FAQs for Parents for students sitting GCSE and A Level Exams in 2027

Access arrangements

'Access Arrangements' allow candidates/learners with special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries to access the assessment without changing the demands of the assessment. In this way Awarding Bodies will comply with the duty of the Equality Act 2010 to make 'reasonable adjustments'.

Question: Am I permitted to request an access arrangement (such as 25% extra time, the use of a word processor, a reader, or scribe) on behalf of my child, and/or to provide evidence such as an educational psychologist's assessment?

An access arrangement for use in an awarding body's examination/assessment can only be awarded if JCQ requirements are met. Although the centre may consider advice from professionals from other organisations, JCQ regulations state that the centre must make decisions on appropriate access arrangements for their candidates. Managing parental requests for access arrangements Where a parent or candidate requests an arrangement that has not been recommended by subject teachers, learning support or teaching assistants who are familiar with the way the candidate works in the classroom, the SENCo, access arrangements coordinator or an equivalent member of staff should fully investigate the request.

This may involve:

• Speaking directly with the candidate about their experiences and perceived difficulties • Consulting with subject teachers and support staff who know the candidate's classroom behaviour and performance

• Carrying out informal screening or observational assessments (where appropriate and proportionate)

• Reviewing classwork, timed tasks or mock exam scripts for evidence of difficulty If it is determined that the access arrangement is not justified or appropriate, the SENCo (or equivalent role) should provide feedback to the parent(s) or candidate, explaining why the requested arrangement would not be appropriate.

For example, it should be explained that:

• The centre must strictly adhere to the JCQ regulations

• Granting arrangements without the required evidence would constitute malpractice

• Access arrangements are not given on the basis of preference or a diagnosis alone; they must reflect how the candidate ordinarily works in the centre and what is needed to remove a disadvantage The role of the SENCo It is the responsibility of the SENCo to lead on the access arrangements/reasonable adjustments process within their centre and to make appropriate

and informed decisions based on the JCQ regulations, as they will have a working knowledge of an individual candidate's needs and how their difficulties impact in the classroom and/or in timed assessments.

The SENCo must work with:

• teaching staff and members of the senior leadership team to identify, determine and implement appropriate and practicable access arrangements and reasonable adjustments

• the centre's appointed assessor to ensure a consistent, joined-up process. This will also allow the SENCo to discuss individual candidate cases with the assessor before making final decisions

• where appropriate, specialist advisory teachers, educational psychologists and medical professionals Applying for an access arrangement(s) Applications for access arrangements must only be processed/awarded where they are supported by the centre, and the candidate meets the published criteria for the arrangement(s) with the full supporting evidence in place.

This includes:

• evidence of need from subject teachers

• an assessment from the centre's approved assessor

• that the arrangement(s) put in place reflect the support given to the candidate in the centre (for example, in the classroom (where appropriate), working in small groups for reading and/or writing, support lessons, intervention strategies, in internal tests/examinations, mock examinations). This is known as the 'normal way of working' Arrangements which require JCQ awarding body approval must be processed using JCQ's Access arrangements online (AAO) system.

Although some arrangements are delegated to the centre, these must still meet JCQ regulations as stated above. Using assessments provided by parents/carers JCQ regulations state that: 'A privately commissioned assessment, where the centre has not been involved, cannot be used to award access arrangements and cannot be used to process an application using Access arrangements online. This would be where the assessor has not contacted the centre, has not liaised with the centre, has not been approved by the head of centre and has not received a completed Part 1 of Form 8 from the SENCo.'

However, the SENCo and assessor should: '…consider any privately commissioned assessment to see whether the process of gathering a picture of need, demonstrating normal way of working within the centre and, ultimately, assessing the candidate themselves should be instigated.' EHCPs and evidence from CAMHS An Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) does not automatically entitle a candidate to an access arrangement(s). An EHCP can be used as evidence for the application of an access arrangement(s), but this must meet the evidence of need requirements as set out in JCQ regulations.

