

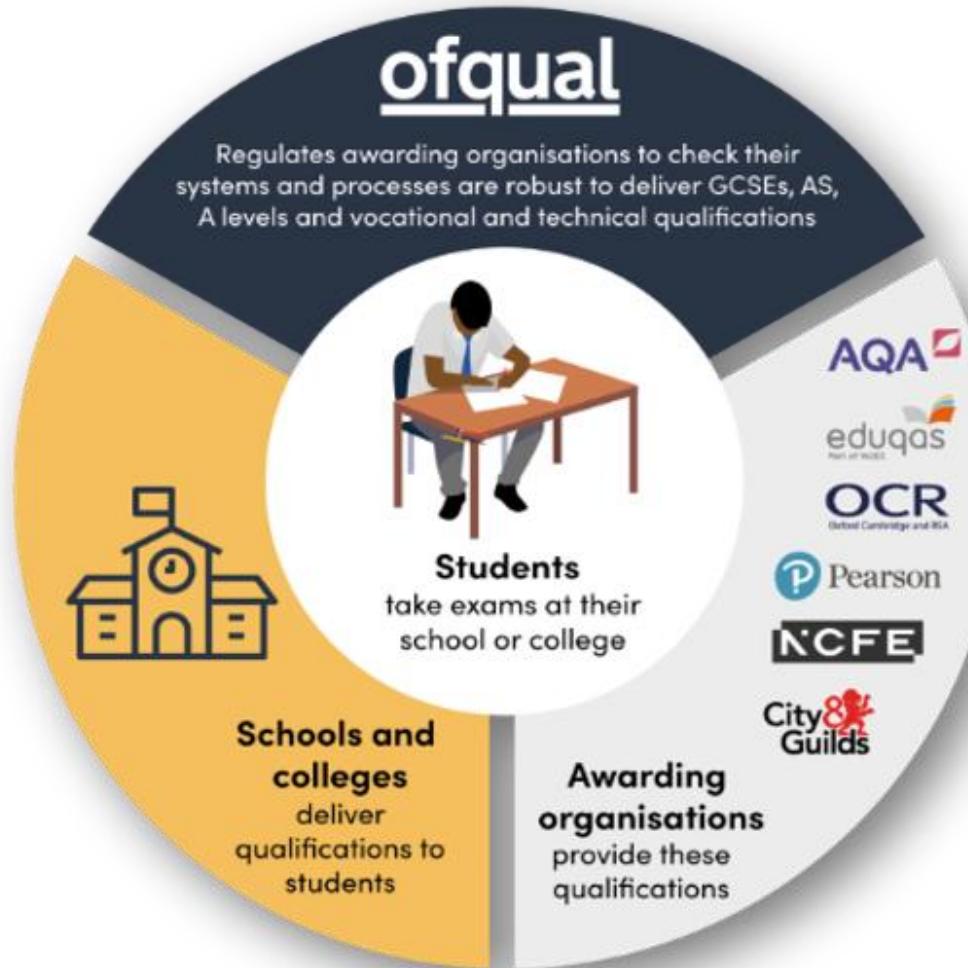
Qualification accessibility

Sian Blount, Associate
Director Policy

NAEO SENCo conference 2026

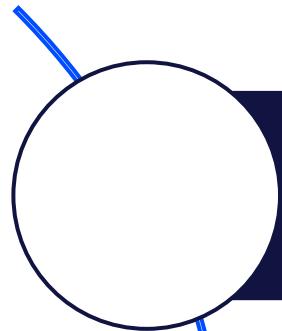


Roles and responsibilities

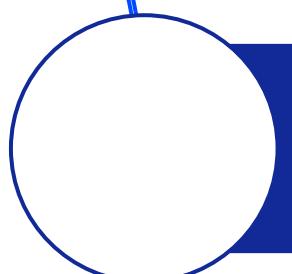


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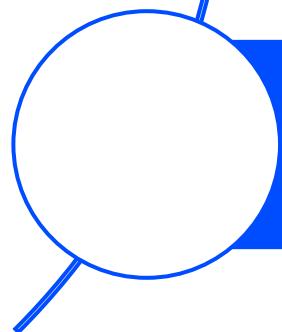
The role Ofqual plays in qualifications



Qualifications must accurately reflect what students know, understand and can do at the time of assessment.

