

Royal Alexandra & Albert School



Access Arrangements for Examinations Parental Guidance

This guidance was originated by Sally Ralph.

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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 that Access Arrangements can be granted. We have created this document in order to try to give parents a useful brief outline as to what is required for Access Arrangements to be granted 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 Joint Council for Qualifications. We have to comply with the JCQ regulations otherwise this 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 AA in any of their examinations we will withdraw the access arrangement. If we continued with the AA we would be in breach of regulations which is considered malpractice.

The JCQ regulations are very complex, and there have been major changes for this academic year. The current guidance for 2016 to 2017 can be viewed on the [JCQ website](#).

JCQ specify that a normal way of working is 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 AA based on it. It will trigger an internal investigation into the normal way of working for that student.

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

Evidence needed for the most common request of **Extra Time**

In particular 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. 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 as follows.

The specialist assessor's report must confirm that the student has:

At least one 'below average' standardised score of 84 or less relating to speed of processing which has a **substantial** adverse effect on 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 speed of processing or working.

In rare and very exceptional circumstances, students with a cluster of scores 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 of processing or working.

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

Furthermore, the JCQ has also advised that where a student has been awarded extra time for his or 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 Lower Sixth.

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 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 carry out testing on the student. It is the results of the testing carried out by the school that 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 or 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 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 can be applied for, each of which are governed by the guidelines set out by the Joint Council for Qualifications – we have highlighted as part of this policy the two main ones applied for. Information on all can be found on the JCQ website, link posted on first page of this document.

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 is carried out on admission as well as at the start of each academic year. The testing comprises literacy based tests, this is then used as a baseline for the students and the information shared with staff.

Year 9

Following assessments that are carried out in the Summer term the Year 9 students will sit a test which will provide the school with an indication as to whether further testing may be necessary for specific students. This will also involve the gathering of information from teaching staff to check the student's normal way of working in lessons. When making an application the school utilises all previous years' testing as evidence of the student's difficulties as well as being able to demonstrate the normal way of working within the classroom and during test situations, which is a JCQ requirement. Any application we make requesting Access Arrangements needs to include school based evidence of need.

Once students have been tested and it is deemed that they are entitled to Access Arrangements then the school will post a letter home to notify parents.

Other testing opportunities within the school

The Enhanced Learning Team will also carry out testing at planned points in the year as a result of students either being referred by teaching staff based on their concerns over performance in class/test situations over an extended period or through concerns raised by parents.

This testing again includes literacy tests as well as other specific tests, depending on the need which can include working memory, phonological processing and others.

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

If under the schools testing system, as we are only able to carry out certain tests within school, a student does not qualify for Access Arrangements parents can, 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 centre to make a single on-line application for a candidate requiring access arrangements using any of the secure awarding body extranet sites. *Access arrangements online* will provide an instant response and will only allow a maximum of 26 months for any arrangement. The result of which will be shared with the parents.

The evidence to support all applications is collated in collaboration with the school **SENCO** Mrs Emma Glover and the appointed **specialist assessor** Mrs Sally Ralph.

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* seek assurances that any specialist assessor have 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.