

Statistics for access arrangements and special consideration at GCSE and A level: 2008



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Introduction

Ofqual is committed to making sure that candidates have fair access to exams so that they are able to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding.

This document consolidates data received from the English unitary awarding bodies for the 2007/8 academic year. It should be read with the report *Making a difference: Promoting confidence in A level and GCSE exams in England: summer 2008* which presents Ofqual's findings from 2008 monitoring activity, including steps taken by Ofqual to ensure the quality of the exams and further measures to be taken.

The GCSE, GCE and AEA code of practice promotes quality, consistency, accuracy and fairness in assessment and awarding. It helps maintain standards, both within and between awarding bodies and from year to year. The code lays down agreed principles, processes and practices for the awarding bodies who develop and deliver these accredited qualifications.

Access arrangements

Section 7 of the code of practice requires awarding bodies to make sure that candidates with particular requirements can demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding, for example by providing modified question papers for candidates with visual impairments. The code makes clear that arrangements must be based on the needs of individual candidates and must not give them an unfair advantage or undermine the integrity of the qualifications in any way. In addition, the code of practice states that awarding bodies must give special consideration to candidates affected by an unforeseen and temporary illness, injury or incident at the time of the exam. Ofqual collects and reports information on requests for arrangements to monitor change over time.

Awarding-body-approved access arrangements

Arrangements are available so that candidates with a range of different requirements can access the assessment. A number of these arrangements must be approved in advance by the awarding bodies. Between September 2007 and August 2008 awarding bodies approved 179,611 requests for arrangements for A level and GCSE candidates.

Table 1: Awarding-body-approved arrangements

Year	AQA	Edexcel	OCR	Total
2008	68,349	45,869	65,393	179,611
2007	59,962	35,493	54,718	150,173
2006	51,286	31,395	42,433	125,114
2005	42,306	25,526	37,075	104,907

These figures are for the number of awarding-body-approved arrangements for A level and GCSE exams rather than the number of candidates, as an individual candidate may require a number of arrangements and may take exams from more than one awarding body.

The total number of awarding-body-approved arrangements for 2008 rose by 29,438, an increase of 20 per cent compared with the equivalent period for 2007. The total number of A level and GCSE question papers distributed in the same period increased by approximately 29 per cent.

Table 2: Number of awarding-body-approved access arrangements by type of arrangement

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR	Total
Additional tapes/CD	not available	0	301	301
Alternative venue	1012	285	678	1975
Colour naming (by the invigilator)	166	116	166	448
Early opening of QP (up to 1hr before start time)	972	215	310	1497
Extra time (more than 25%)	1244	610	873	2727
Live speaker	104	47	99	250
Oral language modifier	276	19	211	506

Practical assistant	388	209	312	909
Reader/computer reader	35,376	26,272	36,056	97,704
Scribe (voice input system)	18,798	11,947	17,565	48,310
Use of signers	248	145	318	711
Transcript of recording	not available	2	99	101
Voice-activated computer	not available	17	0	17
Word processor	9667	5,979	8,374	24,020
Certificate indications	98	6	31	135

These figures are for the number of awarding-body-approved arrangements rather than the number of candidates, as an individual candidate may require a number of arrangements and may take exams from more than one awarding body.

Equivalent figures for 2007, 2006 and 2005 are not included for comparison due to changed categories for access arrangements. The data for previous years can be found in the relevant year's *Performance of awarding bodies for general qualifications* report at www.ofqual.gov.uk/90.aspx

The most frequent arrangement in 2008, accounting for just over half of all approved requests, was readers for candidates with particular visual impairments or a learning difficulty which impacts on their reading. A reader is either a person who reads the questions to the candidate or computer software that reads out a scanned paper. The number of approved arrangements for using a reader increased by 21 per cent from 2007.

The other most frequent arrangements were the use of a scribe or word processor for candidates with learning difficulties, a medical condition, a physical disability, a severe visual impairment or a temporary injury which impacts on their ability to write independently. The number of approved arrangements for use of a scribe increased by 20 per cent and use of a word processor by 11 per cent from 2007.

Centre-delegated access arrangements

Although some arrangements must be approved by awarding bodies, responsibility for authorising other arrangements is delegated to centres. Centre-delegated arrangements are designed for candidates with more commonly occurring needs

requiring lower levels of assistance. Centres are expected to inform awarding bodies of these arrangements in advance of the exam. Centres can now use an online system to do this.

Ofqual monitors and reports on the number of centre-delegated arrangements each year. However, direct comparison between the number of centre-delegated and awarding-body-approved arrangements is not possible because a centre-delegated arrangement for one candidate can cover a large number of qualifications from different awarding bodies, whereas separate requests for awarding-body-approved arrangements for every candidate are made to each awarding body.

