

Damian Hinds MP
Member of Parliament for East Hampshire
House of Commons
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

2 July 2025

Ref: PQ 59730

Sent by email only to:
damian.hinds.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Hinds,

Re: PQ 59730 To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the time series trends are of the proportion of entrants for (a) GCSEs and (b) other public examinations that use a method other than hand writing for any written, as opposed to practical or coursework, assessment for (i) special educational need or disability reasons and (ii) other reasons from the earliest year for which data are available.

Minister McKinnell has asked Ofqual to respond directly to your recent Parliamentary Question. A copy of this response will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Ofqual publishes [official statistics](#) on the number of exam board-approved access arrangements valid for use for each academic year for GCSEs, AS and A levels in England. This includes statistics on the number of approvals for a scribe or speech recognition, which a student may use as an alternative to handwriting. The [most recent official statistics](#) show that there were 49,080 approvals for a scribe or speech recognition valid for use in the 2023/24 academic year.

Ofqual first reported England-only access arrangements official statistics for the [2016/17 academic year](#). Those statistics noted that there were 41,960 approvals for a scribe in 2016/17. The associated [data table](#) contained figures dating back to 2013/14, when there were 42,080 approvals for a scribe. From [2017/18](#), the arrangement began being recorded as “scribe/speech recognition”, with 41,070 approvals in that year.

It should be noted that an access arrangement for a long-term condition is valid for up to 26 months, which means that any access arrangement approved for a

long-term condition may contribute to the statistics over multiple years, even if the student did not sit exams in each of those years.

The exam boards' arrangements for granting access arrangements are [set out by the Joint Council for Qualifications \(JCQ\)](#), their representative body. JCQ notes that access arrangements are awarded to "candidates with specific needs, such as special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries". However, the access arrangements data that Ofqual receives from the exam boards does not record the nature of a student's need, so it does not capture what proportion of approvals address a special educational need or disability as opposed to another type of need.

As an alternative to handwriting, JCQ allows a student to use a word processor in their exams and assessments where that it is the student's normal way of working in their school or college. JCQ designates a word processor to be a "centre-delegated arrangement", meaning that a school or college can provide a student with a word processor without needing exam board approval. Access arrangements data is only collected for exam board-approved arrangements, meaning that the official statistics do not include data on the arrangement of a word processor.

Ofqual does not currently report access arrangements data for other regulated qualifications.

Yours sincerely,

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

Sir Ian Bauckham

Chief Regulator, Ofqual