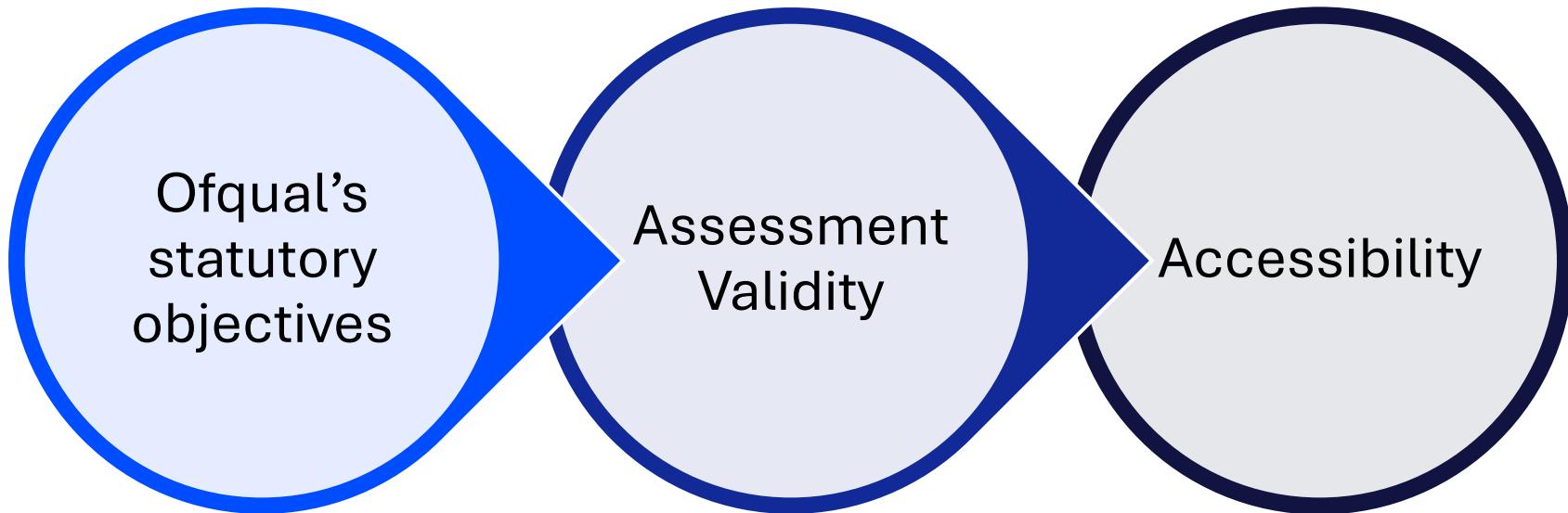


They must be valid, trusted and hold their value over time.



Trusted, reliable and fair qualifications unlock future opportunities.

Accessibility of assessment



Guidance on designing and developing accessible assessments

- Ofqual [statutory guidance](#) on how to make exams and assessments as accessible as possible, introduced in May 2022.
- Our guidance is kept under review – initial evaluation shows it is delivering positive outcomes.
- Accessibility is a priority following Curriculum and Assessment Review.

If you become aware of any concerns about accessibility of an exam or assessment, please inform the relevant awarding organisation

Ofqual's view of an effective access arrangements system

Enables students to receive appropriate arrangements for their needs

Is manageable for schools, colleges and other exam centres

Commands public confidence

Access arrangements and reasonable adjustments

- **Changes** made to an assessment, or the way an assessment is taken, that allow students with **specific needs** to access the assessment and demonstrate their **knowledge, skills and understanding**.
- **Must not change** what is being assessed and must not give the student an **unfair advantage or disadvantage**.

Reasonable adjustments

- Legal duty under the Equality Act 2010
- Reduce or remove the substantial disadvantage caused by a student's disability

Other arrangements

- Adjustments for students who are not disabled but have an accessibility need
- For example, a student who has a temporary illness or injury



