

Statistical Release

Special Consideration in GCSE and A Level: Summer 2013 Exam Series

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Key points

This release provides information on special consideration for GCSE and A level, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland during the summer 2013 exam series. Special consideration is the process by which results are awarded for candidates who could not be present for the exam, or a mark adjustment is applied for candidates present, but disadvantaged in some way. The key findings for this release are:

- The number of requests for special consideration has increased by 13 per cent on last year, from 365,900 in summer 2012 to 413,100 for the summer 2013 exam series. This is in the context of a 7 per cent decrease in the number of marked papers.
- Just under 3 per cent of all exam papers received approval for special consideration in the summer 2013 exam series.
- There were 372,700 approved requests for special consideration for the summer 2013 exam series, compared with 341,500 in 2012: a 9 per cent increase.
- The proportion of approved requests for special consideration has been steadily decreasing, from 97 per cent in 2009 to 90 per cent in 2013.
- For the second year running, the most common mark adjustment made was 3 per cent of the maximum mark of a question paper.

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Introduction

This statistical release, published on behalf of the qualifications regulators for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, presents data on special consideration for GCSE and A level exams during the summer 2013 exam series. Six exam boards offer these qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland:

- AQA
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (Northern Ireland)
- International Curriculum & Assessment Agency (Examinations) (ICAA(E))
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson
- WJEC.

Exam boards must have procedures in place for making adjustments to the marks of candidates who have not been able to demonstrate attainment because of exceptional circumstances.

Adjustments may be made for candidates who were present for an assessment but disadvantaged due to temporary injury, illness, indisposition or another unforeseen incident immediately before or during the exam's period.

Exam boards must also have procedures for making a qualification award by special consideration where a candidate has covered the course but is unable through temporary illness, injury or indisposition to be present for the exam of a unit/component and, therefore, to fulfil all the usual assessment requirements.

Please note: figures within this commentary have been rounded to the nearest 100. All tables are in the appendix.

Key statistics

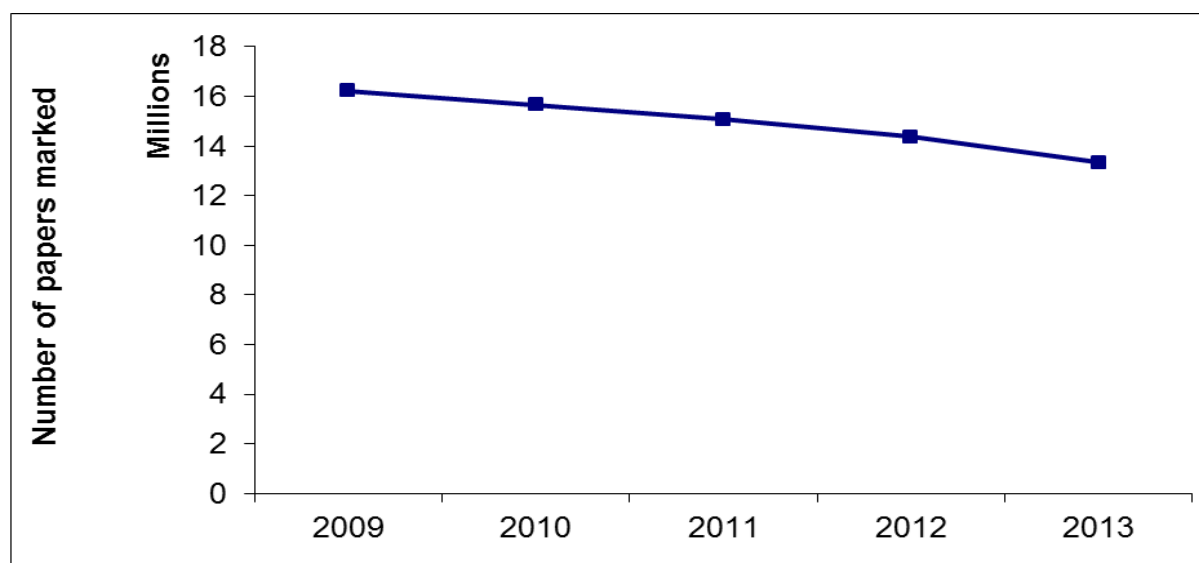
Certificates awarded

In the summer 2013 exam series, more than 2.4 million AS and A level certifications were made. More than 6 million GCSE certifications were made in England, Wales and Northern Ireland during the summer 2013 series¹.

