



Exam Centre Access Survey 2022

Initial Analysis, April 2022

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About the Home Educators' Qualifications Association

Home educated children in the UK face a number of challenges relating to exams, including:

- explicit discrimination in policy, such as the 2020 exam replacement system, which excluded a large number of home-educated children
- difficulties finding suitable centres to sit exams
- access to exam preparation materials, such as past papers

The Home Educators' Qualifications Association (HEQA) aims to make things easier.

HEQA provides a channel for home educators to talk to organisations involved in exams — Ofqual, the Department for Education, exam boards, etc. We aim to resolve exam-related difficulties for home-educated children.

For more information, visit our website at <https://heqa.uk>.

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1 Survey methodology and responses

The survey took place using a Google Forms survey comprising multiple choice, closed and open response questions. The questions asked can be found in Appendix A. The survey was open between 9th February and 1st March 2022, and was publicised through a number of home educator support groups, with requests to share to any relevant participants.

The survey was directed towards home educating parents of young people who are sitting or had planned to sit GCSE, AS or A level qualifications (including International equivalents) in Summer 2022. Participants were asked to confirm they fitted into this category. Survey responses were per child, so a parent who had two children taking exams in summer 2022 was asked to make two survey responses.

Respondents were self selected and no attempt was made to identify or normalise for population characteristics. No attempt was made to verify comments referring to particular situations.

Participants were assured of anonymity for themselves and any exam centres mentioned. Explicit personal information was not collected and any identifying features in comments are redacted in this report. All questions other than confirming participation in the survey were optional.

2 Respondent characteristics

2.1 Number and location of respondents

The survey received 134 responses. Responses were received from across the UK, including England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. One response was from a home educator currently based in Barcelona, Spain.



Map of survey respondents' approximate locations.

2.2 Educational characteristics

127 respondents were Electively Home Educating (EHE); the remaining respondents had some level of additional involvement from the Local Authority (LA), for example an Educating Other Than At School (EOTAS) arrangement, 14-16 program at local college, or personal budget through an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP).

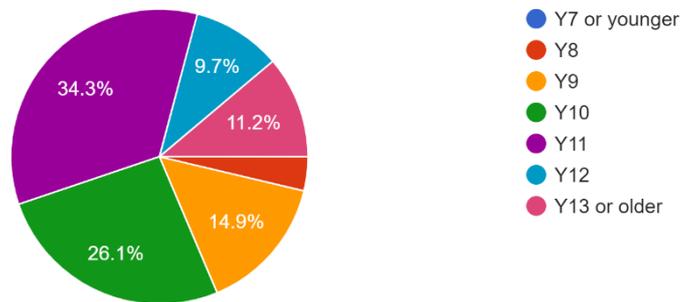
Three respondents had deregistered within this academic year (since 1 September 2021); the remaining respondents had either deregistered at an earlier point or had never been registered with a school.

2.3 Age

A slight majority (60.4%) of respondents had children in years 10 or 11, with 18.6% younger than year 10 and 20.9% older than year 11 (this includes students sitting both GCSEs and A levels). This reflects the common practice among home educators of taking exams over multiple years, rather than only taking GCSEs in year 11 and A levels in year 13.

What school year would your child be in?

134 responses

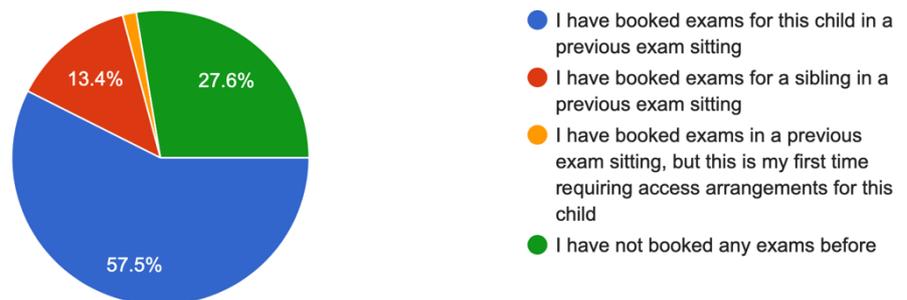


2.4 Experience of booking exams

The majority of respondents (72.4%) had previously booked exams for this child or a sibling, and therefore had experience of the process.

Have you previously booked exams for your home educated child, or a sibling?

134 responses



3 Qualification types

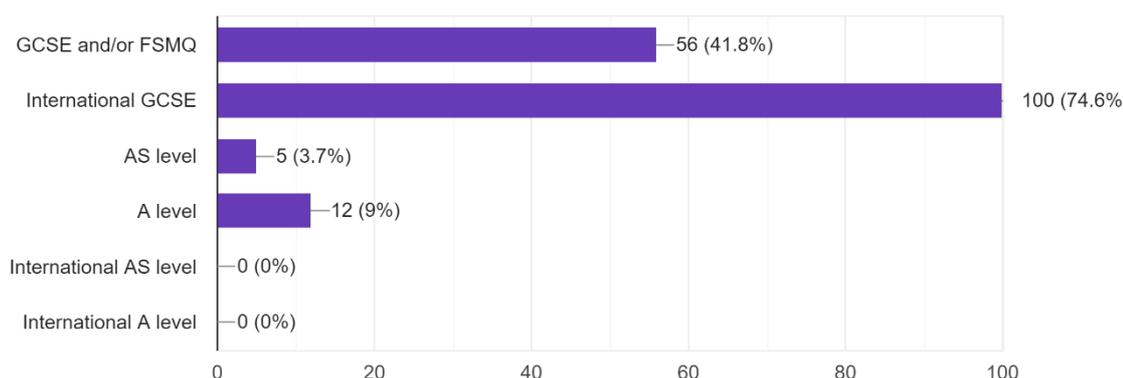
The majority of respondents had children sitting or planning to sit GCSE or International GCSE qualifications, with 121 sitting at least one qualification at this level, and 15 sitting at least one qualification at AS or A level. Many respondents had children taking exams from multiple categories in the summer sitting, including combinations of GCSE, AS and A level.

The high number of respondents using International GCSEs rather than GCSEs for their children reflects the greater accessibility of these qualifications for home educating candidates, particularly in subjects where practical sign-offs are required of exam centres.

Further information regarding the subject and board breakdown of qualifications was collected, and may be the subject of further analysis.

Which qualification types is your child sitting, or had planned to sit, in Summer 2022? (select all that apply)

134 responses



Respondents could select more than one option so percentages do not sum to 100%

4 Finding an exam centre

4.1 Ability to book a centre for planned qualifications

The survey period was around the time of the first entry deadline for GCSE and A level qualifications (21st February), with many exam centres setting an earlier deadline for candidate entries. Therefore if a place had not been secured by this point, centres would likely either be fully booked or charging late fees.

Respondents were asked if they had booked an exam centre for their child, and could explain any changes to their plans, or interactions with centres, in a number of different open response questions.

The majority of respondents had booked an exam centre for their child, with 90.3% booked for some or all of the exams they had planned to sit.

However 9.7% of respondents had not yet booked or were no longer planning to take exams. All of these respondents cited issues to do with exam centre availability, support for access arrangements, or costs, as the reason for this decision – none had made a decision to defer exams completely because the child was not ready.

“We were let down by the local school who had originally said they would accommodate private candidates only to cancel days before exam cut offs”

“No one is accepting Language exams with Orals, I have spent days trying to find a centre”

“There wasn’t enough laptop provision for my dyslexic daughter. I was offered the option of not using a laptop (as if somehow it’s just an optional extra rather than an actual requirement!) or told I need to book a year in advance for laptops. Which is clear discrimination.”

This was also the case for some of the respondents who had booked for a reduced set of exams compared to their plans.

“We have to make a 300 mile round trip, plus a hotel stay, for each paper of each exam and it would have cost a fortune to do more than one exam”

“Because we are on the Isle of Wight and no one on the island would accept private candidates this year, until we managed to persuade a college at the end of last year. We could not afford to go to the mainland for all those exams, so we dropped some.”

