

# **Exam Access Arrangements**

## **A guide for school staff**

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## Introduction

Ensuring that our most vulnerable students are not disadvantaged when it comes to their education is at the core of our whole school philosophy and desire to be an effective, truly inclusive school.

Therefore, it is vital that we are all aware of our roles and professional responsibilities in minimising disadvantage through our planning and teaching but also through establishing robust mechanisms to meet our statutory responsibility in identifying and subsequently making our best endeavours to make reasonable adjustments to our provision in order to meet need.

Ensuring that students have appropriate provision in their assessments and examinations is a key part of this, however, this is an element where all staff are involved and whilst the SEND team have some specific key roles to play in the processes, we are all responsible for ensuring evidence is gathered and needs are identified and met.

**This guide provides all of the detail that teaching/associate staff require to meet their responsibilities as teachers, supporters and tutors to support our students, provide accurate detailed advice and guidance and manage expectations of our role as a school and what is and isn't possible.** In addition, this is supplemented by a one page 'quick guide to EAA' which outlines the key points for easy reference.

## What is an Exam Access Arrangement (EAA)?

If a student has an identified learning need or disability that means that he or she is disadvantaged in comparison to other students of similar ability, he or she may qualify for access arrangements for public examinations. There are a number of different types of access arrangement and these are determined by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). The main ones are listed at the bottom of this document.

## 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 and JCQ Inspectors will inspect the Centre every year to ensure compliance with Regulations.

JCQ Regulations are updated annually in September and the criteria that must be met for an access arrangement changes frequently. Therefore, it is important to note that the arrangements experienced in a previous year may have changed for subsequent cohorts. You can access these online [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk).

**Note: It is important to note that Exam Access Arrangements are not given for the practical element of an exam. i.e. DT, Art, etc.**

***It is a mandatory duty for schools to adhere to the JCQ regulations and all staff have a professional responsibility to fulfil their role.***

## **Who is eligible for exam access arrangements?**

### ***SEND Team Responsibilities***

"The SENCo must be satisfied that the candidate has an impairment which has a **substantial and long term adverse effect, giving rise to persistent and significant difficulties** (the candidate is disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act) 2010". (Access Arrangements and Reasonable adjustments - JCQ 2022/2023)

- There are specific criteria set out in the JCQ Regulations relating to application for access arrangements.
- It is the role of the SENCO to ensure any application meets the published criteria and to make the final decision regarding the application process, **based upon the evidence collected** and whether the candidate meets the current criteria.
- If a student is eligible they will have the arrangements in all internal tests and exams for year 10 and year 11. We will notify parents of the exam access arrangements for the academic year, by letter.
- All exam board delegated arrangements can only be given once a student has been tested by a qualified assessor.

### ***Teaching / Support Staff Responsibilities***

- Exam Access Arrangements are also noted on student's EHCP and in the plan /One Page Profile (SLP) via Provision Map it is important that staff are aware of and apply the appropriate provision in all in class and external assessments to establish normal way of working and provide evidence.
- **All arrangements must be submitted with evidence from teaching staff and be the candidate's usual way of working.**
- Students may not need the same access arrangements in each subject. This will be decided on a subject by subject basis based on need.

## **What are Reasonable Adjustments?**

The Equality Act 2010 requires an Awarding Body (Exam Board) to make reasonable adjustments where a disabled person would be at a substantial disadvantage in undertaking an assessment.

How reasonable the adjustment is will depend on a number of factors including the needs of the candidate/learner. An adjustment may not be considered reasonable if it involves unreasonable costs, timeframes or affects the security or integrity of the assessment. (JCQ 2022/2023)

## When will we assess a student?

- We will assess identified students with 'persistent and significant difficulties' (JCQ regulations) **at the end of year 9 and the start of Year 10** in order to ascertain whether students meet the criteria and subsequently apply for access arrangements to be granted.
- **Any application is only valid for 26 months** and it is for this reason that we do not apply earlier. Applications are only valid for one level (ie Level 2 GCSE; or Level 3 A Level). **A reapplication will need to be made if students move from Level 2 to Level 3.**

## 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.

## Role of teachers and support staff

*(This section is also included on the Quick Guide)*

It is essential that all teachers and support staff understand the differences between SEND and Exam Access Arrangements (EAA) and are aware of their roles and responsibilities in contributing to the process of evidence collection in a timely fashion.

This is so that all staff are able to manage expectations and advise students and their parents/carers accurately as a first responder, and only have to pass on to the SEND team if there are supplementary questions.

**There are two types of EAA school-delegated and exam board delegated assessment. Both require us to demonstrate a picture of need and normal way of working.**

In order for us to apply for EAA we MUST:

- **provide evidence of an ongoing need and show that the access arrangement we apply for is the student's normal way of working.**
- This evidence is supported by the graduated approach for SEND - Assess, Plan, Do, Review and collected over time via internal assessments to demonstrate normal way of working.
- Therefore, throughout Years 7, 8 and 9 we may **trial** various strategies and conduct a number of different tests and assessments in order to make sure that we are not only meeting the criteria but that we can work out what might be the best provision for the student.
- Having an Education Health and Care Plan or diagnosis of a Specific Learning Difficulty, does not necessarily mean that a student will qualify for access arrangements, even if the student has regular in class support.
- If an access arrangement has never been used, the application cannot be made.

- There is a deadline and cut-off point for applications each year (usually around March) and exam access arrangements cannot be added after this point. However - it would be increasingly difficult to justify 'normal way of working' if the EAA is not used in PPEs in December and March of Year 11.
- **No access arrangement is formalised until the end of Year 9/ start of Year 10\*** and any arrangement made before that time is essentially part of the assessment process and will only be 'trialled' until the application is made which will issue confirmation.

