



**Access Arrangements and
Special Consideration for
General and Vocational Qualifications conducted by Joint Council for
Qualifications Awarding Bodies**



Of interest to:

- Curriculum managers
- Exams officers
- Heads of Centres
- Special Needs Co-ordinators
- Heads of departments
- Learners
- NVQ training and assessment managers
- NVQ assessors and internal verifiers
- Programme leaders
- Quality nominees
- Teaching staff
- Training providers

Policy on Access Arrangements and Special Consideration

JCQ member Awarding Bodies aim to facilitate open access to their general and vocational qualifications, for candidates who are eligible for access arrangements or special consideration in assessments, without compromising the assessment of the skills, knowledge, understanding or competence being measured. This will be achieved through:

- **Access Arrangements** – These are agreed at the pre-assessment/pre-planning stage and help to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty, which places the candidate at a substantial disadvantage in the assessment situation. Access arrangements must not, however, affect the reliability or validity of assessment outcomes nor must they give the candidate an assessment advantage over other candidates undertaking the same or similar assessments.
- **Special Consideration** – This is a post-assessment /post examination allowance to reflect temporary illness, injury or indisposition that occurred at the time of assessment. Any special consideration granted cannot remove the difficulty the candidate faced at the time of assessment and can only be a relatively small adjustment to ensure that the integrity of the assessment is not compromised. Special consideration **cannot** apply to “licence to practise” units within a qualification, or to “licence to practise” qualifications.

JCQ Awarding Bodies will only consider requests for Access Arrangements and Special Consideration submitted by the Head of Centre/Principal/CEO.

Qualifications:

- Entry Level Certificate (Life Skills/Skills for Working Life)
- BTEC Introductory Certificate and Diploma
- BTEC First Certificate and Diploma
- BTEC National Award, Certificate and Diploma
- BTEC Short Courses
- BTEC Higher National Certificate and Diploma
- Diploma in Foundation Studies Art & Design
- NVQ
- BTEC Customised Qualification Framework
- OCR Nationals
- OCR vocational certificates
- OCR vocational diplomas
- AEA
- GCE
- VCE
- GCSE
- GNVQ
- Entry Level
- Key Skills

Introduction

JCQ Awarding Bodies recognise disabilities of a diverse nature and do not tolerate discrimination on the basis of disability. JCQ Awarding Bodies will comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and the subsequent amendments to the Act.

This policy meets the requirements of the DDA to allow fair access to qualifications. The policy:

- explains how the Centre should manage/request access arrangements or request special consideration
- identifies roles and responsibilities
- describes the practice for dealing with lost or damaged work

Information on access arrangements for each qualification can be found on the appropriate Awarding Body's regulations for vocational qualifications and the Joint Council for Qualifications publication '*Access Arrangements and Special Consideration: Regulations and Guidance Relating to Candidates who are Eligible for Adjustments in Examinations*' for general qualifications'.

Guidance on Access Arrangements and Special Consideration

1. Access Arrangements

1.1 Explanation of Access Arrangements

Access arrangements help to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty that places the candidate at a substantial disadvantage in the assessment situation. Access arrangements are based on demonstrable need.

An access arrangement must never affect the validity or reliability of assessment, influence the outcome of assessment or give the candidate an unfair assessment advantage.

Access arrangements must be approved (internally or externally, according to the Awarding Body's regulations) and set in place prior to assessment commencing. Not all the access arrangements described below will be permissible or practical in particular situations. The candidate may not need, nor be allowed, the same adjustment for all assessments.

Access arrangements may involve:

- modifying assessment materials, such as modified print or language examination question papers
- providing appropriate assistance during assessment, such as a scribe, reader, practical assistant or sign interpreter
- re-organising the assessment physical environment
- using assistive technology, mechanical and electronic aids such as computer software which scans but does not encode or interpret examination question papers'
- alternative ways of presenting responses, such as a word processor
- allowing extra time for an examination or for the completion of course work

1.2 Centre recruitment

It is essential that Centres recruit with integrity onto vocational qualifications and select general qualifications in the knowledge that the learner can meet the assessment requirements. Centres must ensure that learners have the correct information and advice on their selected qualifications and that the qualifications will meet their needs. The recruitment process should include the Centre assessing each potential candidate and making justifiable and professional judgments about the learner's potential to successfully complete the assessment and achieve the qualification.