Likewise, evidence from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) may be used as supporting evidence in confirming a candidate's need/disability, but a report/letter from CAMHS does not automatically entitle a candidate to an access arrangement(s).

Word processors The centre's word processor policy confirms the criteria the centre uses to award and allocate word processors for examinations and assessments. JCQ regulations state that a word processor cannot simply be granted to a candidate because they now want to type rather than write in examinations or can work faster on a keyboard or because they use a laptop at home.

The use of a word processor must reflect the candidate's **normal way of working** within the centre. For example, where the curriculum is delivered electronically and the centre provides word processors to all candidates.

The centre may also set out the types of candidates which it considers would benefit from the use of a word processor. This may include (but is not limited to) candidates with: • 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

If a word processor (e.g. computer, laptop or tablet) is provided, the spelling and grammar check and predictive text facility must be switched off.

Extra time JCQ issues regulations relating to the granting of 25% extra time during an examination.

The awarding of 25% extra time must be approved by the awarding body/bodies concerned, and must meet the following criteria:

• The provision of appropriate evidence which includes: o a sample of internal tests/mock exam papers across relevant subjects showing the application of 25% extra time o comments and observations from teaching staff in relevant subjects as to why the candidate needs 25% extra time and how they use the 25% extra time awarded

• Painting a picture of the candidate's **normal way of working** which clearly demonstrates the need for extra time

Extra time cannot suddenly be granted to the candidate at the time of their examinations.

Although a specialist, e.g. a medical consultant, may recommend the application of extra time, it is the SENCo who must determine the arrangements for the candidate's examinations. It is the SENCo's professional judgement which is based on their knowledge of the candidate's disability, the candidate's normal way of working in timed assessments and comments and observations from teaching staff. Comments from parents cannot be recorded as evidence.

The SENCo should consider the option of supervised rest breaks before making an application for 25% extra time since they may be more appropriate for candidates with an impairment other than a learning difficulty. Candidates not requiring their extra time during an examination The centre will confirm the actions which will be taken if a candidate does not want to utilise their extra time.

The actions which may be taken are:

• A candidate is not permitted to leave the examination room before the end of their extra time or

• A candidate is permitted to leave the examination room before the end of their extra time but they will be required to sign a declaration (or similar) to confirm that they have decided not to utilise their full allocation of extra time Exam timetables, timetable clashes, multiple examinations and contingency arrangements

Question: Can I request that my child's examination(s) is(are) moved to another day due to a family commitment? Exam timetables/dates

The exam timetable is confirmed by JCQ and the awarding bodies well in advance of the exam series.

Centres are not allowed to vary the timetable if a candidate's examination clashes with any of the following:

• work experience

• a school function or closure

• a field trip

• sporting events below international level

• holidays and weddings

• a candidate's personal arrangements

• school transport arrangements

Timetable clashes

There may be instances where a candidate is timetabled to take two (or more) examinations at the same time/during the same session. If the total time of these clashing examinations is

three hours or less, the centre will decide the order of the examinations within the timetabled session.

The candidate may also be given a supervised break of no more than 20 minutes between papers within a session. This must be conducted within the examination room, under formal examination conditions at all times. This means that the candidate cannot talk to, communicate with or disturb other candidates or use this time to revise.

Multiple examinations during the same day The exams officer will confirm the options which are available to a candidate who is entered for multiple examinations (three or more examinations) timetabled for the same day and the total duration for those papers is:

• more than six hours for GCE examinations (AS, A2, A level), including approved extra time allowances and/or supervised rest breaks

• more than five and a half hours for GCSE examinations, including approved extra time allowances and/or supervised rest breaks

Contingency arrangements

The awarding bodies designate contingency sessions for examinations in the summer series which will only be used in the event of national or significant local disruption to examinations. The contingency day for the summer 2026 exam series is (the morning and afternoon sessions of) 24 June 2026.

