



Joint Council for
Qualifications^{CIC}

An overview of the access arrangements and reasonable adjustments process for centres accepting private candidates

1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026

For the attention of SENCos, assessors and senior leaders.

Produced on behalf of:



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1 Introduction

This document has been specifically written to support SENCos, assessors and senior leaders within centres who enter private candidates for examinations.

The document is intended to support, but **not** replace, the JCQ publication *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*, which SENCos, equivalent members of staff within FE colleges and assessors **must** continue to refer to.

Wording highlighted in yellow reflects the principal changes for the academic year 2025/26.

2 What are access arrangements?

Access arrangements are agreed **before** examinations. They allow candidates with **specific needs**, such as special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries, to access the assessment and show what they know and can do without changing the demands of the assessment. The intention behind an access arrangement is to meet the needs of an individual candidate without affecting the integrity of the assessment. Access arrangements are the principal way in which awarding bodies comply with the duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make 'reasonable adjustments'.

3 What are reasonable adjustments?

The Equality Act 2010 requires an awarding body to make reasonable adjustments where a candidate, who is disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010, would be at a **substantial disadvantage** in comparison to someone who is not disabled.

The awarding body is required to take reasonable steps to overcome that disadvantage. An example would be a computer reader, 50% extra time and a word processor, which would be reasonable adjustments for a visually impaired candidate. A reasonable adjustment may be unique to that individual.

Whether an adjustment will be considered reasonable will depend on several factors which will include, but are not limited to:

- the needs of the disabled candidate;
- the effectiveness of the adjustment;
- the cost of the adjustment; **and**
- the likely impact of the adjustment upon the candidate and other candidates.

An adjustment **will not** be approved if it:

- involves unreasonable costs to the awarding body;
- involves unreasonable timeframes; **or**
- affects the security and integrity of the assessment.

This is because the adjustment is not 'reasonable'.

In most cases it **will not** be reasonable for adjustments to be made to assessment objectives within a qualification. To do so would likely undermine the effectiveness of the qualification in providing a reliable indication of the knowledge, skills and understanding of the candidate. There is no duty to make adjustments which the qualifications regulators have specified should not be made.

Where a centre is under a duty to make a reasonable adjustment, it **must not** charge a disabled candidate any additional fee in relation to the adjustment or aid.

For further information, heads of centre, senior leaders, SENCos and assessors should refer to Chapters 1 and 3 of the JCQ document *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*:

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration>

4 Types of access arrangements and reasonable adjustments

Twenty-two access arrangements/reasonable adjustments are delegated to centres. These arrangements **do not** require an examination centre to process an online application or, in most cases, produce any evidence of need for inspection. The SENCo, or an equivalent member of staff within an FE college, is empowered at a local level to determine the appropriateness and reasonableness of the arrangement. However, the SENCo **must** be satisfied of the need for the arrangement(s).

The SENCo will base their decision on the private candidate's normal way of working and whether their impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect. See **section 7**, which provides information on establishing a candidate's normal way of working.

The following arrangements are delegated to centres:

- Alternative rooming arrangements – sitting the examination outside of the main examination hall/room, e.g. a room for a smaller group of candidates with similar needs. This would be where the candidate could not be seated more appropriately within the main examination hall/room. Centres will apply strict criteria for this arrangement, subject to appropriate evidence of need.
- Amplification equipment
- Bilingual dictionary
- 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)
- Braille transcript
- Braillers
- Colour naming by the invigilator for candidates who are colour blind
- Coloured overlays
- Examination question paper on coloured/enlarged paper
- Fidget toys and stress balls
- Live speaker for pre-recorded examination components
- Low-vision aid/magnifier
- Non-electronic ear defenders/ear plugs
- Non-electronic headphones
- Optical Character Reader (OCR) scanners
- Prompter
- Read aloud (which can include an examination reading pen)
- Sign Language Professional
- Squared paper for visual spatial difficulties
- Supervised rest breaks
- Timer on a candidate's desk
- Word processor (with the spelling and grammar check switched off)

The SENCo should confirm in writing any agreed centre delegated access arrangement(s) with a private candidate.

