

ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY SCHOOLS

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

SENCOs and Senior Leaders must be familiar with the updated JCQ Regulations which are published in September each year.

What evidence should be held on file?

It is essential that SENCOs are able to demonstrate evidence of need for access arrangements, and normal way of working. I.e. where a student needs an adjustment in class, as their normal way of working, they may also need this adjustment in public exams. SENCOs must hold evidence of need on file. This can be collated through questionnaires to teaching and support staff and the candidates themselves.

Other evidence to be held on file includes:

- details of any internal test results to show the extent of the learning needs
- details of support provided in class
- details of when the difficulty was first identified and the provisions implemented as a result
- provide evidence of use of the access arrangement in internal exams/tests
- include any letters from specialists, such as specialist teacher for VI, paediatrician, clinical psychologist, physiotherapist, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist to show how the difficulty impacts upon access to the exams

When is the best time for applications to be made?

Applications must be made at the time of the assessment, which must be after the start of Year 9 and within 26 months of the exam series. The cut-off date for applications varies according to which cycle of exams are being entered for and which concession is being applied for.

Some Awarding Bodies have earlier cut-off dates (e.g. CIE) and each setting must consult the JCQ Regs and the Awarding Body information to determine the most suitable arrangements for making applications.

There is no ideal time for making an application, since it also relies upon collating evidence of need and normal way of working. A suggestion would be to assess candidates at the end of year 9 or beginning of Y10 after they have taken formal exams at the end of Year 9.

How are applications processed?

Once an assessment has been conducted and Form 8 completed, most applications for access arrangements are processed online through the AAO - Access Arrangements Online. In most instances approval is granted straight away. However, in more complex cases there may be a delay between processing an application and approval of that application. In some situations, the Awarding Body may ask for copies of all the evidence.

There are some access arrangements which are Centre designated, such as supervised rest breaks. Evidence of need must be held on file in order for JCQ Inspectors to inspect the evidence when they visit the Centre.

How do I know if the application is successful?

When processing an application online it is usually approved straight away. However, in some instances there may be a delay of up to a week before approval is granted. Approval is received electronically via the JCQ AAO website, or directly from the Awarding Body concerned.

Parents are not contacted automatically to notify them of the approval of the application; it is the responsibility of each Centre to ensure they inform parents and students of the access arrangements which have been approved.

Is there a requirement for a diagnostic report?

Although there is no specific requirement for a full assessment or report to be produced in order to make an application for access arrangements, there is a mandatory requirement for the completion of a Form 8 for most applications, or a letter from an appropriately qualified professional. If a full assessment has been conducted, the report could be used as evidence of need, but must be accompanied by the completion of the Form 8.

There are different requirements for different access arrangement applications and it is the responsibility of the SENCO to ensure they consult the JCQ Regulations to provide the appropriate evidence of need.

Does the school have to follow the recommendations of the specialist assessor?

No, although there would need to be strong justification for not doing so, as it could be viewed as a failure in their duty of care. Ultimately, the decision for the application for access arrangements rests with the SENCO who collates the evidence of need and works with teaching staff to provide the appropriate concession which is evidenced through everyday performance.

Does the assessor have to conduct all the tests themselves?

Yes. The assessor must be qualified to level 7 in assessment and must conduct the tests, complete Form 8 Section C, sign and date it.

Can old tests be used?

No. Tests that have been superseded by revisions, such as the CTOPP (superseded by the CTOPP2) cannot be used as they are obsolete. The assessor must use nationally standardised tests which are up-to-date and which are delivered one-to-one.

Can group tests be used?

Group screening tests cannot be used to make applications for exam access arrangements. They can be used for supporting evidence only.

Can the tests be conducted by staff who are not specialists?

No. The tests which are to be used for access arrangements must be conducted by a level 7 qualified specialist assessor. It is malpractice for unqualified personnel to complete the tests.

Can late applications be made, if the deadline has passed?

In exceptional circumstances late applications are sometimes allowed by the Awarding Body. Each application will be treated upon its own merit. However, all applications should endeavour to be processed before the relevant deadline.