Papers marked

In the summer 2013 exam series, 13.3 million papers were marked (see table 1 and figure 1). Figure 1 covers A level, applied A level, GCSE, applied GCSE, GCSE short course and overseas entries. There has been a consistent decrease in the number of papers marked in the summer series. The change in structure of qualifications, such as the move from six to four units in A levels and the return to linear assessment in GCSE, is likely to have contributed to the reductions seen over the past five years.

Figure 1: Total papers marked for GCSE and A level, summer exam series 2009–13



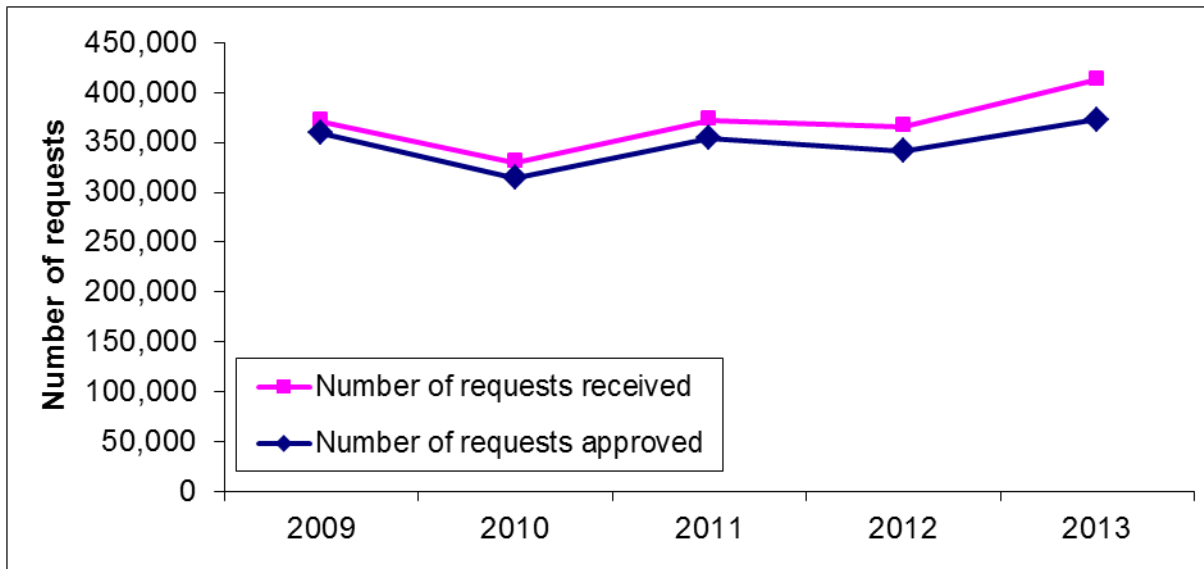
Special consideration may be applied to a candidate at question paper level or for the certification.

During the summer 2013 exam series, there were 413,100 requests for special consideration, an increase of 13 per cent when compared with 2012. This increase in requests for special consideration is in the context of a 7 per cent decrease in the total number of marked papers in summer 2013 when compared with summer 2012 (see table 2 and figure 2).

¹ These figures include applied subjects, other UK regions e.g. Isle of Man and overseas entries.

