



Frequently Asked Questions about Exam Access Arrangements (updated January 2026)

1. What are exam access arrangements?

Exam access arrangements (EAA) are adjustments made before exams to allow students with specific 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. Examples include extra time, a reader, a scribe, or using a word processor. These arrangements remove barriers but do not give an unfair advantage.

2. Who can get exam access arrangements?

Assessing students' needs for exam access arrangements begins with teachers identifying a need by what they observe in the classroom and exam environment. A diagnosis alone does not automatically lead to access arrangements; decisions are based on evidence of need and normal way of working. The process for applying for exam access arrangements begins with teacher feedback which shows the difficulties are observed across multiple subjects and are a sustained difficulty which means they are disadvantaged in that subject.

Students who have a long-term need (such as dyslexia, ADHD, autism, physical disability, or medical condition) or a temporary injury may qualify. The school must have evidence that the arrangement reflects the student's normal way of working in class and tests.

If you have a concern, please contact your child's form tutor in the first instance.

3. My child says they can't finish tests in time – what should I do?

This is quite common, but it doesn't automatically mean extra time will be given. JCQ requires evidence that the student consistently struggles under timed conditions because of a specific need, not just because the test feels hard or there is a poor exam technique.

What you can do is speak to your child's teachers to see if they have noticed anything in the classroom or assessment environment.

If there is an underlying learning difficulty or medical need, the SENCo will gather evidence and decide next steps.

4. My child gets very anxious about exams – can they have extra time?

No. JCQ rules make it clear that exam anxiety alone is not a reason for extra time. Extra time is only approved if there is a documented learning or processing difficulty that affects working speed. Instead, schools can offer other support via our wellbeing co-ordinators and external partners for exam anxiety support.

5. My child has a diagnosis of dyslexia – do they automatically get extra time?

No. A dyslexia report alone is not enough to give your child exam access arrangements at GCSE. JCQ states that schools must not accept external reports as sole evidence. If your child is diagnosed with dyslexia, please let the SENCo know and send in the full report. We can then use this to support your child in class with Quality First Teaching. If teachers then flag a need for additional time in assessments, we can do some internal screening assessments to see if they meet the JCQ regulation thresholds. This ensures arrangements are fair and based on genuine need, not just a diagnosis. For full details, see the JCQ Guidance.

6. Why can't we apply for extra time in Year 11 – is it too late?

Yes - it is often too late unless there is clear evidence of an established need or a recent, significant change in circumstances. JCQ requires that access arrangements are based on a student's normal way of working overtime, not something introduced just before GCSE exams. If a student has not been using extra time in lessons and assessments/exams throughout Key Stage 3 and 4, the school cannot apply for it in Year 11. This rule ensures arrangements are fair and reflect genuine need, not last-minute changes. The only exception would be a new student with evidence from a prior setting or a sudden change to a child's health which would impact their processing speed.

7. Can my child use a laptop in exams?

Yes, but only if it is their normal way of working well before Year 11 exams. JCQ requires evidence that the student regularly uses a laptop for classwork and assessments because of a specific need (e.g., handwriting difficulties, motor issues, or slow writing speed linked to a learning difficulty).

A laptop cannot be introduced just for exams—it must be an established practice supported by school evidence.

8. What happens if my child injures themselves just before an exam?

If your child has a temporary injury (for example, a broken arm), the school can apply for emergency access arrangements. These are handled quickly and may include:

- A scribe (someone to write for your child)
- Use of a laptop
- Extra time if needed
- Potentially the use of a Supervised Rest Break

You should contact the school immediately so they can submit the request to JCQ and make arrangements before the exam. Evidence (such as a doctor's note) will be required and arrangements cannot be applied for without this.

9. What are supervised rest breaks and why are they used?

Supervised rest breaks allow a student to pause during an exam without losing time. They remain under supervision but can take a short break to manage fatigue, pain or concentration difficulties. In detail:

- The student would have a rest-break card on their desk during an exam.
- The student may also have a small sand timer on their desk.
- If the student feels overwhelmed or needs time to regulate, they can raise the card to request a break.
- The invigilator then pauses the exam for up to five minutes.
- The sand timer is turned over so the student can visually monitor the break time.
- The exam paper is turned over so they are not working during the break.
- Once the break ends or they indicate they are ready to continue, the exam restarts and the time taken is added back onto the end of the exam.

JCQ recommends school considers rest breaks before considering extra time because they often help students with conditions such as ADHD stay focused without extending the whole exam unnecessarily. In some exceptional circumstances students are allowed to leave the exam hall to take their supervised rest break however this must be approved by the SENCo and reflect their normal way of working in school.

10. What has changed for 2025/26?

- JCQ expects schools to consider supervised rest breaks first before considering applying for 25% extra time for medical or neurodevelopmental needs.
- Extra time is not the default option – schools should consider alternatives like assistive technology or timers.
- Teacher evidence is essential; applications without detailed examples will be rejected.
- Parent comments are not used in applications.
- Data consent forms have been removed, but students must be told their application is processed online.

11. How does the school decide what support is right?

The SENCo and teachers look at:

- How the student works in lessons and tests
- Feedback from teachers and support staff
- Evidence from mock exams or timed tasks
- Specialist assessments (for some arrangements)

The aim is to choose support that meets the student's needs and prepares them for real life – not just exams.

12. Does having an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) mean automatic access arrangements?

No. An EHCP helps show need, but JCQ still requires evidence that the arrangement is the student's normal way of working.

13. When are applications made?

Schools apply online through JCQ's system. Applications must be completed well before exams, usually by the end of the Autumn term. Deadlines are set by JCQ and awarding bodies.

14. Will my child always get 25% extra time?

Not necessarily. JCQ now expects schools to trial supervised rest breaks first. Extra time is only approved if evidence shows it is essential and other options do not meet the need. If your child goes onto college or another educational establishment, the paperwork regarding any access arrangements is given to students with GCSE exam results in the summer.

Access arrangements do not automatically transfer to post-16 study. Colleges will review the evidence and may apply to roll forward the same arrangements, particularly for GCSE resits. New applications are required for A-levels or Level 3 courses.

15. What can parents do to help?

- Share relevant medical or specialist reports with the SENCo
- Encourage your child to speak to their teachers about anything they are struggling with
- Encourage your child to use any agreed arrangements in class and mocks
- Understand that JCQ rules are strict – schools cannot approve arrangements without evidence.

16. Where can I find the official JCQ guidance?

The full JCQ document Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments 2025/26 is available on the JCQ website: [Regulations and Guidance - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications.](#)