

Introduction

Summer 2022 saw a full exam series for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications delivered for the first time since 2019.

This is a significant achievement for all in the sector, particularly in light of the various changes to exams to recognise the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The summer 2022 exam series marks an important first step towards pre-pandemic assessment arrangements.

The series was possible because of the substantial efforts of everyone involved. This included teachers, exams officers, school and college leaders and support staff and, above all, students themselves who have shown considerable resilience in the face of disruption to their learning. Exam boards also implemented new assessment arrangements on a significant scale, and at pace, with input from Ofqual and the Department for Education (DfE).

Ofqual employs a range of approaches to achieve our goal of regulating on behalf of students of all ages, making sure that GCSEs, AS and A levels are good quality, and ensuring exam boards treat students fairly if problems arise. We determine whether it is best to set rules and provide advice to the exam boards, monitor, or make regulatory interventions depending on the context.

As with any summer exam series, there were some issues to manage. Some of these related to the aspects of qualification delivery which were new this year, such as advance information, where there was greater potential for things to go wrong because of their untested nature and the way in which they differ from normal exams. Others concerned routine aspects of exam delivery.

Overall, there were fewer incidents reported in exam boards' normal delivery processes in summer 2022 than in 2019, although the number of issues is comparable when novel aspects of delivery such as advance information are included.

While there were some issues with the advance information notices, the majority of these were addressed ahead of the exams. There were 4 question paper errors resulting from the advance information this summer, 2 of which had the potential to significantly impact students.

This report includes a summary of those issues. It describes how Ofqual monitored the delivery of the series, the actions Ofqual took and the resulting actions by exam boards. It includes issues identified in the lead up to, during and immediately after students took exams and exam boards issued results for summer 2022.

This report focuses on GCSE, AS and A level qualifications offered in England in summer 2022, and all data concerns exams taken in England only. The report does not cover the November 2022 exam series for GCSE English language and GCSE maths.

Assessment arrangements differed considerably in 2020 and 2021 when summer exams did not take place. Comparative figures in this report are generally therefore from 2019, the last year in which summer exams took place in these qualifications. It should be noted, however, that the package of support provided to students in 2022 meant that the context was different from previous years where assessment was by exam. For this reason, it is not always possible to draw direct comparisons with 2019. Where this is the case, we explain why.

The [unprecedented package of support for students taking exams in 2022](#) created some extra challenges for delivery, over and above the usual production, distribution and processing of exam scripts. These included:

- changes to non-exam assessment in many subjects to take account of the public health restrictions in place at the time students were completing the work
- some choice of content taught in some GCSE subjects
- production of advance information, which exam boards published on 7 February
- delivery of formulae and revised equation sheets for students to use in class and during their exams in GCSE maths, physics and combined science

These adaptations added to the complexity of the summer exam series and increased the risks to the secure and timely delivery of results.

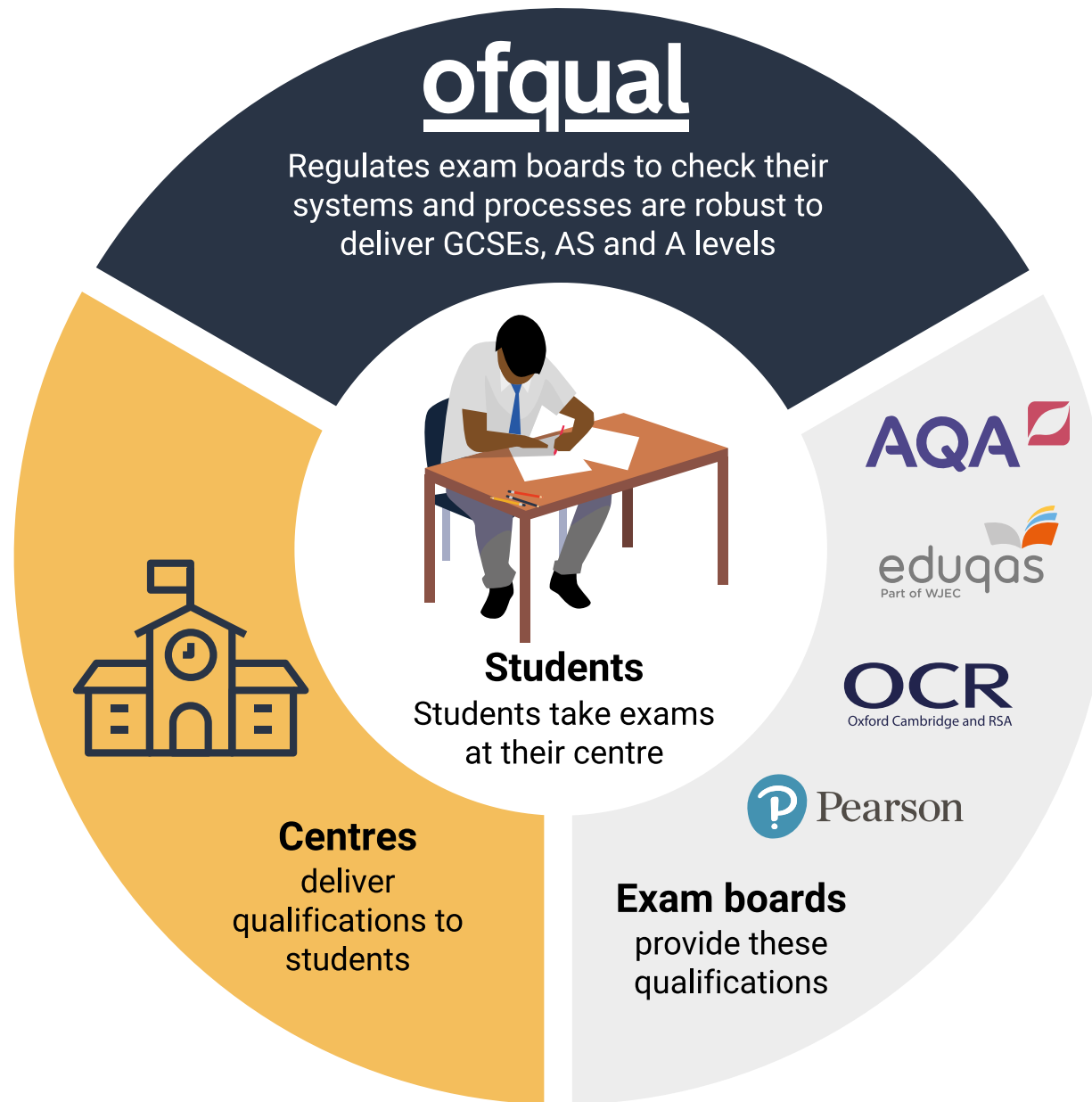
Each exam board is responsible for managing, and reporting to Ofqual, any issues with the delivery of their qualifications. Such issues can occur at any time but they are more likely to occur in the run-up to, and during, the summer exam series. When such issues arise, Ofqual monitors the exam board's actions closely, to make sure they do all they can to minimise the impact on students.

Ofqual's immediate priority during the summer exam series is to make sure students get results that are delivered on time and reflect their performance. But it is also important to make sure exam boards take action to minimise the possibility of an issue recurring. Once results are released, Ofqual follows up each incident with the relevant exam board to make sure they are taking appropriate corrective actions. We also evaluate the cause of each incident, its impact and how effectively it was managed. We decide if any regulatory action is necessary at this point.

