



# Access arrangements in GCSE, AS and A level Qualifications

**Background Information Accompanying Statistical Release for  
2019/20 Academic Year – Northern Ireland**

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# Information about the Statistics

## Purpose

In this release, CCEA Regulation presents data on access arrangements approved for GCSE, AS and A level unit/component assessments taken during the 2019/20 academic year.

## Geographical Coverage

This report presents data on appeals in Northern Ireland (NI). Five awarding organisations offer GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in NI:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC)

These five awarding organisations are members of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), which issues regulations, instructions and guidance on examination conduct and administration, including the appeals process.

## Covid-19

In March 2020, the Minister for the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) announced that examinations in schools and colleges due to take place in summer 2020 would be cancelled in order to help fight the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The ministerial direction stated that learners due to sit examinations and assessments in summer 2020 should receive results where possible, through receiving calculated grades, in order to allow them to progress to further education, training or employment.

In referring to the data, it should be noted that, due to the cancellation of the summer 2020 examinations series, it can be expected that the number of centres with candidates sitting examinations and the number of candidates sitting examinations is lower than previous years.

## Access Arrangements

Access arrangements are the provisions made for candidates, agreed before they take an assessment, ensuring 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 examinations or non-examination assessments who meet the eligibility criteria. 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 covered in a separate report on [special consideration](#).

If a student has a disability (as defined by the Special Education Needs and Disability Order 2005 (SEND O 2005)) i.e. 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 apply for reasonable adjustments, which are a form of access arrangement. Awarding organisations have a duty, under SEND O 2005, to make reasonable adjustments to assessments for students with disabilities who, because of their disability, would otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage when demonstrating their skills, knowledge or understanding in an assessment. SEND O 2005 sets out that awarding organisations 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.

The qualifications covered in this release are regulated by CCEA Regulation, which publishes conditions 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.'

CCEA Regulation 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 eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK, and defines [access arrangements](#) as pre-examination adjustments for candidates based on evidence of need and normal way of working. JCQ publishes an [annual document](#) setting out the standard arrangements that examination centres can request of awarding organisations and the relevant eligibility and evidential criteria. Other arrangements can also be requested without needing the approval of awarding organisations. However, the data in this release only cover those types of arrangements which are processed through JCQ's Access Arrangements Online system.

Any candidates taking examinations or non-examination assessments for GCSE, AS or A level qualifications who meet the eligibility criteria for an access arrangement can receive approval for it. Individual candidates may require more than one arrangement (e.g. 25% extra time and a computer reader). Once granted, an arrangement will apply for up to 26 months, although applications based on temporary conditions will last for one examination series only.

Centres should 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, 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.

The approval of some arrangements is delegated to centres where awarding organisations judge there is no advantage to candidates in relation to the knowledge, skills and understanding being tested (for example, the use of a word processor). The range of arrangements that centres must register with awarding organisations has varied over time.

## **Data Source**

Access Arrangements Online is JCQ's centralised system used by centres to request access arrangements. It enables centres to make one central application for each candidate rather than applying to each awarding organisation separately. JCQ sends CCEA Regulation data on access arrangements from Access Arrangements Online. While other types of access arrangements 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). Normally, each awarding organisation submits data to Ofqual, the regulator for England, in relation to the number of modified papers that are referred directly to them for approval, and the number of candidates taking examinations and the number of centres. Due to the cancellation of the examinations, modified paper data was not collected in summer 2020.

A full description of modified papers is published by JCQ. JCQ and the awarding organisations send data to Ofqual annually who then share this with CCEA regulation. For this release, Ofqual received data from all the awarding organisations that were in a position to award these qualifications in Northern Ireland.

## **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 awarding organisations and JCQ. CCEA

Regulation 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.

## Revisions

Once published, data are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to update data that were previously unavailable or subject to change.

## Confidentiality and Rounding

To ensure confidentiality of the accompanying data, if the value is less than 3, it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero values.

Total values of rows or columns are calculated using unrounded figures; the sum of rounded figures may differ from the total reported. Some totals may be masked to prevent small counts being calculable.

## Status

These statistics are classified as Official Statistics.

## Useful links

Previous releases of access arrangements statistics for Northern Ireland as well as those for England and Wales can be found [here](#).

## 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 [ccearegulation@ccea.org.uk](mailto:ccearegulation@ccea.org.uk).

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This publication is available at [ccea.org.uk/regulation/statistics](https://ccea.org.uk/regulation/statistics).

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