“We haven't been able to take Geography this year because there is no nearby place to sit it for Cambridge and it's a morning exam this year. We have to take public transport and it's too far to get there for a morning exam. Hotel bills on top of fees and transport is too much.”

Other respondents who had booked for a reduced set of exams compared to their plans cited issues to do with the pandemic.

“cost and problems revising 2 years after they should have sat the exams”

“Too difficult finding exam centre supporting CEV children in a global pandemic”

“They didn't feel ready to take the exam yet, due to Covid-19. Also to spread the cost.”

Have you been able to book an exam centre for your child for Summer 2022?

134 responses



In addition, 19 respondents (14.2% of total respondents) who selected 'Yes, for all the exams they had planned' added comments to the open response question "If your child is taking fewer subjects than they had planned, why has this changed?" indicating that they had changed plans at an earlier stage. Of these 19 responses:

- Nine indicated reasons of general readiness to take exams

"Not ready to take 3rd subject, commenced it as 1 year study and decided to change to 2 year."

- Seven indicated impacts of Covid

"The uncertainty in 2020/2021 about whether to switch from GCSE to IGCSE (in the hope IGCSEs might have gone ahead) and whether we should complete syllabuses early (ready for early centre assessed grades) or slow down aiming to complete syllabuses by the Autumn - (which might have been Sep, Oct, Nov) or slow down drastically and wait a whole year, caused a lot of stress and wasted a lot of time, as did me getting long Covid. We eventually deferred exams we'd planned to take in 2020 and 2021 to the autumn. Staying "exam ready" for 5 months after completing the syllabuses, twice, wasted a lot of time, and disrupted the start of new courses that we'd planned to begin when we'd completed other subjects. So we decided to drop a subject to relieve the stress."

- Four indicated cost

"Too expensive"

- One indicated centre availability

"He wanted to also take CIE IGCSE Environmental Management, but the exam centre is full (and due to a clash we cannot use a different centre for that exam)"

Some responses included multiple reasons and have been counted in all appropriate categories above.

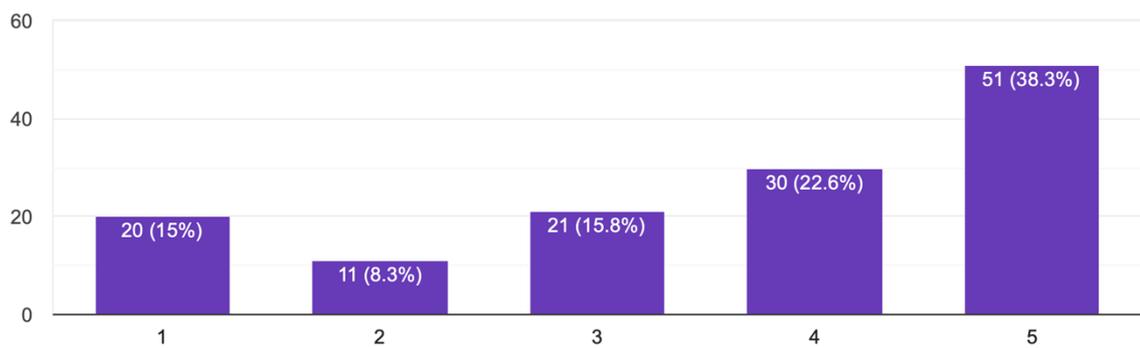
“Was too expensive to sit all and last year was cancelled exams for others (lost money) and lost confidence she could sit all in Summer.. too late to do in Nov as it pushes back A level.”

4.2 Ease or difficulty of finding a centre

Respondents were asked to rate how easy they had found it to book an exam centre on a scale of 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy). There was a following open response question to explain their answer.

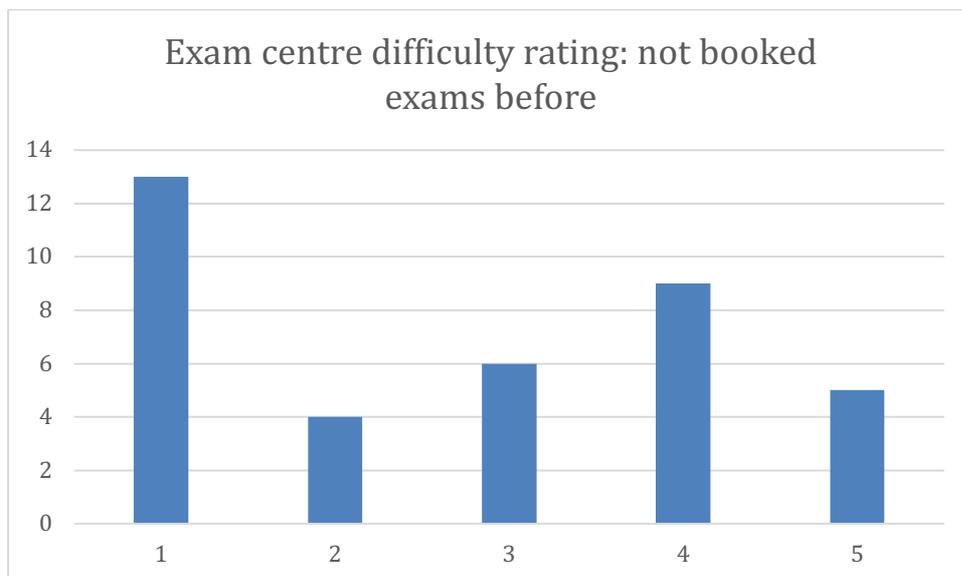
How easy did you find it to book an exam centre for your child in Summer 2022?

133 responses



Rated from 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy)

A sizeable minority of total respondents (23.3%) found it difficult or very difficult to find an exam centre. Looking at only respondents who had not booked an exam before, this was more pronounced, with 35.1% finding it “very difficult” and 10.8% “difficult”; a total of 45.9% finding this process difficult when approaching it for the first time.



Rated from 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy)

4.2.1 Easy to find a centre

A commonly cited reason for respondents who found it easy to book an exam centre was having an existing relationship with an exam centre, sometimes one that would not be available to new candidates.

"I am on my 4th home educated child so I know the local terrain for this sort of stuff and knew exactly where to go. I've had two children use this particular centre before."

"I already had an existing exam centre relationship. I also knew that there would probably be an increased number of exam entries this year, so I made sure to apply early (before Christmas)."

"We were able to use the same exam centre (a local school) as we used pre-COVID. They were not able to help with CAGs in 2020/21 but are [now] accepting their old customers back again. They're not accepting new people though."

Some respondents indicated that while they had rated the process as easy this time, when they had first booked an exam centre it had been more difficult.

"It was easy because we had an existing relationship with a centre. Initially it was very stressful and difficult, as no online info about Dorset exam centres was up to date, no organisations or local Home Educators I contacted could help and no schools/PRUs/colleges replied to my phone messages/emails/letters with SAEs before the deadlines for entry. We struck lucky when I applied to an exam centre so far away we would have needed overnight accommodation, and the organiser told me a new exam centre was about to be established only an hour away from me."

"I had previously used <centre name> and just did the same again. ... Finding the initial exam centre for the first exams in 2019 was harder."

Other respondents found that booking exams had got easier.

"We found a local state school exam centre through the JCQ list."

"We have a newly opened <name> centre 10 minutes away from us."

Respondents who were new to booking exams and found the process easy, typically used local recommendations for established centres.

"I have an established centre near me (<centre name>) which are used to facilitating exams for private candidates"

“Was told by other EHE parents of a centre”

“<centre name> have been incredibly helpful. I booked on the deadline day, which was past the deadline for access arrangements assessments, but they fitted us in and couldn't have been more helpful. I have been very impressed.”

4.2.2 Lack of centre availability

Where respondents found finding a centre difficult, the main reason cited was a lack of available local centres.

