

# Exam Access Arrangements – everything parents need to know



**Many children with Tourette Syndrome may experience difficulties at school during assessments and exams. This could be due to many reasons such as anxiety, issues recording their work, concentration or general distraction for themselves and others around them with disruptive tics.**

Any parent will know that assessments and exams can exacerbate children’s anxieties and increase their tics. It may be that school will need to recognise this and put adjustments in place to best support children through these difficult times and make sure their needs do not put them at a disadvantage compared to their peers. To compensate this, schools are able to apply to the exam boards for Exam Access Arrangement which will help children to better manage exam conditions and reach their full potential.

We hope this factsheet will inform you of all the things you need to know regarding exam access arrangements and help to answer some questions you may have about whether your child will benefit from having these put in place.

## **What are Exam Access Arrangements?**

Exam Access Arrangements (EAAs) are the reasonable adjustments that can be made for a student and might include things such as extra time to complete an exam paper, permission to use assistive technology, or provision of rest breaks.

Exam arrangements can only be granted if they are the student’s ‘normal way of working’ and the student has a history of need. This is quite commonly misinterpreted, so parents beware. Any arrangements made must reflect the support that the student has had in the past few years, alongside their assessment test results.

An assessor’s report must show that the student has a significant and long-term impairment. For example, a student who is eligible for extra time would need to have scores that are below average in speed of writing, reading, reading comprehension or cognitive process,

demonstrating they work much more slowly than others and are at a disadvantage compared to their peers. This must then be backed up by an Educational Psychologist’s report and teacher report, and evidence must be provided that this is the student’s normal way of working.

## **Who is eligible for access arrangements?**

Anyone with a special educational need or disability may be eligible for access arrangements in public exams. They can also be considered for students with temporary injury. If a pupil fits these criteria, then the responsible body of a school has a duty not to discriminate against that pupil and the examination board has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate for that pupil’s disability.

The JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) outlines 4 areas of need, including:

### **1 Cognition and Learning:**

- Including specific learning difficulties such as: dyslexia and dyspraxia
- Students must be assessed by a specialist assessor who is level 7 qualified

### **2 Communication and Communication Need:**

- Including students with autism
- Including students with speech and language needs
- Students must be assessed by a speech and language therapist, clinical specialist or specialist assessor
- Any difficulty must be within the student’s first language

### **3 Sensory and/or Physical Needs:**

- Including students with visual impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI) or other sensory need
- Including students with physical disability, such as cerebral palsy

- Students must be assessed by a specialist clinician, such as a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or other clinician
- Students must be assessed by a specialist teacher for VI and/or HI where there are sensory needs

#### 4 Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs:

- Including students with ADHD/ADD and anxiety-related conditions
- Students must be assessed by a specialist clinician, such as a neurodevelopmental paediatrician or clinical psychiatrist

### Can a student have exam access arrangements without any official diagnosis?

The short answer is yes. A student does not necessarily have to have a diagnosed learning difficulty to be allowed an access arrangement. However, there must be 'evidence of need' and 'normal way of working', in addition to other criteria, such as below average performance in certain skills.

### What sort of exam arrangements are available?

This list is not exhaustive, but these are some of the most common arrangements:

- Extra time: The most frequent EAA is extra time which is usually around 25 per cent. More time can be allocated to students with more severe difficulties and disability on an individual case by case basis.
- A reader: Readers can be used for students who have visual impairments or a disability that affects their ability to read accurately themselves. In an exam that assesses reading ability a human reader is not allowed. In some cases, a computer reader will be allowed.
- A scribe: Scribes can be allocated to students who have a disability or injury that affects their ability to write legibly.
- A Prompter: Someone to help keep the student on task if concentration is an issue.
- Separate room: Many students who have EAAs will need to work in a separate room.
- Rest breaks: Supervised rest breaks. These are not included in the extra time allowance.
- Modified papers: These are papers which must be ordered well in advance of the exam in different sizes, fonts, colours, braille, or modified language.
- Assistive technology: If the student uses assistive technology as their normal way of working, they will be able to continue this for exams. Some of the most common requests are for word processors, exam reading pens, computer text readers, and voice processors.

