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Official Statistics

# Background information for access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level: 2023 to 2024 academic year

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## Provide your feedback

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## Purpose

This statistical release presents data on approved access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level which were valid for use during the 2023 to 2024 academic year, and the number of requests granted for modified papers for the 2024 summer GCSE, AS and A level series.

## Geographical coverage

This report presents data on approved access arrangements in England. Four awarding organisations 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)

## Description

# Definitions

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 provided as 'reasonable adjustments'.

Where access arrangements are granted for candidates who have experienced a temporary illness or injury, or some other event outside of the candidate's control, these are referred to as 'granted as a form of special consideration' within [Ofqual's regulatory requirements](#). The same categories of access arrangements may be used for both reasonable adjustments and special consideration.

Please note, the term 'special consideration' can also refer to a post-examination adjustment to a student's mark or grade to reflect temporary illness or injury, or some other event outside their control, which has had, or is reasonably likely to have had, a material effect on their ability to take an assessment or demonstrate their level of attainment in an assessment. These post-examination adjustments are distinct from the special consideration access arrangements granted prior to an assessment being taken. A separate publication reports the [number of post-examination special consideration requests for the summer GCSE, AS and A level series](#).

## Duties and regulation

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 awarding organisations administer through their access arrangements process. Awarding organisations 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 awarding organisations are required to take 'such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid the disadvantage'. The awarding organisations may choose to address this by taking steps 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 the Secretary of State for Education, the specified general qualifications include GCSE, AS and A levels. Ofqual does this by setting out the [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 awarding organisations 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 awarding organisations should provide, but requires all awarding organisations to have clear, published details about who qualifies for these arrangements and what arrangements may be given. Awarding organisations choose to follow Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) guidelines in relation to the provision of these arrangements. JCQ is a membership organisation comprising the 8 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 [guidance on access arrangements for the 2023 to 2024 academic year](#) can be found on their website. This [guidance is updated annually](#) and sets out the arrangements that exam centres can request of boards and the relevant eligibility and evidential criteria. The guidance also states that exam centres must consider the need for access arrangements on a subject-by-subject basis.

The approval of some arrangements and some modified papers is delegated to exam centres where awarding organisations judge it is appropriate to do so. This delegation occurs when it is clear there would be no unfair 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 exam centres must seek approval from awarding organisations has varied over time. The data on

access arrangements in this release only covers those types of arrangements which are processed through JCQ's Access Arrangements Online system. It does not cover the arrangements where approval is delegated to exam centres.

Any candidate entered for GCSE, AS or A level qualifications who meets the eligibility criteria will be granted the appropriate access arrangement. Individual candidates may require more than one arrangement (for example, 25% extra time and a computer reader). Once granted, an arrangement for a long term condition will be valid for up to 26 months, whereas 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 planned dates for the summer 2020 examination series were extended until the autumn 2020 examination series.

Exam centres will consider the particular requirements of individual candidates and then follow the guidelines and arrangements of the awarding organisations. 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](#) without having Education, Health and Care Plan, 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.

## Context

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

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'.

From 1 September 2021, the evidence requirements for 25% extra time were changed (please see the relevant [JCQ guidance document](#) for further details). However, candidates who were entered for examination in Autumn 2021 or June 2022 to improve upon a previous grade, and had a previously approved online application for 25% extra time, could be awarded 25% extra time based on the previous criteria. Their new applications were processed by selecting the access arrangement '25% extra time (2021/22 re-sits)' category. The same process was

applied the following year, with new applications processed by selecting the access arrangement '25% extra time (2022/23 re-sits)' category. These re-sit arrangements are included in the '25% extra time' category in the tables and charts in the [main report](#) but are presented separately in the [data tables](#).

From 1 September 2022, the evidence requirements for 25% extra time for candidates with learning difficulties were changed. Further details can be found in the [2022 to 2023 academic year JCQ guidance document](#). Additionally, the 2022 to 2023 guidance specified that arrangements such as fidget toys do not require an application using the Access Arrangements Online system.

From 1 September 2023, new categories of access to a mobile phone for medical purposes, remote invigilation, and timetable variation requiring overnight supervision for a candidate with a disability have been introduced. They are reported within the "all other remaining arrangements" category in the main report but are reported separately in the data tables. Also, from 1 September 2023, the extra time granted when applying for "Bilingual translation dictionary with extra time" has been extended from 10% to 25%. The 2 categories are reported within the "all other remaining arrangements" category in the [main report](#) and under "Bilingual translation dictionary with extra time" in the accompanying [data tables](#). Further details can be found in the [2023 to 2024 academic year JCQ guidance document](#).

## Centre types

Some figures in the report and data tables are broken down by centre type. The centre type categories are those available in the NCN register. Further details on the centre type categories definition can be found on the [NCN register web page](#). These Centre types have been collapsed under the following categories for use in this report:

### Secondary non-selective, non-independent

This category includes:

- Academies
- Free School

- Secondary comprehensive or middle school or wide ability school
- Secondary modern school or high school

## **Independent**

This category includes:

- Independent or private school including city technology colleges (CTCs)

Centres in this category are not maintained by a local authority. This includes independent special schools but excludes 'non-maintained special schools'.

Centres in this category must provide full-time education for (a) 5 or more pupils of compulsory school age or (b) at least one pupil of that age who is looked after by a local authority, or has a statement of special educational needs, or an education, health and care plan.

Independent establishments that are not DfE-registered should use the 'Other' category.

## **Selective**

This category includes:

- Secondary selective school, for example grammar or technical

## **Sixth Form and Further Education**

This category includes:

- Sixth Form College
- Further education establishment - includes centres which primarily offer study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree) as well as Centres that have previously used the tertiary college category.

# Other

This category includes:

- Other - includes, but is not exclusive to, pupil referral units (PRUs), prison or hospital schools, language schools, tutorials centres, higher education institutions, distance learning providers providing part-time teaching only and private examination centres accepting private candidates who they have not taught, all non-DfE registered centres
- Centres when the centre type is not known

# Data source

Access Arrangements Online is JCQ's centralised system used by schools, colleges and other exam centres to request access arrangements. Centres can make one central application for each candidate through the system 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 implemented, the access arrangements 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 for modified papers 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 awarding organisations 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 awarding organisations that award these qualifications.

# 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 approved applications valid in a given academic year, and arrangements can be valid for 26 months. There will also 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 awarding organisations and JCQ. Ofqual compares the data over time and checks for systematic issues with the data. Summary data are sent back to awarding organisations 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. Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

## 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 'Fewer than 5' 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.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the [Office for Statistics Regulation \(OSR\)](#). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

You are welcome to contact us directly at [data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk) with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk) or via the OSR website.

## 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, AS and A Level: summer 2024 exam series](#): this statistical release published by Ofqual gives statistics on special consideration requests in GCSE, AS and A level for the summer 2024 series

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 \(SQA\)](#).

# 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

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