**\* This can be quite confusing for parents/carers as we are aware that students have sometimes been granted an access arrangement for tests at primary school or believe that if an access arrangement is being trialled in Key stage 3 that this will follow through to their KS4 examinations. This is NOT the case** - for exam board delegated EAA we must get an assessment by a qualified assessor within 26 months of the exams to confirm the EAA and this is submitted to the exam board. The official assessment can show that the threshold is not met and/or the requested EAA is not accepted by the exam board.

## School Staff Responsibilities

- **Complete the Graduated Approach to identifying needs (RANGE 1) to build picture of need:**
  - Your professional judgments need to follow a structured approach to provide supportive evidence of need.
  - This structure is provided by the graduated approach: Assess, Plan, Do, Review **before** initiating the SEND referral process if you have concerns about a student's progress due to cognition.
  - This allows us to build up a picture over time.
  - Include all of the adjustments you are making in the classroom to support the students' learning needs - we have to record 'current difficulties in the classroom' and 'normal way of working' as part of the EAA application process.
- **Apply the strategies on the One Page Profile (SLP) consistently** - report back to SEND if students do not need/use the provision, especially in assessments.
- **Collect evidence as part of internal assessments** - if a student is trailing or has an EAA - make sure it is applied in your in-class assessments and that evidence is gained (ie ask students to draw a line / change colour after normally allowed time so additional time use is evidence). Photocopy papers and return to the SEND Administrator to file.
- **Have a working overview of how Exam Access Arrangements are allocated** and provide accurate information to students, parents and carers as a first response.
- **Respond in a timely manner to requests for information via a round robin** - this is part of building the evidence to establish need. A partial picture potentially disadvantages the students.
- **Manage expectations and de-escalate** by not making suggestions or promising that a student may need extra time/ a smaller space or other exam access arrangements outside of the SEND referral process - we must have evidence of a cognitive need!
- **A simplified, parental version of this guidance will be on the website** and so parents/carers can be directed there for more information.

**Please note:** we are subject to no notice exam board inspection to check that the evidence for students identifies the substantial and long term adverse effect of their need. We all have a role to play in ensuring that this evidence is present and robust for students we support / teach.

## Frequently Asked Questions from students and parents / carers.

- *These questions and their responses are available on the NSG website under SEND and Exams. Please ensure you are aware of the arrangements so that you can be a first responder to queries that come to you as a tutor, subject teacher or support staff.*
- *Please feel free to signpost parents/carers to the website for further information.*

### Is there a variety of Exam Room Provision?

- The access arrangement provision is necessarily a process that builds over time to enable us to accurately identify need and demonstrate a normal way of working.
- At NSG we build this picture of needs from the beginning of Year 7 but it becomes much more specific regarding examinations from the end of Year 9.
- The rules relating to public examinations are rightfully very stringent to ensure fairness within the examination system.
- Due to the nature of these rules, alongside capacity related to spaces and personnel (ie invigilators), **it is expected that all students will take their examinations in the Sports Hall.**

**\*Separate Invigilation:** (students sit with others in a smaller room rather than in the Sports Hall) for examinations and controlled assessments.

- There is an exceptionally high demand for separate invigilation and we require medical evidence of need from a consultant or specialist.
- We cannot accept a letter from GPs. This must be dated within one year of the exam to be taken.
- Unless it is for a serious, acute and/or chronic medical or psychological condition, we cannot provide Separate Invigilation.
- General anxiety, low mood, stress indicators or other common conditions or factors will generally not provide adequate evidence for separate invigilation.
- We encourage all students requesting separate invigilation to make use of the school's pastoral team and school counsellor to help with student welfare, wellbeing and exam stress.

### **\*Individual Invigilation**

- Individual Invigilation can only be accommodated in highly exceptional circumstances.
- We require evidence of need from a consultant or specialist which provides details of the student's condition and states exactly why Individual Invigilation is necessary.
- Following submission of this evidence, the SENCo and Examinations Officer will make a final decision and communicate this back to the applicant and parents/carers.

**The criteria for the allocation of space lies entirely at the discretion of the school and may alter each year depending on the needs of the cohort in relation to JCQ regulations and school capacity.**

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

### **Supervised rest breaks**

- These must always be considered before applying for extra time.
- These will be allowed where it is the candidate's normal way of working.
- Medical conditions – rest breaks can be agreed if you have a serious medical condition, examples of this are type 1 diabetes or a sensory need. Medical evidence is required. AD(H)D - if you have a diagnosis we will look at the recommendations and consider whether rest breaks will be helpful in exams. Evidence of your diagnosis is required.
- Evidence from CAMHs of current treatment for a condition that requires rest breaks. However, we do not accept evidence from this service if you have been discharged from treatment.

### **Please Note:**

- ***We are not able or allowed to provide rest breaks in advance for anxiety/worry/stress caused by taking exams. It is normal to feel stressed and worried about exams.***
- ***Our exam invigilators are experienced and trained to deal with students who are upset and worried on the day.***

### **Exam Board delegated:**

- Extra time (25%, 50%...)
- Reader
- Scribe
- Enlarged papers

### **Centre (school) delegated:**

- Rest breaks
- Word processor
- Read aloud
- Own room
- Reader pen
- Prompt
- Practical assistant

## What information/evidence 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 (see exam board delegated above), 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 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 (round robin) 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.

## **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.

## **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.

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 experiencing special educational needs and/or disability. 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 and the Statement of SEN or EHCP can be used as evidence for the requirement to implement access arrangements. However, the application must be based upon evidence of need, which would be determined by the specialists involved in the care of the candidate.