



Exam Access Arrangements (2025- 2026)

A Guide for Parents and Carers

What are Exam Access Arrangements?

Often referred to as Access Arrangements (AAs), this are something you may hear from time to time in the lead up to your child sitting assessments.

Access arrangements allow students with specific needs, such as special educational needs or disabilities, to access an exam, and may include access to a reader, word processor, extra time, or a smaller exam room.

They are intended to level the playing field for students by removing barriers not associated with the content of the exam. It allows your child to show their true understanding and knowledge of a topic.



Access arrangements are reasonable adjustments designed to give equal opportunities to all students to demonstrate their skills, knowledge, or understanding in exams.

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When schools apply and use access arrangements they must be compliant with the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). This is a governing body who provides specific guidelines for professionals and schools to follow. They provide annual updates to regulations, which assessors and schools must follow.

[Home - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](#)

Students join the school.

We gather information about previous assessments, including SATs. Students complete baseline assessments, without any support, to establish what barriers they have to learning and what support would suit them best.

Informal arrangements are put in place.

Following the baseline assessments, teachers and the learning support teams work with students in lessons and assessments, finding out what barriers need overcoming in order to show their true ability. This may be additional time as they read slowly, or a prompter as they become distracted, or a laptop as they struggle to write legibly.

Access Arrangements are not cheating!

Many students worry that having support in an assessment is cheating. This is not the case, and we work with students to help them understand why arrangements are in place for them and not necessarily for their peers.

Students experiment with different arrangements.

The aim is for all students to be as independent as possible in the final GCSE exams. Therefore, we use Years 7-9 to experiment with arrangements while teaching the students strategies for being independent over time. For example, some students may begin with a scribe, but quickly learn typing skills, and so change to using a word processor.

Formal Access Arrangements.

This guide takes you through the process of gathering evidence and assessments for the final, formal assess arrangements that can be used in GCSE exams.

Assessing for Access Arrangements

Who is assessed?

Students who are identified as having a learning need or disability that impacts on their ability to access the exam paper under exam conditions. These students are eligible to be considered for access arrangements.

- If a student has an identified learning need, they will be assessed by a qualified access arrangement assessor.
- If a student has a diagnosed medical condition (such as ADHD or Autism), their diagnostic report will be used in place of the assessor report, as long as it outlines the current difficulties that student has in accessing education.

Things to bear in mind:

- Communicate with your school's SEND team - good and open communication will help begin the identification process.
- SENDCos will work with your child's teachers to identify possible arrangements - this often starts with transition from Primary to Secondary school.
- Most importantly - your child's voice is key to the decision - are they happy with what works for them?

How are they assessed?

To qualify for an access arrangement, your child may need to be assessed by a qualified access arrangement assessor. These are completed and arranged by your child's school.

You will not need to seek this privately or pay for these assessments.

Throughout this process, the student is at the heart of all decisions. They must be comfortable using the arrangements and their voice is included at all stages. If the student does not want the arrangements, they will not receive them. However, they are strongly advised to use them in order to show their true ability under exam conditions, and work is done to help them feel comfortable.

1. Your child will be made known to the SENDCo and learning support team as needing an assessment.
2. The SENDCo and the learning support team gather evidence to support informal arrangements and identify what support may be needed within exams.
3. The school's appointed qualified assessor will be contacted to complete the relevant assessments. Usually at the beginning of year 10.
4. The assessor will conduct the assessments and complete recommendations based on the evidence provided by the SENDCo and the assessment outcomes. Various access arrangements are available to support students who have difficulties with reading, writing, speed of working, concentration, etc.
5. Once the assessor has completed assessments and fed back their findings and recommendations to the SENDCo, they determine the final access arrangements.

If the student has a diagnosed medical condition, it is important for the school to have a copy of the diagnostic report, as this forms the evidence of need required by JCQ.

1. The assessment report must be 'current' by describing the barriers the student faces now in education.

The initial assessment may be from when the child was diagnosed several years ago, but as long as it still reflects the difficulties they face now, it can be used.

If the child has developed and gained strategies for managing their difficulties independently, and the report is no longer an accurate reflection of them, it cannot be used as evidence and they may need to be assessed by the qualified assessor to ensure their eligibility and that the correct arrangements are put in place.

2. This does not mean you need to get an up to date assessment report or diagnosis. It just means the student will be seen by the assessor who will establish what arrangements they need.

3. The diagnostic medical report should not contain recommendations for access arrangements as JCQ do not allow these to form part of the evidence pack. Instead, the report must outline what difficulties the child faces, such as slow processing skills, difficulties maintaining concentration, or difficulties interpreting and inferring language. This must be specific to the child and not a generic list of possible difficulties associated with the condition.

4. This report, along with the evidence gathered from teachers and learning support teams by the SENDCo, is submitted to JCQ for their consideration.

What happens next?

Your child has been assessed, either by an assessor or through a diagnostic report, and you may wonder what happens next.

The school SENDCo must decide which access arrangements a student has for their exams.

Specialists (a medical consultant or psychiatrist) are responsible for providing a formal diagnosis. They are not responsible for decisions about access arrangements.