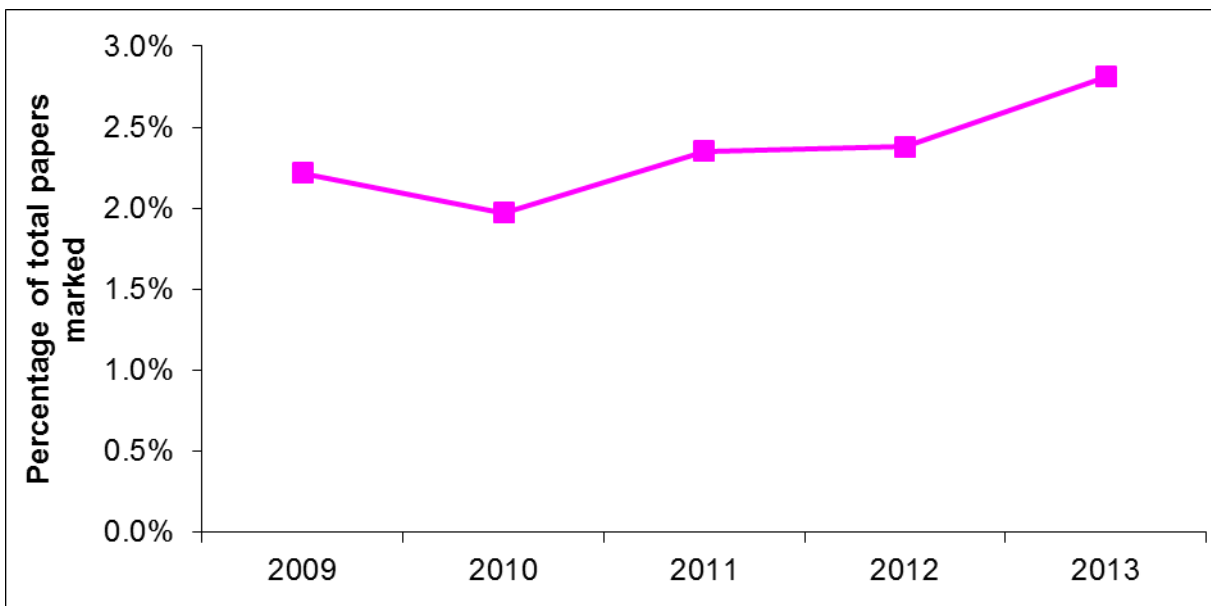
Exam boards approved 372,700 requests for special consideration, representing 90 per cent of requests received. The approval rate decreased from 93 per cent in summer 2012; the difference is statistically significant. This continues the trend seen over the past five years, where the approval rate has gradually decreased. In 2009, the approval rate was 97 per cent.

Figure 2: Number of requests received and approved for special consideration, 2009–13



The requests approved for special consideration during the summer 2013 exam series represent 2.8 per cent of the total number of papers marked. This has increased from last year, when it was 2.4 per cent of papers, (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Requests approved for special consideration as a percentage of total papers marked, 2009–13



These figures represent the number of requests for special consideration rather than the number of candidates requesting it. An individual candidate may require special consideration for a number of exam papers and is likely to take exams with more than one exam board for which the same special consideration may be appropriate. Special consideration needs to be requested from each exam board.

The proportion of approved requests for special consideration has been decreasing over the past five years for all but one of the exam boards (see table 2).

The two categories of special consideration

A breakdown of figures for the two categories of special consideration has been included in the release (see table 3) and covers:

- those candidates who were present for an assessment but disadvantaged in some way - mark adjustment;
- those candidates who could not be present to complete all the normal assessment requirements - qualification award.

Overall, the percentage of special consideration requests that resulted in a mark adjustment was 93.2 per cent, compared with 93.7 per cent in summer 2012.

The proportion of special consideration requests that had a qualification award granted in the summer 2013 exam series was 6.8 per cent. This is where candidates could not be present for part of the assessment. In summer 2012 this applied to 6.3 per cent of the special consideration requests (see table 3).

Special consideration requests resulting in mark adjustments

The procedures for applying a mark adjustment allow for relatively minor adjustments to a candidate's mark: up to 5 per cent of the maximum mark of a question paper.

The maximum adjustment is reserved for exceptional cases, such as for candidates disadvantaged by the recent death of an immediate family member.

This is the second year exam boards have reported a breakdown of the figures showing the extent of mark adjustments made as the result of special consideration requests (see table 4).

For the second year running, the most frequent mark adjustment was a change of 3 per cent of the total marks available for the exam, to be added to a candidate's overall score. This category is granted for candidates who have had a recent traumatic experience, such as the death of a close friend or distant relative. Of the 340,164 approved requests resulting in a mark adjustment:

- 20 per cent resulted in a 1 per cent mark adjustment;
- 24 per cent resulted in a 2 per cent mark adjustment;
- 25 per cent resulted in a 3 per cent mark adjustment;
- 22 per cent resulted in a 4 per cent mark adjustment;
- 8 per cent resulted in a 5 per cent mark adjustment.