Therefore, when candidates receive their exam timetable, they will be asked to make themselves available on 24 June, even if their last examination is shown as taking place on an earlier date.

Once candidates have sat their final examination, they do not have to make themselves available on the contingency day. Centres are required to ensure that candidates and parents are aware of the contingency arrangements so that they take this into account when making their plans for the summer.

The contingency day cannot be used to accommodate a request to move an individual candidate's examination(s) for any reason whatsoever – including requests that may relate to illness, absence or a family event (such as a holiday, wedding etc). Absence from an examination

Question: What happens if my child is absent for an examination?

As written examinations are timetabled (i.e. scheduled to take place on set dates) ahead of an exam series, if a candidate is absent from an examination there are very limited options which a centre can offer to the candidate. A centre is not permitted under any circumstance to reschedule an examination that a candidate has missed. If a candidate is absent from an examination for an acceptable reason as defined by the centre within the regulations, the

candidate may be eligible for special consideration. The centre will deal with this on a case-by-case basis.

Examination room arrangements Question: Is my child permitted to have a room to themselves if they are nervous about sitting an examination?

The JCQ regulations state that a candidate may only take their examinations in a smaller environment away from the main examination room if they have an established difficulty. The decision to award separate (one-to-one) invigilation is a centre decision.

JCQ regulations instruct centres that the use of an alternative room with one-to-one invigilation would apply where the candidate has a serious medical condition, such as frequent seizures, Tourette's or significant behavioural issues which would disturb other candidates in the examination room.

A centre may offer separate invigilation/alternative rooming arrangements, e.g. a room for a smaller group of candidates with similar needs, where a candidate's disability is established within the centre. This means it is known to a Form Tutor, a Head of Year, the SENCo or a senior member of staff with pastoral responsibilities, for example, a long-term medical condition which has a substantial and adverse effect.

Separate invigilation/alternative rooming arrangements must reflect the candidate's normal and current way of working in internal school/college tests and mock examinations. Nervousness, low level anxiety or being worried/overwhelmed about examinations is not sufficient grounds for separate invigilation/alternative rooming within the centre.

Leaving the examination room Question: Will my child be permitted to leave the examination room temporarily to visit the toilet?

The exams officer will confirm the circumstances – and the process - under which a candidate may leave the exam room permanently and temporarily.

This includes:

• Candidates requesting a toilet break for known medical reasons

• Candidates requesting a toilet break for non-medical reasons – it is a centre decision if candidates are prohibited to leave the exam room temporarily. Many centres reflect their practice during lesson time in confirming if and when candidates are permitted to visit the toilet for non-medical reasons between the start of and before the end of the exam

• Candidates who have finished their exam and request to leave the examination room before the finish time of the exam or before the end of their allotted extra time Late and very late arrival for an examination

Question: What happens if my child is late for an examination?

If a parent/carer or candidate is aware that they will be late for an examination (for example, due to traffic), they should contact the exams officer and explain the situation. The parent/carer should supervise their child ensuring that they do not have access to the internet (using a mobile phone or any other device) or make contact with anyone else. If a candidate arrives after the start of the examination, they will only be allowed to enter the examination room and sit the examination at the discretion of the centre. If a candidate is permitted by the centre to sit the examination, they will be allowed the full time for the examination.

The difference between late and very late arrival

A candidate is considered very late if they arrive:

• more than one hour after the awarding body's published starting time for an examination which lasts one hour or more, i.e. after 10.00am for a morning examination or after 2.30pm for an afternoon examination

• after the awarding body's published finishing time for an examination that lasts less than one hour.

Late arrival is defined as arriving after the start of the examination and before the times related to very late arrival. Awarding bodies cannot guarantee that the scripts of very late arriving candidates will be marked as these candidates may have come into contact with candidates who have sat the examination.

Malpractice Question: What is malpractice and what happens if my child is suspected of, or engages in malpractice?