Table 3: Centre-delegated arrangements

	Year	Total
Total number of centre delegated arrangements:	2008	104,807
	2007	91,842
	2006	78,833
	2005	43,869
extra time (up to 25 per cent more time)	2008	78,570
	2007	69,226
	2006	56,900
	2005	35,319
bilingual dictionary with extra time	2008	9,716
	2007	8,859
	2006	6,286
	2005	4,083
bilingual dictionary without extra time	2008	4,660
	2007	4,236
	2006	9,382
	2005	1,680
supervised rest breaks	2008	6,382
	2007	5,385
	2006	3,539
	2005	1,919
transcript	2008	2,553
	2007	2,104
	2006	1,416
	2005	485
prompter	2008	2,926
	2007	2,032
	2006	1,310
	2005	383

Equivalent figures for 2007, 2006 and 2005 are included for comparison. These figures are for the total number of centre-delegated arrangements, rather than the number of candidates as one candidate may require more than one arrangement.

Between September 2007 and August 2008 centres recorded almost 105,000 centre-delegated arrangements, a rise of almost 13,000 on the number recorded in 2007 and over twice the number recorded in 2005. However, the systems for recording centre-delegated arrangements have changed over this period and it is therefore not possible to draw any firm conclusions about year-on-year differences. During 2008, the majority of centres used an online system to record centre-delegated arrangements.

Based on the data available, more candidates were registered for each of the centre-delegated arrangements in 2008 than in 2007. Three-quarters of centre-delegated arrangements were for up to 25 per cent extra time, an increase of 13 per cent on 2007. Up to 25 per cent extra time can be given to candidates with a learning difficulty or other applicable medical, physical or other psychological requirement. For many candidates a smaller allowance, such as 10 per cent extra time, is appropriate.

QCA centre support officers have been working with exams officers in centres to increase awareness of centre-delegated arrangements, and the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has provided information about centre-delegated arrangements in its materials for centres.

To ensure that centres are not making inappropriate arrangements to give candidates an unfair advantage the JCQ will continue to inspect each centre once a year. The JCQ inspectors check centres' applications for centre-delegated access arrangements and review the evidence used to substantiate the need for an access arrangement.

Access arrangements online

Access arrangements online is a new system, launched in September 2008, that allows centres to apply for all GCSE and GCE access arrangements quickly and efficiently online. *Access arrangements online* replaces the existing systems for both centre-delegated and awarding-body-approved access arrangements.

Modified question papers

Awarding bodies provided over 21,000 modified question papers for the June 2008 exam series. Modified question papers allow candidates with a range of visual impairments and significant language comprehension disorders to demonstrate their abilities.

Table 4: Modified question papers

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of modified question papers	9,248	3,936	8,011
Braille question paper	647	219	529
Exam on coloured paper	0	0	70
Enlarged paper (18 and 24 point bold)	6,304	2,677	4,510
Modified language	454	93	1455
Tactile diagrams	48	15	48
Unmodified A3 QP	1,795	932	1,399

The number of modified papers produced for the June 2008 exam series was very similar to 2007 and 2006, at around 0.1 per cent of the total number of exam papers produced in 2008.

Special consideration

Special consideration is a post-exam adjustment reflecting temporary injury, illness, indisposition or other unforeseen incident immediately before or during the exams period. There is a common JCQ form and standard rules and regulations for centres to request special consideration for candidates.

Special consideration only allows for relatively minor adjustments to a candidate's mark, of up to five per cent of the maximum mark for the question paper, and is

designed to be fair to candidates without compromising standards. The maximum adjustment is reserved for exceptional cases, for example candidates disadvantaged by the recent death of an immediate family member. Most adjustments for special consideration are smaller, for example two per cent of the maximum available mark for candidates with minor illness on the day of the exam. Each case is assessed individually and the decision made by the awarding body will be based on various factors, which could include the severity of the circumstances, the date of the exam in relation to the circumstances, and the nature of the assessment.

For the June 2008 exam series, awarding bodies approved 329,119 requests for special consideration, an increase of around 29,000 on 2007:

Table 5: Special consideration

	Year	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of requests for special consideration	2008	141,743	106,961	89,693
	2007	144,765	89,816	73,551
	2006	134,857	93,225	68,584
	2005	130,971	65,797	70,031
Number of requests approved	2008	139,699	106,655	82,765
	2007	139,842	89,036	71,500
	2006	132,051	83,340	59,576
	2005	127,653	60,075	67,472
% of requests approved	2008	98.6	99.7	92.3
	2007	96.6	99.1	97.2
	2006	97.9	89.4	86.9
	2005	97.5	91.3	96.3

Equivalent figures for 2007, 2006 and 2005 are included for information. These figures are for the number of requests for special consideration (by component) rather than the number of candidates, as an individual candidate may require special consideration for a number of exam papers and may take exams from more than one awarding body.

The total number of requests for special consideration in 2008 was greater than for the equivalent period in 2007 (338,397 in 2008 compared with 308,132 in 2007), an increase of around 10 per cent. This increase was not uniform across the awarding bodies, with Edexcel and OCR seeing substantial increases in the number of requests and AQA receiving fewer requests than in 2007. The number of approved requests represents around 1.5 per cent of the total number of exam papers completed for the June 2008 exam series, or less than one approved request for every 50 papers.

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