Such assessment must identify, where appropriate, the support that will be made available to the candidate to facilitate access to the assessment.

Where the recruitment process identifies that the learner may not be able to demonstrate attainment and thus gain achievement in all parts of assessment for the selected qualification, this must be communicated clearly to the learner. A learner may still decide to proceed with studying a particular qualification and not be entered for all or part of the assessment.

The Centre is advised to ensure that learners are aware of:

- the range of options available, including any access arrangements that may be available, to enable the demonstration of attainment across all required assessment; and
- any restrictions on progression routes to the learner as a result of not achieving certain outcomes.

1.3 Applying access arrangements

The JCQ Awarding Bodies expect all Centres to apply access arrangements in a transparent and unbiased manner. All access arrangements made must be recorded, and must be held by the Centre in the candidate's file and should be available at all times for scrutiny if so requested.

All reasonable adjustments implemented by Centres are subject to meeting the requirements of the appropriate assessment strategy for the qualification.

It is the responsibility of the Head of Centre/Principal/CEO (or designated nominee) to ensure that any access arrangement implemented by the Centre on behalf of the candidate is based on firm evidence of a barrier to assessment.

If further clarification is required in relation to the application of access arrangements, then please contact the appropriate Awarding Body.

In vocational qualifications that are internally assessed, the Centre will not apply to the Awarding Body to implement a reasonable adjustment, but it must:

- only make access arrangements that are in line with this policy
- record all access arrangements made on the appropriate candidate's record
- make these records available to inspectors and Awarding Bodies as required.

1.4 Requesting access arrangements from JCQ Awarding Bodies

For specified assessment units in vocational qualifications that contain externally assessed components, applications for access arrangements must be submitted to and authorised by the appropriate Awarding Body prior to implementation. Such requests must be submitted using the appropriate form.

It is essential that you have authorisation from the appropriate Awarding Body before such access arrangements are implemented.

Where the Centre is uncertain about the candidate's ability to achieve the assessment criteria please contact the appropriate Awarding Body:

1.5 Assessing achievement

Centres must ensure that for all internal assessment, credit is given only for the skills demonstrated by the candidate and that access arrangements do not compromise the outcomes of assessment.

1.6 Special Educational Needs

Centres should note that a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) does not automatically qualify the candidate for access arrangements to assessment, as:

- the SEN statement may not contain a recent assessment of the needs; and
- the access arrangement may compromise the assessment

1.7 Inappropriate use of access arrangements

If a Centre misuses the access arrangement policy, then Awarding Bodies will take appropriate action. Such action will range from advice and action for the Centre through to the implementation of steps to manage assessment malpractice. This could ultimately lead to the recall of certificates, removal of qualification approval or removal of Centre approval.

2. Special Consideration

2.1 What is special consideration?

“Special consideration” is consideration given following a period of assessment for a candidate who:

- was prepared for and present at an assessment but who may have been disadvantaged by temporary illness, injury or adverse circumstances that have arisen at or near to the time of assessment
- missed part of the assessment due to acceptable circumstances outside their control.

It is important to note that it may not be possible to apply special consideration in instances where:

- assessment requires the demonstration of practical competence or
- criteria have to be met fully
- units/qualifications confer a “licence to practise”.
- minimum requirements have not been met

Where assessment is in the form of “on demand” assessment, such as electronic tests set and marked by computer, then it is probably more appropriate to offer the candidate an opportunity to re-take the assessment at a later date.

Special consideration cannot give the candidate an unfair advantage, nor must its use cause the user of a certificate to be misled regarding a candidate’s achievement. The candidate’s results must reflect real achievement in assessment and not potential ability. To this end, special consideration can only be a small post-assessment adjustment to the mark or outcome.

The Awarding Body’s decision will be based on various factors, which may vary from candidate to candidate, and from one subject to another. These factors may include the severity of the circumstances, the date of the assessment, the nature of the assessment (e.g. practical, oral presentation, etc.).

