



Bill Wiggin MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

8 April 2019

Dear Mr Wiggin,

Parliamentary Question 233472: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that modified versions of GCSE and A Level exams are available for young people with a visual impairment; and what steps his Department takes to monitor that availability.

Parliamentary Question 233473: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that young people with vision impairment are provided with past papers and exams in their stated preferred format in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP has asked Ofqual to respond to you directly regarding your recent parliamentary questions. A copy of this response will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Awarding Organisations who offer GCSEs and A levels are subject to a duty (under the Equality Act 2010), and which is reflected in our regulatory requirements, to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students to remove or reduce the disadvantage that they would otherwise experience due to their disability when taking their assessments. For students who are disabled due to visual impairment, this might be in the form of a modified exam paper or through the use of assistive technology.

The four exam boards routinely provide examinations in a variety of different reading formats, including:

- enlarged print (available in 3 different sizes),
- Braille (both UEB and SEB),
- tactile diagrams (with either braille or print labels), and
- electronic (PDF) format for use with computer-reading software.

If these standard arrangements do not meet the needs of a particular student, then the student (or, more usually, their school or college) can request alternative formats. The awarding organisation – in line with its Equality Act duties – must provide such a format where that would be a reasonable adjustment.

In November 2018 Ofqual published Official Statistics on access arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels during the 2017/18 academic year. While the overall number of approved access arrangements fell 0.5% on the previous year, the number of modified question papers rose by 4%. This followed a 26% increase the previous year. There were 4,225 discrete modified exam papers issued for GCSE, AS and A level exams in summer 2018, in addition to 2,373 standard papers.

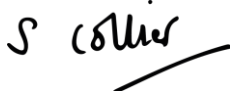
Schools and colleges can download past GCSE, AS and A level exam papers from exam boards' websites. Where the exam boards have put papers into large print, usually 18pt or 36pt, these are also available to download. A school or college that would like a hard copy of a large-print past paper should ask the relevant exam board.

Where a school or college would like a past paper in Braille, exam boards direct them to the Braille agency used for that paper. The agency will print a hard copy of the paper and send it to the centre. The Braille agencies have traditionally recovered the costs of printing and posting past papers in Braille from the school or college that has requested them. (The live papers are, of course, provided at no extra cost.) Two exam boards have decided to absorb these costs from the start of this month. The other two exam boards are considering whether to do the same.

If the past paper requested was not modified for the live sitting, the school or college should ask the relevant exam board to modify it. We understand from the exam boards that they usually provide past papers in modified form in response to any such requests. We have not received any recent complaints about lack of access to modified past papers.

I do hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely



Sally Collier
Chief Regulator