Background: the 2022 context

Ofqual regulates the 4 exam boards that award GCSEs, AS and A levels in England. The exam boards – AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC (Eduqas) – provide these qualifications to schools, colleges and other exam centres. These are referred to as ‘centres’ in this report.

These centres, in turn, enable students to take the qualifications. Ofqual monitors each stage of this process in the interests of students, so that the results they receive are a fair reflection of what they know, understand and can do.



The roles of Ofqual, exam boards and centres in the delivery of GCSEs, AS and A levels

A return to exams in summer 2022 was a big step towards normality. There were some changes made to the summer 2022 assessment arrangements, however, to recognise the impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning during the 2-year courses of study students would have followed.

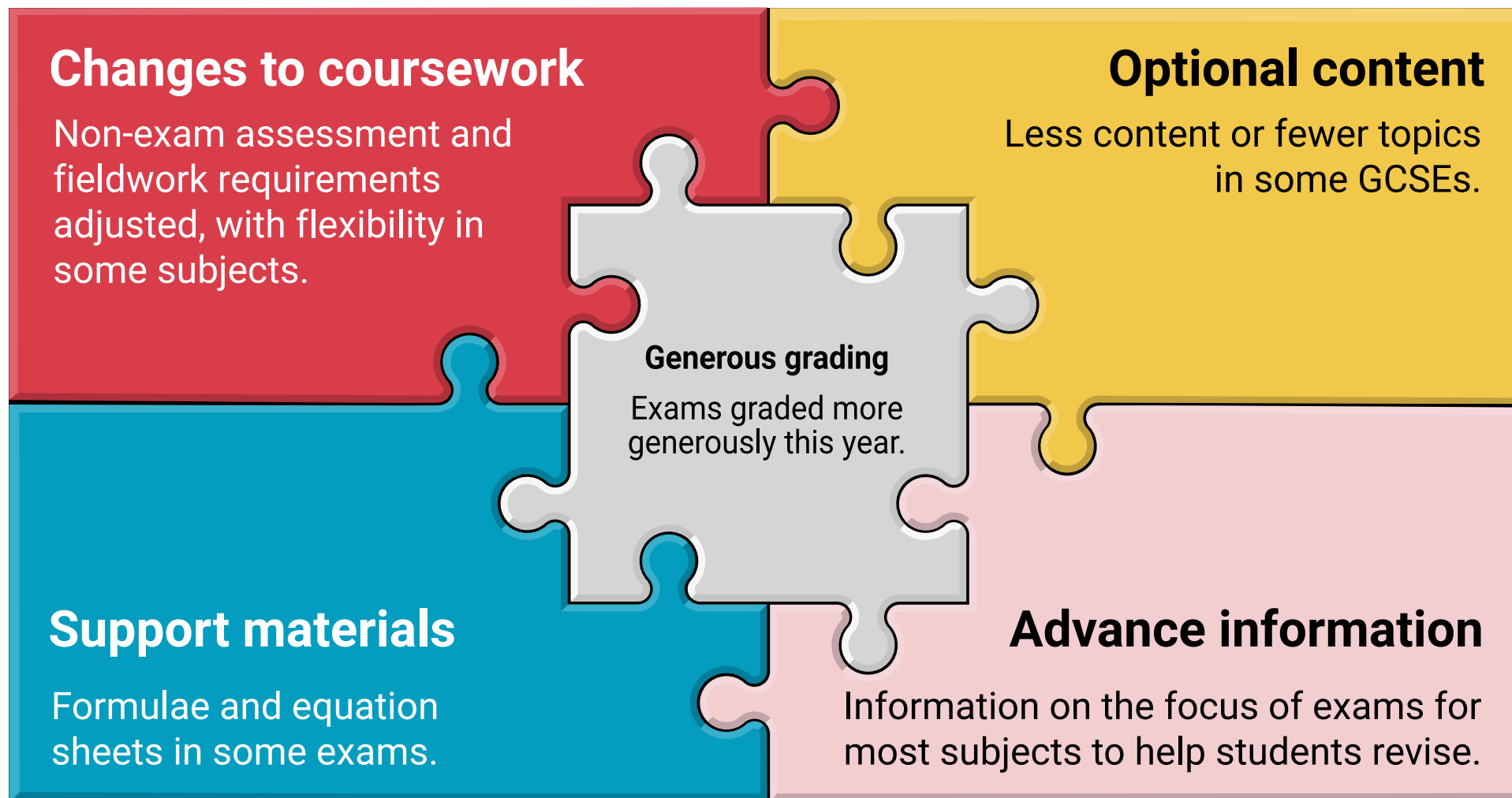
Chief Regulator's listening tour

Ofqual's Chief Regulator, Dr Jo Saxton, visited schools and colleges across the length and breadth of the country, from Blackpool to Plymouth, to hear directly from students, teachers and school leaders.

Dr Saxton spoke to more than 100 senior staff and more than 200 students from more than 60 schools and colleges. These visits allowed the Chief Regulator to hear feedback directly from students and apprentices and sit alongside a range of school and college visits undertaken by other colleagues across the organisation.

Students up and down the country consistently said they wanted to sit exams and assessments. They wanted the chance to show what they know, understand and can do. They were also clear that the support arrangements put in place were helpful. During the visits we were able to address misconceptions and concerns of students, their teachers and sometimes parents and carers directly. Their feedback has helped us understand additional advice students, teachers and leaders would like, and led us to commission materials on how to revise and manage exam preparation, for example.

In September 2021, Ofqual and DfE announced [changes to the 2022 assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels](#), following a joint consultation on proposals, for which there was broad support. These changes were in addition to [changes to non-exam assessment \(NEA\)](#), [fieldwork requirements and arrangements for GCSEs in modern foreign languages \(MFL\)](#) announced in June 2021.



Adaptations to GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2022

See Ofqual's postcard on [additional help for students sitting exams in 2022](#) for an accessible version of this image.

Exam boards also made changes to the ways they delivered exams in 2022, working collectively through the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). These included:

- changing the exam timetable to reduce the likelihood of students who were ill or required to self-isolate missing all assessments in a given subject
- changing the minimum threshold required for students absent from exams with good reason to receive a grade
- greater flexibility over invigilator-to-student ratios to address recruitment issues

The summer exam series for GCSE, AS and A levels is a large-scale operation. From first exams in May until results are issued in August is approximately 14 weeks. This year, in that time, 1.2 million students took nearly 1,500 different question papers (and over 4,000 modified papers) and produced approximately 15.7 million individual exam scripts. These were marked by around 69,000 examiners, and in August exam boards issued approximately 6 million grades [\[footnote 1\]](#), broken down as follows:

