

## 2025/26 Update to:

# Assessing the need for Access Arrangements in Examinations

A Practical Guide – Seventh Edition, by Lia Castiglione

### Introduction

This update provides a brief commentary on changes to the JCQ regulations “**Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments**” since the publication of the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of “Assessing the need for Access Arrangements” in 2023. It covers key changes made within the 2025/26 JCQ regulations. There is a separate update covering changes for 2024-25, which should also be referred to.

The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the book explores in depth the fundamental aspects of access arrangements work, including the range of skills to be investigated, appropriate tests, interpretation of data, and considerations of the wider issues involved. **Please note** that this update is intended to be read in conjunction with the book, which is available to purchase on the Patoss website: [www.patoss-dyslexia.org/Books](http://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/Books)

The online resources accompanying the 7<sup>th</sup> edition have also been updated to reflect the 2025/26 JCQ regulations. A link to the online resource area is provided in Appendix 1 of the book (see page 267).

It is essential that professionals familiarise themselves with the JCQ regulations in full. Neither this update nor the accompanying book replaces the official JCQ guidance; they are intended to support and supplement professional understanding.

### Effective Date and Existing Applications

All changes outlined in this update take effect from **1st September 2025**. They do not apply retrospectively to access arrangements already approved for the 2024/25 academic year or earlier. There is no requirement to amend existing evidence or reprocess current applications.

## Qualifications Covered by the JCQ AARA Document

The 2025/26 JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments document now includes a wider range of qualifications. This expansion covers additional awarding bodies and qualifications, including a number of NCFE qualifications and Essential Skills. A full list of the qualifications covered can be found on the front of the JCQ AARA document.

## Data consent forms

*This information provides an update to Chapter 17. Please note also that references to the data consent form appear throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> edition book.*

The two JCQ documents, Candidate Personal Data Consent Form and Data Protection Confirmation by the Examinations Officer or SENCo have been withdrawn and are no longer required.

Instead, where applicable, centres must ensure that candidates are informed that an application for access arrangements will be processed online using Access Arrangements Online (AAO), in line with the UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018.

## Preparation for the Workplace

*This information provides an update to Chapter 20, which discusses transferable skills, technology, and real-world implications.*

A new paragraph in the introduction of the JCQ regulations highlights the importance of considering access arrangements that help prepare candidates for the demands of the workplace. While 25% extra time remains a common arrangement, it may not always be the most appropriate or transferable support. SENCos are encouraged to consider alternatives such as assistive technology, supervised rest breaks, timers, or listening to music or white noise. These options may better reflect real-world adjustments and promote long-term independence.

## JCQ Forms

*This information provides an update to Chapter 6 and Chapter 8 and Chapter 15.*

It is no longer acceptable for Part 1 of Form 8 to contain only a skeleton of information. This JCQ term refers to minimal or incomplete information that does not provide sufficient evidence of the candidate's normal way of working. Before an assessment takes place, Form 8 Part 1 must now include teacher feedback and evidence of the candidate's normal way of working as a minimum. This requirement applies whether the assessment is carried out by a centre-based assessor or an external assessor approved by the head of centre.

Comments from parents must not be included on JCQ forms (Form 8, Form 8RF, or Form 9). Parental views do not form part of the evidence required for access arrangements.

The JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments document now sets out further detail about what may be recorded in Part 1 of Form 8. In addition to feedback from teaching and support staff, results from any screening tools, and evidence of arrangements used in class and during internal tests and mock exams, the following may also be included:

- Classroom observations of the candidate's learning style
- A review of the candidate's workbooks, including spelling accuracy, handwriting legibility, and task completion.

This expanded guidance supports a more robust and needs-led approach to access arrangements, ensuring that decisions are based on a well-rounded view of the candidate's day-to-day learning profile.

## Assessing Cognitive Processing Fluency

*This information provides an update to Chapter 11 (page 139).*

For Part 2 of Form 8, JCQ has now provided a clearly defined list of acceptable areas of cognitive processing/fluency. These are:

- Short-term/working verbal memory
- Short-term/working visual memory (*these may be combined within a composite score*)
- Delayed memory
- Phonological memory
- Phonological awareness
- Phonological processing speed / rapid naming
- Visual processing speed
- Visual-motor processing
- Word reading fluency / sight word efficiency
- Decoding fluency / non-word reading efficiency
- Associational / oral fluency
- Orthographic fluency
- Mathematical fluency

Assessors can no longer rely on alternative measures of their own choosing.