“No local exam centres that can do all subjects”

“There are no exam centres in Cornwall for private candidates. ... we will have to make a 300 mile round trip to <centre name> in <location> for each exam paper”

“no schools accepting external candidates”

Some respondents stated that this was related to additional needs.

“Couldn't find an [wheelchair] accessible exam centre taking private candidates in Scotland - tried 16 centres”

“The first exam centre I contacted was unwilling to accommodate my autistic son when I asked if they would be understanding when he doesn't speak to people when anxious. They suggested I find another centre for all my children (autistic and non-autistic).”

“My child requires access arrangements and we had been told that the centre we previously used was not [particularly] approachable about this.”

Some respondents indicated that the situation was worse than it had been previously.

“Exam centres we were relying on had closed their doors”

“There are literally no exam centres in our county at all! Many who did take us also now don't.”

“in the past (for siblings) we have used local schools, but having dropped private candidates in 2020 and 2021 they have decided not to take any more for now.”

“The excellent exam centre we have used for ten years (a local school) changed its policy after Covid so we had to look elsewhere”

“I think that a decrease in the number of centres at the same time as an increase in the number of candidates has led to huge pressure on places”

4.2.3 Lack of certainty

A number of respondents cited the stressful effects of a lack of certainty and security in the process. These effects took several forms.

- Difficulty getting responses to initial enquiries from centres.

“Most schools never even replied to me.”

- Centres dropping support, or fears that this might happen.

“First centre let us down. Now travelling 75 miles and paying more”

“It also felt a bit nerve wracking before entries actually went in as other local schools were pulling out and other centres were getting full up.”

“Thankfully we have managed to find a secondary school in our next county that we have worked hard to build a fragile relationship with and who has been relatively supportive of our entries. It has involved much grovelling and we live in fear of losing them daily.”

- Uncertainty over whether contingency arrangements might be required, which impacted on centre choice.

“Impossible to tell what’s happening with exams, yet again. So left it till we knew they were definitely on. Then couldn’t get into the exam centre. Third year of upheaval for us now.”

“Used a tutor registered with a more distant exam centre in case of CAG.”

- Available information was not always correct.

“JCQ list was totally inaccurate. Rang/emailed dozens of exam centres on list including outside Kent but to no avail.”

“I tried contacting a few schools - which were on a list the LEA gave me - some didn't reply, others said they were no longer taking private candidates.”

4.2.4 Practicals

Respondents who had candidates sitting exams that were not entirely assessed based on written exam papers reported that this made finding centres more difficult.

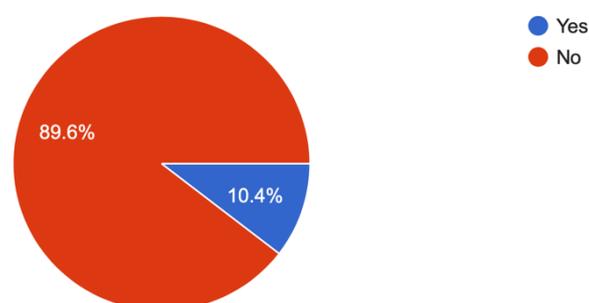
“I found it even harder to find a centre this year for science! ... Practical exams have proved near impossible this year. Will cost £2000+ for 1 exam including accommodation. Had similar expense of last year's exams too including A level Physics practicals including 2 oral German exams through <centre name>.”

5 Use of multiple exam centres

Just over 10% of respondents indicated they were using multiple exam centres during the Summer 2022 season. This increases the complexity of organising exams and can cause problems if exams are scheduled at the same time but administered by different centres.

Are you using more than one exam centre in Summer 2022?

134 responses



Respondents were asked the follow-up open response question “If you are using more than one exam centre in Summer 2022, why is this?”.

The primary reason given was that a local centre was available for some subjects, but not all, and was used where possible for convenience and cost reasons.

“Nearest is cheaper and way easier to get to, furthest does Cambridge IGCSE”

“Our usual centre decided to accept our son for the two exams which their pupils were also sitting (maths and Latin) - we gratefully accepted, since we have had a very good relationship with them for so long, and they are nearer, and considerably cheaper!”

Availability of CAIE (Cambridge) exams was a particular issue due either to timing, or to exam centres not having the necessary registration with the awarding organisation.

“Sibling had to use another centre as the local one would not do caie because the exams fell during halfterm.”

“Our usual exam centre does not provide access to CIE exams”

Travel was also cited as a factor.

“One centre is pricier, but we have a good relationship with them. Another centre has recently opened in our area; they are slightly cheaper and I can get there by train, rather than relying on my husband to drive me to the

centre we have previously used. So for afternoon exams we are using the cheaper centre, but for morning exams, when the exam starts prior to the train arriving, we will use the more expensive centre."

Subjects involving practicals also required travel to more distant centres.

"Music was only available using a different centre, much further from home."

"Our local state school exam centre is unable to accommodate French (or any language, any board)."

"A level maths being taken locally was not an issue. A level chemistry with practical has been a nightmare"

6 LA help with finding exam centres

Was your LA involved in helping you to find an exam centre for your child?

134 responses



Respondents were asked whether the LA was involved in helping to find an exam centre for their child, with the options:

- My LA was very active in finding a centre for my child
- My LA gave me some basic information
- I asked my LA but they were not helpful
- I didn't involve my LA
- Other (option to specify)

The majority of respondents (76.1%) did not involve their LA. A further 11.2% asked their LA but found they were not helpful.

"Cornwall Council are aware that there are no exam centres in Cornwall that will take private candidates, and they are not interested - they have been contacted by a number of parents but they don't seem to consider it

an issue and they will not help. There is also no longer any 14-16 provision at the colleges in Cornwall as that was recently removed."

Another 6% of respondents gave detail in the 'other' option which indicated that they had previously contacted the LA but found them unhelpful, or that their LA would like to help but was unable to. Two respondents indicated that the question was not relevant.

"I haven't asked LA this time but I asked many time in previous years (with previous children) and never got a response."

"In our first year of exams, my EHE officer offered suggestions and also spoke with some exam centres, but they all rejected my child (needed AA) and the EHE team had no power to override this."

Six respondents (4.5%) indicated that the LA had been helpful, either providing details of exam centres or being more actively involved. One LA (in Wales) provided the exam centre directly.

"Educational Psychologist helped us access a centre that is usually only 19+"

"Caerphilly LA do all the home ed exams in county. Just call <name> at the LA and book what you need."

7 Additional needs

Respondents were asked about additional needs, access arrangements, and any additional costs of providing access arrangements. There was also an open response question where any further information relating to access arrangements could be given. Access arrangements or additional needs were also sometimes mentioned in answers to other questions (for example, relating to difficulty of finding a centre).

44.4% of respondents (59) indicated their child had some form of additional needs, with 12.8% (17) indicating that the additional needs affected preparation for exams but not the exam process itself. This includes, for example, candidates who need substantial preparation and rehearsal of the format that exams will take, but do not need any formal access arrangements.

"My child does not qualify for access arrangements but suffers extreme anxiety and ASD. Access arrangements should be about more than just scribes and extra time, it should be about the whole process including site visits, nominated desks to sit at, awareness that ticking clocks or other noises can be sensory issues for children."

18% of respondents (24) had been awarded access arrangements, with a further 6.8% of respondents (9) still going through the assessment process.

6% of respondents (8) had been unable to find a centre to support access arrangements and so would sit exams without them.