The following arrangements require an online application to be submitted by the centre, supported by evidence of need:

- Access to a mobile phone for medical purposes
- Bilingual dictionary with 25% extra time (principally for GCSE qualifications)
- Computer reader/reader
- 25% extra time
- Extra time over 25%†
- Listening to music/white noise due to a substantial impairment
- Practical Assistant†
- Remote invigilation*
- Scribe/speech recognition technology
- Timetable variation on the day of the exam for a candidate with a disability
- Timetable variation requiring overnight supervision for a candidate with a disability

†The arrangement will be automatically rejected. Applications should then be referred online by the centre to the relevant awarding body.

*Remote invigilation may be acceptable in **very exceptional circumstances**.

A disabled candidate may require other adjustments which are not listed in this document. Accordingly, the list of arrangements is not exhaustive. Where a candidate has substantial needs which are not accommodated by *Access arrangements online*, the centre **must** make an online referral to the relevant awarding body/bodies. This **must** be done via *Access arrangements online* by selecting 'Other'.

Additional paperwork may be required to justify the request being made. Awarding bodies may require more compelling evidence of need before approving an arrangement that would otherwise unfairly advantage the candidate. The requirement for evidence of need is important to maintain the rigour and standard of the examination system. Evidence is also necessary to ensure that those using examination certificates can continue to have confidence in the awarding of qualification grades.

5 Applying for access arrangements

Arrangements **must** be processed and approved **before** an examination or assessment, no later than the published deadline, as below.

Exam series	Access arrangement	Final deadline
June 2026	Modified papers	31 January 2026
June 2026	All other access arrangements	21 March 2026

The centre **must** ensure that private candidates are aware of the internal deadline for access arrangements/reasonable adjustments. This will then allow the centre to gather, collate and produce the required evidence to support an online application.

Private candidates will be required to adhere to the centre's internal deadlines. Requirements for access arrangements **must** be notified at the point of application/enrolment.

The centre's application form for a private candidate **must** include questions on a private candidate's difficulties when working under timed and controlled conditions and any potential access arrangements/reasonable adjustments. Where a difficulty is highlighted, the centre should then contact the private candidate as soon as possible to discuss their needs. This will enable the centre to meet its internal deadline and discuss with the private candidate whether the choice of qualification(s) is/are appropriate as well as exploring possible access arrangements/reasonable adjustments.

6 Overview of evidence requirements which require an online application using *Access arrangements online*

Access arrangements	Evidence requirements (in all cases normal way of working unless the candidate has a temporary illness/injury)
Physical disability, sensory impairment	
25% extra time, extra time of more than 25%, computer reader/reader, scribe	The SENCo will complete Form 9 confirming the candidate's normal way of working and that the candidate has persistent and significant difficulties, confirmed by a formal diagnosis from a registered specialist, such as a clinical paediatrician or a hospital consultant (not a GP).* Applications for 25% extra time will require additional supporting evidence (see section 7). The SENCo will exercise their professional judgement as to whether they consider 25% extra time to be appropriate, as opposed to supervised rest breaks.
Medical condition (e.g. ADHD, ASD, mental health conditions)	
25% extra time, extra time of more than 25%, computer reader/reader, scribe	The SENCo will complete Form 9 confirming the candidate's normal way of working and that the candidate has persistent and significant difficulties, confirmed by a formal diagnosis from a registered specialist, such as a clinical paediatrician or a hospital consultant (not a GP).* Applications for 25% extra time will require additional supporting evidence (see section 7). The SENCo will exercise their professional judgement as to whether they consider 25% extra time to be appropriate, as opposed to supervised rest breaks.
Learning difficulties (e.g. dyscalculia, dyslexia)	
25% extra time	A fully completed Form 8, Parts 1, 2 and 3, with an assessment by the centre's appointed assessor from Year 9 onwards or where the private candidate is aged 14 years or over in the academic year of entry using current editions of nationally standardised tests (assessor selects tests). At least two below average standardised scores of 84 or less, or one below average standardised score (84 or less) and one low average standardised score (85-89)[†], relating to two different areas of speed of working (cognitive processing/reading/writing). Only Form 8 is acceptable. Spreadsheets, email messages, centre-devised equivalents of Form 8, educational psychologists' reports and other reports are not acceptable for processing and inspection purposes. Applications for 25% extra time will require additional supporting evidence (see section 7).
Scribe/speech recognition technology (including the use of a word processor with the spelling and/or grammar check switched on)	A fully completed Form 8, Parts 1, 2 and 3, with an assessment by the centre's appointed assessor from Year 9 onwards or where the private candidate is aged 14 years or over in the academic year of entry using current editions of nationally standardised tests (assessor selects tests). The candidate cannot produce written work through any other means due to: • spelling in the below average range (a spelling accuracy standardised score of 84 or less) with unrecognisable spellings; or • below average writing speed (a standardised score of 84 or less). Only Form 8 is acceptable. Spreadsheets, email messages, centre-devised equivalents of Form 8, educational psychologists' reports and other reports are not acceptable for processing and inspection purposes.

