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Official Statistics

Background information for special consideration in GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2024 exam series

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Applies to England

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Provide your feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. If you have any comments on this statistical release, or how to improve it to meet your needs, please complete our [short survey](#) or [email our statistics team](#).

Purpose

This release provides information on special consideration for GCSE, AS and A levels for the summer 2024 exam series. Special consideration is 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 either due to exceptional circumstances occurring at the time of their assessment or being absent from the assessment for reasons which meet [JCQ's eligibility criteria](#).

Geographical coverage

This report presents data on special consideration requests made in England. Four exam boards currently offer GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in England:

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

Description

The qualifications covered in this release are regulated by Ofqual and must meet [Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition](#) and other relevant regulations. These General Conditions state that “an awarding organisation must have in place clear arrangements for special consideration to be given to learners in relation to qualifications which it makes available”.

Special consideration is any adjustment given to a student who has temporarily experienced an illness, injury, or other event outside of their control at the time of the assessment which significantly affects their ability to:

- take an assessment
- demonstrate what they can do in an assessment

The aim of the special consideration process is to mitigate against the impact of unexpected factors that are beyond the student's control occurring at the time of their assessment which could materially affect a student's ability to demonstrate their level of attainment or to participate in an assessment.

Post-assessment special consideration differs from pre-assessment access arrangements. Although both mechanisms are designed to support fairness in the assessment of students, they serve different purposes and are implemented at different stages of the assessment process. Access arrangements take the form of adjustments to the way an assessment is taken and are planned in advance of the assessment. Data on pre-exam access arrangements is available in a separate publication by Ofqual ([Access Arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level](#)).

Special consideration applications for exams and non-examination assessments are made by schools and colleges to exam boards. According to [JCQ guidelines](#), special consideration applications can be made either on an individual or group basis. An individual application involves just one student but can relate to one or more assessment components. In cases where a group of students has been affected by the same issue (for example, a fire alarm during an exam), a group application can cover all students and any components affected by the issue.

A single special consideration request relates to an individual student and a specific component in an exam series. The total number of applications for individuals and groups is not the same as the total number of special consideration requests. For instance, a single group application can represent more than a hundred requests, because requests are counted at individual student and component level. A single special consideration request relates to an individual student and a specific component in an exam series.

[Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition](#) require that exam boards publish details on procedures for providing special consideration to candidates taking their qualifications, which must include how a candidate qualifies for special consideration and the forms of special consideration available. Ofqual does not prescribe the processes and procedures the exam boards use to make decisions about special consideration applications. This is because the circumstances of each application may be unique, and it is for exam boards to decide if and what special consideration should be given under the circumstances and apply it in a fair and consistent way.

There are 2 categories of special consideration available:

- Mark adjustments: a small number of extra marks for students whose exam performance is affected by temporary illness, injury, indisposition, or an unforeseen incident
- Qualification award: awarding the qualification if the student was absent from an exam or formal assessment for reasons which meet [JCQ's eligibility criteria](#). A student must have completed at least one component to be eligible for this type of special consideration.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), a membership organisation of 8 providers of qualifications, including the 4 exam boards offering GCSE, AS and A levels in England, publishes [guidelines and procedures on special consideration](#).

Adjustments reported in this release may have been given to students who were present for an assessment but disadvantaged due to temporary injury, illness, or other unforeseen incident occurring immediately before or during the assessment period. JCQ's procedures allow for small adjustments to a student's mark – up to 5% of the maximum raw mark of a question paper.

[JCQ guidelines on special consideration](#) indicate mark adjustment tariffs between 1% and 5% for different circumstances.

There is also a 0% tariff. This tariff is used in slightly different ways by each exam board. It may be used when an exam board approves the overall reason for the request, but not all instances the application covers. For example, the exam board may determine that a student for whom a special consideration application has been made should only receive it for those assessments taken within a given time period and not for assessments taken afterwards.

These adjustment tariffs provide a framework for accommodating various challenges that candidates may face during exams. Each application must be assessed on its merits, and the exam board's decision should be based on various

relevant factors, such as the severity of the circumstances, the date of the exam in relation to the circumstances, and the nature of the assessment.

External influences

There are various factors over time which might have influenced the number of special consideration requests made for GCSE, AS and A level assessments presented in this release:

1. The number of requests in each subject will be influenced by the number of components available. Specifications with a greater number of components are likely to receive higher volumes of special consideration requests.
2. In 2023, the Department for Education issued guidance on measures to minimise the impact of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in education settings. The JCQ also published [information for centres affected by RAAC](#), clarifying the circumstances under which candidates would be eligible for special consideration.
3. In summer 2023, AS, A level and the majority of GCSE qualifications returned to pre-pandemic arrangements. [Some changes](#) changes to the special consideration procedures and the design of the exam timetable were maintained which could influence the figures in this report. Additionally, the [extended time intervals between exams](#), first introduced in 2022, [were largely preserved](#). This [decreased the likelihood that students would miss all exams](#) in a subject due to illness or another acceptable reason.
4. Summer 2022 saw the return of exams and assessments following disruption due to the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. JCQ issued [supplementary guidance](#) for students with symptoms of COVID-19. Candidates who were unable to attend exams due to following [UK Health Security Agency guidance](#) were considered to be absent for acceptable reasons. In 2023, [JCQ's eligibility criteria](#) for students who missed an exam removed specific requirements relating to COVID-19 symptoms, in line with updated advice from the [UK Health Security Agency](#) and the lifting of school-related COVID-19 rules.

Data source

The exam boards send Ofqual data on the number of requests for special consideration and their approvals. The data contains details of special consideration requests up to the data cut-off date provided in Ofqual's data reporting schedule.

Data for AS and A level has been combined in this release.

To aid comparison with previous years we have presented the number of withdrawn requests in the total number of requests. Withdrawn requests refer to instances where exam boards withdraw the original application if it was made in error, or where the application requires amendment by the centre, at which point it is treated as a new application.

Limitations

There is potential for error in the information provided by exam boards, therefore Ofqual cannot guarantee that the information received is correct. However, Ofqual conducts various quality assurance checks which are outlined in the 'quality assurance' section below.

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 special considerations are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error.

Confidentiality and rounding

To ensure confidentiality, the accompanying data in this report has been rounded in line with [Ofqual's rounding policy](#).

All figures for the number of special consideration requests are rounded to the nearest 5. Figures below 5 appear as 'fewer than 5' and '0' refers to cases where there are zero values relating to the number of requests, approvals and individual or group applications.

Where individual rounded values have been presented in a table along with their sum total, the total may be slightly different to the sum of these individual rounded values because it has been calculated using the original unrounded values.

Percentages have been derived from unrounded values. Percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.

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 with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing 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](#)
- [Statistics: 16 to 19 attainment collection](#)
- [Statistics: Access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level](#)

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 follow for production of statistical releases

Head of profession: Ben Cuff

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