



Catherine West MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

5 August 2019

Dear Ms West

PQ 279121: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of (a) community, (b) academy, (c) grammar and (d) independent school students were given special consideration in exams due to mental health problems in each of the last three years.

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

Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England, and therefore regulates the exam boards that offer GCSE and A level qualifications. Exam boards offer three different types of special consideration to students affected by illness, injury or other events outside their control:

- Changes to the way assessments are taken for students with temporary injuries or illnesses (sometimes referred to as “access arrangements”) – for example to allow a student with anxiety to take their examinations in a separate room, or take rest breaks;
- A small number of extra marks for students whose exam performance is affected by an event outside of their control – for example a recent family bereavement, or illness;
- Awarding the qualification to a student who, because of an event outside of their control, has not completed all the assessments that would normally be required (a student must have completed at least 25% of the assessment to be eligible for this type of special consideration).

Each year we publish official statistics on special consideration awarded in the GCSE and A level summer exam series, which can be accessed online.¹

Our official statistics on special consideration do not break down the data by centre type for these qualifications as we are not confident this information is sufficiently reliable. Schools and colleges submit information to exam boards using a code to indicate their centre type, as required by JCQ (the Joint Council for Qualifications², the exam boards' representative body). JCQ made us aware of concerns about the quality of this centre categorisation. As we collect this data from awarding organisations we do not use the centre type to prepare the statistics because of the unreliability of this aspect of the data. We do not use information on centre type to prepare the statistics. Earlier this year, the JCQ issued new guidance to centres on centre type codes. Ofqual will keep the quality of the data under review in light of this and consider whether to report centre type in future official statistics.

We currently have no way of reliably identifying candidates from data submitted by awarding organisations who were given special consideration due to mental health problems specifically. We are investigating the process for Awarding Organisations reporting data on special consideration and access arrangements to us. We will review our practices on publishing this data based on the findings of this investigation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Collier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Sally Collier
Chief Regulator

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-consideration-in-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2018-exam-series>

² <https://www.jcq.org.uk/>