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Official Statistics

Special consideration in GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2023 exam series

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Applies to England

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Introduction

We report here on special consideration given in the form of post-assessment adjustments made to the mark or grade of students who might not have been able to demonstrate their ability in an assessment due to exceptional circumstances occurring at the time of their assessment that could have had an impact on their performance. For post-assessment special consideration, a request relates to a single request for a student who has sat a specific component in an exam series. Post-assessment special consideration differs from access arrangements, which are adjustments that are made to the way an assessment is taken. We report on data for pre-assessment access arrangement in our [statistics on access arrangements](#).

Requests for post-exam mark adjustments are made by schools and colleges, usually after an assessment has taken place. Requests specify which students and which components the application is for. Applications can be for an individual student, or for a group of students if a reason for special consideration covers all these students. The Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ), a membership organisation of 8 providers of qualifications, including the 4 exam boards offering GCSE, AS and A levels in England, publishes [guidance and procedures on special consideration](#). There may be small changes year-on-year to this document that reflect the procedures in place for a particular exam series.

There are 2 categories of special consideration included in this report: mark adjustments and qualification awards. Mark adjustments are for students who were present for the assessment but disadvantaged in some way at the time of taking the assessment. Qualification awards are for students who were absent with [good reason for one or more of the assessments](#).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of exams in [summer 2020](#) and [summer 2021](#). As a result, there were no special consideration requests for those series. Exams and assessments resumed in summer 2022, with some adaptations to the usual assessments. [Under JCQ guidance](#), students with symptoms of COVID-19, who were absent from exams due to following [UK Health Security Agency guidance](#), were automatically considered absent for an acceptable reason. To minimise the likelihood of students missing all their assessments for a qualification, extended time intervals were introduced between timetabled exams. JCQ also

changed [the eligibility criteria](#) for students who missed an assessment for an acceptable reason. Previously, students needed to have completed at least 25% of the overall qualification's assessments to be eligible for a grade under special consideration arrangements. This was changed to only require completion of at least one assessment in a qualification.

In 2023, AS, A level and the majority of GCSE exams and assessments [returned to pre-pandemic arrangements](#). Nevertheless, in a small number of GCSE subjects, some of the [adaptions implemented in 2022 were maintained](#). In addition, the extended spacing between exams was retained, as were the revised expectations for students to be eligible for a grade under special consideration arrangements where they were unable to take assessments for an acceptable reason. This was to maximise the likelihood that students who were in this position could receive a grade.

In this release, all values are rounded to the nearest 5 to ensure confidentiality of data. Figures for AS are reported along with A level. Further information on this release is available in the [background information and data tables accompanying this report](#).

Key headlines



1. In 2023, there were 700,600 special consideration requests, 19% higher than in 2022 and partially explained by an increase in GCSE and A level entries. In 2023, special consideration requests were submitted for 4.4% of all assessments, similar to 2022 (3.5%).
2. Special consideration requests for GCSEs were 20% higher in 2023 (561,415 requests) than in 2022 (465,670 requests). Requests for AS and A level were 14% higher (139,185 requests) than in 2022 (122,500 requests). Most special consideration requests were for GCSE assessments (80%), similar to 2022 (79%).
3. The majority of special consideration requests (95%) were approved, slightly higher than in 2022 (94%).
4. There were 666,175 special consideration requests approved in 2023, meaning special consideration requests were approved for 4% of all assessments, similar to 2022.

Total number of special consideration requests

There were 700,600 special consideration requests in 2023, 19.1% higher than in 2022 (588,170 requests). The increase in special consideration requests for 2023 may be partially explained by increases in GCSE and A level entries. For example, there was a 1.2% increase in the total number of [GCSE and A level entries](#), from 16.6 million in the summer 2022 exam series to 16.8 million in the 2023 summer exam series. Out of all special consideration requests in 2023, 95.1% were approved (666,175), similar to the proportion of requests approved in 2022 (93.9%).



Special Consideration requests	Level	2018	2019	2022	2023
Requests made	AS and A level	131,220	123,615	122,500	139,185
Requests made	GCSE	484,150	467,220	465,670	561,415
Requests made	Total	615,370	590,835	588,170	700,600
Requests approved	AS and A level	124,045	114,500	116,475	133,590
Requests approved	GCSE	447,645	429,030	435,825	532,585
Requests approved	Total	571,690	543,530	552,300	666,175

Special consideration requests for external and internal assessments

Requests relating to internal assessments (for example non-examination assessments) represent a small proportion of the total number of requests. In 2023, 1.6% of requests were for internal assessments (11,400 requests) and 98.4% were for external assessments (689,200 requests). The proportions of requests were similar to 2022, where 1.0% of requests were for internal assessments (5,880 requests) and 99.0% were for external assessments (582,290 requests).