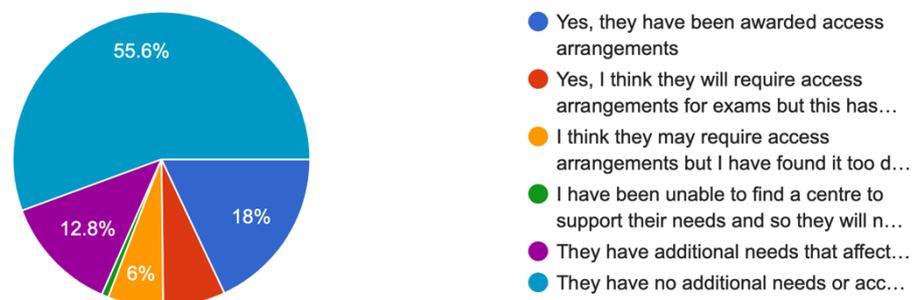
“We have had them awarded for SATS in primary school but since EHE it has been so hard to ask for them and risk not being accepted.”

“She should have had word to text software but they don’t have a private room”

One respondent had been unable to find a centre to support access arrangements and as a result would not be taking exams in this sitting.

Does your child have any additional needs that may affect their ability to access examinations?

133 responses



Answer categories:

- 18% Yes, they have been awarded access arrangements
- 6.8% Yes, I think they will require access arrangements but this has not yet been assessed or is still being assessed
- 6% I think they may require access arrangements but I have found it too difficult to get this from an exam centre so they will sit exams without them
- 0.8% I have been unable to find a centre to support their needs and so they will not sit exams this summer
- 12.8% They have additional needs that affect preparation for exams but not the exams process itself
- 55.6% They have no additional needs or access arrangements

7.1 Types of access arrangements

48 respondents (35.8% of total respondents) indicated that some form of access arrangement was required for their child. This includes respondents who indicated that they thought access arrangements were required but had not been able to find a centre to support them, and also some respondents who had previously indicated that access arrangements were not required. This may be because respondents did not consider access arrangements that are administered at the exam centre level (such as word processor use) when answering the question about additional needs.

Respondents could select more than one access arrangement.

The four most commonly required access arrangements were:

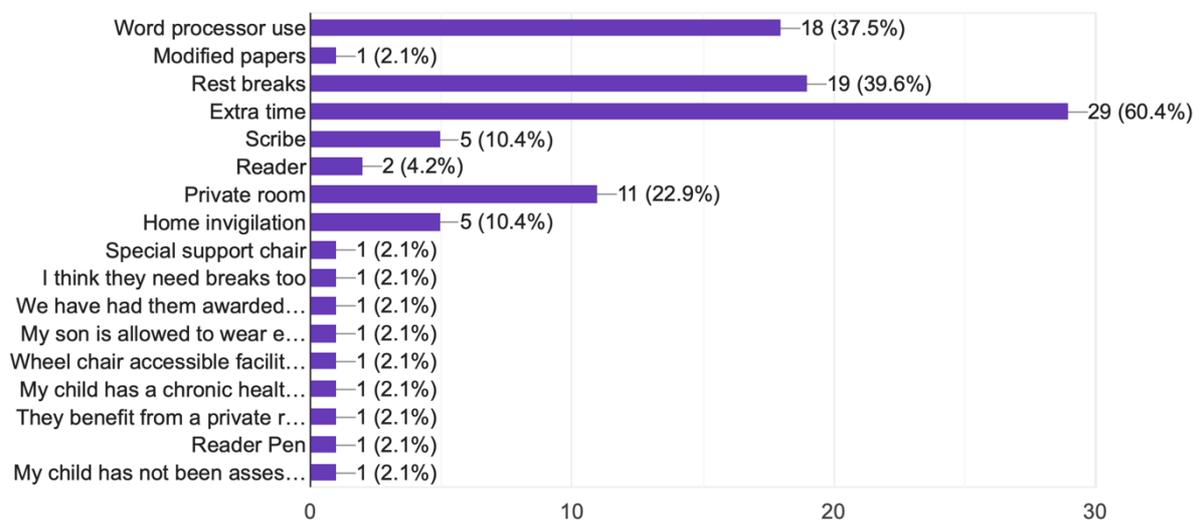
- Extra time (21.6% of all candidates)

- Rest breaks (14.2% of all candidates)
- Word processor use (13.4% of all candidates)
- Private room (8.2% of all candidates)

This matches the national picture of 21.6% of all candidates requiring 25% extra time (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-arrangements-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-2020-to-2021-academic-year/access-arrangements-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-2020-to-2021-academic-year>). National statistics for rest breaks, word processor use and private rooms are not available as these arrangements are administered at the exam centre level.

If access arrangements are relevant for your child, which arrangements do they require, or do you think they may require?

48 responses



Respondents could select more than one option so percentages do not sum to 100%

7.2 Charges for access arrangements

Under the Equality Act 2010, and as defined in JCQ guidance, candidates should not be charged for reasonable adjustments.

Respondents were asked if they had incurred additional costs in relation to access arrangements. 42 respondents replied.

40.5% of respondents (17) to this question had paid or would pay some form of additional charge in relation to access arrangements. Of these, 70.4% (12) had paid an assessment or admin fee and 29.6% (5) for the arrangements themselves.

If access arrangements are relevant for your child, have you paid (or will you pay) anything extra in relation to the arrangements?

42 responses



7.3 Costs and difficulties of the access arrangements process

In addition, many respondents made comments relating to the costs or difficulties of accessing reasonable adjustments. These were in the following main categories:

- Difficulty demonstrating need

"It is harder to prove that they need the support than if they were in school."

"I believe that if my child was school educated, she would have been offered more access arrangements than just typing. I did not apply, as the process seems too confusing, complicated, expensive, unreliable and I feared exam centres would be less likely to accept her."

"It's really difficult to know what evidence is going to be required. Without a tutor it is very difficult to evidence a 'normal way of working'"

- Confusing process

"We were told that my daughter would have three lessons and then a SENCO assessment. The lessons turned out to be exam papers. If we had had proper information this would have been less stressful for her."

"You need to have a fairly good knowledge of the system to navigate it. I'm a teacher and we still needed lots of previous home edders to help us find our way through the system."

"There are so many rules & options we need to make sure we've got right."

- Additional costs

“No school setting accepted my child. Most did not have the courtesy to respond and one that seemed positive fizzled out in the end. We registered for <centre name> only to have them tell us that my daughter with AA (extra time; own room; breaks) could not have her own room. I suspect it was £££££ because they are not allowed to charge extra and previous head of centre had made comments about money when she said “there is no way your daughter can have a 10 min break; it would cost too much for us”. We were left with the choice of having her sit but not with AA. We called <centre name> who would accommodate but at a price: an additional £100 PER PAPER for her own room. So we are now paying £440 EXTRA to have AA at the May sitting for two exams (4 papers)”

“It costs a lot! Although our AAs were in place for previous exams, and so we haven't had to pay this year, the overall costs of getting AAs for her in the past have been nearly £500 in assessment and admin charges.”

“This is the most difficult thing, so much evidence is needed and additional costs of assessment to prove this are significant for anyone.”

- Reduced number of centres, necessitating travel to a non-local centre

“It was extremely frustrating that despite EHE officer involvement, no local centres which accept private candidates would take my son due to AA requirements. Fortunately, just in time we discovered <centre name>, where all the staff have been brilliant regarding his AA and in helping him to feel at ease, but it still feels morally wrong that a highly anxious young person with numerous other difficulties should have to travel more than 50 miles to a centre and cope with overnight hotel stays. We visited <centre name> twice in advance of exams and also spent time familiarising him with the general area to make this work.”

- Fear of requesting assessment leading to centres being unavailable.

“We are fundamentally terrified to ask for [access arrangements] for fear of being rejected by a centre/school; and my child has had to therefore sit all GCSE's taken so far (except one) without the usual support she should have. Her grades are subsequently lower than expected.”