- 5.2 million GCSE grades
- 61,355 AS grades
- 776,625 A level grades

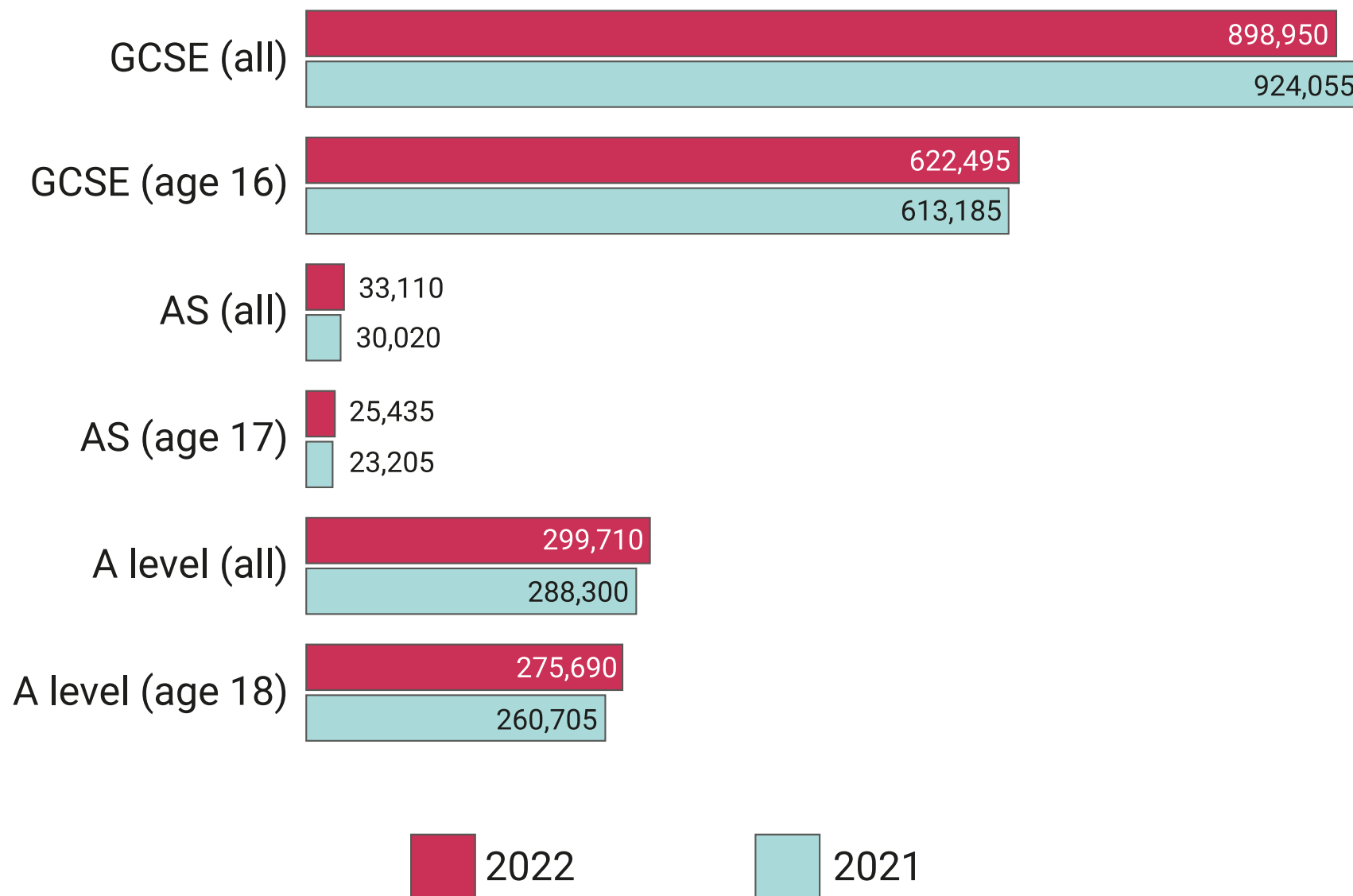


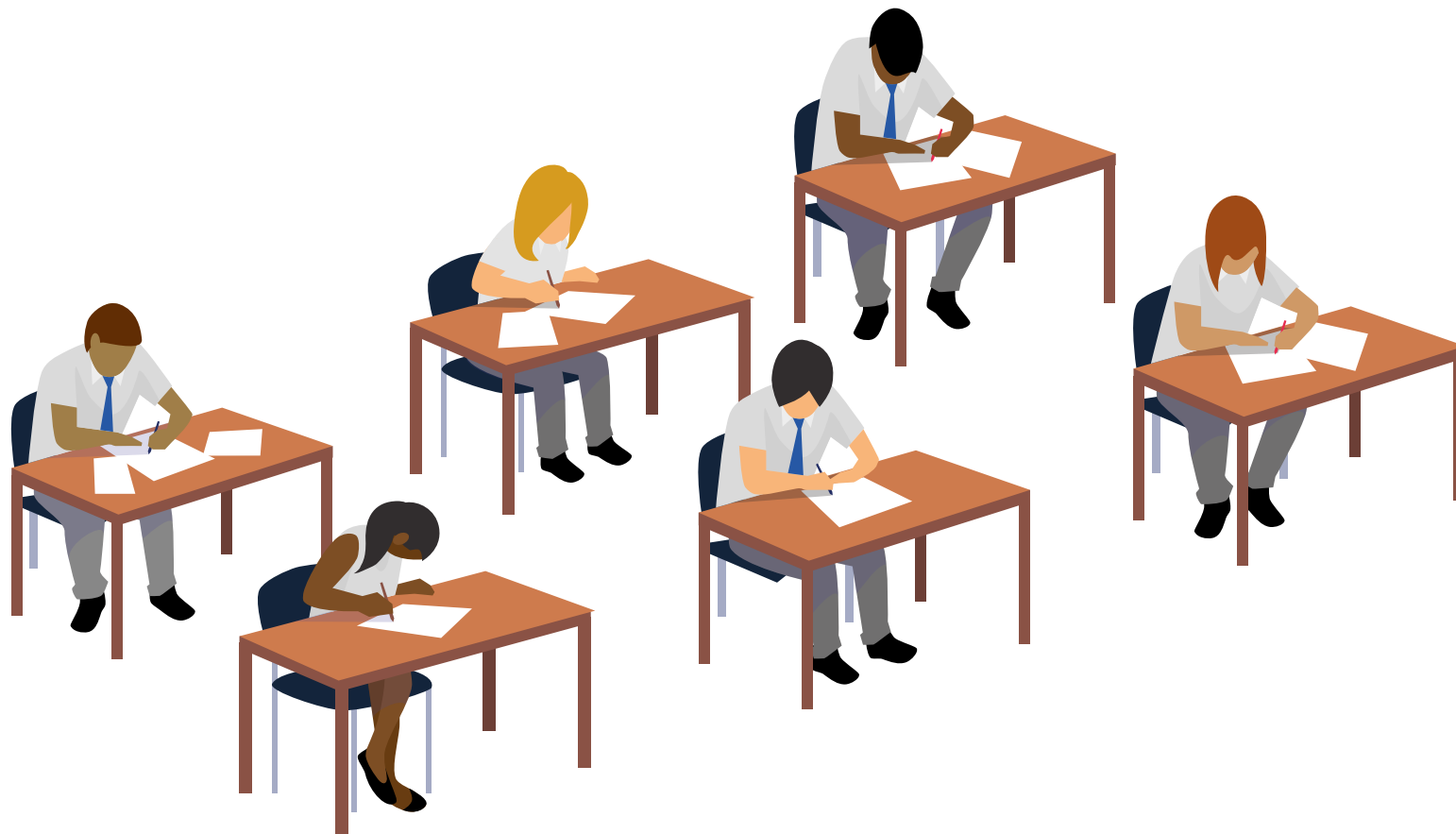
Figure 1: Student numbers by qualification, 2022 compared with 2021

The return to exams for 2022 meant a return to normal for Ofqual too, to some extent. We closely monitored exam boards' preparation for, and delivery of, the summer exam series. Our monitoring priorities were to ensure that:

- standards were set in line with the grading approach for 2022, and aligned between exam boards
- exams (including adaptations) were fit for purpose, with results being issued on time and reflecting the performance of students

It was not, however, a complete return to normality. Ofqual adapted its approach because we knew that a 2-year pause on a large-scale exam series, coupled with adaptations to some qualifications, increased the challenges of delivery.

