



Official Statistics

Background information: Access Arrangements for GCSE AS and A level: 2020 to 2021 academic year

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1. Purpose

This statistical release presents data on access arrangements approved for GCSE, AS and A level during the 2020 to 2021 academic year.

In previous releases of this report, we have reported on the number of modified papers produced for the summer exam series. However, due to the cancellation of summer exams this year, there are no numbers to report on modified papers in this release.

Access arrangements are approved before candidates take an assessment. This statistical release covers access arrangements approved in advance of exams in the 2020 to 2021 academic year, including the summer exams that were

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subsequently cancelled due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The decision to cancel the summer exams and to instead award teacher assessed grades was announced before the deadline for submitting applications for access arrangements.

2. Geographical coverage

This report presents data on approved access arrangements in England. Four exam boards offered GCSE and GCE qualifications in England for the period covered in this publication:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC/Eduqas)

3. 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. Access arrangements can be provided for any candidates taking exams or non-exam assessments who meet the eligibility criteria.

Access arrangements granted for disabled candidates are known as reasonable adjustments. Access arrangements can also be granted for candidates who have experienced a temporary illness or injury, or some other event outside of the learner's control. These are known as special consideration. The same types of access arrangements might be used for both reasonable adjustment and special consideration purposes.

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. These post-examination adjustments are also called special consideration and are covered in a separate report. [A report on special consideration for the summer series 2019](#) is the latest such report on special consideration in GCSE, AS and A level. Please note that due to the cancellation of exams this summer in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, statistics in relation to special consideration in GCSE, AS and A level for the summer 2021 series are not reported.

If a student has a disability (as defined by the Equality Act 2010 – meaning the student 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 reasonable adjustments, which exam boards administer through their access arrangements process. Exam boards have a duty, under the Equality Act 2010, to make reasonable adjustments to assessments for disabled students 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.

Section 96(7) of the Act gives the appropriate regulator – Ofqual in England – the power to prohibit or limit the extent to which awarding organisations must make or allow reasonable adjustments for specified general qualifications. Following decisions taken by Secretary of State for Education, the specified general qualifications include GCSE, AS and A levels. Ofqual does this by making the specifications set out in [Specifications in relation to the reasonable adjustment of general qualifications](#). Our specifications only remove the duty on awarding organisations to make reasonable adjustments within the confines of those specifications. Where we have not made a relevant specification, awarding organisations remain under a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students.

The qualifications covered in this release are regulated by Ofqual, which publishes [General Conditions of Recognition](#) 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.’ Awarding organisations must also set out how a learner can qualify for special consideration.

Ofqual does not prescribe what arrangements exam boards should provide, but requires 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 eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK, and provides a [JCQ definition of access arrangements](#) as pre-examination adjustments for candidates based on evidence of need and normal ways of working. JCQ publishes an [annual JCQ guidance document](#) setting out the standard arrangements that exam centres can request of boards and the relevant eligibility and evidential criteria.

The approval of some arrangements and some modified papers is delegated to schools or other exam centres where exam boards judge there is no advantage to be gained by candidates in relation to the knowledge, skills and understanding being tested, unless they need the arrangement (for example, the use of supervised rest breaks). The range of arrangements, including modified papers, for which schools or colleges must seek approval from exam boards has varied

over time. The data in this release only cover those types of arrangements which are processed through JCQ's Access Arrangements Online system.

Any candidate entered for GCSE, AS or A level qualifications who meets the eligibility criteria for an access arrangement will receive approval for it. Individual candidates may require more than one arrangement (for example, 25% extra time and a computer reader). Once granted, an arrangement for a disabled student will apply for up to 26 months, although applications based on temporary conditions will last for one exam series only. In the 2020 to 2021 academic year, applications that had expired prior to, during or after the summer 2020 examination series were extended until the autumn 2020 examination series.

Schools and other exam centres will 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.

4. Context

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

In September 2017, the reader and computer reader categories were merged in Access Arrangements Online to reduce burden for centres. So as to allow for comparability of figures over time, these categories have been merged for all years in the report and accompanying data tables. From 1 September 2018, the coloured and enlarged paper category (included within the "other arrangements" category in the report) does not require an online application, therefore the numbers in this category have significantly decreased. From 1 September 2019 the 2 categories; practical assistant for written papers and practical assistant for practical assessments, were merged into a single category of practical assistant. The change was introduced to reduce bureaucracy for centres. In line with earlier practices used to report such changes, the 2 categories have been merged for all years in the report and accompanying data tables.

5. Centre types

Some figures in this year's report are broken down by centre type. Centre types have been collapsed under the following categories:

5.1 Secondary non-selective, non-independent

This category includes:

- Academies
- Free Schools
- Secondary comprehensive or middle school or wide ability school
- Secondary modern school or high school

5.2 Independent

This category includes:

- Independent school including city training colleges (CTCs) - includes all independent schools having some or all students of secondary school age

5.3 Selective

This category includes:

- Secondary selective school, for example grammar or technical

5.4 Sixth Form and Further Education

This category includes:

- Sixth Form College
- Tertiary College
- Further education establishment - a centre which primarily provides education for students aged 16+ up to and including A level and its equivalent

5.5 Other

This category includes:

- Other, for example special school, college of higher education, university

department, tutorial college, language school, pupil referral unit (PRU), HM Young Offender Institute (HMYOI), HM Prison, training centre

- Centres when the centre type is not known

6. 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. While other types of access arrangement can be requested, the data in this release only covers those granted through Access Arrangements Online ([JCQ guidelines](#) outline which types of arrangements need to be processed through this system).

In addition, each exam board submits data to Ofqual in relation to the number of requests that are referred directly to them for approval, and the number of candidates taking exams and the number of centres. [A full description of modified papers is published by JCQ.](#)

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.

7. Limitations

The ability to extract detailed statistical information was not part of the scope for the original data recording system design in Access Arrangements Online. As a result, there are limitations in the data produced. For example, the figures reported to Ofqual 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.

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

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. Status

These statistics are classified as Official Statistics.

12. 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 2019 Exam Series](#): this statistical release published by Ofqual gives statistics on special consideration requests in GCSE and A level for the summer 2019 series (the 2020 and 2021 releases were cancelled due to the cancellation of exams in summer 2020 and 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic)

For any related publications for qualifications offered in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland please contact the respective regulators - [Qualifications Wales](#), [CCEA](#) and the [Scottish Qualifications Authority \(SQA\)](#).

13. Useful links

- [Report and data tables](#) accompanying this release
- [Definitions of important terms](#) used in this release
- [Policies and procedures](#) that Ofqual follows for production of statistical releases

14. 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 data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk.

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