* SENCos **must** refer to the JCQ document *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*:

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration>

[†]In very exceptional circumstances, two low average standardised scores (85 to 89) relating to two different areas of speed of working may be accepted.

Access arrangements

Evidence requirements (in all cases normal way of working unless the candidate has a temporary illness/injury)

Learning difficulties (e.g. dyscalculia, dyslexia) (cont.)

Extra time between 26% and 50%

A fully completed Form 8, Parts 1, 2 and 3, with **an assessment carried out by the centre's appointed assessor within 26 months prior to the final examination(s)** using current editions of nationally standardised tests (assessor selects tests).

- Speed of cognitive processing/reading/writing **must be very substantially below average (two standardised scores of 69 or less which relate to two different areas of speed of working).**
- **This is a rare and exceptional arrangement.**

Only Form 8 is acceptable. Spreadsheets, email messages, centre-devised equivalents of Form 8, educational psychologists' reports and other reports **are not** acceptable for processing and inspection purposes.

Computer reader/reader

Centre-based evidence from the SENCo confirming the nature of the candidate's impairment and that the use of a computer reader/reader reflects their normal and current way of working.

Please see section 5.5 of the JCQ regulations.

EAL

Bilingual dictionary

A candidate with EAL might be eligible for a bilingual dictionary. The bilingual dictionary must be stored at the centre.

Bilingual dictionary and 25% extra time

The candidate **must** meet the published criteria. **This is a rare and exceptional arrangement.** Please see section 5.18 of the JCQ regulations.*

Computer reader/reader

Centre-based evidence from the SENCo confirming the nature of the candidate's impairment and that the use of a computer reader/reader reflects their normal and current way of working.

Please see section 5.5 of the JCQ regulations.

* SENCos **must** refer to the JCQ document *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration>.

7 How do SENCos establish the candidate's normal way of working when completing forms and processing online applications?

There are a variety of sources a SENCo can use to paint a picture of need, complete Part 1 of Form 8 or Part 1 of Form 9 and show to a JCQ Centre Inspector. When completing Part 1 of Form 8 or Part 1 of Form 9, the SENCo must make clear that the picture of need and normal way of working relates to a private candidate.

Where the private candidate and/or a private tutor provides insufficient information to enable the SENCo to complete Part 1 of the form, parent/carers comments may be included.

When determining whether the private candidate should be awarded 25% extra time or supervised rest breaks, the SENCo may consider comments from the private candidate. They may provide feedback on their perceived effectiveness of supervised rest breaks in relation to their difficulty.