Our monitoring this year reflected this context.



Incidents

Exam boards must promptly notify Ofqual of any actual or potential incident which could have an impact on standards, public confidence in qualifications, or an exam board's ability to develop, deliver or award qualifications in a way which complies with our rules. Exam boards must also show how they have mitigated any impact. These are referred to as [Adverse Effects](#) under [Condition B3 of our General Conditions of Recognition](#). Reporting of these incidents is crucial to making sure students are treated fairly across qualifications, and between exam boards and centres.

In this report we include all incidents reported in relation to the delivery of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications for the summer 2022 series in England as of 28 November.

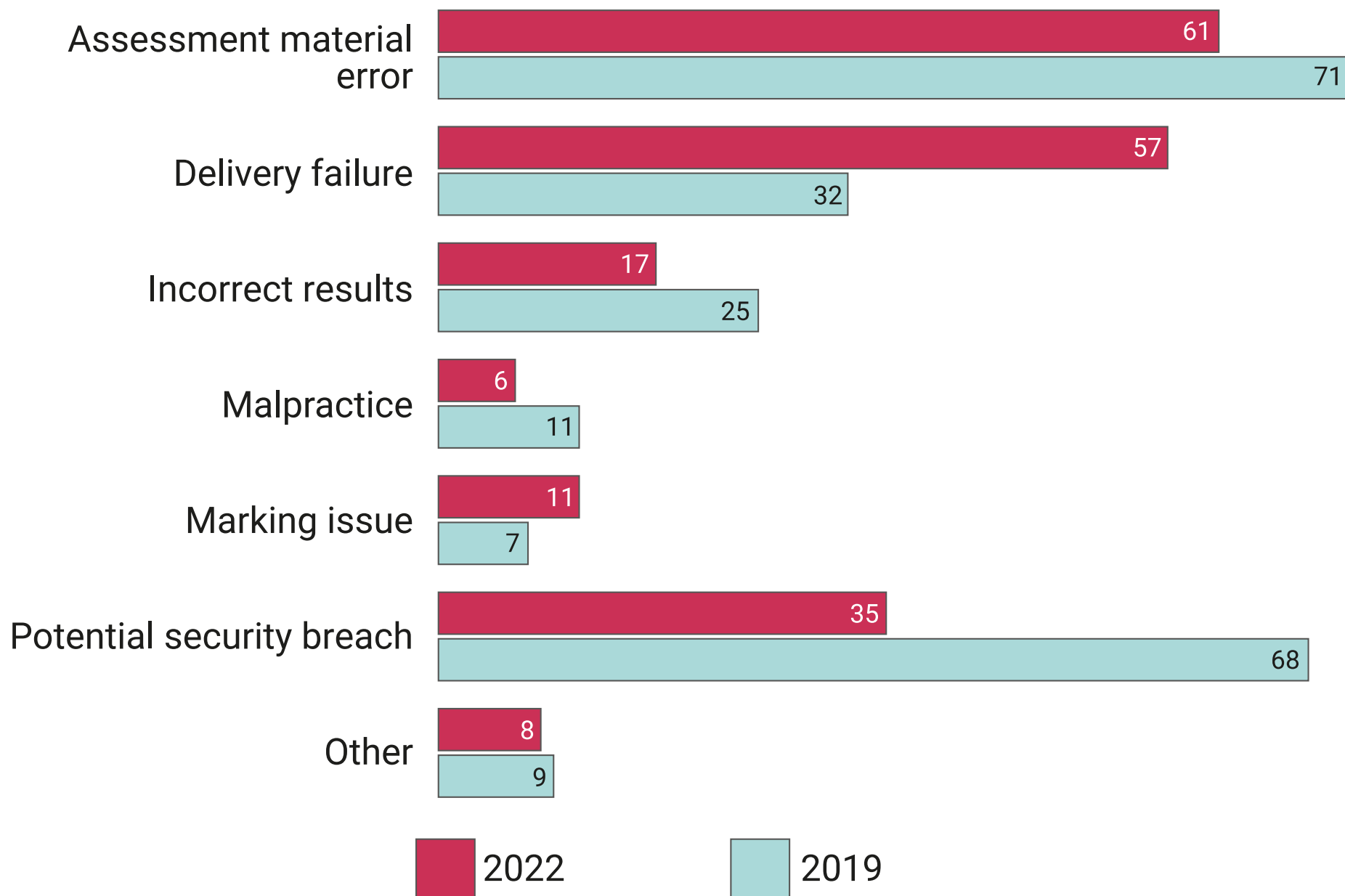


Figure 2: Incidents reports received by exam year

The advance information provided for most GCSE, AS and A level assessments was a new requirement for summer 2022 exams. It created new opportunities for errors and uncertainty.

There were a small number of issues where the advance information notices were not sufficiently clear, or where the question papers did not reflect the content of the advance information. The issues in question papers were potentially more serious as the way in which advance information was released ahead of the series meant that there was time to address any mistakes in the advance information notices.

In total there were 35 issues with the advance information provided this series. Of these 29 were in relation to the content of the advance information notices rather than the assessment materials themselves and were identified before the exams were taken. Many were relatively minor, but where necessary, exam boards issued revised advance information. There were 4 errors that were not identified until students took the exam. Two of these were more serious, as the advance information indicated aspects of specification content which would not be assessed, but which did appear on the paper. In both cases, exam boards gave all students full marks for those questions.

We discuss issues that arose with advance information in more detail later in this report.