If a centre fails to report any instances of alleged, suspected or actual incidents of malpractice in examinations and assessments to the appropriate awarding body, they are committing malpractice. This may result in sanctions being applied against the head of centre and/or the centre itself.

Examples of candidate malpractice which must be reported to the relevant awarding body include:

• the alteration or falsification of any results document, including certificates

• a breach of the instructions or advice of an invigilator, supervisor, or the awarding body in relation to the examination or assessment rules and regulations

• the unauthorised use of alternative electronic devices or technology during remote assessment and remote invigilation

• accessing the internet, online materials or AI tools during remote assessment and remote invigilation, where this is not permitted

• failing to abide by the conditions of supervision designed to maintain the security of the examinations or assessments

• collusion: working collaboratively with others, beyond what is permitted

• copying from another candidate (including the use of technology to aid the copying)

• allowing work to be copied, for example, posting work on social networking sites prior to an examination/assessment

• the deliberate destruction of another candidate's work

• disruptive behaviour in the examination room or during an assessment session (including the use of offensive language)

• failing to report to the centre or awarding body the candidate having unauthorised access to assessment related information or sharing unauthorised assessment related information online

• exchanging, obtaining, receiving, passing on information (or the attempt to) which could be assessment related by means of talking or electronic, written or non-verbal communication

• making a false declaration of authenticity in relation to the authorship of controlled assessment, coursework, non-examination assessment or the contents of a portfolio

• allowing others to assist in the production of controlled assessments, coursework, non-examination assessments, examination responses or assisting others in the production of controlled assessments, coursework, non-examination assessments or examination responses
• the misuse, or the attempted misuse, of examination and assessment materials and resources (for example, exemplar materials)

• being in possession of unauthorised confidential information about an examination or assessment

• bringing into the examination room notes in the wrong format (where notes are permitted in examinations) or inappropriately annotated texts (in open book examinations)

• the inclusion of offensive comments, obscenities or drawings; discriminatory language, remarks or drawings directed at an individual or group in scripts, controlled assessments, coursework, non-examination assessments or portfolios

• personation: pretending to be someone else for fraudulent purposes, arranging for another person to take one's place in an examination or an assessment

• plagiarism: unacknowledged copying from, or reproduction of, third party sources or incomplete referencing (including the internet and artificial intelligence (AI) tools) • theft of another candidate's work

• being in possession (whether used or not) of unauthorised material during an examination or assessment, such as: notes, study guides and personal organisers, own blank paper, calculators (when prohibited), dictionaries (when prohibited), watches, instruments which can capture a digital image, electronic dictionaries (when prohibited), translators, wordlists, glossaries, iPods, mobile phones, AirPods, smart glasses, smart devices, MP3/4 players, pagers, or other similar electronic devices#

• the unauthorised use of a memory stick or similar device where a candidate uses a word processor

• facilitating malpractice on the part of other candidates

• behaving in a manner so as to undermine the integrity of the examination

Special consideration 'Special Consideration' is a post examination adjustment to a candidate's mark or grade to reflect temporary injury, illness or other indisposition at the time of the examination/assessment.

Question: What are special considerations and when do they apply?

The special consideration process is totally separate to the access arrangements process (see Access arrangements above). For candidates who are present for an examination/assessment but disadvantaged, special consideration is normally given by applying a percentage to each component affected within a specification.

The percentage depends on the timing, nature and extent of the qualifying criteria. The maximum percentage given is 5% of the total raw marks available in the component concerned, including coursework and non-examination assessment.

This percentage is reserved for the most exceptional cases, such as:

• terminal illness of the candidate

• terminal illness of a parent or carer, brother or sister

• death of a member of the immediate family within three months of the examination

• exceptional and disruptive crisis or incident at or near the time of the examination, such as attempted murder against the candidate

JCQ regulations Centres are only permitted to submit applications for special consideration where an adverse issue or event has had, or is reasonably likely to have had, a material effect on a candidate's ability to take an assessment or demonstrate their normal level of attainment in an assessment.