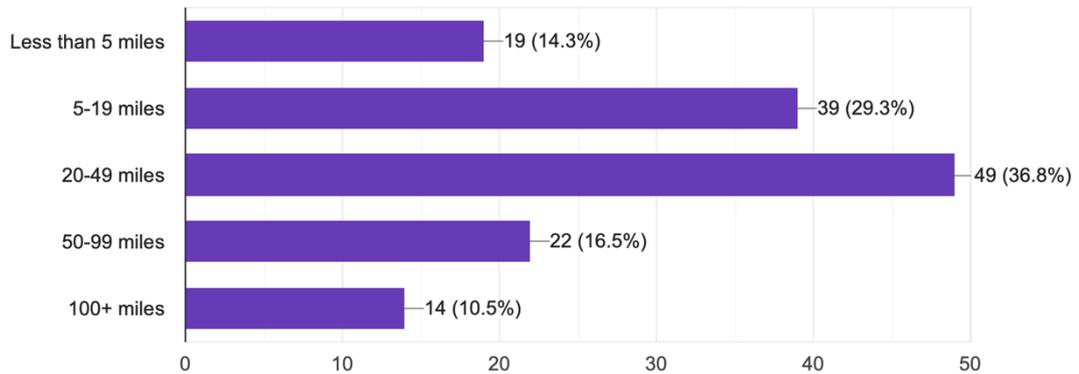
8 Exam centre distance

The majority of respondents (63.8%) travelled more than 20 miles to their exam centre. Over a quarter (27%) travelled more than 50 miles, with 10.5% travelling more than 100 miles.

31% of respondents required an overnight stay for their child to be on time for morning exams.

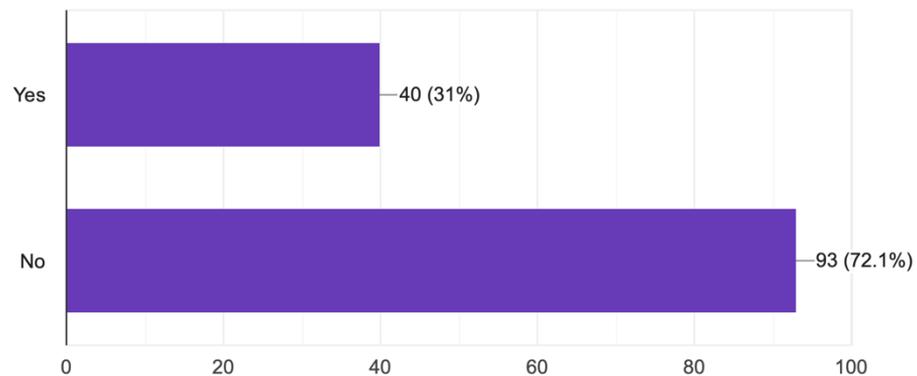
How far will your child have to travel to the exam centre? (If you are using multiple exam centres, answer for each centre)

133 responses



Will your child require an overnight stay in order to be on time for morning exams? (If you are using multiple exam centres, answer for each centre.)

129 responses

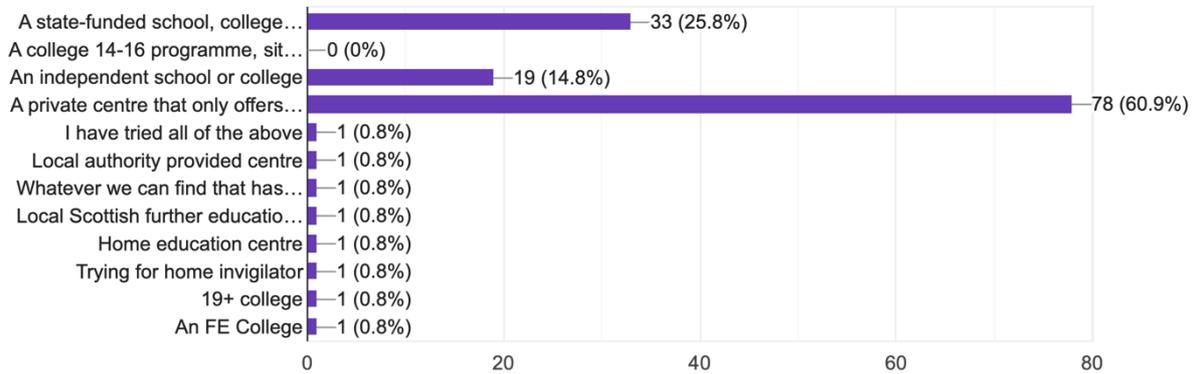


9 Exam centre type

The majority of respondents (60.9%) used a private exam centre. 25.8% used a state-funded school, college or PRU, sitting as a private candidate. 14.8% used an independent school or college.

What type of exam centre is your child using? (If you are using multiple exam centres, answer for each centre.)

128 responses



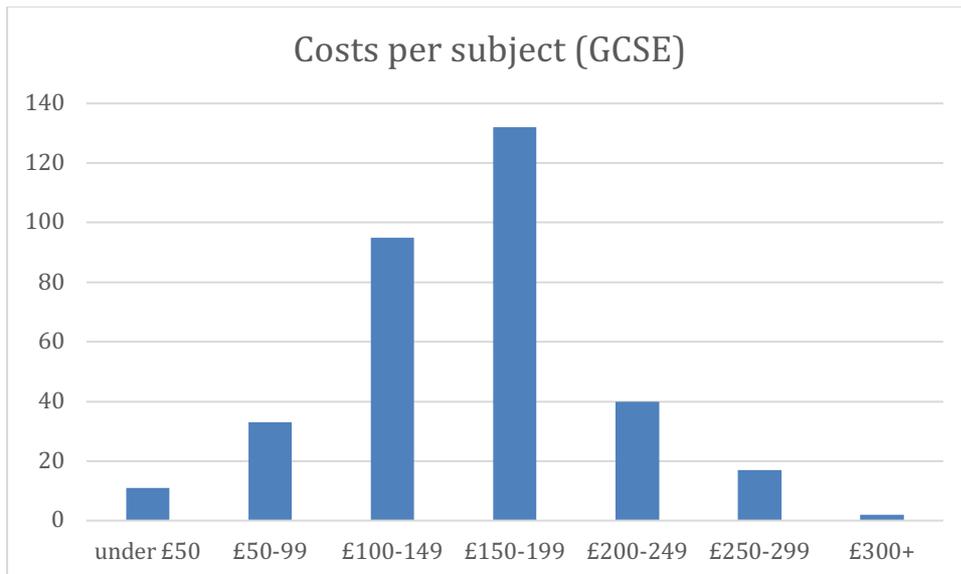
10 Exam costs

10.1 GCSE or International GCSE costs

Respondents were asked how much they were paying per subject to take GCSE and International GCSE exams, counting only the exam fee, not any course or tutoring charges. Respondents could list costs for up to eight subjects, so it was possible to give different costs for different subjects.

118 respondents gave costs for at least one GCSE or International GCSE subject. In total, costs were given for 330 subject entries.

40% of respondents gave costs of £150-199 per subject, and 28.8% gave costs of £100-149 per subject. 13.3% gave costs of under £100, and 17.9% gave costs of over £200 per subject. Over all subjects, the average cost was approximately £160 per subject.