This defined list offers wide scope to identify candidates' needs across a range of underlying processing and fluency difficulties. It ensures greater clarity and consistency in evidence-gathering, while allowing assessors to draw on a diverse set of measures tailored to the candidate's profile.

## 25% Extra Time

*This information provides an update to Chapter 11 (page 142).*

### Assessment Evidence for Form 8 Part 2

The option of using a cluster of three scores between 90 and 94 in different areas of speed of working, alongside a diagnostic assessment report, has been removed.

No other changes have been made to the assessment evidence requirements. These remain as follows:

- **Approval via AAO:** Two below average standardised scores (84 or less), or one below average score (84 or less) and one low average score (between 85 and 89), in two different areas of speed of working.
- **Referral to awarding body:** Two low average scores (between 85 and 89), in two different areas of speed of working. These applications must be referred for awarding body approval, with the Form 8 and supporting evidence attached.

### Centre-Based Evidence

Whichever form is used, Form 8, Form 8RF, or Form 9, additional samples of centre-based evidence must now accompany the evidence for 25% extra time. The following are required:

- A sample of internal tests or mock exam papers across relevant subjects showing how extra time is applied. The candidate will have changed pen or font colour for the extra time.
- Comments and observations from subject staff explaining why 25% extra time is needed and how it is used in practice.

This should not create a significant additional burden on centres, as this evidence will already have been gathered in order to complete Form 8, Form 8RF, or Form 9. The key difference is that for applications processed from 1 September 2025 onwards this material will now form part of the formal evidence required for JCQ centre inspections.

Where 25% extra time is evidenced through Form 9, there must also be evidence that supervised rest breaks have been trialled and found insufficient. This should be clearly documented on Form 9.

### Re-sit candidates

Where a candidate is entered for GCSEs in November 2025 or June 2026 to improve upon a previous grade and an existing Form 8 or Form 9 is used, additional samples of evidence (i.e. teacher comments or internal test/mock papers) are not required.

## **Referral pathway for Form 9**

*This provides an update to Chapter 16, page 188.*

Where a candidate has been referred to CAMHS or an NHS Trust, this referral pathway may, in exceptional cases, provide the specialist evidence supporting a Form 9 application. However, there must be a CAMHS/NHS Trust referral confirmation/acceptance letter agreeing to formally assess. An initial referral or request for assessment without such confirmation is not acceptable.

There will also be a greater reliance on centre-based evidence, including detailed comments and observations from teaching and support staff to demonstrate the impact of the candidate's difficulties in the classroom and exams.

## **Timetable variation requiring overnight supervision and Timetable variation on the day of the exam for a candidate with a disability**

*This information provides an update to Chapter 4 (page 57).*

An online application for these arrangements must not be submitted until it is confirmed which of the candidate's exams will require a timetable variation.

Full details of all affected examinations must be clearly recorded. This includes the date and session for each relevant exam.

If the centre is copying timetable information from a database, they must check carefully to ensure that every exam subject to a timetable variation has been correctly included.

## **Listening to music/white noise due to a substantial impairment**

*This information provides an update to Chapter 4 (Access arrangements requiring approval).*

As well as this arrangement being available for candidates with social, emotional and mental health needs or with a sensory impairment such as tinnitus or misophonia, those with ADHD or ASD may find that listening to music helps them to focus.

The device used must not have internet or Bluetooth connectivity. Suitable options include a CD player, MP3 player, white noise machine, or a centre laptop controlled by the invigilator.

Candidates may choose the content, but music playlists must be checked to ensure no unfair advantage is gained.

## Practical assistant

*This information provides an update to Chapter 4 (page 56).*

Before making an application for a practical assistant, the SENCo must consult with subject teachers. This is essential to confirm that the proposed support will not compromise the assessment objectives or the specific skills the candidate is expected to demonstrate independently, especially in subjects such as Geography, Mathematics, and the Sciences.