For example, a candidate who has temporarily experienced illness, injury or some other event outside of their control at the time of the assessment. It is for the centre to decide whether a candidate meets the published criteria for special consideration.

Applications can only be processed where they are supported by the centre and the candidate meets the published criteria for special consideration with evidence in place. If the centre does not support an application for special consideration, then it cannot submit this application to the relevant awarding body or bodies. Speculative applications for special consideration will not be accepted. Where a candidate does not meet the published criteria for special consideration, the awarding body will reject the application.

When special consideration does not apply Centres are not permitted to submit applications for special consideration for trivial cases which include, but are not limited to:

• a bird tweeting outside the examination room

• a lorry reversing

• a toilet being flushed

• doors in a corridor adjacent to the examination room opening and closing

• very short, momentary noise from, for example, aeroplanes, helicopters or lawnmowers

Special consideration cannot be applied for if the candidate was not able to develop their subject knowledge and understanding due to absence during the course, joining the course late or teaching and learning being disrupted by staff shortages, planned building work or lack of specialist facilities.

Candidates will not be eligible for special consideration if preparation for or performance in the examination(s)/assessment(s) is affected by:

• Long-term illness or other difficulties during the course affecting revision time, unless the illness or circumstances worsen what would otherwise be a minor issue at the time of the assessment (i.e. difficulties over and above those that previously approved access arrangements would have alleviated)

• Bereavement occurring more than six months before the assessment, unless an anniversary has been reached at the time of the assessment or there are ongoing implications, such as an inquest or court case or exceptional individual candidate circumstances

• Domestic inconvenience, such as moving house, lack of facilities, taking holidays (including school or exchange visits and field trips) at the time of the assessment

• Minor disturbance in the examination room caused by another candidate, such as momentary bad behaviour, a mobile phone ringing or a momentary fire alarm.

• The consequences of committing a crime, where formally charged or found guilty. (However, a retrospective application for special consideration may be considered where the charge is later dropped or the candidate is found not guilty.)

• The consequences of taking alcohol or recreational drugs

• The consequences of disobeying the centre's internal regulations

• The failure of the centre to prepare candidates properly for the examination for any reason

• Quality of teaching, loss of teaching, staff shortages, planned building work or lack of facilities

• Misreading the timetable and/or failing to attend at the right time and in the right place • Misreading the instructions of the question paper and answering the wrong questions

• Making personal arrangements, such as a wedding or holiday, which conflict with the examination timetable

• Not submitting any coursework or non-examination assessment, unless the coursework or non-examination assessment is scheduled for a restricted period of time, rather than during the course

• Missing all examinations and internally assessed components or units

• Failure to cover the course because of joining the class partway through

• Any disability or learning difficulties (diagnosed or undiagnosed), unless the disability or circumstances worsen what would otherwise be a minor issue at the time of the assessment, i.e. Difficulties over and above those that previously approved access arrangements would have alleviated

• Failure by the centre to process access arrangements by the published deadline When special consideration may apply Candidates will be eligible for special consideration if they have been fully prepared and have covered the whole course but performance in the examination, or the production of coursework or non-examination assessment, is materially affected by adverse circumstances beyond their control. These circumstances include:

• Temporary illness, accident or injury at the time of the assessment

• Bereavement at the time of the assessment (where whole groups are affected, normally only those most closely involved will be eligible)

• Domestic crisis arising at the time of the assessment

• Serious disturbance during an examination

• Accidental events at the time of the assessment, such as being given the wrong examination paper, being given a defective examination paper or CD, failure of practical equipment or failure of materials to arrive on time

• Participation in sporting events, training camps or other events at an international level at the time of the assessment, e.g. representing their club or country at an international level in chess or football on the day of an examination

• Failure by the centre to implement previously approved access arrangements for that specific examination series