor/laptop
- reading pen
- human or computer reader
- supervised rest breaks
- prompt
- modified papers
- coloured overlays
- human scribe or voice activated software

### **What information is needed to make an application?**

The information needed depends upon the access arrangement being applied for. Some arrangements require a specialist assessment by a level 7 qualified specialist assessor, whereas others require an assessment by other professionals, such as an occupational therapist.

The JCQ Regulations are updated every year at the beginning of each academic year and provide information regarding the evidence needed for each access arrangement.

It is essential that the application reflects the candidate's need and normal way of working: i.e. if a candidate requires a reasonable adjustment within the classroom to access the learning environment, they will also need this adjustment to access an external exam.

### **Does an EHC Plan qualify a candidate for access arrangements?**

No. The EHCP can be used as evidence for the requirement to implement access arrangements. However, as described above, the application must be based upon evidence of need, which would be determined by the specialists involved in the care of the candidate. Applications must be processed in the same way as for those without an EHCP, through the AAO and the access arrangements must be stated within the EHCP documentation. There is no requirement to complete a Form 8.

### **Who are the JCQ?**

The JCQ - Joint Council of Qualifications - are the Regulatory body who regulate most of the exam boards in external examinations. Their Regulations are published in September and updated every year. These Regulations are mandatory to schools who are offering external exams and the JCQ will inspect schools' records every year.



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## **Is there a right of appeal?**

Generally speaking, an application for access arrangements in public exams is very clear-cut. However, there are always exceptions for candidates with complex needs who may not always meet the appropriate requirements. Where a Centre believes an access arrangement is essential but has been rejected upon application, the Centre is able to appeal to the relevant awarding bodies. Parents/pupils are unable to appeal directly with the boards. Similarly, parents are not able to consult directly with the JCQ. All communication with the JCQ must be through the Centre/setting. However, where a parent believes that an access arrangement should have been put into place, which was not done so by the Centre, they should contact the SENCO in the first instance. Alternatively, they should follow the published complaints process of the setting.

## **Who makes the decision over the arrangements to be made?**

The SENCO is responsible for making the final decision. Where there has been a specialist assessment, the SENCO should consider the recommendations, but does not have to follow them. The application must be based upon need and normal way of working in the classroom, in addition to meeting the revised published criteria.

## **Am I able to pay for a specialist assessment?**

Where there is an established relationship with the setting, the parents can be asked to pay for the updated assessment. However, if a parent commissions an assessment from an assessor who does not have a special relationship with the school, the setting, the setting do not have to follow the recommendations of this assessment. Parents are always advised to contact the school first, before commissioning an external assessment.

## **What do I do if the setting refuse to provide exam access arrangements?**

If you feel that your child is being disadvantaged by not having an assessment or not being considered for exam access arrangements, you should contact the school SENCO. Following this, you can make a formal complaint under Disability legislation to the Head of Centre. You should follow the Complaints process for the setting, which is legally obliged to follow Equality Act legislation.

## **Can a setting charge for an exam arrangement?**

No. An exam access arrangement is a reasonable adjustment under Disability legislation and is therefore put in place to support a protected characteristic, as a legal requirement. It is therefore illegal to request payment for something which is a legal requirement.