

Access Arrangements Policy

This policy has been approved by Directors and the Operations Board

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Lee', is located below the approval text.

Date Policy was created: September 2020

Date of next renewal: September 2021

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1. Introduction

This document outlines the SfLT (Skills for Life Trust) policy on access arrangements. These are arrangements put in place to ensure all students have equal access to examinations. Students should not be disadvantaged by any learning, medical, physical, sensory or psychological difficulty they may experience. SfLT academies must comply with the rules for Access Arrangements as set out in the most recent Joint Council for Qualifications publication.

Access arrangements are the principal way in which awarding bodies comply with the duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make '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 disadvantage in comparison to someone who is not disabled.

According to statutory guidance, disability means 'limitations going beyond the normal differences in ability which may exist among people'. A candidate with a disability or difficulty which has a substantial and long term effect on performance in examinations may qualify for access arrangements.

Access arrangements should allow students with substantial long term special educational needs or short term illnesses or injuries to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding without affecting the integrity of an assessment or examination.

Access arrangements are not intended to help certain candidates, or give them an advantage, but to give them a fair opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. The intention is to remove barriers that may prevent them from demonstrating their knowledge and to allow them on to a 'level playing field' with other candidates. However, each individual academy must assess learners who may be eligible and make justifiable and professional judgements about the learner's potential to successfully complete and achieve the qualifications. Some types of disability may affect the candidate's ability to demonstrate one or more of the assessment objectives. An alternative route may be available in the specification and advice must be sought from the awarding body. In some cases, a disabled candidate may have to be exempted from a component if that is the only reasonable adjustment available to enable him/her to overcome a substantial disadvantage in accessing the specification.

Access Arrangements encompass a wide range of provisions which may include: being allowed to sit examinations in a smaller room, supervised rest breaks, use of colour overlays, prompter, extra time, reader, scribe, use of a word processor, practical assistant, etc.

2. Identification of candidates who might need access arrangements

There are several ways in which this might occur:

- A teacher may voice a concern about a student with difficulties that prevent them from completing tests or practice papers.
- A parent / carer may raise concerns about their child who is attempting but unable to complete work set in class and as homework. In all cases, there must be a genuine need for the arrangement. Each individual academy must be satisfied that the candidate has an impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect, giving rise to persistent and significant difficulties. 'Long term' means the impairment has existed for at least 12 months, or is likely to do so.

Students with special educational needs are not automatically eligible for access arrangements. For example, a student with a slight hearing impairment, a previous diagnosis of 'mild dyslexia' or a physical disability that does not affect performance in an examination may not meet the criteria for access arrangements. However, when concerns are raised about a particular student, the Assessment and SEN Coordinator will gather information from all the student's teachers to see whether they have similar concerns. If the initial concerns are echoed by others, the student will be assessed for access arrangements.

Candidates with medical, physical, sensory, behavioural or complex needs.

Where access arrangements are requested due to medical or physical difficulties, a letter from a GP or consultant is required. The Assessment and SEN Coordinator will ask parents/carers to obtain a letter with a brief outline of the student's condition or disability and the access arrangements that are deemed to be necessary. Parents/carers may be requested to obtain letters from other professionals when a student requires arrangements due to their psychological, behavioural, sensory or communication difficulties.

Candidates with learning difficulties

There would normally be a long history of learning difficulties. Late identification of learning difficulties can occur, but concerns should be raised during the early months of a course leading towards an examination.

JCQ publish deadlines by which arrangements must be processed, in advance of an examination series. Arrangements should not be requested just before or at the time of a candidate's examinations, unless they are to be a temporary and due to illness or injury. A student with learning difficulties must be formally assessed by a specialist teacher or an educational psychologist. The assessment must have taken place no earlier than the start of Year 9. An approved range of standardised tests are used and Form 8 is completed.

Parents may choose to arrange an assessment by an outside agency or provider, however, it must be noted that private assessments do not guarantee arrangements without the 'picture of need' that is required before an application is made. If a private assessment is carried out, it should be undertaken by a suitably qualified person and the name of the assessor must be included on the application. The parents should provide the academy their son/daughter attends with a copy of the report, which should include a section laid out as Form 8. A Data Protection Notice must be signed by the student, which enables the Examinations Officer with support from the Assessment and SEN Coordinator to make the online application using their information and results. An application is made online, and the awarding bodies approve access arrangements

only if the student's scores meet the criteria issued by JCQ. Supporting evidence must be filed and available for inspection. In all cases, access arrangements should reflect the support that is usually given to the student in the classroom, internal tests and mock examinations. This is commonly referred to as the 'normal way of working.' The decision to apply for access arrangements is based on evidence of a history of need, history of provision and reports from teachers or other professionals.

Students with no previous history of SEN will require significantly more evidence of need. For instance, the evidence required for extra time must include comments and observations from teaching staff as to why the student needs extra time and how the student uses the time awarded. Therefore, it may be necessary for the student to sit tests or practice papers with extra time for a trial period. It can then be gauged whether the quality and quantity of written answers improves significantly with the allowance of extra time, and will establish having extra time as a 'normal way of working'.

A candidate may require access arrangements in all his/her written examinations, or they may only need arrangements in those requiring extended answers. Each individual academy must compile evidence that supports a candidate's particular need for arrangements.

Notification about access arrangements

Parents / carers are informed by letter when formal applications for access arrangements are approved.