The percentages above have been rounded and, therefore, do not equal 100.

In last year's report, cases that were approved but, when calculated, generated no extra marks were included, of which there were 9,893 approved requests. As these cases have no effect on a candidate's mark, the data are no longer collected from exam boards. Therefore, this category has been removed from table 4, which shows the proportion of each mark adjustment made.

This means the total number of approved requests for mark adjustments, 347,390 (see table 3), will not equal the total of the breakdown for each percentage of mark adjustments, 340,164 (see table 4). The difference of 7,226 is requests for mark adjustments that were approved but, when calculated, generated no extra marks

Background notes

About special consideration

The qualifications covered by this release are regulated by us, the Welsh Government and the CCEA. Each qualifications regulator publishes conditions² that set out the requirements the exam boards it regulates have to meet. These 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.' This may be for a candidate who has temporarily experienced an illness or injury, or some other event outside his or her control, which has had, or is reasonably likely to have had, a material effect on that candidate's ability to take an assessment or demonstrate his or her level of attainment in an assessment.

In addition, the *GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice (2011)*³ aims to promote quality, consistency, accuracy and fairness in assessment and awarding. It helps maintain standards, both within and between exam boards, and from year to year. The code of practice lays down agreed principles, processes and practices for the exam boards that develop and deliver these qualifications.

Section 7 of the code of practice requires exam boards to have procedures for making adjustments to the marks of candidates who have not been able to demonstrate attainment because of exceptional circumstances. Adjustments may be given to candidates who were present for an assessment but disadvantaged due to temporary injury, illness, indisposition or another unforeseen incident immediately before or during the exam's period. These procedures allow for only relatively minor adjustments to a candidate's mark: up to 5 per cent of the maximum mark of a question paper. The maximum adjustment is reserved for exceptional cases, such as candidates disadvantaged by the recent death of an immediate family member. Most adjustments for special consideration are smaller, such as a 2 per cent adjustment of the maximum available mark for candidates who have a minor illness on the day of the exam. Each case is assessed on its merits, and the decision made by the exam

² www.ofqual.gov.uk/documents/general-conditions-of-recognition

www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/docs/accreditation/general_conditions_of_recognition_september_2013.pdf

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/120329generalconditionsen.pdf>

³ www.ofqual.gov.uk/downloads/category/93-codes-of-practice?download=680%3Agcse-gce-principal-learning-and-project-code-of-practice-2011

board is based on various factors, including the severity of the circumstances, the date of the exam in relation to the circumstances, and the nature of the assessment.

The code of practice also requires exam boards to have procedures for making a qualification award by special consideration where a candidate has covered the course but is unable, through temporary illness, injury or indisposition, to be present for the exam of a unit/component and, therefore, cannot complete all assessment requirements.

To be eligible for a qualification award by special consideration, candidates must have met the following minimum requirements:

- For A level, normally at least 50 per cent of the total assessment must have been completed.
- For linear GCSEs, with 100 per cent of the assessment at the end of the course of study, 35 per cent of the total assessment must have been completed.
- For modular GCSE specifications, with assessment opportunities throughout the course of study, 50 per cent of the total assessment must have been completed.

The exam boards specify the eligibility criteria for special consideration and must ensure that the criteria, application procedures and deadlines are available to schools and colleges.

Data source

Exam boards provide the data. They submit data to us for GCSEs and A levels they have awarded in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Data also includes other UK regions such as the Isle of Man and overseas entries.

Rounding

Figures in the commentary are rounded to the nearest 100.

Glossary of terms

A level

Available as advanced level (A level) and advanced subsidiary (AS) qualifications. They are the qualifications that the majority of students use to gain entry to university.

Awarding organisation

An organisation recognised to develop, deliver and award descriptions of qualifications. Also referred to as an exam board.

GCSE

General Certificates of Secondary Education are the main school leaving qualification in England Wales and Northern Ireland. They are available in a range of subjects and can be studied alongside other qualifications. They are generally sat by 15–18 year olds in schools and colleges but are open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification.

Special consideration

Procedures that may result in an adjustment to the marks of candidates who have not been able to demonstrate attainment because of temporary illness, injury, indisposition or another unforeseen incident at the time of the exam.

