



# IPSEA

Independent Parental Special Education Advice

Hunters Court, Debden Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4AA

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## **My son/daughter has SEN: what access arrangements is he/she entitled to for exams? [GCSEs/A-Levels]**

Support arrangements for students taking exams are known as 'Access Arrangements'. They are the principal way in which examining and awarding bodies can comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010 to make 'reasonable adjustments' for those students who have disabilities.

The most common arrangements are:

- Provision of 25% extra time to complete the exams;
- Provision of a reader, i.e. someone who reads the exam questions and information aloud; and
- Provision of a scribe, i.e. someone to whom the candidate dictates his or her answers so that he is not restricted by the speed with which he writes.

The criteria for granting access arrangements for exams are set by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), which issues comprehensive guidance. The guidance is reissued for each Academic Year and the current guidance can be found here:

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

In most cases, schools are required to apply for permission to put an access arrangement into place, and to submit (and hold on file) evidence of the need. The criteria that the child has to meet are very clear. For extra time, the tests used might relate to difficulties with speed of information processing, reading comprehension and so forth; for provision of a reader and / or scribe, a different range of tests would be needed.

The school will either have within the staff, or have access to, a specialist assessor who carries out assessments to see if a child meets the criteria for an access arrangement. While the assessor might be an educational psychologist, it is the school's responsibility to arrange for an assessment. The tests used by the assessor must be 'standardised' tests that are established and accepted as appropriate, and generally the child has to have a score of below 85 (where the average score is 100) in order to 'qualify' for the access arrangement.

Throughout the guidance it is emphasised that an access arrangement is expected to be a pupil's 'normal way of working' – so it is reasonable to expect that if a pupil needs an access arrangement it should be 'built in' to the school's standard assessment arrangements. It will, however, be important to remember that to show that an arrangement is a 'normal way of working' it will need to be planned / put in place in good time before the exams take place. It

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## **Providing advice to parents of children with special educational needs**

would therefore be wise to consider discussing these issues with the SENCO at your child's school or College well in advance of any planned examinations.

The important thing to remember is that access arrangements such as extra time, readers or scribes are not granted because a child has dyslexia, for example, but because the child has a specific weakness in an area such as reading accuracy and speed, speed of comprehension or speed of writing – and therefore needs direct support in order to be able to demonstrate what they know in assessments. Usually, the access arrangement is a way of 'getting round' or bypassing the child's difficulty.

Although the arrangements set out above are the most common ones, it may be that even if there is no 'packaged' solution set out in the guidance, it could be possible to gain permission for more bespoke arrangements if that was what was needed. Whether an arrangement was reasonable might depend on a number of factors, including the disabled student's needs and the cost of any adjustment. It is also worth noting that the JCQ guidance also suggests that an adjustment may not be considered reasonable if it "affects the security or integrity of the assessment."

We can only provide information through this service, rather than offer direct advice. So if you need this, or you wish to discuss the situation with someone, you should book a call with one of our Advice Line volunteers:

<https://www.ipsea.org.uk/contact/advice-and-support/advice-line>