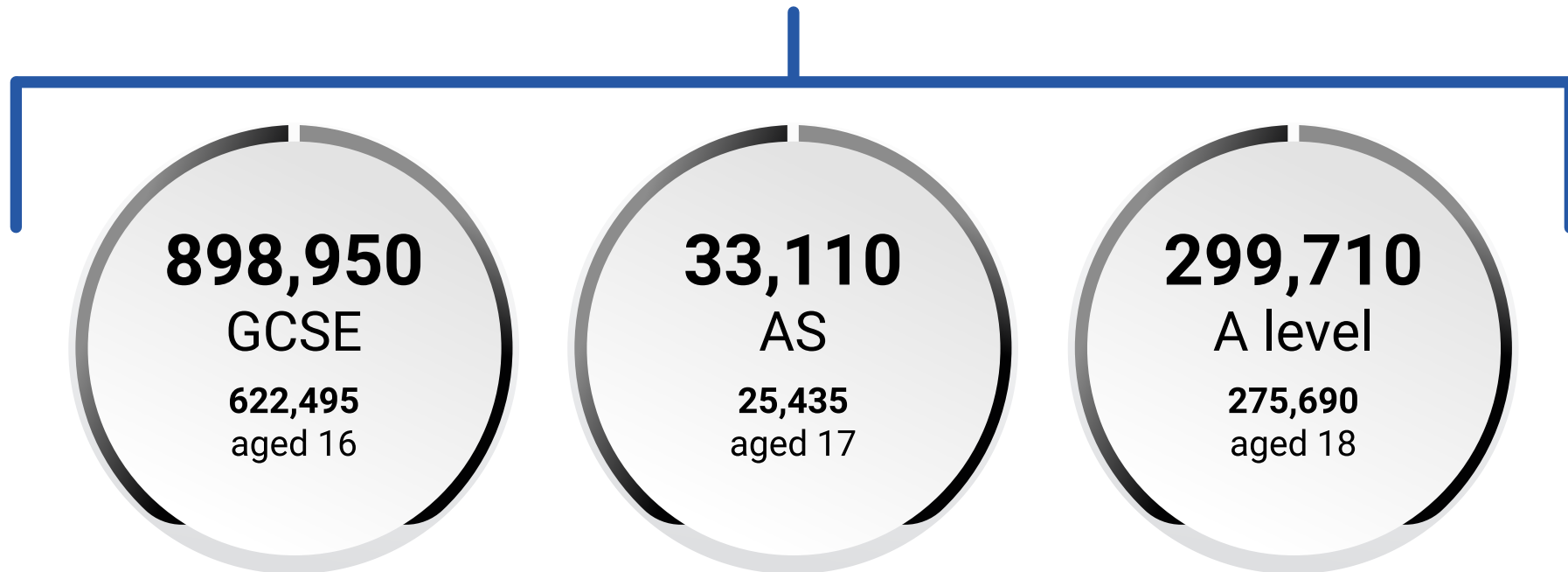
Fewer incidents (195) were recorded in exam boards' normal delivery processes in 2022 than in 2019. When issues with advance information are included, the number is similar to 2019 (230 in summer 2022 compared to 223 in summer 2019).

This report is structured to reflect the 6 phases of exams delivery in summer 2022:

1. Planning
2. Implementing advance information
3. Exam delivery
4. Marking
5. Grading
6. Results and post results

Phase 1: Planning

1.2 million students



Infographic: The numbers of students entered for GCSEs, AS and A levels for summer 2022

Planning the adaptations

Ofqual carefully considered the arrangements for each GCSE, AS and A level subject and exam board specification in light of the challenges caused by the pandemic. Ofqual consulted subject experts, held multiple meetings with exam boards and met with teaching and subject associations representing teachers of these qualifications to understand the specific issues and to seek feedback on our proposals for how those might be mitigated.

The government's overall policy intention was that every effort should be made to maintain the standard and rigour of the qualifications so that students taking exams and assessments could progress successfully to the next stage of their education or employment. This included not changing the subject content that forms the basis for these qualifications. In 4 GCSE subjects, however, the government agreed exam boards should provide a degree of optionality, meaning teachers had some choice of topics beyond a common core identified for each exam board specification. Ofqual met with exam boards to agree how this content and topic optionality could be introduced across specifications with different assessment structures.

For subjects with practical work, public health restrictions meant that it was not possible for teachers and students to carry out activities in the usual way. For each subject, Ofqual considered changes that could be made to the qualification and assessment arrangements so that students were not disadvantaged. Overall, these changes gave teachers some flexibility to decide how best to support their students given their facilities and the public health restrictions in place at the time. For most subjects with non-exam assessment, Ofqual made changes to the amount and type of evidence students needed to produce, and how this evidence could be marked and moderated. This meant that marks from non-exam assessment could still contribute to students' grades in the normal way, and that each qualification represented the same balance of knowledge, skills and understanding in 2022 as in other years.

Practical work in GCSE, AS and A level drama and theatre

For GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in drama and theatre, students are usually expected to demonstrate their ability to create and produce aspects of theatre, both individually and as part of a group, in final theatrical performances that are recorded. Public health restrictions limited students' opportunities to take part in performances and for group and collaborative work more generally. Ofqual changed the requirements so that exam boards could allow students to work individually and produce alternative evidence of their theatrical skills. This meant that if students were unable to access equipment or appropriate workspaces in their school or college, exam boards could accept, for example, prototypes or

annotated sketches or photographs of set or costume designs, or remotely recorded videos of students acting alone without the need for a fully designed set, lighting or costumes.

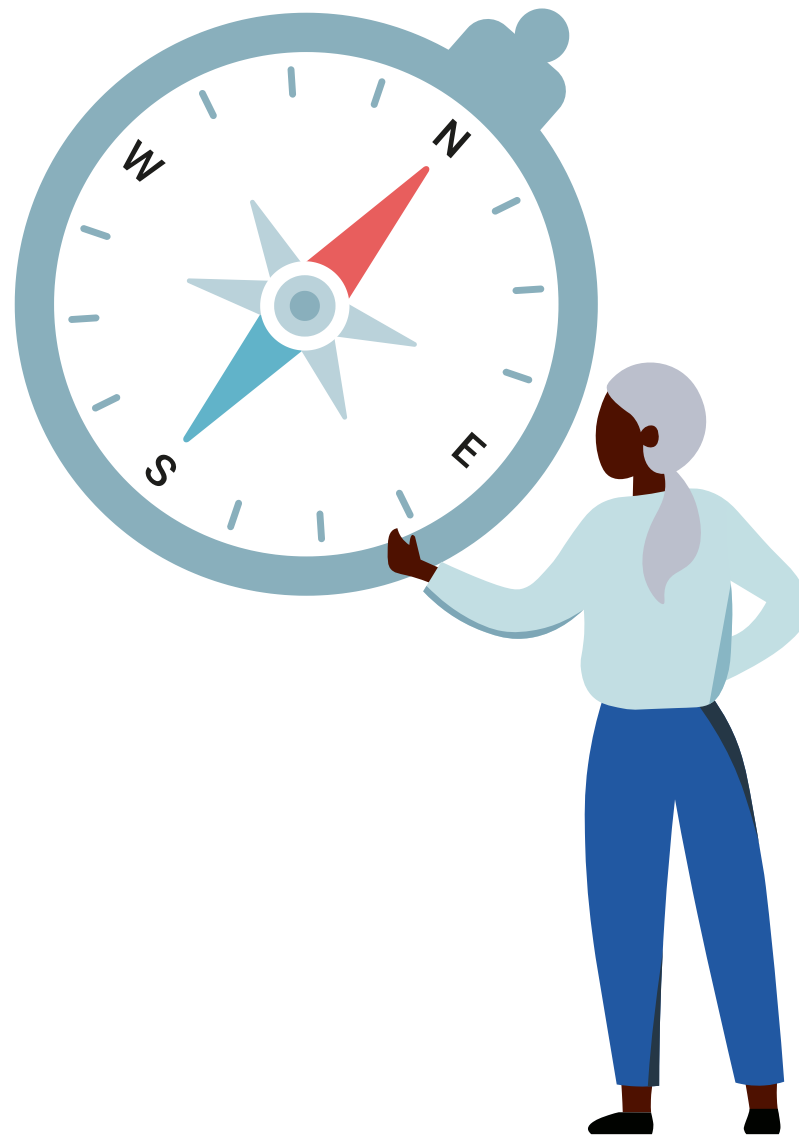
Practical work in GCSE, AS and A level design and technology

For GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in design and technology, students are usually expected to design and make a prototype, using specialist techniques, tools and equipment. Public health restrictions limited students' access to equipment and safe working spaces in centres. Ofqual changed the requirements so that exam boards could allow students who were unable to work in the usual way to submit a mock-up or detailed intentions for the prototype, in place of a full prototype, and to allow teachers to demonstrate the use of machinery, tools and processes to support students' understanding and preparation for their written exams.