- Refer to the candidate's responses on the centre's application form regarding their difficulties and any previous access arrangements.
- Have a detailed conversation with the private candidate, identifying their difficulties, including those which are self-reported, when working under timed conditions.*
- Where relevant, information from the candidate's distance learning provider or a qualified private tutor. This information could be relayed, for example, by email, telephone or video call.
- Refer to a structured support plan, such as an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or an Individual Learning Plan (ILP).
- Refer to any online feedback given to the private candidate whilst studying and/or any reported difficulties if the private candidate receives regular 1:1 tuition.
- Information from a previous centre, which may include:
 - arrangements made for Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Tests;
 - arrangements made for any previous internal and/or external examinations and assessments;
 - where relevant, a copy of the approval sheet from *Access arrangements online*;
 - where relevant, centre-based evidence used by the previous centre to support an online application. This could include a fully completed Form 8, accompanied by evidence of the assessor's qualification;
 - any other evidence of support from a previous centre;
- The conducting of screening tests for a candidate with learning difficulties.*

For applications for 25% extra time the following sources (as below) can be used to show the candidate's normal way of working and be available for inspection.

Where it is not possible for the centre to conduct a timed test for a private candidate, such as a mock examination, a work log or samples of the private candidate's work may be presented for inspection alongside the completed Form 8 or 9:

- setting the private candidate assessments (for example, awarding body past papers) to establish the need for 25% extra time or a scribe. For extra time, the candidate could be given the allocated time for the paper, then change their pen colour and continue for an extra 25% of the time allowed. This would help to establish whether extra time is used effectively;*
- a work log. The candidate is asked to keep a log of their working methods for assignments (for example, support with reading or spelling from another individual or the use of technology) and the time taken to complete the work;
- evidencing the candidate's difficulties from completing short, timed tasks or online formative assessments;
- samples of work. The candidate is asked to provide examples of their work to evidence any difficulties (e.g. issues with legibility or spelling) or support (e.g. the use of dictation software, the use of a laptop with spellcheck switched on).

*Where a private candidate is unable to attend the centre for a conversation or assessment, communication can take place, where appropriate, remotely by phone or via a video call. No specialist remote invigilation software is required.

8 Assessment of candidates with learning difficulties

The head of centre is responsible for:

- the quality of the access arrangements/reasonable adjustments process within their centre; **and**
- the appointment of assessors and checking the qualifications of those assessing candidates.

The assessor should be employed or contracted by the centre.

An external assessor identified by a parent/carer or an adult learner, who contacts the SENCo, establishes a working relationship with the centre and is approved by the head of centre may assess the private candidate.

Before assessing the candidate, the assessor **must** receive a completed Part 1 of Form 8, working with the SENCo.

Examples

A home educated student with a formally diagnosed medical condition

A home educated student with a formal medical diagnosis of Autism is being prepared for some GCSE examinations. He has a current EHCP which confirms his Autism.

The candidate's Autism has become more pronounced, and he is now receiving home tuition.

The tutor checks the JCQ website for those centres that have indicated a willingness to accept entries from private candidates.

The student is being prepared for 4 GCSEs – Combined Science, Mathematics, Statistics and Astronomy, which is of particular interest to him. It is hoped that he will be able to complete GCSE English Language at a later date, although the Spoken Language Endorsement will be a challenge.

His mother completes the centre's application form, which includes questions on any difficulties a private candidate might encounter when sitting examinations, as well as information on any previous access arrangements put in place for examinations/assessments. The student had 25% extra time and a reader for Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Tests.

The tutor talks to the SENCo to explain his student's difficulties. Following this conversation, the student begins to keep a log of his difficulties. He records that his tutor helps him read assignments and teaching materials. The tutor also records that he often gives his student short breaks, as he can find it tiring absorbing information and begins to lose focus.

As the student begins to complete past GCSE papers, the tutor acts as his reader, gives 25% extra time and provides supervised rest breaks.

With the student's work log and a further conversation with his tutor, the SENCo can complete page 3 of Form 9. She can confirm the student's disability and produce a short concise statement justifying a reader and a short concise statement justifying supervised rest breaks.

The SENCo can do the same on page 4 of Form 9. The tutor has helpfully provided an email message based on his observations as to why 25% extra time is also required. He has explained that his student, when completing past GCSE papers, used their 25% extra time allowance to review and, where required, expand their answers.

25% extra time, a reader and supervised rest breaks have become the candidate's normal way of working when completing past papers in all four subjects.

With initial background information from the student's mother and with observations and feedback from his tutor, the SENCo feels confident in completing pages 3 and 4 of Form 9.

