



Ms Helen Hayes MP
Chair
Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

23 July 2025

By email only to educom@parliament.uk

Dear Ms Hayes

I write to you to update the Education Select Committee on an announcement Ofqual made on 17th July 2025 concerning approvals of 25% extra time and other access arrangements in GCSE and AS and A level examinations.

In November 2024 we published, as we have done in previous years, official statistics summarising access arrangements valid for use in the 2023/2024 academic year. The data for this publication is supplied to Ofqual by the four examination boards who are responsible for approving access arrangements, in line with their responsibilities under relevant legislation.

These statistics were the subject of some significant public interest and debate when published and subsequently, largely focussed around the apparently high proportion of candidates for whom 25% extra time was approved. The published figure was 30.1%.

As in previous years, the statistics were caveated in the Ofqual report. Specifically, the publication points out the following:

"This release provides information on the number of access arrangements approved by awarding organisations for GCSE, AS and A level in England 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."

"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."

The statistics were caveated because we knew it was possible that the data might have overstated the true prevalence of access arrangements, but we did not know to

what extent until we had ourselves analysed the full candidate-level data. Despite the caveat, understandably, public debate tended to focus on the published headline figures.

Ofqual has been working to understand in more detail the reliability of the data on access arrangements for some while. Following the publication of the 2023/2024 data in November and the public interest this attracted, I was clear that we must intensify work on this and provide greater clarity to the public on this important issue.

We have now completed the first stage of this work. To do this, we asked examination boards to give us the full candidate-level data sets for approvals of access arrangements (rather than the aggregated data they normally supply to Ofqual), and the necessary technical information needed to interpret this data. We then undertook our own close analysis, reconciling these very large data sets with actual exam entries, initially for two exam series, those of summer 2024 and 2023. While this reconciliation task has presented some difficulties resulting from data inconsistencies (non-matching candidate names for example), we have been able to establish that the proportion of candidates with grants of 25% extra time within each of the two years is much lower than the previously published headline figures led us to believe was the case.

Because of the marginal uncertainties caused by data inconsistencies I reference above, we are not currently able to pinpoint a specific figure, but we have established with a high degree of certainty that it lies within a range which is broadly aligned to the total figures for SEN in the relevant school population.

It is important to note that this is a reporting correction and does not invalidate the access arrangements approved to date or change the process for approving such arrangements.

Some public debate was focussed specifically around the differing proportions of students with approvals for 25% extra time in state-funded and independent schools. While the overall proportion of candidates with approvals for 25 % extra time at cohort level is much lower than previously assumed from published data, we believe at this stage that there remains a difference between the two types of centre. We will publish data to help greater public understanding of this issue later in the year.

Because the outcomes of this work paint a different picture of access arrangements, specifically approvals of 25% extra time, we have agreed with the Office for Statistics Regulation that we should mark Ofqual's publications on this particular topic as 'withdrawn'. This decision does not affect any other statistics Ofqual publishes. We will now continue work both on previous years' statistics and on determining how we can secure from the examination boards more accurate data by specific exam entry cohort to inform future publications on this issue. We expect to provide an updated analysis and a plan to develop future reporting on this issue before the end of 2025.

We also plan to publish a report explaining our review of evidence (including the new data analysis), as well as research into perceptions of 25% extra time in exams. This long-term research, as well as our work to improve the official statistics, shows our commitment to improving the understanding and transparency of this important part of the qualifications system.

I trust this letter provides a helpful update on the issues associated with access arrangements, in particular 25% extra time, in the light of public commentary on the

issue. I would of course be glad to answer any specific queries that may arise on this or indeed any other issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Bauckham'.

Sir Ian Bauckham CBE
Chief Regulator.