In a minority of subjects, Ofqual required exam boards to make further modifications to assessments. This applied to specific activities in GCSE food preparation and nutrition, AS and A level music technology and GCSE and AS geography, where it was not possible to establish viable alternative evidence or be certain all students would be able to carry out the practical work. In the circumstances, Ofqual did not wish students to be disadvantaged in their assessments if they had not been able to carry out the usual activities. Centres were encouraged to engage with these activities, if possible, to support students' preparation for their written exams and for progression for further study.

Fieldwork

For GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in geography and geology, and A level environmental science, Ofqual removed the requirement for centres to ensure all students had undertaken fieldwork outside the school or college premises on a mandated number of days or occasions. In GCSE and AS geography, Ofqual also required exam boards to change their exam papers to remove questions that asked students to write about fieldwork they had done themselves. Exam boards were still required to include questions about fieldwork more generally.



In AS and A level music technology, students are usually assessed on their ability to use music technology to capture sound (including from musical instruments), and to edit and produce recordings. Public health restrictions limited the opportunities for students to record other musicians playing live music, so Ofqual removed the requirement for students to be directly assessed on this specific activity. Instead, Ofqual required the exam boards to provide sample recordings, or to approve sample recordings selected by centres, that would be suitable for students to show their ability to edit and produce audio recordings.

Contingency arrangements for GCSE modern foreign languages

Ofqual published contingency arrangements for GCSEs in modern foreign languages in case public health restrictions meant it was not possible to conduct formal speaking tests. These arrangements set out assessment criteria that could be used by teachers to determine a grade (pass, merit or distinction) for students so that their spoken language performance could be awarded as an endorsement alongside their 9 to 1 grade. The contingency arrangements were not needed, however, and formal speaking tests were able to take place in April and May 2022.

In all these cases, Ofqual consulted publicly on the proposed changes and additionally with exam boards on what those changes would mean for the rules they had to follow. For all affected subjects, Ofqual published updated [GCSE Conditions and Guidance](#) and [AS and A level Conditions and Guidance](#). Ofqual required exam boards to submit details of the changes they were making to their assessment arrangements. Ofqual reviewed the proposed changes to ensure they were fit for purpose, and to understand how the exam boards intended to implement the changes and communicate these to schools and colleges. This included considering how question papers for GCSEs in English literature, history, ancient history and geography would be restructured to reflect the optional content and topics being offered, and the specific evidence that would be accepted for non-exam assessment activities in each exam board's specification.

Throughout the planning phase, the exam boards collaborated through JCQ to provide consistent guidance and support to centres, in line with government policy and our rules.

In addition to changes for individual subjects, the government decided that students could be given advance information about the focus of the content of exams for most subjects (except those with topic optionality) and formulae and revised equation sheets for exams in GCSE maths, physics and combined science.

To put in place such a significant change to the assessment arrangements, Ofqual had to make further changes to its rules. Following consultation, we introduced new rules applicable for summer 2022 only, which required exam boards to provide advance information and to ensure their exams were consistent with that information. Ofqual also worked with exam boards and DfE to develop high-level principles to guide the exam boards in preparing their advance information. These principles related to the integrity of the assessments, fair results, and student progression, and were included in our new rules. These rules also required exam boards to publish formulae and revised equation sheets for GCSE maths, physics and combined science. The rules were included in [updated GCSE Conditions](#) and [updated AS and A level Conditions](#).

Ofqual made sure that exam boards worked together to plan how these novel arrangements for advance information and formulae and revised equation sheets would be delivered, and to ensure there was sufficient capacity and expertise in place to do so.

Following the published principles, the exam boards agreed a common approach to advance information for each subject. The aim was that, as far as possible, students taking a subject would get a similar level of support, regardless of the exam board they were entering with. Each individual exam board then decided how best to approach advance information for each of their specifications within this common framework.

Unusually, we joined the exam board subject-specific meetings, to make sure that the approaches aligned with the principles set out in our rules. We did this because the adaptations represented such a significant change to the assessment arrangements. In September 2021, exam boards shared with Ofqual their proposed approaches to advance information for each of their specifications. To avoid any breaches of security of the live 2022 papers, these approaches were modelled on past papers or sample assessment materials rather than live question papers.

Ofqual reviewed the proposals and provided feedback which exam boards took into account when drafting their advance information for 2022 exam papers.

Exam board readiness

Ofqual's expectations of exam boards in summer 2022 were in line with those in previous years when exams have taken place. As a consequence, most of the exam boards' processes and procedures used this year were closer to those used pre-pandemic. Ofqual also put in place extra rules to reflect the adaptations to exams and assessments, as described above. These required exam boards to adapt other processes and procedures to deliver the package of support for students.

In December 2021 exam boards published guidance on advance information. JCQ also produced [guidance for students and parents](#). This sat alongside Ofqual's [Student guide to exams and formal assessments in 2021 to 2022](#).

Information and guidance for students

Ofqual provided a range of resources to give information to students and their parents or guardians on the arrangements in place for 2022. Central to this was the publication of the [Student guide to exams and formal assessments](#). Ofqual's Chief Regulator, Dr Saxton, also wrote a [letter to students](#) outlining the arrangements for exams and assessments in 2022.

Ofqual also produced a range of [media resources to support students](#) who were taking formal exams for the first time. Ahead of GCSE, AS and A level results days, Ofqual produced [blog posts so that students knew what to expect](#), and also [worked with UCAS to provide a letter to students receiving results](#) with information about next steps.

Ofqual worked with mental health charities to share information to support students and listened to their feedback about the mental health of students. We also communicated directly with students, for example through the student guide, [Coping with exam pressure - a guide for students](#), and [Ofqual blogs](#).

As part of early joint planning work, Ofqual had identified two areas of increased systemic risk to exam boards' delivery of GCSE, AS and A level results for summer 2022.

The first of these was examiner recruitment and training. With no exams in summer 2020 or 2021, teachers or former teachers (who together make up 99% of examiners) may have been less willing to take on marking in 2022. The absence of exams had also meant there were no opportunities to recruit new examiners to replace those who had left the community. In addition, the deliberate spacing of exams to minimise the possibility of a student missing all exams in a subject reduced the marking time overall, so exam boards needed to recruit and train more examiners. Given that much of the marking takes place in school and college summer holidays, there were also concerns that the lifting of travel restrictions may have meant teachers might not have chosen to take on examining work.

The second, related, area of increased risk was the ability of exam boards to complete marking on time once exams had started. With the changes to the timetable already reducing the marking time in some subjects, it was also possible that advance information and other adaptations would mean students writing more, which would mean their scripts would take longer to mark.

Exam boards also had to manage extra challenges given that this was the first summer exam series in 2 years, including staff turnover since 2019, the need for refresher training and ongoing hybrid working. The pandemic was also expected to have a direct impact on exam boards' capacity in the lead up to and during exams delivery, for example through increased staff illness during critical periods and extra work to support centres through complex, changing circumstances.

