Access Arrangements for GCSE and A Level

2016 to 2017 academic year

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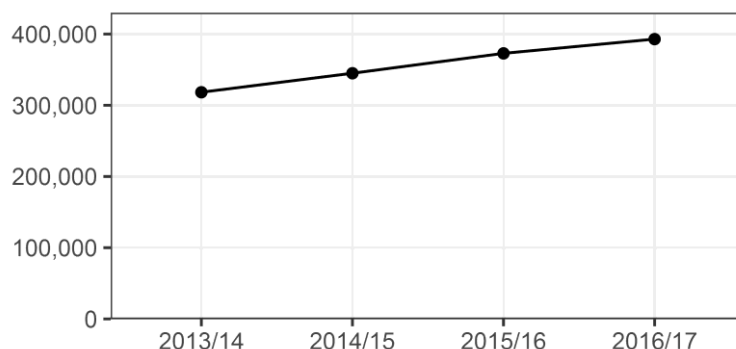
This report provides information on the number of access arrangements approved for GCSE, AS and A level, in England during the 2016/17 academic year.

Number of approved arrangements

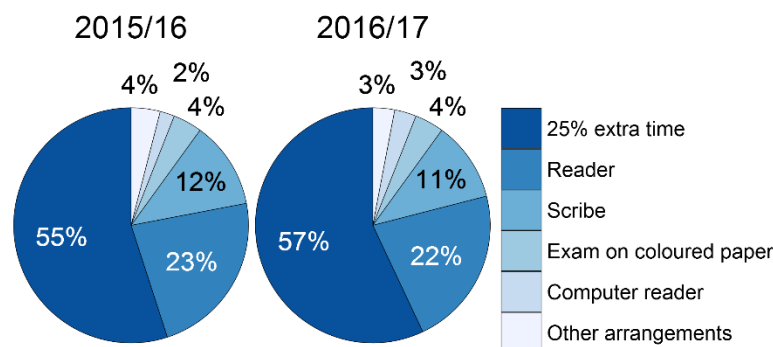There were 392,955 approved access arrangements, up 5% on 2015/16.

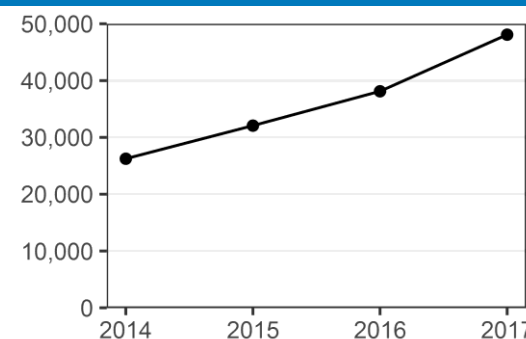### Proportion of centres with approved arrangements

91%

5,380 centres (91% of all centres) had approved access arrangements for one or more of their students, compared to 90% of all centres last year.

Proportion of each type of approved arrangement

25% extra time arrangements made up 57% of all approved arrangements in 2016/17, compared to 55% in 2015/16.

2015/16: 4%, 2%, 4%, 12%, 55%, 23%
2016/17: 3%, 3%, 4%, 11%, 57%, 22%

Legend:
- 25% extra time
- Reader
- Scribe
- Exam on coloured paper
- Computer reader
- Other arrangements

Number of modified papers

There were 48,080 modified papers this year, up 26% on 2016, mostly due to an increase in non-interactive electronic question papers.

Access arrangements

In this report, Ofqual presents data on access arrangements approved for GCSE and A level exams during the 2016/17 academic year in England.

Access arrangements are the provisions made for students, agreed before they take an assessment, to ensure 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. These should not be confused with post-examination adjustments to the marks of students 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.

Any students taking GCSE or A level exams or non-exam assessments who meet the exam boards' eligibility criteria can have an access arrangement. Individual students may require more than one form of access arrangement. According to JCQ guidelines, once granted, an arrangement will apply for up to 26 months, although applications based on temporary conditions will last for one exam series only.

Due to differences in data collection, figures for modified papers are presented separately from other types of access arrangement towards the end of this report.

In this release, all figures are rounded to the nearest 5 to ensure confidentiality of data.

Reports published in previous years included data for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland as well. As such, historical figures in this year's report reflect England only figures and may therefore differ from previously published figures. Following a transition arrangement with Qualifications Wales (the regulator in Wales) and CCEA (the regulator in Northern Ireland), Ofqual will publish separate data tables for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland without commentary for the academic year 2016/17.

Further information on this release is available in the background information as well as data tables accompanying this report.