School:

- Either a Form 8 (if assessed by an assessor) or a Form 9 (if assessed by a medical professional with a diagnostic report) is completed, along with a pack of evidence gathered from teachers and the school SENDCo.
- A formal application to Access Arrangements Online(AAO) is completed for some access arrangements, for example 25% Extra Time.
- These are applied for before the JCQ's deadline each year of the first public exam.
- The arrangement that your child has been granted, must be implemented in any assessments from that point on. This is to enable a normal way of working, but also to make sure your child is practiced in using them comfortably, and nothing has been overlooked.



WHAT ARE ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS?

- Access arrangements allow students with specific needs, such as special educational needs or disabilities, to access an exam.
- They allow students to show what they know and can do without changing the demands of the exam.



HOW WILL THE PROCESS START?

- Parents and carers should let the SENCo know as soon as possible if their child has additional needs. Good and open communication is important.
- Students in further education should record their additional needs on the college's enrolment form.
- The SENCo will work with teachers and the student to identify possible arrangements.
- Various access arrangements are available. For example, support for students who have difficulties with reading, writing, speed of working or concentration.
- Not all students with additional needs will require access arrangements. This depends on whether their difficulty affects their access to exams. Additional needs or a diagnosis alone do not entitle a student to access arrangements.



WHO WILL MAKE THE ASSESSMENT?

- If a student has learning difficulties, the school or college's appointed assessor must conduct the assessment to determine the need for access arrangements, such as 25% extra time.
- If an external assessor diagnoses a learning difficulty (for example, dyslexia or dyscalculia), the assessment can only be used as evidence for access arrangements if the assessor has liaised with the school or college and received the necessary access arrangements paperwork in advance of the assessment taking place.
- Specialists (for example, a medical consultant or a psychiatrist) are responsible for providing a formal diagnosis. They are **not** responsible for decisions about access arrangements.
- The school or college must decide which access arrangements a student has for their exams.
- Teachers must give evidence to show that an access arrangement is needed. The school or college will record how effective the arrangement is in the classroom, in internal tests or in mock exams.



WHAT ELSE NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- The school or college will have to apply for some arrangements.
- If a student has complex needs, a school or college can discuss their needs with the exam board.

FINALLY

Schools and colleges **must** follow the rules. They are inspected and if they are found to be breaking the rules, this will be malpractice.

**If you have any questions about access arrangements,
please speak to the school, college or SENCo.**

Frequently asked questions & Common misconceptions.

“My child had support for their SATs. Will they get support in secondary school?”

Your child's school will complete transition work for your child. It is likely information regarding SATs support will be considered.

Your child will complete a series of baseline assessments when joining the school - no access arrangements are used (coloured paper/overlay and enlarged fonts are exceptions). This establishes a current picture of need and what barriers your child faces. This can then be addressed through access arrangements.

Arrangements will likely be different to what was agreed for SATs as the process for secondary school is different. However, all students are considered individually and information from SATs is taken into account when considering arrangements.

“My child has a formal diagnosis, they will need access arrangements. The professional report states this. What happens next?”

The school's SENDCo will be aware of your child's diagnosis, as you will have worked together to implement the recommendations. You will also have shared any professional reports.

Your child's formal diagnosis and report recommendations will be considered when assessing for access arrangements by the SENDCo. The diagnostic report is used as supplementary evidence. The professional is not able to make the final decision to grant the access arrangement, this is the school or college's decision.

“Does my child need a diagnosis or Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for access arrangements?”

In short, no. Your child does not need a formal diagnosis or an EHCP to be granted access arrangements.



Here's the deal: you don't need a diagnosis of a learning difficulty to get an access arrangement. But, if you do have a diagnosis, it's not an automatic ticket to access arrangements either.

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To ensure your child is getting the correct support, they will need to be identified, assessed, and then continue to establish their normal way of working when using their later granted access arrangements.

“What is normal way of working (NWOW)? Why is this important when looking into access arrangements?”

Normal way of working (NWOW) is the standard support your child receives when completing class work and in assessments. A pack of evidence is gathered over time that shows what support they need and have used over time. This is referred to as the normal way of working.

It is important not only for evidence of need, but to ensure your child is comfortable and practiced in using their arrangements for their exams.

“What external evidence is used and accepted for access arrangements?”

Professional diagnostic reports, medical evidence from a Specialist GP, consultant, or psychiatrist can provide supporting evidence for assessors when considering access arrangements.

These reports should not contain recommendations for access arrangements as JCQ do not allow these to form part of the evidence pack. Instead, the report must outline what difficulties the child faces, such as slow processing skills, difficulties maintaining concentration, or difficulties interpreting and inferring language.

With this evidence, and the evidence from teachers, the SENDCo will make the final decision of what access arrangements are necessary.

“Will these arrangements be in place for college as well?”

As with schools, colleges must gather evidence that the arrangements are still necessary and support the student, without putting them at an unfair advantage.

Schools pass information and evidence onto the college and they complete their own process to ensure compliance with JCQ. This is often a quick process and should not affect GCSE re-sits or public exams that are taken in November of year 12.

“Can I appeal to JCQ?”

JCQ have a strict policy that they do not communicate with parents or carers, as they are for professional bodies only. However, they provide a large number of parent guides and infographics that explain the process and answer the majority of questions parents and carers may have. Their website can be found here: [Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](#)

For more information or to discuss your child's arrangements, please contact your school's SEND team.