As in previous years, monitoring of exam boards' preparations for the summer series started early in 2022. In February, senior Ofqual officials met individually with senior staff from each of the 4 exam boards. The purpose of these meetings was to review each exam board's plans and assess their readiness for the summer 2022 exam series. Each meeting focused on how the exam board would manage its specific risks and, in particular, how they would secure the timely delivery of fair results in light of the 2 areas of increased systemic risk. We sought assurance, for example, that they were on track to recruit, train and supervise sufficient subject specialists to mark exams fairly. In the context of the additional package of support for students, it was also important for us to be confident that each exam board would be able to manage any additional processes required.

Ofqual did not identify any serious concerns with exam boards' preparations for the summer series but followed up with each board individually, noting the actions they were taking and presenting observations for their consideration.

In April, Ofqual colleagues met again with representatives from each exam board to review their individual preparations for the summer and progress against their plans. We explained the types of issues we expected to be notified about and how we expected each board to manage these if they arose. We stressed the importance of managing issues quickly and effectively to minimise any impact on students. We reminded exam boards that they should alert Ofqual quickly to any issues. We subsequently wrote to exam boards to confirm these expectations (see Appendix C).

To minimise the risks to safe delivery throughout summer 2022, Ofqual also worked closely with DfE, the exam boards and JCQ to:

- discuss delivery progress against plans
- identify and manage systemic risks and issues
- coordinate support and guidance wherever possible.

Ofqual monitored exam boards' examiner recruitment closely. All the exam boards provided updates to Ofqual colleagues at weekly meetings. We also reviewed progress with each board individually, on a fortnightly basis, until the end of May. Ofqual also monitored marking progress closely once it started. This is discussed in more detail under Phase 4, Marking.

This extra oversight and close working were necessary to minimise the additional risks of running summer exams, with adaptations, for the first time since 2019.

Entries

Centres submit entries to the exam boards for each qualification their students will take. For the 2022 summer series:

- GCSE entries decreased slightly, falling by 0.3% on 2021 (5,219,550 in 2022 compared to 5,236,860 in 2021)
- A level entries for summer 2022 increased by 3% on 2021 (776,625 in 2022 compared to 752,555 in 2021)
- AS entries increased by 8% on 2021 (61,355 in 2022 compared to 56,560 in 2021) reversing a trend seen in these qualifications since reforms decoupling them from A levels

Information on final entry numbers for GCSE, AS and A level subjects in summer 2022 can be found in the [results tables published by JCQ](#).

Access arrangements and reasonable adjustments

As in any other examination series, exam boards made some changes to exam arrangements for individual students and allowed centres to make other necessary adjustments. These were to allow students to be assessed fairly by meeting their specific access needs and must be agreed before they take the exams or assessments. In summer 2022 the deadline for centres to submit applications for access arrangements via JCQ's Access Arrangements Online portal was 31 March.

Ofqual requires exam boards to publish clear information about what arrangements may be put in place and who qualifies for these arrangements. There is more information about access arrangements and reasonable adjustments in our [Guide for schools and colleges 2022: GCSEs, AS and A levels](#).

Access arrangements

Access arrangements are provisions made for students 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.

Access arrangements granted for disabled students are provided as reasonable adjustments. Changes to the way assessments are taken for students with temporary injury or illnesses are provided as a form of special consideration.

Access arrangements include the provision of modified papers – exam papers or assessment tasks which have been adapted to make them more accessible for particular students (for example, a larger font size or papers provided in Braille). Centres were required to order modified papers by 31 January to allow exam boards time to prepare them individually for students according to their needs.

Access arrangements can be provided for any students taking exams or non-exam assessments who are eligible. Individual students may require more than one form of access arrangement.

Reasonable adjustments

The Equality Act 2010 requires exam boards to make reasonable adjustments to assessments for disabled students (defined as those that have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities). Reasonable adjustments are changes made to an assessment or to the way an assessment is conducted that reduce or remove a disadvantage caused by a student's disability. There is a wide range of adjustments based on individuals' needs that might include 25% extra time, or the use of a reader or a scribe.

The exam boards choose to administer reasonable adjustments through JCQ. They published revised guidance for centres applying on behalf of their students for [Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments](#) in the academic year 2021 to 22. This guidance set out important changes effective from 1 September 2021, including, for example, changes to the evidence requirements needed for 25% extra time arrangements.

Access arrangement statistics

In November 2022, we published official statistics on [Access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level: 2021 to 2022 academic year](#).

When the summer 2021 exams were cancelled on 4 January 2021, the deadlines for centres requesting access arrangements were imminent and centres were encouraged to continue to submit applications. The data gathered for the 2020 to 2021 academic year is, therefore, used here as reference for 2021 to 2022. Comparisons are also made to data from 2018 to 2019 as the most recent academic year in which exams went ahead.

For the 2021 to 2022 academic year in England, there were 512,085 access arrangements approved, up by 14.4% (from 447,555) and up by 26.6% (from 404,600) compared with 2020 to 2021 and 2018 to 2019 academic years respectively.

There were 5,485 centres (92.9% of all centres) that had access arrangements approved for one or more of their students this year, compared to 5,175 centres (88.2% of all centres) in the 2020 to 2021 academic year. In 2018 to 2019, 5,420 centres (91% of all centres) had access arrangements approved for one or more of their students.

Among the types of access arrangements, 25% extra time remains by far the most common, making up 65.3% of all arrangements approved in 2021 to 2022, compared to 65.8% in 2020 to 2021 and 63.4% in 2018 to 2019 academic years respectively.

Ofqual will evaluate the use of extra time in assessments provided to disabled students as a reasonable adjustment, as set out in our [Corporate Plan](#).

There were 61,125 requests for modified papers in summer 2022, up 4.9% on summer 2019. With no exams in 2020 and 2021 data on modified papers was not collected.

Ofqual will continue to collect and review exam boards' data on access arrangements to better understand how they are used to support students who need them.

Question paper production

Exam boards typically write assessment materials for upcoming exam series a year or more before they take place. These materials include question papers, stimulus materials and mark schemes. Ofqual's Conditions require exam boards to produce assessment materials which are clear, appropriate and fit for purpose. It is an exam board's responsibility to make sure its papers are free of errors. Ofqual does not review or otherwise vet the content of question papers before students take them.

Due to the introduction of advance information (see Phase 2) and other adaptations, exam boards had to revisit all of the assessment materials they had already produced to ensure they complied with the new requirements in place for summer 2022. Where exam boards determined that the use of advance information might make it challenging to replace either specific questions or complete assessments should there be a security breach, we asked exam boards to commission further assessment material to address this risk.

In 2022, exam boards produced over 5,000 unique question papers. This comprised approximately 1,500 standard question papers and more than 4,000 discrete modified question papers^{[\[footnote 2\]](#)}.