### What are the common types of need for an access arrangement?

Most applications for access arrangements are for students who experience difficulties in areas such as:

- slow and/or inaccurate reading
- maintaining attention and/or concentration
- very slow and/or illegible handwriting
- weak memory
- speech and language difficulties
- visual perception and/or visual tracking
- visual impairment or hearing impairment
- slow rate of working
- anxiety
- disruptive tics

### Do all access arrangements have to be applied for?

Not all. Some arrangements can be made under the discretion of the SENCo. Students who have a history of needing rest breaks and/or a separate room do not necessarily have to apply for EAAs, the school's special needs co-ordinator (SENCo) can organise this as long as it reflects the person's normal way of working and can be evidenced. The SENCo must be satisfied the need is genuine.

### Who assesses Exam Access Arrangements?

Schools and colleges must have a designated member of staff, usually the SENCo, who organises exam arrangements and then works with an exam officer to put the arrangements in place. Schools and colleges should have an in-house officer to assess each student for exam arrangements. This person must be a specialist teacher with a Level 7 EAA assessing qualification.

EAAs need to be approved by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), which brings together examination boards for GCSEs, A Levels and Functional Skills to create uniformity in how exams are run.

The regulations have become tighter in recent years, and all schools and colleges that act as exam centres, regardless of how they are funded, must follow the JCQ directives. Inspectors can ask to see evidence to support any decision that has been made regarding an individual's exam arrangements. Exam centre files are inspected to ensure that unfair advantages are not being given to students.

### When should applications for Exam Arrangements be made?

If you are aware your child is likely to need Exam Access Arrangements, draw the school's attention to this during year 9. Students will need to be assessed by the school or college's assessor with the standardised testing materials to see whether they qualify. Applications must be made by the Joint Council for Qualification's annual deadline which varies but is always during the spring term. Don't leave it until the Easter holidays, you will be too late!

### What if my child's needs only became apparent after the application deadline?

In exceptional circumstances late applications are sometimes allowed by the exam boards themselves. Each application will be treated upon its own merit.

### My child has an EHCP does that mean they are entitled to EAA?

Documents such as an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or a report from professional such as an educational psychologist (EP) may be supportive but do not automatically entitle a pupil to access arrangements without additional corroborative evidence from the school. If the child or young person has an EHCP then this may strengthen your request but it doesn't create a legal obligation.

### What do I do if I feel my child would benefit from EAA?

The first step is to speak to the class teacher and SENCo. If you have already done this, approach the head teacher or other relevant member of the senior management team for a meeting about the kind and amount of help which you believe is necessary.

### What if the school/college don't agree that my child needs EAA?

If the head refuses to arrange support for the child or young person with public exams, or even to agree to assess them for support, then you will need to put your request in writing and send it to the school governors. IPSEA has a model letter that you can use for making this request (see link below).

Clearly, the outcome you are seeking is for the school to agree to put the arrangements in place (or make the necessary assessments and application for permission).

However, if the governors will not take action then you may have to consider making a formal complaint under the school's complaints policy or a claim of disability discrimination against them on the basis of the failure to make 'reasonable adjustments'. You can find out more about this on the IPSEA website via the link below.

### Further information and support

We know that the change to routine, disruption to the usual structure and timetable of the day can be very hard to adapt to during exam time. You may find that there is an increase of tics in your child around these times due to the rise in expectations and pressure from school and general anxiety. For further information on how to manage exam stress and help ease anxieties around this time, please see the factsheet on 'managing exam stress' below along with some other useful links.

[https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk/storage/downloads/1579041759\\_Factsheet--Managing-Exam-Stress.pdf](https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk/storage/downloads/1579041759_Factsheet--Managing-Exam-Stress.pdf)

[https://www.sendiss.co.uk/downloads/access/handouts/14\\_frequently%20asked%20questions.pdf](https://www.sendiss.co.uk/downloads/access/handouts/14_frequently%20asked%20questions.pdf)

<https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/exam-access-arrangements-what-are-they-and-who-gets-them>

<https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/special-educational-needs/your-rights/exam-access-arrangements>

<https://sendadvice.surrey.org.uk/help-in-exams>

<https://www.ipsea.org.uk/help-in-exams>

If you have any further questions or concerns and would like to find out more about any of the information above, then please feel free to contact our Education Manager, Lucy Toghill:

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