

ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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.

For further information and advice regarding applications for access arrangements and completion of Form 8 you can email Pearl on: pearl@sendiss.co.uk

Common questions asked by parents:

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:

- Including, 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:

- including candidates with autism
- including 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:

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

- Including 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 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.

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 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
- wordprocessor/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 update 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 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. This is evidenced through the support provided within the classroom. A teacher questionnaire can capture the evidence provided within the classroom.

The application must also reflect the candidate's needs. For instance: If a candidate needs longer to complete a task due to their slow processing ability as a result of cerebral palsy, and would not perform to their full potential if not provided with extra time, an application for extra time would be made. Evidence of need can be obtained by obtaining evidence of performance during internal exams.

What is a Form 8?

The Form 8 is a legal document/application form required when making applications for access arrangements online in external examinations. It consists of three parts:

Section A: must be completed by the SENCO or Specialist assessor working within the Centre, in close collaboration with the teaching staff. This section must be completed before the candidate is referred for a specialist assessment.

Section C: must be completed, signed and dated by the Specialist Assessor. Only the assessor conducting the specialist assessment can complete and sign this section.

Section B: must be completed by the SENCO only, after the specialist assessment has been conducted

An application for access arrangements through the AAO can only be made once the Form 8 has been completed fully.

Does having a diagnosis help with being allocated access arrangements?

It is not necessary to have a specific diagnosis in order to make an application for access arrangements, provided there is a substantial difficulty or disability, as defined by the Equality Act (2010) which prevents a candidate from demonstrating their true potential. The access arrangement is provided to enable a candidate to be given a level playing field and overcome substantial disadvantage.

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. If a candidate doesn't need the arrangement, then there is no need to apply for it.

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.

Does an EHC Plan qualify a candidate for access arrangements?

No. Although an application can be made in the normal way through Form 8, and the Statement of SEN or 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.

What is the JCQ?

The JCQ - Joint Council of Qualifications - are the Regulatory body who regulate most of the exam boards in external examinations. They issue Regulations regarding access arrangements, which are updated annually in September of each year. Their Regulations are mandatory for schools and must be followed. JCQ Inspectors will inspect the Centre every year to ensure compliance with Regulations.

What is the role of the Specialist Assessor?

The Specialist Assessor must work in close association with the setting. The assessor must complete the specialist assessment using appropriate up-to-date, nationally standardised tests appropriate for the age of the candidate, after the completion of the Form 8 Section A by the setting. The Specialist Assessor must be Level 7 qualified and must complete, sign and date the Form 8 Section C with the relevant information. Photocopied signatures are not acceptable. The School must hold copies of the assessors qualifications for inspection purposes.

What is the difference between an Educational Psychologist (EP) and Specialist Assessor (Teacher)?

An EP is a specialist educationalist who has a psychology degree and has trained to masters level. They are usually specialist in child psychology; understanding why children behave and learn they way they do. Psychology is the study of the brain and how it develops and learning is associated with brain development.

A specialist teacher is a fully qualified teacher who has studied for additional post-graduate qualifications in specific learning difficulties and assessment.

Both EPs and Specialist teachers are able to diagnose specific learning difficulties. However, the EP is viewed as a generalist as opposed to specialist in the field of SpLD, whilst being perhaps more experienced in complex emotional and behavioural needs. The specialist teacher has specialised in specific learning difficulties as their post-graduate qualification and are able to provide recommendations for differentiated teaching and learning as they remain qualified teachers.

Is an Educational Psychologist Assessment needed for an application for access arrangements?

No. As outlined above, an EP is trained in the development of the mind and hence their assessments are more holistic than is necessary for an access arrangements assessment. A specialist assessor can assess for the specific areas of need required for the application of access arrangements and would therefore be a more appropriate assessor for access arrangements in young people with specific learning needs.

It is important that the specialist assessor works in close association with the school and is known to the school to be able to make recommendations which are based upon the known difficulties already experienced within school.

What is the role of the SENCO?

The role of the SENCO is pivotal to the appropriate application for, and implementation of, access arrangements. The SENCO should ensure that they read the JCQ Regulations every year, and ensure that teaching staff are informed of any changes with the Regs. The SENCO should have a detailed understanding of the range of access arrangements available and why they are appropriate. The SENCO must collate the evidence needed to apply for access arrangements.