Assessment type	2018	2019	2022	2023
Internal assessment requests	11,885	10,360	5,880	11,400
External assessment requests	603,490	580,475	582,290	689,200

Special consideration requests by subject

The charts in this section present 2 sets of data: special consideration requests at a component level (referred to as units prior to 2019) and the number of certifications. Statistics on the number of certifications are based on data [published by JCQ](#). The certification chart is provided to show the breakdown of certifications by subject. Typically, we would anticipate a relationship between the number of special consideration requests and the number of certifications. However, it is important to recognise that the number of components can vary depending on the subject. Comparing this data with previous years should be approached cautiously due to changes in

qualification structures, including the transition between [legacy and reformed qualifications](#).

AS and A level subjects with the highest number of special consideration requests in 2023 with number of certifications



Subject	Number of requests	Total qualification certifications
Mathematics	17,640	97,940
Psychology	13,810	83,035
Biology	13,750	73,300
Chemistry	10,955	61,330
Sociology	7,640	49,640
History	7,440	46,490
Physics	7,285	38,680
Economics	6,350	40,495
Geography	6,345	36,405
English Literature	6,175	35,730

For AS and A level, the subjects with the highest number of special consideration requests were generally those with the largest number of certifications. Figures for all subjects can be found in the [accompanying data tables](#).

GCSE subjects with the highest number of special consideration requests in 2023 with certifications

Please note that certifications in combined science are double counted because combined science is the equivalent of 2 GCSE grades.



Subject	Number of requests	Total qualification certifications
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Combined Science	109,905	874,000
Mathematics	81,870	761,960
English Language	61,150	728,210
History	50,060	293,195
English Literature	49,980	594,530
Geography	36,075	279,080
Religious Studies	27,185	222,410
French	18,595	125,150
Spanish	18,120	120,200
Biology	14,015	177,905

Similar to AS and A level, the GCSE subjects with the most special consideration requests were generally those with the highest certifications. Figures for all subjects can be found in the [accompanying data tables](#).

Special consideration applications for individuals and groups

According to [JCQ guidelines](#), special consideration applications can be made either on an individual or group basis. An individual application involves just one student and can relate to one or more assessment components. However, there can also be cases where a group of students has been affected by a similar issue (for example, a fire alarm during an exam). In these cases, a group application can cover all students and any components affected by the event. Because a single group application encompasses a number of students, the sum of applications for individuals and groups is not equal to the total number of special consideration requests (which are counted at individual student and component level).

The chart and table show the percentage of applications relating to individuals or groups as a percentage of all special consideration requests.



Application type	2018	2019	2022	2023
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Individual	95.8%	96.6%	97.0%	96.2%
Group	4.2%	3.4%	3.0%	3.8%

The chart and table below give a breakdown of group applications in 2023 by number of students in the group. For instance, 25.4% of group applications included between 2 and 5 students.



Size of group application	Percentage of all requests	Percentage of group requests
2-5	1.0	25.4
6-10	0.7	19.4
11-20	0.7	19.6
21-50	0.7	19.4
51-100	0.4	10.4
101-200	0.2	4.9
201+	<0.1	1.0

Categories of special consideration

There are 2 categories of special consideration included in this report: mark adjustments and qualification awards. Mark adjustments are for students who were present for the assessment but disadvantaged in some way at the time of taking the assessment. Qualification awards are for students who were absent with good reason for one or more of their assessments. Further information is provided in the [JCQ guidelines](#).

Number of approved requests for mark adjustments and qualification awards



Special consideration type	2018	2019	2022	2023
Qualification award approved requests	16,985	21,260	50,135	32,565

Mark adjustment approved requests	554,705	522,265	502,165	633,610
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Most (95.1%) approved requests in 2023 were for mark adjustments, higher than in 2022 (90.9%), but similar to previous years (for example, 96.1% of approved requests were for mark adjustments in 2019).

The proportion of approved qualification award requests (4.9%) was lower in 2023 compared to 2022 (9.1%), but similar to the years before the pandemic (for example, 3.9% of approved requests were for qualification awards in 2019).

Approved special consideration requests for mark adjustments by tariff

The [guidelines published by JCQ](#) allow for percentage adjustments to a student's mark according to a tariff. The exam boards permit adjustments of up to 5% of the maximum mark of a question paper. The chart and table below show the total number of approved mark adjustments and the percentage approved by tariff.



Mark adjustment tariff	Percentage of marks adjusted in 2018	Percentage of marks adjusted in 2019	Percentage of marks adjusted in 2022	Percentage of marks adjusted in 2023
0%	0.8	0.2	<0.1	0.0
1%	18.3	16.4	16.2	13.3
2%	25.0	23.7	24.4	27.0
3%	24.5	26.2	26.8	28.0
4%	22.9	27.9	24.0	26.2
5%	8.5	5.6	8.6	5.5

The majority of mark adjustments (81%) were by either 2%, 3% or 4% in 2023. A smaller proportion of students received the highest tariff of 5% in 2023 (5.5%) than in 2022 (8.6%), though this is more in line with the 2019 summer exam series (5.6%) prior to the pandemic.

User 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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