The tutor feedback, the student's own work log and an example of a past GCSE paper where the student has used his 25% extra time can all be shown to a JCQ Centre Inspector.

An online application for 25% extra time and a reader is subsequently approved.

In his GCSE examinations, his tutor **will not** be able to act as a reader. The SENCo will work with the exams officer to identify a reader for him who will be the same person for all his GCSE examinations.

A private candidate with learning difficulties

The candidate took GCSEs at a local secondary school. She continued into the 6th form for a year studying three A levels: English Literature, Geography and History. However, due to bullying she did not return for her final year of her A level studies. Her parents have engaged a private tutor to support her with her studies.

The private tutor notices that she takes a long time to read and understand text and notices that she writes slowly. The private tutor suggests that she uses her laptop to complete written work. However, although she is a competent typist, she still struggles to type her responses within the time her tutor sets to complete assignments.

She has identified another local school that is willing to enter her as a private candidate for her chosen A level subjects.

The school provides her with their application form for private candidates, and she records her difficulties, as identified by her tutor. She records her difficulties in taking time to read and absorb the teaching materials her tutor provides, as well as the time it takes her to complete assignments set by her tutor.

She has a video call with the SENCo and can explain her difficulties when working. It is decided that she will come into the school and complete some screening tests. This will allow the SENCo to complete Part 1 of Form 8 before she is assessed by the school's appointed assessor. The assessor will focus on her speed of reading and cognitive processing.

With a Part 1 of Form 8 based on the candidate's self-reported difficulties and screening test results, together with one below average standardised score relating to speed of reading comprehension and one below average standardised score relating to cognitive processing recorded within Part 2 of Form 8, the SENCo can process an online application for 25% extra time.

The SENCo records within 'Other relevant information' – Part 1 of Form 8 for inspection purposes – that, as this is a private candidate, it is not possible for the SENCo to produce a picture of need to the level expected for an internal candidate.

The tutor feedback and the student's recording of her difficulties, in particular the time it takes her to complete assignments set by her tutor, can be shown to a JCQ Centre Inspector.

The SENCo also records within Part 3 of Form 8 that the candidate will be awarded a word processor with the spelling and grammar check switched off.

A distance learning private candidate with late disclosure of complex needs

A student aged 17 enrolls with a distance learning provider in September to study one GCSE subject, aiming to sit the examinations the following June. They have been out of formal education for several years due to ongoing medical issues that affect their energy levels, processing speed and concentration. However, no information about their condition or previous access arrangements was declared at the point of enrolment.

The student studies using the provider's online platform. All interaction takes place through written feedback on assignments and messages in the course portal. There are no live lessons or opportunities for direct observation by the tutor.

In November, when the student submits their examination entry form, they indicate for the first time that they wish to receive 25% extra time for their examinations. They provide medical evidence from a consultant confirming a chronic condition that significantly impacts fatigue and cognitive stamina.

As the request was made close to the distance learning provider's internal deadline of 1 December for access arrangement applications, the SENCo must quickly establish a picture of need and evidence of normal way of working. This presents challenges because:

- of the way the student has studied;
- the tutor has not observed the student working under timed conditions; and
- the need for extra time was not identified earlier in the course.

To gather appropriate evidence, the SENCo arranges for the student to complete a timed past paper at home, under parental supervision, within the standard time allowed. The student then changes pen colour and continues working for an additional 25% extra time. The parent confirms that the additional time was used to review and extend written responses.

The private candidate is also asked to complete a learning log over one week, describing how they approach a specific topic from the course — how long different tasks take, what difficulties they experience (e.g., fatigue, focus, physical strain) and any coping strategies used. The tutor supplements this with comments drawn from assignment submission data and feedback records, noting that the student often requires extended time between tasks and tends to submit assignments later than scheduled, despite consistent engagement and good understanding of content.

Using this combination of:

- the consultant's medical evidence;
- the timed task results;
- the learning log; and
- parental observations;

the SENCo completes Form 9 and applies for 25% extra time. The SENCo records within Part 1 of Form 9 that while this is not an ideal evidence trail, it reflects the reality of a private distance learning candidate with a late disclosure of need.