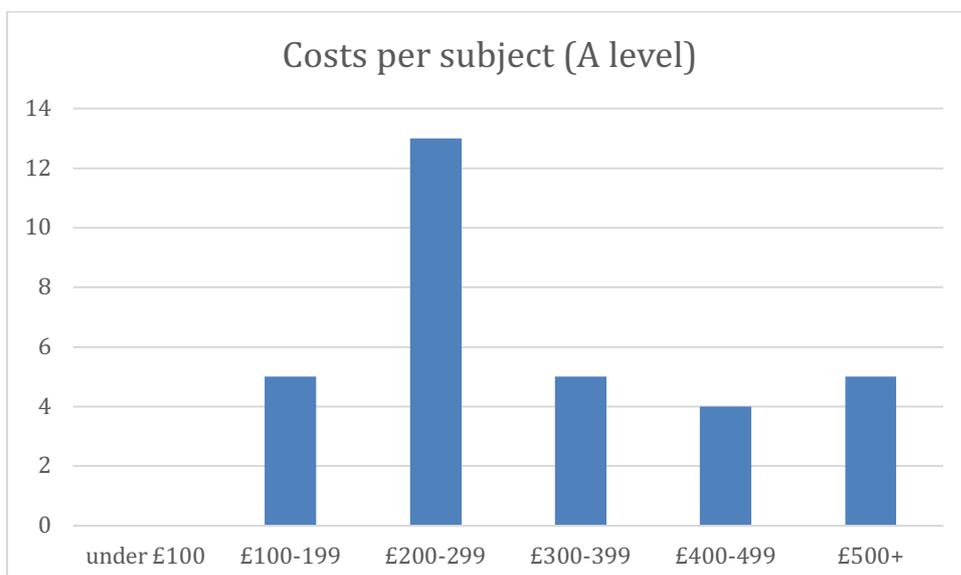


10.2 AS or A level costs

Respondents were asked how much they were paying per subject to take AS or A level exams, counting only the exam fee, not any course or tutoring charges. Respondents could list costs for up to four subjects, so it was possible to give different costs for different subjects.

15 respondents gave costs for at least one AS or A level subject. In total, costs were given for 32 subject entries. As this is a small sample size, these results may not be representative of the wider picture. However they are consistent with fees published by private centres for these exams.

40.6% of respondents (13) gave costs of £200-299 per subject, which was the most common response. 15.6% (5) gave costs of £100-199 per subject. A further 15.6% (5) gave costs of £300-399, and 28.1% (9) gave costs of over £400 per subject.



One significant factor in the higher A level cost is the cost of demonstrating the practical assessment of A level Science exams. Respondents were asked about this separately, and 3 respondents gave costs. One indicated the cost per A level science subject was under £800, and two indicated costs per subject of over £1000.

10.3 Perceptions of costs

Several respondents indicated that costs were a significant factor, which was linked to availability of exam centres.

"The costs are extortionate."

"Finding a reliable, local centre is impossible. It's costly and stressful to have to travel so far, and to use private centres."

"Booking science A levels is awful, the paper exam is cheap, but the practical can be £1000 which is off putting."

"Very expensive process for families, especially those on low incomes which makes it discriminatory"

"Entering our children for exams shouldn't be such an expensive, limiting and limited enterprise."

In some cases, respondents felt that the costs were a barrier to children receiving the number of qualifications they would otherwise have been able to.

"...overall I think that the provision for exams access is awful and seriously undermines our students ability to take the subjects and pursue the career choices that they need or wish to study."

"my child would have loved to have done Citizenship, but although it is 100% exam, there is a project that has to be signed off. This has to be done by working [with] a private tutor connected to the exam centre. We couldn't afford that. We are only doing 6 GCSEs because of the cost. We can't afford to do Art because of the need to work with a tutor for practical assessments.."

"Having to limit number of exams each of our children sit due to expense. Have to spread exams out more and youngest has to wait until we can afford rather than when she's ready."

Some respondents indicated that although costs were high, the benefit of a reliable exam centre was worth it.

"we were forced to use a Private school which is excellent but quite a long drive away and quite expensive."

"Was easy but expensive"

“The exam centre had been recommended and had done greatly helping others through the exams in 20 and 21. It is not the cheapest option but I was prepared to go through them and pay more for the peace of mind that they would take care of things if exams would be cancelled again.”

“The exams are expensive but it is worth the money to have a trusted exam centre. Would be great if they were more local.”

10.4 Rising costs

This survey only asked about costs for the Summer 2022 season and so this report cannot draw a comparison with any previous years' costs. It is hoped that the survey will continue and provide data on whether costs and availability are changing over time.

However a number of respondents commented on open response questions indicating that they believed costs had increased from previous years.

“Seems to be less private schools willing to take private candidates after the hassle of exams being cancelled in 2020 and them not wanting/being able to offer private candidates tutor predicted grades. This means there are less places available, which get booked up very quickly. So those private schools that are offering places have increased their fees.”

“We are concerned about the impact the Covid situation has had in terms of causing a school which has been extremely helpful and welcoming for a decade to now close its doors to us save for a couple of subjects; also, that with other schools closing their doors, the one or two remaining ones have a monopoly and are charging twice what the other schools were - it has become more of a commercial interest. As long-standing home-educators (20years+) we are concerned to see the increasingly commercial nature of exam taking and the way in which newer parents are so accepting of the need to pay high costs for tutors and commercial centres, particularly post-Covid. There is no way we could have put all our children through this system at these prices!”

“When my eldest sat his exams at the private school in 2018, we were charged only £40 per subject but due to the increase in private candidates attending there, the charge is now £140 per subject.”

“Getting harder. Older sibling first sat exams in 2011. Prices and distance doubled since then”

“We've had a nightmare for the last 2 years just trying to sit exams for our 2 oldest boys and it's now costing more than twice what it would using the local school as was originally booked in 2020.”

11 Other comments

11.1 Requests for government support

A number of respondents indicated that they felt there should be more government support for home educators who wished to take GCSE and A level exams. Some requested funding towards exam costs and some a greater role for LAs or schools in providing exam centres.

“I feel Home Educated families have experienced additional difficulties and uncertainties over the past 2 years with exams compared with schools. I have found it stressful & many families including ours, have suffered financially as a result of huge over-inflated costs associated with taking exams. I know many other HE families found it stressful & bewildering. The exam system should simply be accessible for all at a standard rate in local areas. The JCQ list didn't work for us apart from centres far away. I feel parents should be reimbursed for our huge outlays and many simply had to hold back their children's progress as they probably weren't able to afford it.”

“No school or college on the Isle of Wight would accept private candidates. <College name> did until COVID started, but now they refuse to accept home ed children, for a number of reasons. I emailed local councillors, the local MP, the Education Minister, the Prime Minister, and anyone else I could think of. I badgered the local authority until they agreed to help, but they did very little. We were told in a Zoom meeting that they would be talking to all the schools and colleges and that we would hear from them in a couple of months, but we heard nothing. I contacted them again and was told they would email <College name> again that day. In spite of the LA telling us not to contact them ourselves, I sent an email begging them to allow my son to sit exams there. They agreed. They are only doing a few exams, though, and only for Edexcel. The island has nowhere to sit any other exams and the LA seem to be doing nothing at all to remedy that. For A-Levels, we will have to travel to <location>, although I have no idea how I will be able to afford to do so. Ferry fares are a massive expense, plus we will need accommodation and fuel. I don't know if I will be able to afford to do that. The whole situation is beyond being a nightmare and I'm already under a lot of stress because of this. More and more centres are closing down, and as I cannot afford for my son to do science practicals, the only place we can go to take the exams is <location>. This is so wrong.”

“Exam centres we were relying on had closed their doors. The remaining company <name> are charging £180 per GCSE. I feel LEAs should be paying for those home ed kids who choose to sit formal exams and provide a space.”

“The bookings and emotional /financial stress of EHE families is underplayed by using the narrative from LAS that it was a choice. To some

it was the only choice. The cancellation of private school exams impacted hugely on motivation to even try prep for exams that could well be cancelled again. Kent is lacking in exam centres that are accessible and those further afield are expensive as well as overnight stays, train and time - makes them almost impossible to navigate. Each county should have at least 1 centre for all exam boards”

“If the LEAs are going to be more involved in HE lives through the potential registration, it would be incredibly helpful if they were able to help access to IGCSE examinations.”

“More schools need to accept external candidates, especially with the increasing numbers of children being home educated”

“Even though we are all unavoidably paying into the education system but not using its resources, we are locked out of the examination process and access to the resources given by the course materials suppliers as a matter of course to state schools. The overwhelming responses of the examination centres themselves are negative or simply non-existent and even those who do offer places have wildly differing prices and exam availabilities. Of the few that have responded, while always friendly and professional, all have assumed a level of knowledge on the part of the parents comparable with that of a local education authority. This makes many of their communications difficult to understand without extensive to-ing and fro-ing. Added to this in our case none of the examination centres we have found could even reasonably be described as local. COVID with the continuing possibility of exam cancellations and our lack of access to mock exam assessments has obviously amplified these issues. Taken together all of the above makes for a very uncertain and nerve-racking experience for both us and our child which has perversely affected her studies and mental health.”

