

Access Arrangements for GCSE and A Level: 2016 to 2017 academic year

Background information accompanying statistical release



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Contents

- Information about the statistics 2
 - Purpose..... 2
 - Geographical coverage 2
 - Description 2
 - Context..... 4
 - Data source..... 5
 - Limitations 5
 - Quality Assurance 5
 - Revisions..... 6
 - Confidentiality and rounding..... 6
 - Status 6
- Related publications 6
- Statistical policies 7
- Glossary 7
- Useful links 7
- Feedback..... 7

Information about the statistics

Purpose

This statistical release presents data on access arrangements and modified papers approved for GCSE, AS and A level exams during the 2016/17 academic year.

Geographical coverage

This report presents data on approved access arrangements in England. Reports published in previous years included data for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland as well. As such, historical figures in this year's report reflect England only data and may therefore differ from previously published figures.

For this, and all other releases for the academic year 2016/17, Ofqual will publish separate data tables for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland without commentary, in addition to data tables and report for England. This is following a [transition arrangement](#) with Qualifications Wales (the regulator in Wales) and CCEA (the regulator in Northern Ireland) whereby the responsibility for publishing data for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland for the academic year 2017/18 and beyond has been passed to Qualifications Wales and CCEA respectively.

Five exam boards offer GCSE and GCE qualifications in England, Wales and/or Northern Ireland:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC)

Description

Access arrangements are the provisions made for candidates, agreed before they take an assessment, to ensure that they can be validly assessed and are not unfairly disadvantaged due to a disability, temporary illness or injury, or if their first language is not English, Irish or Welsh. Access arrangements are distinct from post-examination adjustments to the marks of candidates who have not been able to

demonstrate their ability in an assessment due to exceptional circumstances such as bereavement at the time of the assessment. Access arrangements can be provided for any candidates taking exams, controlled assessments or coursework who meet the eligibility criteria.

If a student has a disability (as defined by the Equality Act 2010¹ – ie has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities) they are entitled to apply for reasonable adjustments, which are a form of access arrangements. Exam boards have a duty, under the Equality Act 2010², to make reasonable adjustments to assessments for students with disabilities who, because of their disability, would otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage when demonstrating their skills, knowledge or understanding in an assessment. The Equality Act sets out that exam boards are required to take ‘such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid the disadvantage’ - such as providing modified question papers for candidates with visual impairments.

The qualifications covered in this release are regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA. Each qualifications regulator publishes conditions³ that set out the requirements that the exam boards it regulates have to meet. These conditions state that “An awarding organisation must, in accordance with Equalities Law, have in place clear arrangements for making reasonable adjustments in relation to qualifications which it makes available.”

The regulators do not prescribe what arrangements exam boards should provide, but require all exam boards to have clear, published details about who qualifies for these arrangements and what arrangements may be given. Exam boards choose to follow Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) guidelines in relation to the provision of these arrangements. JCQ is a membership organisation comprising the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK, and defines [access arrangements](#) as pre-examination adjustments for candidates based on evidence of need and normal way of working. JCQ publishes an [annual document](#) setting out the standard arrangements that exam centres can request of boards and the relevant eligibility and evidential criteria. Other arrangements can also be requested.

¹ The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 provides the definition of disability for Northern Ireland.

² The Equality Act 2010 does not apply to Northern Ireland. The equivalent act in Northern Ireland is the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2005 (SENDO 2005).

³ Conditions in [England](#), [Northern Ireland](#) and [Wales](#)

Any candidates taking exams or non-exam assessments for GCSE or A level qualifications who meet the eligibility criteria for an access arrangement can receive approval for it. Individual candidates may require more than one arrangement (eg 25% extra time and a computer reader). Once granted, an arrangement will apply for up to 26 months, although applications based on temporary conditions will last for one exam series only.

Schools and colleges should consider the particular requirements of individual candidates and then follow the guidelines and arrangements of the exam boards. The evidence required to support an application will vary, depending on the reasons for the particular requirement and the types of arrangement requested. For example, where a request is made for a candidate to have 25% extra time because of a learning difficulty, JCQ requires that the impact of the candidate's difficulty is evidenced using standardised tests of their speed of reading, reading comprehension, writing and/or using cognitive processing measures.

