

Royal Alexandra & Albert School



Access Arrangements for Examinations Parental Guidance

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| Policy applies to | School staff and pupils |
| Committee responsible | Pupil Matters |
| Governing Body approval required | No |
| Accountable Executive | Deputy Head (Teaching & Learning) |
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Introduction

The school receives a number of requests each year regarding Access Arrangements for students in public examinations. Over the last few years, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has changed both the requirements for, and the evidence needed, in order to grant Access Arrangements. We have created this document in order to try to give parents a useful brief outline as to what is required for Access Arrangements and the evidence the school needs to provide to the Examination boards in order to support this claim.

Access Arrangements

Access Arrangements are non-standard arrangements approved before the examinations take place in order to enable candidates with special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries to access assessments. The Equality Act 2010 requires awarding bodies to make reasonable adjustments where a candidate would be at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to someone who is not disabled.

The Examination boards will not consider applications in respect of long-term conditions that are submitted only weeks before the exams. It is essential therefore, that we are informed of existing circumstances that might justify Access Arrangements as soon as possible, preferably on joining the school. Arrangements can then be made to accommodate the particular needs of students in formal internal exams. This will allow us to test the effectiveness of such arrangements, and will provide grounds for their implementation at GCSE and GCE Level.

When applying for Access Arrangements we are obliged to work within the framework laid down by the JCQ. Non-compliance with the JCQ regulations is considered malpractice, which has potentially severe consequences for all our students.

In order to qualify for an Access Arrangement a student must have a disability. According to the Equality Act 2010 a disability is a 'physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on someone's ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. The impairment must have lasted, or be likely to last, for 12 months or more.

JCQ regulations state that "if a candidate has never made use of the arrangement granted to him/her.....then it is not his/her normal way of working. The arrangement should not be awarded for examinations." Therefore, if a student does not use an Access Arrangement in any of their examinations we will withdraw the Access Arrangement. If we continued with the Access Arrangement we would be in breach of regulations which is considered malpractice.

The JCQ regulations are very complex. The current guidance for 2021–2022 can be viewed on the JCQ website.

The JCQ specify that a normal way of working is a priority when considering awarding an Access Arrangement to a student. Therefore, whilst we will accept a private report from an educational psychologist and/or letter from a GP or other professional, we will not automatically award an Access Arrangement based upon it. It will trigger an internal investigation into the normal way of working for that student.

To clarify: An independent report on its own is not a guarantee that a student will receive the Access Arrangements.

Evidence needed for the most common request of Extra Time

When looking at any student's needs, the school must always consider granting Supervised Rest Breaks before making a request for extra time, as the former will often be a more appropriate response. Extra time can never be given if there is any possibility that the student would thereby be given an unfair advantage over other students.

As extra time is the Access Arrangement requested most often, we will look at some of the associated regulations. The JCQ lay down similar guidance for each of the other possible arrangements.

In order to maintain the credibility of GCSE and GCE qualifications, the JCQ defines the parameters as to what constitutes a 'substantial disadvantage'. To this end, they have defined eligibility for up to 25% extra time.

The Specialist Assessor's report must confirm that the student has:

At least two below average standardised scores of 84 or less OR one below average standardised score of 84 AND one low average standardised score (85-89). In either scenario, the two standardised scores must relate to two different areas of speed of working.

In exceptional cases, up to 25% extra time may be awarded to students where the assessment confirms that the candidate has at least two 'low average' standardised scores between 85 and 89 relating to two different areas of speed of processing or working.

In rare and very exceptional circumstances, students with a cluster of scores, where at least 3 relate to three different areas of working speed, and which fall within the 'average' range of 90 to 94, may be considered if the awarding body deems there is sufficient compelling evidence for eligibility. This would be where a candidate has been formally diagnosed as having a significant learning difficulty or disability which has a clear, measurable and substantial long-term adverse effect on performance and speed or processing or working.

In all cases, supplementary compelling evidence will be required for inspection by the awarding bodies.

The JCQ has also advised that where a student has been awarded extra time for his/her GCSEs, there is not an automatic right for eligibility to continue to GCE. New applications for GCE examinations must be made to the awarding bodies and standardised scores must meet the above criteria in order to be approved. This will mean that some students who were awarded extra time in Year 11 may not now qualify for extra time in the Sixth Form.

It is not normally appropriate to grant more than 25% extra time in examinations. In exceptional cases, the awarding bodies may allow additional time where speed of processing is substantially below average i.e. a score of 69 or less may be considered, or where a candidate has a multi-sensory impairment that substantially hinders speed of processing. In such circumstances, an up to date assessment will be required immediately before GCSE examinations and GCE examinations.

There must be a strong justification as to why more than 25% extra time is required. Extra time between 26% and 50% is an exceptional arrangement.