Most common types of access arrangements, 2013/14 to 2016/17

25% extra time remains the most common type of arrangement

The top five most common types of arrangement
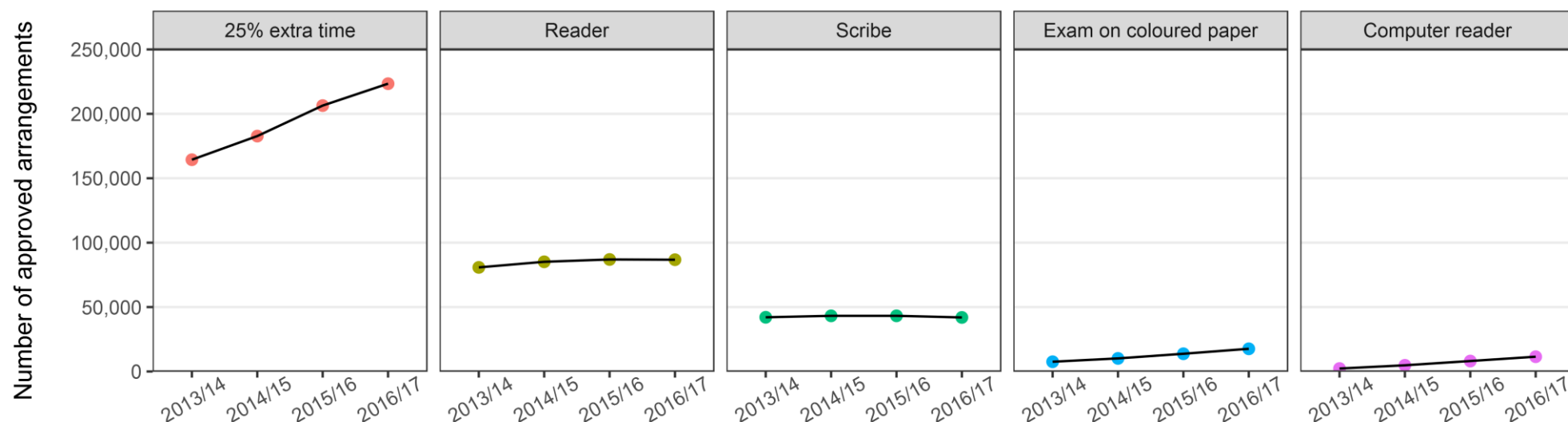
Number and proportion of each type of access arrangement for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years

Type of arrangement	Number		% change	% of students taking exams	
	2015/16	2016/17		2015/16 cohort	2016/17 cohort
25% extra time	206,405	223,405	▲ 8.2%	12.4	15.7
Reader	86,950	86,765	▼ 0.2%	5.2	6.1
Scribe	43,205	41,960	▼ 2.9%	2.6	2.9
Exam on coloured paper	13,755	17,605	▲ 28.0%	0.8	1.2
Computer reader	8,110	11,460	▲ 41.3%	0.5	0.8
Other arrangements	14,505	11,760	▼ 23.3%	-	-
Total	372,930	392,955	▲ 5.4%	-	-

'Other arrangements' and 'Total' contain multiple types of arrangements whereby individual students can be in receipt of multiple arrangements.

However, the number of approved arrangements as a % of students taking exams can only be calculated when 1 access arrangement is granted per candidate. Therefore, these figures cannot be calculated for these two rows.

Modified question papers

Requests for modified question papers are made by schools and colleges in advance of a specific exam series. Modified papers are prepared for students with, for example, a range of visual impairments and significant language comprehension disorders in order to allow them to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding.

A request for a modified paper is made for each individual exam paper (whereas for the other types of access arrangements given in this release one request is made for each candidate across all exams). Therefore, an individual candidate may request multiple modified papers in a single exam series. The figures reported in this section are also for the summer exam series only (whereas the rest of the data reported in this release covers the whole academic year). For these reasons, data for modified papers is presented separately from the other access arrangements.