Does the Centre have to follow the recommendations made by external professionals, such as a clinician?

No. External professionals, such as a paediatrician do not necessarily know the individual needs of the candidate as well as the Centre. The access arrangements being applied for must reflect the individual needs of the candidate, must be evidenced through normal way of working and current need. Hence, if an external professional recommends an EAA which is not normally given to the candidate, it is not appropriate for the Centre to apply this arrangement. However, the Centre must always ensure they are providing the most appropriate support for candidates and not disadvantaging them in any way.

Who constitutes a specialist, when making an application based upon medical needs?

The specialist must be a consultant, such as a consultant paediatrician or psychiatrist. They cannot be a GP, but can be a specialist therapist, if qualified to specialist level. As a rule of thumb, the following should apply:

- Behaviour and mental health needs: letters from a consultant paediatrician, child and adolescent psychiatrist, qualified psychotherapist
- Physical needs: a letter should be obtained from a qualified physiotherapist or occupational therapist
- Speech, language and communication needs: a letter should be obtained from a qualified speech and language therapist
- Sensory Impairment: a letter should be obtained from the teacher responsible for sensory impairment within the Local Authority; they will be qualified to Masters level in either Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment or both.

If a candidate qualifies for a reader and extra time do I need to complete a Form 8 and a File Note?

Yes. There will be a requirement to obtain a specialist assessment who will complete Part 2 of the Form 8 as evidence of need for extra time, whilst the evidence of need for a reader must be through normal way of working. Evidence must be held on file for both EAA.

What do I do if a candidate moves from Year 11 to year 12 and the Form 8 does not comply with the current, updated Regs?

All new qualifications (such as moving from GCSE to A Level must be applied for online and meet the revised published criteria. All Form 8s need to be scrutinised to ensure they meet the revised criteria. If they do not, a new application cannot be made and EAA cannot be awarded, unless reassessment takes place and the new assessment meets the revised criteria.

Can a word processor and 25% extra time be allocated?

A candidate can now only be given 25% extra time where there are at least two below average scores in speed related areas (below 85), or if there is one score below 85 and one score between 85 and 89. If one of these scores is for writing speed, the candidate cannot be awarded the use of a word processor and extra time, because the word processor

would mitigate the handwriting speed difficulty. In order to give both a word processor and extra time, the candidate must be proficient in the use of a word processor and must have two below average (or one which is low average) score which are not related to handwriting speed. However, if the candidate's handwriting is totally illegible or incomprehensible, it may be that the EAA of a word processor is the best way forward. A file note and Form 8 need to be completed.

Can a setting charge for the exam access arrangements?

No, since they are reasonable adjustments under Equality Act legislation, it is unlawful to charge for a reasonable adjustment, because without the adjustment the candidate would be placed at a substantial disadvantage and essentially discriminated against under Disability legislation.

Can parents contact the JCQ directly?

No. The JCQ do not liaise directly with parents.

Can parents appeal to the exam access arrangements which have been applied for?

There is no specific right of appeal. An exam access arrangement is a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act (2010) and any appeal would be through disability legislation under the settings own Disability Policy.

Can I pass on the access arrangements information to another school/setting?

Yes. When a student moves schools, for example when moving from Year 11 to Year 12 or mid-term to continue their studies, the new setting is required to make a new application for access arrangements. They can do this based upon the previous Form 8. All information pertinent to access arrangements should be handed over to the new school as part of the usual handover of student information, However, there is no requirement to forward documentation to a higher education provider, such as a university.

How long should I keep the Access Arrangement evidence for?

Under General Data Protection Regulations information should only be kept for as long as is necessary. However, there may be a need to access the evidence held on file at a future date, say for evidence for Disabled Students Allowance, or if the student has a query relating to their education, when they complete their education.

It is therefore prudent to archive evidence for between five and seven years. This provides opportunity for sharing of information, under Freedom of Information requests, alongside ample opportunity for students to request further information for evidence for Disabled Students Allowance.

NOTE:

The JCQ produce factsheets which are published through their website and provide information relating to specific situations.

If the answer to your question is not available through the JCQ website, you can contact JCQ directly and they should be able to advise you further.