Extra time with a private report

The school has to present a ‘compelling’ case that the student’s learning difficulty has ‘a substantial and adverse effect’ on the student’s performance in exams. Any private report will only form part of the school’s evidence and the school will still have to test the student. Results of the testing undertaken by the school will be used in the application with reference made to the scores within the private report that has been submitted. In addition to the testing, the two paragraphs below will also need to be considered.

Applications for extra time will generally require statements/feedback from subject staff that a student is underperforming in classroom tests, as well as evidence in the form of incomplete mock examinations or similar.

The student must also have made use of extra time over a substantial period of time, in both classroom tests and mock examinations before the arrangement can be used in external examinations.

Extra time with a letter from a GP

In order for a student to be granted extra time on medical grounds, the school has to:

- Show that a student has an impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his/her speed of processing
- Confirm that he/she has persistent and significant difficulties when accessing and processing information
- Show evidence of how the disability/difficulty has impacted on teaching and learning in the classroom
- Show the involvement of teaching staff in determining the need for extra time of up to 25%
- Confirm that without the application of extra time of up to 25% the candidate would be at a substantial disadvantage
- Confirm that extra time of up to 25% is the candidate’s normal way of working within the Centre as a direct consequence of their disability.

A letter from a GP on its own is not sufficient

In addition to the evidence listed above, the school must also be able to show at least one of the following:

- A letter from CAMHS, a clinical psychologist, a hospital consultant or a psychiatrist
- A letter from the Local Authority Educational Psychology Service or Local Authority sensory impairment service.
- A letter from a Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT)
- A Statement of Special Educational Needs relating to the candidate’s secondary education, or an Education, Health and Care Plan, which confirms the candidate’s disability.

Evidence needed for the use of a Word Processor

The second most common request is for the use of a word processor.

Under certain circumstances a student may be allowed to use a word processor in exams. This will normally be a laptop with the spelling and grammar check facility/predictive text and internet connectivity disabled (switched off).

The use of a word processor must reflect the candidate's normal way of working within the Centre and be appropriate to the candidate's needs.

In assessing the latter, the school will need to have observed that the candidate has, for example:

- A learning difficulty which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to write legibly
- A medical condition
- A physical disability
- A sensory impairment
- Planning and organisational problems when writing by hand
- Poor handwriting

In all cases the school's decision will be final.

There are numerous other Access Arrangements that may be applied for, each of which are governed by the guidelines set out by the JCQ. We have highlighted as part of this policy the two main Access Arrangements. Information on all Access Arrangements may be found on the [JCQ website](#).

What does the School do to provide evidence for such claims?

Access Arrangements Testing

The Enhanced Learning Team carries out testing of students in all year groups in consideration for Access Arrangements. Testing comprises of literacy and memory-based tests; the results are used as a baseline for the students and information is shared with staff.

Other testing opportunities within the school

The Enhanced Learning Team carries out testing throughout the year as a result of students either being referred by teaching staff or through concerns raised by parents.

This testing again includes literacy tests as well as specific tests for working memory, phonological processing and others.

The JCQ set specific guidelines regarding the standard scores that enable a student to be eligible for Access Arrangements; these are not set by the school. A student may find, for example, completing tests in a fixed time period difficult, but without the appropriate evidence or scores below a certain level, they will not be eligible for Access Arrangements.

Private Educational Psychologist Reports

Under the school's testing system, we are only able to carry out certain tests. Parents may, if they wish, obtain a Private Educational Psychologist (EP) Assessment.

If parents wish to submit an EP report as part of their request for the school to consider their child for Access Arrangements, parents should be aware that the school will require to see:

A full copy of the report and original copies of all the tests completed. This will enable the School (who under JCQ guidelines, can be the sole referrer for Access Arrangements) to have full confidence in the testing that has been undertaken and ensure that testing has been robust and valid and fits the testing interval criteria. Even in this instance, the report will only form part of the school's evidence when applying for Access Arrangements and may not guarantee that concessions will be awarded.

Processing applications for Access Arrangements

For GCSE and GCE qualifications, Access Arrangements Online enables the Centre to make a single online application for a candidate requiring Access Arrangements using any of the secure awarding body internet sites. Access Arrangements Online will provide an instant response and will only allow a maximum of 26 months for any arrangement. The result of the application will be shared with the parents.

The evidence to support all applications is collated in collaboration with the school SENCO Ms Alexandra Hill and the appointed Specialist Assessor Ms Anne Deane.

Appointment of Specialist Assessor and procedures for access arrangements

The Head of Centre, in compliance with the current edition of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) publication Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments, seeks assurances that any Specialist Assessor has a thorough understanding of the principles, procedures and accountabilities involved: be familiar with the Equality Act 2010, to help identify Access Arrangements that might assist the candidate.

To ensure these procedures for the appointment of Specialist Assessor are in place, confirmation is sought that the Specialist Assessor has the required level of competence and holds a Level 7 Post-Graduate qualification in individual assessment.