The number and proportion of modified papers in the summer exam series has increased over time
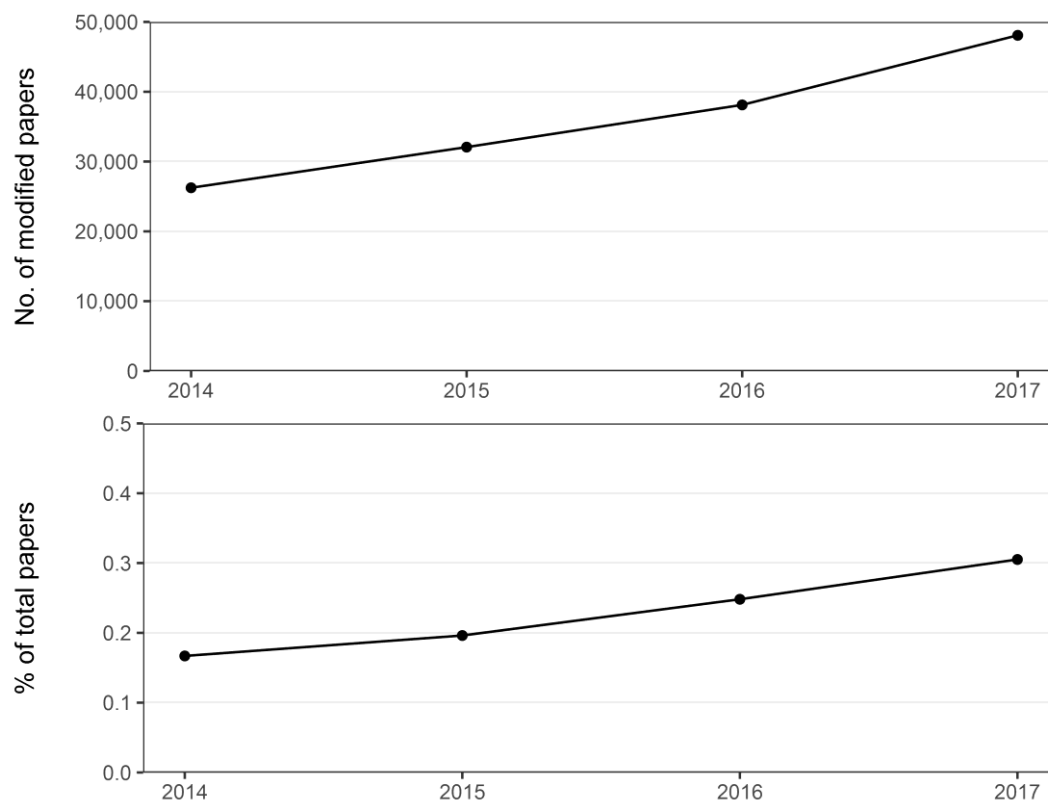
There were 48,080 modified question papers produced in the summer 2017 exam series, an increase of 26% compared with 2016 (from 38,115) (the top graph).

Modified papers have also represented an increasingly greater proportion of the total number of papers produced in each series (the bottom graph).

These increases may be because of the introduction of new types of modified papers in recent years (for example, the introduction of non-interactive electronic question papers in 2014), and better information being available to centres, parents, and students.

The number of modified question papers issued for the summer 2017 exam series (48,080) accounted for small proportion (0.3%) of the 15.8 million papers marked for GCSE and A level exams, an increase on last year when the proportion was 0.2% (38,115 of 15.4 million papers).

Most common types of modified papers

Non-interactive electronic question papers are the most common type of modified paper