“Would be good if all secondary schools offered [exams] and use of labs for science in holidays”

“Also, the cost and access to getting your child assessed is very difficult! This puts home educators at a distinct disadvantage, which is very unfair! All LAs should be responsible for providing access to exam centres, with access arrangements where needed, for private candidates. Ideally free, but if not, offered at a fair price, rather than the inflated fees some private schools/exam centres are offering.”

“I am strongly of the opinion that each LA should be obliged to provide an opportunity for private candidates to sit public examinations within their borough, including those candidates who require AA.”

“I wish the government would give each child a GCSE budget to be used either in schools or privately to not exclude children from GCSEs due to cost.”

“We feel that we are walking on eggshells each year that we must apply for exams and we have been devastated by the Covid pandemic on my child’s path. She has now had to defer for a year and risks not being able to get into sixth form as we have now no time to catch up and the costs for external exam centres are horrendous. There needs to be support for families on low incomes”

“It would just be so helpful if some of the online level 2 courses open to adults at 19+ were also open to younger people. All families ought to be able to access free part time English, Maths and IT qualifications at level 2. Online employability related courses would also be enormously helpful, but can't be accessed if not on a full time college course or NEET. Why do they have to become NEET before getting help?”

11.2 Practical assessments

Some respondents mentioned accessing subjects with practical or coursework assessments as a particular barrier affecting choice of qualifications taken.

“No local centre will accept film studies & didn't want to book all exams at <centre name> due to costs.”

“we've had to adapt subject choices in order to be able to sit the exams. For example, my children have missed out on taking Arts subjects.”

“Language exams are comparatively extremely difficult (and expensive) to access. We have two 240 mile round trips plus overnight stays, one for a 5 minute oral, and another for the written papers (in a week when we have local exams too). History this year, with a reduced content (three one-hour papers instead of two longer papers) has worked out more expensive than usual and than other subjects because the exam centre charges per paper.”

“Private candidates are disadvantaged by the choice of exams they can sit, as many places won't do practical assessments. Also limited by exam boards available. We always get advance info later than everyone else for practical subjects and no help to interpret this years advance information, which is so vague as to be useless.”

11.3 Impacts of exam cancellations

Respondents also referred to impacts of the exam cancellations in 2020 and 2021.

“We didn't get all our exams as covid meant the centre couldn't take as many. As a result, we got put back to the year after. I'm still waiting to find out about this year.”

“lockdown and exams which they were ready for last year being cancelled, has led to a complete lack of confidence and deterioration in mental health”

“The main reason was due to the govt decision to cancel exams for all and yet not put in catch up support for all. If we are supposed to ‘go it alone’ when de registered from school/not in school, why are they cancelling our exams? And if the govt assumes and takes responsibility for our Children’s education by cancelling exams for all, then why does it not have to put in the same catch up and support packages for our students? We all still pay our taxes for education don’t we?”

“My daughter was unable to get a centre grade for maths as she self studied and ended up having to wait 18mths and then sit it this January where there were no modifications made or additional support given, putting her at a disadvantage to both the kids who had their CAG accepted and those who will sit exams this summer.”

“My daughter intended to do exams last year but it would have cost 10x more than we paid last time and was so uncertain we decided to defer.”

11.3.1 Uncertainty about possible move to TAGs

Some respondents indicated that the continued uncertainty about a possible move to TAGs was a concern, as their centre was only able to support exams, or could only grade TAGs for a limited number of subjects.

“A local centre was taking external candidates again, but only for subjects that their staff felt able to mark and assess should exams be cancelled again.”

“We found two or three secondary schools within 120 miles, that would accept private candidates, but they couldn't say whether they would support TAG's if required again this year.”

“In the end I booked her Edexcel exams at a private school which is six hour’s drive from us, where my older children had sat their exams as private candidates, which is much more expensive and involves 3 stays away from home in order for us to do this. I also had to wait from November 2021 until February 2022 to hear if the private school would accept her as a private candidate as they were not sure if OFQUAL would go ahead with the exams and have now limited private candidates to sitting only exams which take place at the same time as their own pupils.”

“Our centre cannot help if exams are cancelled.”

“We are still on tenterhooks because our state school exam centre has said that, if exams are cancelled again, they will not be able to assist with assessed grades. Having juggled deferred exams in autumn 2020

alongside studying for 2021 summer exam assessments (to access grades after independent study), we are really hoping that exams will go ahead this year."

11.4 Online exam options

Two respondents indicated that they would prefer online exam options.

"Move to online exams. It is 2022!"

"I would of course prefer exams to be online."

11.5 Difficulties of the process

Several respondents indicated that the whole process of arranging exams had been a stressful experience.

"there may be nearer and cheaper centres for the current subjects, but having spent hours finding a centre to do the relevant subjects in 2019 I just didn't have the emotional capacity to do it all again."

"Home Educating families outside the UK sit the IGCSE exams, often without any support. I am based between Dublin and Barcelona. The only center offering IGCSE exams in Dublin, <centre name>, closed at the beginning of the pandemic. In Spain, seven different centers (private schools) decided not to offer IGCSEs in Barcelona in 2022. I had contact with two of these schools previously. Each involved travel (approx. 6 hour round trip by public transport) from our home. The British Council in Barcelona (4 hour round trip) is the only place offering IGCSE in 2022, but only CAIEs (one must travel to Madrid for Edexcel board exams). The charge for exams there is £220+. A new <name> center has opened in Belfast this year, however this would involve flights and accommodation costs beyond my budget for this year."

"I wanted my oldest to do functional skills rather than the IGCSE but I can't find anywhere that he can sit it. If these courses exist, it seems ridiculous that I can't use them!"

"if the exams officer is doing all the work unpaid, it may feel impossible for parents to appeal a grade, when the officer has already put time and effort in to help you get grades at all."

"It's so hard to know where to start and if we've booked the right thing."

"I am exhausted by three years of disrupted exams for home ed students, whilst school children get them for free and have received a huge amount more help from the exam boards regarding the refitted syllabus and exam content."

“As home educators we are disappointed with the obstacles in our path to access the exam process. It really has taken the wind out of our sails.”

“I wish with all my heart that there was a closer exam centre and that it was all easier.”

12 Future analysis and research

The survey data supports further analysis, which could include:

- effects of location on distance travelled to an exam centre, and costs of exams.
- effects of access arrangement or other SEND/SEMH needs on distance travelled to an exam centre, and costs of exams.
- a breakdown of exam subjects and boards taken by home educators
- any links between costs and type of exam centre
- any links between subjects and distance travelled to an exam centre, and costs of exams.

It is also hoped that HEQA will repeat this survey annually and therefore be able to track changes in centre availability and costs over time.

Additional surveys or research could be usefully targeted at a number of other areas, such as:

- investigating the variation in processes to determine appropriate access arrangements for candidates.
- to profile the number of qualifications and subjects taken by home educators and any barriers to accessing particular subjects.
- surveying exam centres to discover barriers to supporting home educators.
- surveying Local Authorities to determine their level of understanding and support offered to home educating parents around the exams process.
- obtaining accurate statistics from the exam boards around home educators' use of qualifications. At present while some private candidate data is available its accuracy is unknown and the category represents a wider group than just home educators.
- an attempt to find home educators who are not connected to the local support groups (perhaps through local authorities) and understand their experiences of accessing the exams system without support.

Appendix A: Survey questions

HEQA Home Education and Exams Survey 2022

This survey is for home educating parents of young people who are sitting or had planned to sit GCSE, IGCSE, AS, or A level qualifications in Summer 2022. It will run until 1st March 2022.