Applications for a practical assistant are made via the online system and do not require a JCQ form. Instead, the referral must include:

- Details of the candidate's difficulty or disability.
- A clear list of the tasks the practical assistant would be expected to carry out.
- The specific exams/components, and specifications the arrangement will apply to.

This information enables the awarding body to determine whether the arrangement is appropriate and whether the assessment objectives remain valid.

## Bilingual Dictionary with 25% Extra Time

*This information provides an update to Chapter 22 (page 234).*

The 2025-26 JCQ AARA provides clarification of the three-year rule.

Centres are reminded that applications processed online will show an automatic approval expiry date 26 months from the application processing date, not from the candidate's date of entry into the United Kingdom.

However, the access arrangement itself remains valid for three years from the candidate's entry date. If the three-year period ends during an examination series, the candidate may complete the entire series using a bilingual dictionary with 25% extra time.

## Centre-delegated arrangements

*This information provides an update to Chapter 4 (page 48).*

There has been one removal and one addition to the list of centre-delegated arrangements for 2025/26.

Removed from the centre-delegated list:

- CCTV

Newly added to the centre-delegated list:

- Blank sheet of paper for doodling where a candidate has persistent and significant concentration difficulties. (This must be included with the candidate's completed answer booklet.)

The doodle paper should be clearly struck through so that examiner knows not to mark it.

This arrangement can be provided according to the candidate's needs and normal way of working in the centre. No formal evidence is required, and an online application does not need to be made. The arrangement is not subject to inspection.

## **Supervised rest breaks**

*This information provides an update to Chapter 4 (pages 42 and 49).*

For candidates with impairments other than learning difficulties, before applying for extra time, SENCos must trial and exhaust supervised rest breaks during timed internal tests or mock exams. The 2025/26 JCQ AARA document explains why supervised rest breaks may be more appropriate than 25% extra time for some candidates.

Supervised rest breaks often better support candidates who experience anxiety, attention difficulties or neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD or ASD. These breaks help manage concentration and fatigue by providing structured opportunities to step away from the exam setting, reducing stress and improving focus.

Extending exam time alone may prolong exposure to a stressful environment without addressing underlying issues related to attention or emotional regulation. In contrast, supervised breaks encourage self-regulation and can help develop long-term strategies for managing exam conditions. While some candidates may still require 25% extra time, the regulations highlight rest breaks as a targeted and effective alternative.

## **Alternative rooming arrangements**

*This information provides an update to Chapter 4 (page 44).*

The 2025/26 JCQ AARA document provides further guidance on the use of an alternative room with 1:1 invigilation. This arrangement must only be used when a candidate has a serious medical condition, such as frequent seizures, Tourette's syndrome, or significant behavioural difficulties, which would disturb others in the exam room.

The arrangement must only be considered when the candidate cannot be accommodated in the same room as others due to the disruptive impact of their condition. The focus is therefore on the impact on other candidates in the exam room, rather than the needs of the candidate alone.

## Sign Language Professional

*This information provides an update to Chapter 21 (page 229).*

The term *Communication Professional* has been replaced with *Sign Language Professional* in the 2025/26 JCQ regulations. This is a change in terminology only; no changes have been made to the access arrangement itself.

## Coloured/Enlarged Paper

*This information provides an update to Chapter 4 (page 46).*

Where candidates require coloured paper, the SENCo must ensure this is genuinely needed, as photocopying question papers on exam day can be logistically difficult. Alternatives such as coloured overlays or tinted glasses should be considered first.

Using a single standard colour, such as buff or grey, for all candidates may be a practical solution.

## New JCQ guidance documents

To help centres manage access arrangements more effectively, JCQ has published several new and updated guidance materials. These include:

- **New: Access Arrangements – A Guide for Teaching Staff**  
Designed for use in staff training and briefings, this guide helps teachers understand their role in the access arrangements process. There is also a visual flowchart summarising the key steps and responsibilities.
- **New: Flowchart – Managing Parental Requests for Access Arrangements**  
A clear step-by-step flowchart to support SENCos and access arrangements leads when responding to parental requests.
- **Updated: Access Arrangements when a Candidate Changes Centre**  
This revised version simplifies the guidance and includes a summary table indicating which JCQ form should be used in different scenarios.

These documents are available on the JCQ website and in the 7<sup>th</sup> Edition online resource area.