These figures do not include the number of supporting materials that exam boards were required to produce for advance information, such as guidance and advance information notices. The implementation of advance information is discussed in more detail in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Implementing advance information

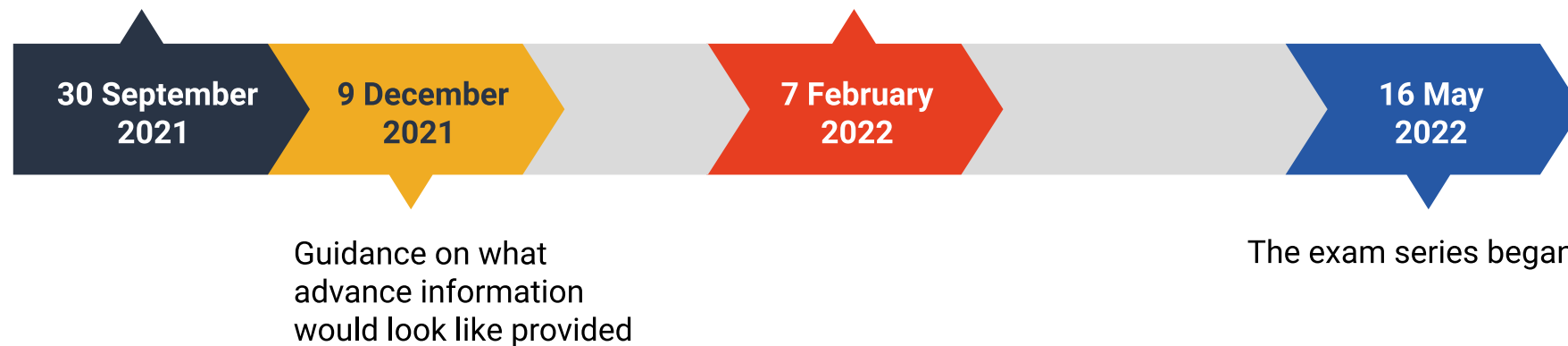
The adaptations provided as part of the package of support for students taking exams in summer 2022 were unprecedented. The use of advance information in particular represented a significant change to the assessment arrangements. This had not previously been tested in any exam series, let alone at scale in a summer series. For this reason, Ofqual worked closely with the exam boards as they put the policy into practice.

354

GCSE, AS and A level specifications for
which advance information was provided

Ofqual and DfE confirmed there would
be advance information for the
majority of GCSEs, AS and A levels

Advance information
published on exam
boards' websites



Infographic: A timeline of key dates for advance information

Purpose of advance information

Advance information was produced to help students focus their revision and to make exams less daunting. It was not intended to reduce the amount of content that must be studied or assessed. In many subjects, it did not cover all of the exam papers or sections within them. That is why Ofqual, as well as the exam boards, JCQ and DfE, emphasised that students should still study the whole course and revise accordingly for each of their exams.

In any given year, exam papers will not include questions on every content area in the specification. Instead, exam papers ask questions about a sample of the content in the specification to test what a student knows, understands and can do overall.

Advance information generally did not change the exam papers this year, as exam boards had already written their papers before they produced the advance information. In a small number of cases, however, exam boards needed to make changes to individual questions or parts of question papers, including to make it possible to provide replacements that matched the advance information in case a question paper was compromised.

Advance information looked different between subjects and exam boards' specifications in the same subject – this reflected the differences that already exist in the design and structure of individual specifications and their assessments. Advance information was tailored to suit each individual specification. Except for GCSE sciences, none of the advance information for any subjects indicated any content or topics that would be excluded from the exams.

Scale of advance information

Advance information was provided for all but a handful of GCSE, AS and A level subjects. The exceptions were art and design (where there are no written exams) and GCSEs in English literature, history, ancient history and geography (where DfE had already decided there could be some optional topics or content).

Exam boards produced advance information for 354 different specifications across GCSE, AS and A level.

In December 2021, JCQ and the exam boards published guidance for teachers and students to explain what to expect from advance information, prior to its publication date. The exam boards' guidance included a description of how advance information would work for each of their individual specifications.

The exam boards published all their advance information notices on their public websites on 7 February 2022.

Issues with advance information

Advance information was provided for one or more papers in 354 separate GCSE, AS and A level specifications in summer 2022. In 35 of these, there were issues: either errors or insufficient clarity in the advance information notice, or a discrepancy between the advance information and the question paper. As advance information had not been used before, there are no comparative figures for 2019.

Table 1: Advance information issues by exam board, summer 2022

Exam Board	Number of advance information issues
AQA	16
OCR	4
Pearson	11
WJEC	4
Total	35

Overall, issues arose in approximately 10% of the specifications which used advance information this year. The majority (8%) occurred in the advance information notices exam boards published rather than the assessments themselves. Four errors (2 which were significant enough to lead to part of the assessment being discounted to avoid disadvantaging students, 2 more minor) were reported in assessments as a result of issues with advance information, equating to 1% of GCSE, AS and A level specifications where it was used.

Issues in advance information notices

Of the 35 issues reported in advanced information assessment materials, 29 were issues or ambiguities in the advance information notices themselves (as distinct from issues with question papers). Of those, 25 were corrected and reissued by

exam boards shortly after publication. The other 4 notices were not corrected as the potential impact on students was low because they concerned minor typographical errors. The exam boards decided not to make any changes as there was deemed to be a greater risk of confusion to students through replacing the material.

Where corrections were made, there was a risk that some students and teachers might not be aware of these. We monitored the situation closely to ensure any corrections were sufficiently visible to all, including private candidates (see: re-issuing of advance information).

Re-issuing of advance information notices

Immediately following the publication of advance information notices on 7 February 2022, it was identified that a small number of the notices contained errors and/or were not sufficiently clear. In some cases, these errors and ambiguities were minor, but in others they could have affected students' preparation for their assessments. We were concerned that, if the exam boards simply issued replacement advance information notices, some students (or their teachers) would not see them and could be disadvantaged when they sat their exams.

We worked closely with exam boards to determine when they should issue replacement notices. We monitored exam boards' implementation so that it was clear where notices had been reissued and to make sure that exam boards had done enough to communicate the changes to teachers and students.

In a limited number of cases, the exam boards decided not to make any changes or issue communications at that point, as this could have made the situation worse. We were satisfied that in these instances this was the approach least likely to disadvantage students but expected boards to consider if changes to their question papers, to ensure they aligned with the notices, needed to be made instead.

Advance information errors impacting assessments

One issue identified prior to the exam related to an advance information notice not correctly indicating which parts of the assessment the advance information related to, rather than there being an error in the content set out. This advance information notice was not replaced due to the risk of causing confusion to students. This error was in a subject where students were still expected to cover all subject content (as opposed to the few subjects where advance information indicated specific aspects of the specification that would not be assessed) and concerned low tariff questions only. Once the

exam had been sat, the exam board reviewed student performance in line with our expectations for the management of errors. The exam board did not find any evidence of a negative impact and so concluded that the questions had functioned as intended, despite the error.

Three other advanced information assessment material errors were not identified until the exams were sat. These errors therefore had the potential to affect students as there were discrepancies between the content of the question papers and the advance information.

Of these 3, 2 were more significant. They were in subjects where the advance information directly or indirectly indicated specific aspects of the specification that would not be assessed, but in these cases, those aspects did appear in the question papers. In both instances, the exam board awarded all students full marks for the affected questions.

Table 2: Point at which advance information issues were identified, by exam board

Exam Board	Prior to exam	During exam	After exam	Total
AQA	12	2	2	16
Pearson	11	0	0	11
OCR	4	0	0	4
WJEC	3	1	0	4
Total	30	3	2	35

The other advance information error occurred in an optional section of a question paper where students could have answered other questions. We made sure that the relevant exam board reviewed the potential impact on student performance, and the exam board's analysis led them to adjust the marks of a small number of students.