This survey is conducted by the Home Educators' Qualifications Association. You can find out more about us at <https://heqa.uk>.

The survey is intended to inform our understanding of the current issues facing home educators accessing national qualifications. Summary information and selected quotes may be shared with representatives from government departments, regulators and exam boards. It may also be collated into a report to be published publicly on the HEQA website and shared in other media channels, including social media. No identifying information of people or exam centres will be used.

By participating in the survey you agree to our use of the information provided in this manner. As we do not routinely collect identifying information it will not be possible to remove data after it has been provided.

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this survey. You may receive indirect benefit or potential harm in the form of future policy initiatives informed by the aggregate information collected; however this is not a formal research project and decisions will not be made based on this information alone.

The survey consists of a series of multiple choice and open response questions. You can complete as many or as few questions as you wish. If a question is not relevant to you, you do not need to answer it. There will be an opportunity at the end of the survey to include anything you would like us to know.

'Parent' should be taken to mean parent, carer, or other adult with parental responsibility taking a lead role in educating the young person. 'Your child' includes any child or teenager that you are responsible for home educating.

If you have more than one child that is sitting exams in Summer 2022, please complete the survey once per child.

I confirm that I understand the format and uses of the survey. *

- Yes
- No

I am a home educating parent of a young person who is sitting, or had planned to sit, national qualifications in Summer 2022 *

- Yes
- No

What is the first part of your postcode (eg SY11)? This allows us to see whether it is easier or harder to access exam centres in different parts of the country. It will not be used to identify individuals.

[open response – short answer]

What is the name of your Local Authority? This allows us to see whether it is easier or harder to access exam centres in different parts of the country. It will not be used to identify individuals.

[open response – short answer]

Are you completely responsible for electively home educating your child, or does your local authority retain some responsibility?

- I am Electively Home Educating, and my child has deregistered from, or never registered with, a school.
- I have an EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) arrangement with my local authority.
- My child is still on roll at school but their education takes place mostly at home.
- My child is Electively Home Educating and attends a 14-16 study programme at a college.
- Other... [allows open response – short answer]

Have you deregistered your child on or after 1 September 2021? This helps us to see whether there is a difference between families who have recently deregistered and those who have been home educating for longer.

- Yes
- No

What school year would your child be in?

- Y7 or younger
- Y8
- Y9
- Y10
- Y11
- Y12
- Y13 or older

Which qualification types is your child sitting, or had planned to sit, in Summer 2022? (select all that apply)

- GCSE and/or FSMQ
- International GCSE
- AS level

- A level
- International AS level
- International A level

Have you been able to book an exam centre for your child for Summer 2022?

- Yes, for all the exams they had planned
- Yes, for a reduced set of exams compared to their plans
- No, my child will no longer be sitting any exams this summer
- Not yet but I still hope to

What boards, type and subjects had your child planned to sit in Summer 2022? For example, Edexcel IGCSE Maths A, OCR GCSE Psychology, AQA GCSE Chinese; AQA A level Physics and Maths

[open response – long answer]

What boards, type and subjects is your child booked to sit in Summer 2022? For example, Edexcel IGCSE Maths A, OCR GCSE Psychology, AQA GCSE Chinese; AQA A level Maths

[open response – long answer]

If your child is taking fewer subjects than they had planned, why has this changed? For example, they didn't feel ready to take a subject yet and preferred to leave it to a later sitting; it proved too difficult to find a centre to support a subject; it was too expensive to take all the subjects they had planned.

[open response – long answer]

Have you previously booked exams for your home educated child, or a sibling?

- I have booked exams for this child in a previous exam sitting
- I have booked exams for a sibling in a previous exam sitting
- I have booked exams in a previous exam sitting, but this is my first time requiring access arrangements for this child
- I have not booked any exams before

How easy did you find it to book an exam centre for your child in Summer 2022?

[linear scale from 1 – very difficult to 5 – very easy]

Can you explain why you gave this answer? For example, did you have to contact several exam centres before finding one; did you already have an existing exam centre relationship; did you have difficulties finding support for a practical subject.

[open response – long answer]

Are you using more than one exam centre in Summer 2022?

- Yes
- No

If you are using more than one exam centre in Summer 2022, why is this?

[open response – long answer]

Was your LA involved in helping you to find an exam centre for your child?

- My LA was very active in finding a centre for my child
- My LA gave me some basic information
- I asked my LA but they were not helpful
- I didn't involve my LA
- Other... [allows open response – short answer]

Does your child have any additional needs that may affect their ability to access examinations?

- Yes, they have been awarded access arrangements
- Yes, I think they will require access arrangements for exams but this has not yet been assessed or is still being assessed
- I think they may require access arrangements but I have found it too difficult to get this from an exam centre so they will sit exams without them
- I have been unable to find a centre to support their needs and so they will not sit exams this summer
- They have additional needs that affect preparation for exams but not the exam process itself
- They have no additional needs or access arrangements

If access arrangements are relevant for your child, which arrangements do they require, or do you think they may require? (select all that apply)

- Word processor use
- Modified papers
- Rest breaks
- Extra time
- Scribe
- Reader
- Private room
- Home invigilation
- Other... [allows open response – short answer]

If access arrangements are relevant for your child, have you paid (or will you pay) anything extra in relation to the arrangements?

- There will be no extra charges

- I have paid/will pay the exam centre for an assessment or admin fee
- I have paid/will pay an external assessor for an assessment required by the exam centre
- I have paid/will pay extra for providing the necessary arrangements

How far will your child have to travel to the exam centre? (If you are using multiple exam centres, answer for each centre)

- Less than 5 miles
- 5-19 miles
- 20-49 miles
- 50-99 miles
- 100+ miles

Will your child require an overnight stay in order to be on time for morning exams? (If you are using multiple exam centres, answer for each centre.)

- Yes
- No

What type of exam centre is your child using? (If you are using multiple exam centres, answer for each centre.)

- A state-funded school, college or PRU, sitting as a private candidate
- A college 14-16 programme, sitting as an internal candidate
- An independent school or college
- A private centre that only offers exams or that offers tutoring and exams.
- Other... [allows open response – short answer]

Approximately how much are you paying per subject for GCSE or IGCSE exams? Only count the exam fee, not any course or tutoring charges. If you are taking multiple subjects with a cost per subject, choose as many answers as are relevant. If you have been charged a total price for multiple subjects, divide the total price by the number of subjects, with double science counting as 2 subjects. (For example, if you are taking Double Science, English Language and Computer Science for a combined cost of £840, select $£840 / 4 = £210$ per subject). It doesn't matter which order you list the subjects. If you are taking more than 8 GCSEs in Summer 2022, choose the most representative subjects.

[per subject for up to 8 subjects]

- Under £50
- £50-99
- £100-149
- £150-199
- £200-249

- £300+

Approximately how much are you paying per subject for AS or A level exams? Only count the exam fee, not any course or tutoring charges. If you are taking multiple subjects with a cost per subject, choose as many answers as are relevant. If you have been charged a total price for multiple subjects, divide the total price by the number of subjects. It doesn't matter which order you list the subjects. If you are taking more than 4 AS or A levels in Summer 2022, choose the most representative subjects.

[per subject for up to 4 subjects]

- Under £100
- £100-199
- £200-299
- £300-399
- £400-499
- £500+

If your child is sitting the practical element of an A level Science exam, how much are you paying per subject for the practical assessment?

- Under £800
- £800-999
- £1000+

Is there anything you would like to tell us about finding an exam centre or booking exams?

[open response – long answer]

Is there anything you would like to tell us about organising access arrangements for your child?

[open response – long answer]

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?

[open response – long answer]

Thank you! HEQA is aiming to increase home educators' ability to access qualifications. We welcome all home educators; if you would like to help us, please consider joining the mailing list at <https://heqa.uk>