Your feedback

We would like to hear from the users of our statistical releases.

Users of these statistics

These statistics are of particular interest to recognised exam boards and the Department for Education. Other users include government policy officials, academics, researchers, the public, other government departments in Northern Ireland and Wales, and other interested parties and individuals.

If you use these statistical releases, we would be interested in hearing what you use them for and how well they meet your requirements. We also welcome your feedback on any aspect of these statistical releases, including content, timing and format.

We are continually striving to improve the quality and content of our statistical releases, and we welcome your suggestions or comments. Please send your comments to the Statistics team at statistics@ofqual.gov.uk .

Appendix

Table 1	Total number of papers marked during the summer exam series, by qualification, 2009–13
Table 2	Special consideration requests and approvals during the summer exam series, 2009–13
Table 3	Special consideration requests by candidate present/not present during the summer exam series, 2011–13
Table 4	Approved special consideration requests for a mark adjustment (where candidate was present but disadvantaged) - percentage allocated 2012-13

Table 1: Total number of papers marked during the summer exam series, by qualification, 2009–13

England, Wales & Northern Ireland							
Year	Number of scripts						Total
	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	ICAA(E)	
2009	6,800,493	3,778,240	3,829,081	1,335,063	492,576		16,235,453
2010	6,411,172	3,619,804	3,660,339	1,423,949	538,131		15,653,395
2011	6,089,628	3,661,614	3,238,906	1,610,075	444,771	19,858	15,064,852
2012	5,719,303	3,661,462	2,939,135	1,573,038	467,825	898	14,361,661
2013	5,433,228	3,435,229	2,529,587	1,513,666	422,811	253	13,334,774

Source: EPG exams monitoring data

Notes:

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. 2009 includes GCE, GCSE, Principal Learning, and overseas entries.
3. 2010 includes GCE, GCSE and overseas entries.
4. ICAA(E) awarded GCSEs for the first time in 2011. In previous years, specifications were delivered in conjunction with CCEA.

Table 2: Special consideration requests and approvals during the summer exam series, 2009–13

England, Wales & Northern Ireland								
	Year	Requests for special consideration						Total ¹
		AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	ICAA(E)	
Number of requests for special consideration	2009	143,588	101,522	74,259	33,569	18,220		371,158
	2010	134,269	77,919	65,033	34,094	18,605		329,920
	2011	156,443	82,189	73,690	33,533	26,279	202	372,336
	2012	143,270	90,108	72,734	39,538	20,271	13	365,934
	2013	168,201	105,220	75,074	40,856	23,783	5	413,139
Number of requests approved	2009	140,230	100,819	70,911	29,804	18,002		359,766
	2010	129,429	72,302	62,562	31,981	18,540		314,814
	2011	146,398	80,544	70,517	31,124	25,385	202	354,170
	2012	126,855	87,111	69,941	37,801	19,816	3	341,527
	2013	150,318	92,745	70,709	39,040	19,892	0	372,704
Percentage of requests approved	2009	97.7%	99.3%	95.5%	88.8%	98.8%		96.9%
	2010	96.4%	92.8%	96.2%	93.8%	99.7%		95.4%
	2011	93.6%	98.0%	95.7%	92.8%	96.6%	100.0%	95.1%
	2012	88.5%	96.7%	96.2%	95.6%	97.8%	23.1%	93.3%
	2013	89.4%	88.1%	94.2%	95.6%	83.6%	0.0%	90.2%
Special considerations approved as a percentage of total scripts	2009	2.1%	2.7%	1.9%	2.2%	3.7%		2.2%
	2010	2.0%	2.0%	1.7%	2.2%	3.4%		2.0%
	2011	2.4%	2.2%	2.2%	1.9%	5.7%	1.0%	2.4%
	2012	2.2%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	4.2%	0.3%	2.4%
	2013	2.8%	2.7%	2.8%	2.6%	4.7%	0.0%	2.8%

Source: EPG exams monitoring data

Notes:

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. ICAA(E) awarded GCSEs for the first time in 2011. In previous years, specifications were delivered in conjunction with CCEA.
3. Data relates to applications for mark adjustments and qualification awards and includes applications that received a zero per cent mark adjustment.