Responsibilities in access arrangements

Awarding organisations

Ofqual

Schools and colleges

EHRC



Regulatory report – access arrangements, including 25% extra time



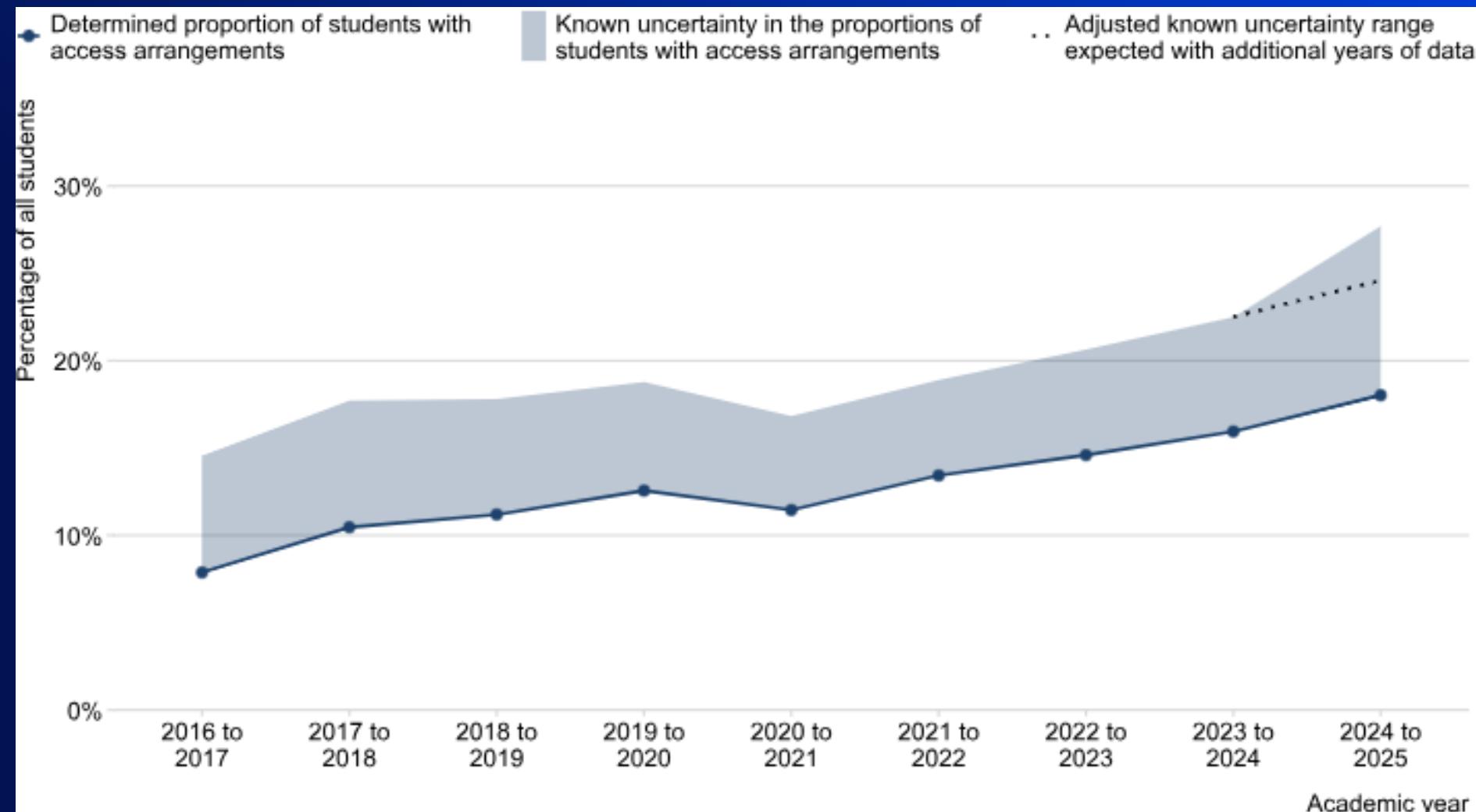
Published November 2025, alongside
revised official statistics and new research



Summarises our wider work on AAs, including
our data and research

Access arrangements data 2024/25

Figure 1. Proportion of students with at least one approved access arrangement valid for use in each academic year





Our main findings:

- Centres face challenges meeting growing demand for access arrangements
- Support for the core principle that access arrangements should be based on a student's individual needs
- Limited evidence of time pressure in GCSE, AS and A level exams
- Opportunities to further improve the system

What does this mean for access arrangements?

Based on our findings, we expect exam boards to:

- review and improve the access arrangements system, focusing on the clarity and accessibility of the information they provide
- ensure that their requirements allow students to receive appropriate access arrangements for their needs while balancing school and college workload
- improve data about exam board approved access arrangements
- strengthen how they monitor that the system is functioning as it should
- take account of potential unintended speediness during assessment design and consider the risks this would present to assessment validity



Consultation: On-screen assessment

- 11 December to **5 March 2026**
- Online submission: [Regulating on-screen assessment - GOV.UK](#)
- Evidence base published alongside the consultation
- A controlled and carefully managed approach
- On-screen assessment **maintains or enhances accessibility** for students with special educational needs and disabilities
- All views will inform our final approach

Ofqual resources

Key information:

- [Ofqual guide for schools and colleges 2026](#)
- [Ofqual student guide to exams and assessments in 2026](#)
- [Consultations page](#)

Keep up to date:

- [Latest updates on regulated qualifications, exams and assessments](#)
- [Sign up to Ofqual's rolling update](#)
- [Subscribe to The Ofqual blog](#)

Closing thoughts



Qualifications should be as accessible as possible for all students but ultimately, they need to assess what a student knows, understands and can do.



Accessibility should be built into the design of qualifications – current practice and a priority following the Curriculum and Assessment Review.



Students should receive appropriate access arrangements based on their individual needs.



Share your views as those working with students taking qualifications.