The approval of some arrangements is delegated to schools or colleges where exam boards judge there is no advantage to candidates in relation to the knowledge, skills and understanding being tested (for example, the use of a word processor). The range of arrangements that schools or colleges must register with exam boards has varied over time.

Context

Ofqual has worked with JCQ on developing the data available from the Access Arrangements Online (AAO) system.

The access arrangements report published in the previous year included breakdown of data by centre type. However, recently there has been some concern on how centres classify themselves according to the JCQ centre type codes. JCQ is currently in the process of reviewing the centre type categories and looking to provide centres with support in deciding the correct categorisation. We have therefore not reported centre type breakdown in this year's release and are working with JCQ to improve the categorisation before it can be published.

It should be noted that the data published in this release from last year onwards is different from the data used in previous annual statistics reports published by Ofqual. The data does not show the number of requests made, compared with the number of arrangements granted (data on requests is not recorded in the AAO managed by JCQ). In addition, arrangements are no longer broken down by GCSE and A level (data prior to 2015/16 was broken down by these qualifications). The separation of GCSE and A level led to duplication of figures as we know there are a number of candidates that take exams in both qualifications in the same academic year.

Data source

Access Arrangements Online is JCQ's centralised system used by schools and colleges to request access arrangements. It enables schools and colleges to make one central application for each candidate rather than applying to each exam board separately.

JCQ sends Ofqual data on access arrangements from Access Arrangements Online. In addition, each exam board submits data to Ofqual in relation to the number of modified papers that are referred directly to them for approval. A full description of modified papers is published by [JCQ](#).

Limitations

The ability to extract detailed statistical information was not part of the scope for the original data recording system design. As a result, there are limitations in the data produced. For example, figures are for the number of approvals in a given academic year but arrangements can last for 26 months, and there will be some candidates who require more than one access arrangement. In addition, the online system is not currently able to detect duplicate requests.

There is potential for error in the information provided by exam boards and JCQ. Ofqual compares the data over time and checks for systematic issues with the data. Summary data are sent back to exam boards for checking and confirmation.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the [Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publications](#) published by Ofqual to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary. Ofqual continuously manages this process by:

- ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them – a process helped by ensuring that providers are fully consulted during the initial design phase and for any subsequent change;
- reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same provider;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers; and
- having a proportionate data-auditing framework in place, allowing for auditing of providers' information collection, collation and delivery processes as necessary, using a wide range of tools from questionnaires to on-site process audits.

Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

JCQ and the exam boards send data to Ofqual annually. Any provider that does not return a complete set of data within the collection period is contacted to make sure the data are as complete as possible. For this release, Ofqual received data from all the exam boards that were in a position to award these qualifications.

Revisions

Once published, data on the number of requests are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error. In some cases, data may be amended to reflect the new categorisation.

Confidentiality and rounding

To ensure confidentiality of the accompanying data, the figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. If the value is less than 5 (1 to 4), it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero access arrangements or modified papers.

Total values of rows or columns are calculated using unrounded figures; the sum of rounded figures may differ from the total reported.

Most percentages are rounded to the nearest one decimal place. As a result of rounded figures, the percentages (calculated on actual figures) shown in tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

Status

These statistics are classified as official statistics.

Related publications

A number of other statistical releases and publications relate to this one:

- [Statistics: GCSEs \(key stage 4\) collection](#) : these statistics, published by the Department for Education, cover students' achievements in GCSEs and equivalent regulated qualifications in schools at the end of Key Stage 4.
- [Statistics: 16 to 19 attainment collection](#) : these statistics, published by the Department for Education, cover the attainment of 16- to 19-year-olds in England, including exam results and performance tables.

- [Statistical Release: Special Consideration in GCSE and A Level: summer 2017 Exam Series](#) : this statistical release published by Ofqual gives statistics on special consideration requests in GCSE and A level for the summer 2017 series.

For any related publications for qualifications offered in Scotland please contact the Scottish Qualifications Authority ([SQA](#)).

Statistical policies

The [policies and procedures](#) that Ofqual follow for production and release of its statistical releases are available online.

Glossary

Definitions of important terms used in this release are [available online](#).

Useful links

The [report and data tables](#) accompanying this release are available separately.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs please contact us at statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



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