



9<sup>th</sup> October 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,

**Changes to JCQ access arrangements from September 2025**

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has made significant changes to its guidance on access arrangements for the 2025/26 academic year. These arrangements are designed to make sure that students with additional needs can approach exams fairly and confidently, and to ensure the right support is in place.

The updates mainly affect the evidence schools can use, the role of external reports, and the way extra time is awarded. I want to share these changes so families understand what they mean in practice, and how we will continue to work together to support students.

Key principles we will follow

- Evidence matters most. Decisions are based on how a student usually works in school, and on the evidence we gather together.
- In school evidence plays a vital role. Teachers' observations and feedback help us understand whether support strategies are needed and making a difference.
- External reports are part of the picture. A diagnosis or private assessment can be helpful, but it must link to school-based evidence. Final decisions rest with the school.
- Extra time is awarded carefully. It is only granted if internal tests and mock exams show it is both needed and beneficial. Sometimes alternatives, like supervised rest breaks, are more effective.
- We will always look at what's best for the student. Individual circumstances will be explored with care and sensitivity, and we will keep families informed throughout.

We know how important it is that students feel encouraged and supported. To help explain the changes more fully, we have prepared a parent/carers guide which sets out the process step by step, including examples, which you will find at the end of this letter.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do read the guide, and don't hesitate to contact Mrs Needs, our SEN teacher and Access Arrangements Co-ordinator, at [t.needs@warlinghamtl.co.uk](mailto:t.needs@warlinghamtl.co.uk). We are here to work with you and your child to make sure the right support is in place.

With thanks for your continued support,

Yours sincerely

Leonie Watts

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Tandridge Learning Trust

## JCQ Access Arrangements – Updated Requirements from September 2025

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has published updated guidance on Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments for the 2025/2026 academic year.

Access arrangements allow students with particular needs — for example, linked to special educational needs or disabilities — to access exams fairly and show what they know, without changing the demands of the assessment.

**Access arrangements** are agreed before an assessment. 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’. 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. (JCQ 2025)

If schools do not adhere to the JCQ regulations, it is malpractice. These changes do not apply retrospectively to any access arrangements already applied for and approved for the 2024–2025 academic year or earlier. However, for students transitioning from Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5, there is no guarantee that students will continue to have the same arrangements as new applications must be made, and they must comply with the new regulations.

Below is a summary of the key changes.

### Starting the Process

- Students joining us in the Sixth Form should have noted any additional needs during enrolment. If this was not done, students should contact Mrs Needs, our SEN teacher and Access Arrangements Co-ordinator, at [t.needs@warlinghamtl.co.uk](mailto:t.needs@warlinghamtl.co.uk).
- Following a concern regarding the need for access arrangements being raised, the SEND team will gather further information from teachers and the student to decide whether a formal assessment of need is appropriate. Only the school’s appointed assessor can carry out this assessment.
- It is important to remember that not every student with additional needs will require exam arrangements. A diagnosis of a special educational need does not, on its own, automatically lead to exam arrangements.

### Core Principles

- Access arrangements must be based on evidence of need. They must reflect a student’s normal way of working in lessons and assessments.
- The purpose is to remove a disadvantage, not create an advantage, and to encourage independence for the future.
- Access arrangements are not a substitute for revision, subject knowledge, or exam preparation.
- External reports or diagnoses cannot on their own guarantee arrangements; the strongest evidence must come from day-to-day classroom performance.
- The updated JCQ regulations also highlight the importance of considering access arrangements that help prepare students for the demands of the workplace. Schools are encouraged to consider alternatives that may better reflect real-world adjustments and promote resilience and long-term independence.

## **Who Makes the Assessment?**

- Only the school or college's appointed assessor can formally assess for arrangements like 25% extra time.
- If an external assessor diagnoses a learning difficulty, their report can only be used if they liaised with the school in advance and the correct paperwork was completed before the assessment. An external diagnosis, assessment, or recommendation is not sufficient for access arrangements on its own.
- Medical specialists (for example, consultants or psychiatrists) can provide a diagnosis, but the JCQ has made it clear that this can only be considered as part of an evidence base, and that the school must make the final decision regarding whether access arrangements are needed in exams.

## **Evidence and Teacher Involvement**

- The JCQ is clear that in-school evidence has the most central role in the process. This includes reviewing:
  - how a student manages in class,
  - how they cope with timed tasks, and
  - whether existing support strategies are effective.
- This evidence is essential to show that an arrangement is both needed and routinely used.

## **25% Extra Time and Alternatives**

- From September 2025, applications for 25% extra time must include clear evidence, such as:
  - mock exams or internal test papers showing how the extra time is used, and
  - teacher commentary on the difference it makes to both the quality and quantity of work.
- Students will be asked to use a different coloured pen (or font if typing) in tests to show which work was done in the extra time.
- We must then review this alongside all other evidence and decide whether extra time is appropriate.
- In many cases, supervised rest breaks may be a better option, especially for students with anxiety, ADHD, ASD, or medical conditions.

## **Coloured Overlays and Papers**

- JCQ guidance has clarified that coloured exam papers should only be used where there is clear evidence of need.
- Before this is applied, alternatives such as overlays or tinted glasses will be trialled to confirm what works best for the student. This will also support students in developing independence in their lives outside of school.

## **Requests Made Externally**

- If a parent or student requests an arrangement that has not been suggested by teachers or support staff, we will investigate carefully. This may involve reviewing work, consulting teachers, or carrying out informal screening.
- If there is no evidence to support the request, the school cannot proceed. JCQ regulations are very clear, and granting unsupported arrangements would be considered malpractice.
- If concerns remain, the matter can be reviewed by a senior leader, but arrangements can only go ahead when all JCQ criteria are fully met.

## **Our Commitment**

We know how important it is that every student feels supported and able to do their best in exams. Our implementation of the JCQ changes is designed to ensure that arrangements are fair, consistent, and tailored to genuine need. We must ensure that we are compliant with the requirements of the JCQ, and we will continue to work closely with families, students, and teachers so that the right support is in place. Our intention

is to ensure that students can gain the qualifications and develop the skills for a smooth transition into adulthood and the workforce.