A candidate who is fully prepared and present for a scheduled assessment may be eligible for special consideration if:

- performance in an assessment is affected by circumstances beyond the control of the candidate, e.g. recent personal illness, accident, bereavement, serious disturbance during the assessment
- alternative assessment arrangements which were agreed in advance of the assessment proved inappropriate or inadequate or were not enacted

A candidate will **not** be eligible for special consideration if:

- no evidence is supplied by the Centre that the candidate has been affected at the time of the assessment by a particular condition
- any part of the assessment is missed due to personal arrangements including holidays or unauthorised absence
- preparation for a component is affected by difficulties during the course, e.g. disturbances through building work, lack of proper facilities, changes in or shortages of staff, or industrial disputes
- the candidate has not met the minimum requirements for an enhanced award under the special consideration process in terms of the percentage of work completed.

In some circumstances availability of assessment opportunities may affect a candidate's entitlement to special consideration.

The following are examples of circumstances which might be eligible for special consideration (this list is not exhaustive):

- terminal illness of the candidate
- terminal illness of a parent/carer/partner/child
- recent death of a member of the immediate family
- serious and disruptive domestic crises leading to acute anxiety about the family
- incapacitating illness of the candidate
- severe car accident
- recent traumatic experience such as death of a close friend or distant relative
- flare-up of severe congenital conditions such as epilepsy, diabetes, severe asthmatic attack
- recent domestic crisis
- recent physical assault trauma
- broken limb on the mend.

Unlike access arrangements, there are no circumstances whereby a Centre can apply its own special consideration. Applications must be made to the Awarding Body conducting the assessment affected.

2.2 Applying for special consideration

Awarding Bodies expect a Centre to put arrangements in place to enable a candidate, in extenuating circumstances, to complete the assessment and thus achieve the qualification. Only when this is unsuccessful should an application for special consideration be made. All applications for special consideration can only be made on a case-by-case basis and thus separate applications must be made for each candidate in each subject affected. The only exception to this is where a group

of candidates has been affected by a similar circumstance such as a serious disruption occurring during an assessment. In this case a group application is permissible. In this situation, however, a list of candidates affected should be attached to the application.

Applications for special consideration should be submitted to the appropriate Awarding Body

The Head of Centre/Principal/CEO must authorise all applications for special consideration.

During the processing of an application for special consideration, Awarding Bodies will only liaise with the Centre making the claim on the candidate's behalf and not with the candidate or their designated third party.

It is important to note that special consideration applications will not be considered once a candidate's achievement has been claimed and certificated and after the closing date for enquiries about results for the examination series in which the candidate has sat the examinations.

2.3 Posthumous certification

Applications for posthumous certification should be submitted by letter by the Head of Centre/Principal/CEO. The Awarding Bodies will liaise only with the Centre making the claim for the candidate.

2.4 Lost or damaged work

When a candidate's work has been lost or damaged, but not as a result of the candidate's negligence, Awarding Bodies may consider accepting mark/issuing a grade for which there is no available physical evidence. In all cases, the Centre must be able to verify that the work was done and that it was monitored whilst it was in progress.

Applications for a grade to be awarded where there is no available evidence should be made to the appropriate Awarding Body

3. Complying with policy

Centres should note that failure to comply with the requirements contained within this policy document could lead to assessment malpractice, which will impact on the candidate's result.

Failure to comply is defined as any or all of the following:

- where applicable, putting in place arrangements without the Awarding Body's approval
- exceeding the allowance agreed by the Awarding Body
- agreeing delegated arrangements that are not supported by evidence
- failing to maintain records
- failing to report delegated arrangements when requested to do so by the Awarding Body
- implementing delegated arrangements that affect the validity and reliability of assessment, compromise the outcomes of assessment or give the candidate an unfair assessment advantage over other candidates undertaking the same or similar assessment.

In addition, claiming special consideration by submitting false information could also lead to assessment malpractice.

Where the Awarding Body's regulations differ in any detail from this general policy, the Awarding Body's regulations will take precedence.

4. Right to appeal

Where a Centre fails to agree with an Awarding Body decision in relation to decisions made in respect of this policy, then the Centre has the right of appeal. Appeals must be submitted to the appropriate Awarding Body.

Web links

www.aqa.org.uk

www.edexcel.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

www.wjec.co.uk