Number and proportion of each type of modified paper in 2016 and 2017

Type of modified paper	2016	2017	% change
Non-interactive electronic QPs	14,110	20,815	▲ 47.5%
18-point bold papers	12,570	14,785	▲ 17.6%
24-point bold papers	8,410	9,625	▲ 14.4%
Braille	1,185	1,130	▼ 4.9%
Tactile diagrams with print labels	720	595	▼ 17.2%
Remaining formats	1,115	1,135	▲ 1.5%
Total	38,115	48,080	▲ 26.1%
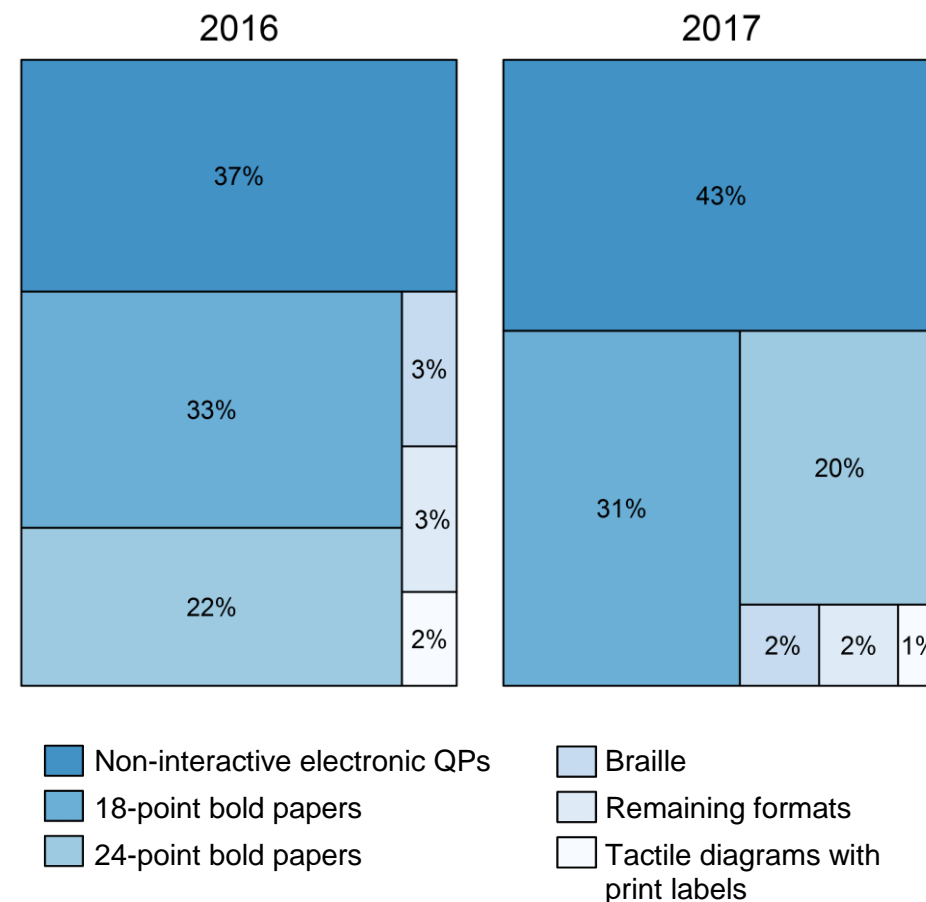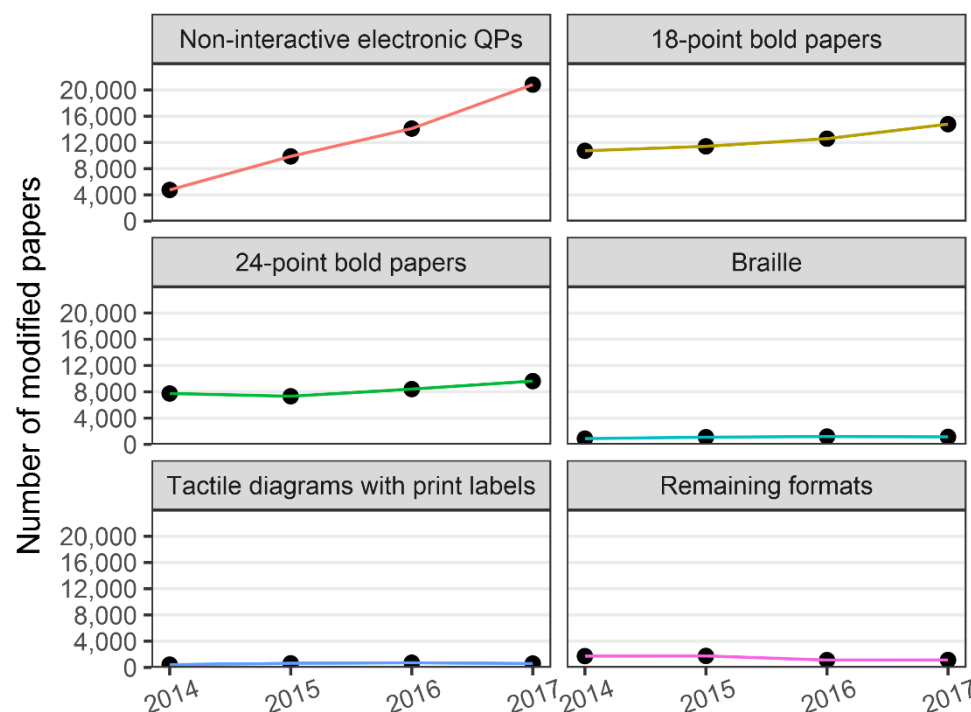
'Remaining formats' includes less frequently used modified papers such as modified language, transcripts of listening test/video, and other formats (detailed breakdown given in data tables).

Centre type categories

The access arrangements report published in the previous year included breakdown of data by centre type. However, recently there has been some concern on how centres classify themselves according to the JCQ centre type codes. JCQ is currently in the process of reviewing the centre type categories and looking to provide centres with support in deciding the correct categorisation. We have therefore not reported centre type breakdown in this year's release and are working with JCQ to improve the categorisation before it can be published.

These official statistics were withdrawn on 17 July 2025

In 2025, Ofqual analysed a more detailed access arrangements dataset that we had requested from exam boards. Our analysis highlighted that our previously published official statistics on access arrangements overstated the number of approved access arrangements in place for the exam cohort in each year. For more details, see https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/shedding-new-light-on-access-arrangements-data

Using this new more detailed dataset, we are strengthening our methodologies for analysis and quality assurance and plan to publish revised figures in our 2025 release. We intend for this release to include the academic years between 2020 to 2021 and 2024 to 2025, for which we have the new data.

While we complete that work, we are withdrawing the previously published statistics because of the limitations we have identified through our analysis.

This issue does not affect the figures relating to modified papers, which are based on a different data source and which are now available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modified-papers-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-2014-to-2024

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Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone   0300 303 3344
Textphone   0300 303 3345
Helpline   0300 303 3346