3. Conduct and procedures

Staffing and accommodation

The Assessment and SEN Coordinator with the Examinations Officer are to ensure sufficient rooms and staffing are organised for candidates with access arrangements when examinations or controlled assessments are taking place. Candidates sitting their exams in smaller rooms are expected to comply with the general regulations issued by JCQ. For example, mobile phones and data recording devices are not permitted in examination rooms for candidates with access arrangements under any circumstances. However, some procedures may vary slightly from those followed in the main rooms. For instance, in a room for candidates with extra time or rest breaks there may be more than one exam taking place and so the seating is arranged to accommodate their needs and to take into account the duration of each exam: wherever possible, those with the shortest exam and/or those with rest breaks are seated nearest to the door. It must be noted that staffing and room constraints mean that candidates cannot normally be seated alone in a separate room.

The Exams Inspector visits during each examination session and may check several Access Arrangement files at random. The Assessment and SEN Coordinator monitors the need for renewal of access arrangements when necessary and liaises with the Examination Officer to ensure that reassessment is carried out for students with additional arrangements (reader / scribe etc.) that expire after their GCSEs. This is to ensure that candidates still meet the criteria for those additional arrangements.

Notes regarding the use of word processors

Certain candidates may be allowed the use of word processors in appropriate written examinations. This should be appropriate to the candidate's needs and used to address an underlying difficulty which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on the ability to write, such as:

- a learning difficulty
- a medical condition
- a physical disability
- a sensory impairment
- speed of handwriting
- planning or organisational difficulties
- poor legibility

The use of a word processor in exams will reflect a student's normal way of working at the school and will be agreed upon as appropriate to the student's needs. The use of a word processor will not be granted to a student simply because this is their preferred way of working.

Examination word processors must have the spelling and grammar check/predictive text disabled. Candidates must be reminded to save at regular intervals. In this way, loss of work is kept to a minimum if a complication or technical difficulty occurs. The candidate using a word processor must be present when the script is printed off so as to verify that the work printed is complete and is his or her own and will sign a form to confirm.

Candidates transferring into Year 12

When a student requests access arrangements following transfer to a SfLT academy in Year 12, the academy is compelled to follow the rules and guidelines issued each year by JCQ. For instance, where a candidate has been allowed extra time for GCSEs at another centre, the Assessment and SEN Coordinator must have available evidence which clearly shows that extra time is still needed for examinations, and that the candidate continues to have an impairment which has a substantial and long term effect on his/her speed of working. It is likely that some re-assessment is necessary on entry to a SfLT academy and some students may find they are no longer eligible for access arrangements if they do not meet the criteria.

Candidates with access arrangements sitting several exams on the same day

Occasionally, a candidate may have several exams scheduled on the same day. If the total time, including extra time, adds up to more than 5 ½ hours (GCSE) or 6 hours (GCE), it may be possible to carry one exam over until the following day, providing certain guarantees regarding supervision are made by parents or carers. Sometimes a candidate with medical difficulties causing fatigue may have a clash of exams. In such a case one exam might be delayed, in order to allow the candidate to rest, before sitting the second exam. They must be supervised in isolation during the intervening period.

Candidates sitting examinations set by awarding bodies not regulated by JCQ

When a candidate is entered for an examination set by an awarding body that is not regulated by JCQ, s/he may find that the rules regarding access arrangements are different. In most cases, the candidate's evidence of need will be accepted, although a separate application must be made, but the awarding body set their own rules regarding access arrangements and their use in specific subjects, e.g. a scribe may be allowed in English by JCQ but not by CIE.

Vocational Qualifications

A large number of access arrangements and reasonable adjustments can be used to facilitate access to vocational qualifications, as long as they do not impact on any competence standards being tested. They must not affect the reliability or validity of assessment outcomes nor must they give the learner an unfair advantage. All SfLT academies follow the advice given by JCQ and maintain a record of the use of access arrangements. If an access arrangement is not used, then it is cannot a candidate's normal way of working and the arrangement should not be awarded for examinations.

Staffing and training

Teaching staff cannot assist or invigilate or support in those examinations for which their own students are entered. During busy examination periods, external invigilators may also be employed, but access arrangements are only provided by SfLT staff. Training is provided and is updated each year to comply with any changes to the JCQ guidelines.

Temporary arrangements

Temporary arrangements may be required by candidates suffering from illness or injury. In general, candidates with leg injuries are accommodated in the main rooms near the doors for easy access and exit. Candidates with an illness or injury that has a direct impact on their ability to access the examination should obtain a letter from a GP, consultant or other professional giving a brief outline of their condition and the access arrangements that are deemed to be

necessary. For example, a right-handed candidate whose right arm is broken may need a scribe and some extra time, as it is not their normal way of working and dictating to a scribe may be difficult for them. A candidate with a painful back condition may require supervised rest breaks in order to stand and move around. In all cases where an access arrangement or a reasonable adjustment is needed, each academy is entitled to expect reasonable notice to carry out its responsibilities. Where a need for access arrangements has been identified before an examination session, the Assessment and SEN Coordinator and Examinations Officer should be provided with medical evidence in reasonable time. For example:

- a candidate who suffers from panic attacks in test or exam situations should obtain a note from their GP well before the start of formal examinations
- in an emergency, a scribe can be provided with 24 hours' notice. It may not be possible to provide a scribe if the request is made without notice.

Temporary arrangements last for one examination session. If the condition persists another letter may be required for the next session.

Alternative accommodation away from the centre

On very rare occasions, a candidate may need to sit an examination at a residential address or at a hospital due to a severe medical condition or profound psychological condition which prevents them from taking examinations within the centre.