It is the role of the SENCO to identify students who may need access arrangements in external exams and should have a clear referral pathway which is known to all teaching staff based upon need.

The SENCO is ultimately responsible for deciding upon the access arrangements to be applied for, based upon the evidence available. Some SENCOs are able to conduct the assessments themselves, but must be qualified to Level 7 in assessment to be able to do so.

The SENCO should have a complete understanding of how to make applications for access arrangements and keep records of the following:

- which arrangements have been applied for and for whom
- evidence of need from past exams and provision mapping
- evidence of use of access arrangements in past exams
- evidence of normal way of working from teachers
- evidence from students of which arrangements they have found that are most effective at meeting their needs
- the expiry date of the application

It is the role of the SENCO to consult closely with teaching staff to complete Form 8 Section A. The SENCO must obtain enough information to be able to answer the following questions:

What are the role of teachers?

All teachers must work with the SENCO to provide the evidence needed to apply for exam concessions. Teachers work closely with students to ensure that they are able to access the learning environment. Any adjustments which are made by teachers and support staff during the normal day-to-day lessons might be necessary for access to exams. For example, where a pupil requires enlarged handouts or handouts on different coloured paper during lessons, these may also be required during exams and the setting would need to apply for access arrangements of modified papers.

What is the role of the Exams Office?

The exams officer is responsible for the organisation of external exams. Whilst the specific job specification may vary from setting to setting, most Exams Officers have responsibility for organising the access arrangements, such as setting up laptops, organising readers, prompts, separate invigilation and supervised rest breaks. They may also be responsible for collating evidence of use of access arrangements from the invigilators during internal and external exams.

In most settings either the Exams Officer or the SENCO are responsible for entering the access arrangements data onto the Access Arrangements Online (AAO) system. Hence, it is recommended that Exams Officers attend update training in JCQ Regulations alongside the SENCO.

What is the role of the Head of Centre?

The Head of Centre is ultimately responsible for the administration of access arrangements. It is their responsibility to ensure they are familiar with the entire contents of the JCQ

Regulations and appoint suitably qualified specialist assessors. They must also ensure the SENCO has enough time to collate the evidence of need and the Exams Officer is trained in their role. Failure to provide access arrangements which are needed by a candidate, based upon substantial evidence of need, is a failure in duty of care, which the Head of Centre is ultimately accountable for. However, implementing access arrangements without supporting evidence can lead to giving an unfair advantage and is malpractice.

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.

Common questions asked by SENCOs:

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 pupils themselves. For examples of useful questionnaires, [click here](#).

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?

SENCOs must be familiar with the updated JCQ Regulations every year, because every year they change. The current cut-off point for application for access arrangements is 21st February of the year of the exam. However, different boards (e.g. CIE) have differing deadline dates; it is worth the SENCO consulting with the Exams Office to ensure they are able to prioritise applications accordingly.

It is also worth noting that applications expire 26 months after being made. Hence the earliest an assessment and application can be made for the summer series of Y11, is during May of Y9.

There is no 'ideal' time to make applications but application should follow collation of evidence of need from internal exams and is possibly most suited to being made during Y10.

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 and application and approval of that application.

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 exam boards 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 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.

When should the assessment take place?

The assessment must take place after Year 9 and within 26 months of the exam series.

Who do I go to for help and advice?

The SENCO is the lead on SEN and should advise parents and students of any applications for exam concessions which are being made.

If the School have applied for exam concessions which have been rejected, the Head of Centre can appeal the decision to the JCQ.

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.

The recommendations made by a specialist assessor regarding teaching and learning are best practice, and should be provided in the best interests of the young person.

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, like the first CTOPP?

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, such as the Lucid Exact, 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 exam boards themselves. Each application will be treated upon its own merit.

How long do I have to wait before I find out whether the application has been accepted?

Once the assessment has been completed and the application is made online, the response is usually immediate for about 90 per cent of the applications. Some decisions are more complicated and a decision can take up to a week.

Can Form 8s be transferred from Y11 to Y12 and Y 13?

When moving from Year 11 to 6th Form a new application has to be made. If the student has changed settings, a new assessment must take place and a new Form 8 completed. If the student remains at the same setting, the old form 8 can be re-administered, but new evidence of ongoing need is required and the data must be re-entered online.