Table 3: Special consideration requests by candidate present/not present during the summer exam series, 2011–13

England, Wales & Northern Ireland

	Requests for special consideration							Total
	Year	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	ICAA(E)	
Number of requests for extra marks where candidate was present for assessment	2011	145,478	71,730	69,588	30,368	25,835	174	343,173
	2012	130,397	83,195	68,524	36,044	19,691	13	337,864
	2013	155,856	88,800	71,103	37,552	23,168	5	376,484
Number of requests for extra marks where candidate was present for assessment that were approved	2011	136,637	70,192	67,051	28,053	24,941	174	327,048
	2012	118,129	81,475	66,316	34,849	19,402	3	320,174
	2013	139,353	85,428	67,217	36,046	19,346	0	347,390
Approved requests for extra marks as a percentage of total approved (where candidate was present)	2011	93.3%	87.1%	95.1%	90.1%	98.3%	86.1%	92.3%
	2012	93.1%	93.5%	94.8%	92.2%	97.9%	100.0%	93.7%
	2013	92.7%	92.1%	95.1%	92.3%	97.3%	0.0%	93.2%
Number of requests for a qualification award where candidate was not able to be present for assessment	2011	10,965	10,459	4,102	3,165	444	28	29,163
	2012	12,873	6,913	4,210	3,494	580	0	28,070
	2013	12,345	16,420	3,971	3,304	615	0	36,655
Number of requests for a qualification award that were approved	2011	9,761	10,352	3,466	3,071	444	28	27,122
	2012	8,726	5,636	3,625	2,952	414	0	21,353
	2013	10,965	7,317	3,492	2,994	546	0	25,314
Approved requests for aegrotat award (where candidate was not present), as a percentage of total approved	2011	6.7%	12.9%	4.9%	9.9%	1.7%	13.9%	7.7%
	2012	6.9%	6.5%	5.2%	7.8%	2.1%	0.0%	6.3%
	2013	7.3%	7.9%	4.9%	7.7%	2.7%	0.0%	6.8%
Total number of requests	2011	156,443	82,189	73,690	33,533	26,279	202	372,336
	2012	143,270	90,108	72,734	39,538	20,271	13	365,934
	2013	168,201	105,220	75,074	40,856	23,783	5	413,139
Total number of approvals	2011	146,398	80,544	70,517	31,124	25,385	202	354,170
	2012	126,855	87,111	69,941	37,801	19,816	3	341,527
	2013	150,318	92,745	70,709	39,040	19,892	0	372,704

Source: EPG exams monitoring data

Notes:

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. Data not collected prior to 2011.
3. Data includes mark adjustments of zero per cent.

Table 4: Approved special consideration requests for a mark adjustment (where candidate was present but disadvantaged) - percentage allocated 2012-13

England, Wales & Northern Ireland										
Approved requests for special consideration - Number of cases for GCSE and GCE combined										
	Year	% mark adjustment	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	ICAA(E)	Total	% of total mark adjustments made
Number of approved requests where candidate was present for assessment	2012	1%	25,794	14,882	7,406	3,958	2,891	0	54,931	17.70%
		2%	22,894	22,603	17,547	13,403	2,373	0	78,820	25.40%
		3%	31,350	20,558	19,230	7,552	3,731	2	82,423	26.56%
		4%	25,829	16,666	15,256	6,530	3,075	1	67,357	21.71%
		5%	11,489	4,052	6,426	3,102	1,681	0	26,750	8.62%
	2013	1%	32,568	16,731	9,644	5,155	3,842	0	67,940	19.97%
		2%	26,663	24,130	16,827	12,162	2,862	0	82,644	24.30%
		3%	33,599	21,249	18,458	8,179	4,584	0	86,069	25.30%
		4%	28,545	17,819	16,064	7,217	5,570	0	75,215	22.11%
		5%	12,119	4,210	6,201	3,333	2,433	0	28,296	8.32%
Total	2012		117,356	78,761	65,865	34,545	13,751	3	310,281	
	2013		133,494	84,139	67,194	36,046	19,291	0	340,164	

Source: EPG exams monitoring data

Notes:

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. Data not collected prior to 2012.
3. Zero per cent category removed from data, as it does not affect a candidate's mark. This means the totals will not equal the totals given in table 3.

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