

Special consideration:
a statistical investigation on the number of requests
and the impact of the enhancements

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Note on printing: Page 55 of this report is best printed in colour to ensure that the colour graphs are clear.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In England, awarding bodies make provision for schools to present a case for special consideration if there are circumstances which may have affected students' performance or their attendance at an examination.

Special consideration is a post examination adjustment to the results of a candidate. It might cause a relative minor adjustment to the marks of the candidate, of up to five percent of the maximum mark for the question paper, if the candidate was present during the assessment but was disadvantaged as a result of a temporary illness, injury, indisposition or other unforeseen circumstances immediately before or during the examination period. If a student missed a time-tabled component for an acceptable reason, an allowance can be made to account for it and an enhanced grade can be issued. Applications for special consideration should be submitted by the candidate's school as they are not acceptable if submitted directly by parents or candidates.

Recently, there have been claims about the number of students receiving extra marks in their examinations due to special consideration increasing considerably year on year. Also, there has been lots of criticism about how pupils and teachers might be abusing the system to boost results, helping schools climb national league tables. Although it has been acknowledged that allowances should be made for students who have been disadvantaged, great care needs to be taken to ensure reasons are genuine and that the system remains fair for all learners.

Aim of the research

The main aim of this research was to provide evidence in relation to:

- the patterns of special consideration applications over time;
- the numbers of special consideration applications by type of qualification (GCSE vs. A-level) and by type of school;
- the impact of the special consideration enhancements in the examination outcomes.

Data and methods

The research presents summary statistics of special consideration applications from 1998 to 2009 (January and June sessions) and detailed analyses of special consideration applications in individual GCSE subjects (linear and unitised specifications) and A-level subjects in the June 2009 session.

There are two types of applications for special consideration: *present but disadvantaged* and *absent with good reason*. Analyses were carried out separately for each type of application.

Only candidates who submitted applications for special consideration to the OCR awarding body were considered. GCSE and A-level results for those candidates and data on special consideration applications were obtained from OCR's examinations processing system. The data comprised personal details (name, sex, date of birth and school), assessment grade details (session, tier, final mark and final grade) and enhancement details (type of application, outcome and tariff applied).

Results

The numbers of special consideration applications have been increasing in the last few years. For present but disadvantaged candidates, applications increased from about 30,000 in 2000 to about 80,000 in 2009. For absent with good reason candidates, applications increased from about 4,500 in 2000 to about 6,250 in 2009.

There might be a number of reasons for the increase in the numbers of special consideration applications:

- Schools are increasingly wise to the rules. Teachers and also parents are possibly more aware now than in previous years of the circumstances which might be eligible for special consideration. In addition, examination officers in schools and colleges work very hard to ensure that candidates get the fair access they are entitled to.
- The special consideration figures published yearly by Ofqual are the numbers of applications for special consideration and not the numbers of candidates receiving an enhancement. The fact that every year the number of modular qualifications increases leads to an increase in the number of applications as in a linear qualification a candidate can request special consideration in one or more papers/components, counting as only one application and in a modular/unitised qualification a candidate can request special consideration in one or more units and each of these requests counts as one application.
- The rise in applications can show increased inclusion, as awarding bodies are committed to meet the needs of those candidates that have been disadvantaged.
- Pupils and teachers might be abusing the system in order to get better grades but there is no measure of how frequently such behaviour might occur.

For *present but disadvantaged* candidates:

- There were more special consideration requests at A-level than at GCSE (1.35% of GCSE entries requested special consideration vs. 4.52% of A-level entries in June 2009). One reason for this could be the fact that A-levels are high stakes examinations and therefore it is more important for candidates to get the 'extra marks'. It could also be due to the modular structure of A-levels (see page vii).
- In GCSE subjects, the percentages of candidates with at least one application for special consideration were lower than 5%. At A-level, the percentages were slightly higher but below 10% for all subjects.
- Both at GCSE and A-level, candidates in independent schools were more likely to submit a request for special consideration than candidates in state schools.
- In most subjects there were significant differences in ability among the students who applied for special consideration and those who did not. The differences were in favour of those who applied, with the percentages of candidates requesting special consideration being higher in the high attaining groups than in the low attaining groups.
- In all subjects, both at GCSE and A-level, the percentages of candidates out of the subject's entry who improved their overall grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement were very low (less than 1%).

For *absent with good reason* candidates:

- There were fewer special consideration requests at A-level than at GCSE (0.10% of A-level entries vs. 0.15% of GCSE entries requested special consideration in June 2009). It could be the case that A-level students, due to the high stakes nature of the qualification, were more likely to tolerate unfortunate situations or minor illnesses and do their exams regardless, whereas GCSE students may have been more inclined to not take the exam.
- In GCSE subjects the percentages of candidates with at least one application for special consideration ranged from 0.28% to 0.35%. At A-level, they ranged from 0.21% to 0.45%.
- In GCSE examinations, around 45% of comprehensive schools submitted at least one application for special consideration whilst only 17% of independent schools and 40% of grammar schools did so; at A-level, 60% of sixth form colleges submitted at least one request for an enhanced grade. This contrasts with 22% of the comprehensives and only 16% of the independent schools.
- In almost all GCSE subjects there were significant differences in ability among the students who applied for special consideration and those who did not and in favour of those who did not apply. However, in all A-level subjects investigated in this research there were no differences in ability between the two groups of students.
- In all subjects, both at GCSE and A-level, the percentages of candidates, out of the subject's entry, who improved their overall grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, were very low (less than 0.50%).

There were more applications for special consideration in modular/unitised qualifications than in linear ones. This might be partly explained by the fact that with the introduction of modular specifications, examinations are spread over a wider period of time increasing the chances of a temporary illness, injury, or other unforeseen circumstances to take place.

1. INTRODUCTION

The GCSE, GCE and AEA Code of Practice (Ofqual, 2009a) promotes quality, consistency, accuracy and fairness in assessment and awarding. Therefore, awarding bodies need to make sure that candidates have fair access to exams so that they are able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Awarding bodies also have to facilitate open access to their qualifications for candidates who are eligible for reasonable adjustments without compromising the assessment of the skills, knowledge or understanding being measured.

A reasonable adjustment is any action that helps to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty that places the candidate at a disadvantage in the assessment. Reasonable adjustments can be of two types: access arrangements and special consideration. JCQ¹ awarding bodies produce a common set of regulations and guidance relating to candidates who are eligible for adjustments in examinations (JCQ, 2009). Each awarding body follows these regulations with the aim of granting fair access while maintaining the integrity of their qualifications.

1.1 ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

Access arrangements are approved or set in place before the assessment takes place and they constitute an arrangement to give the candidate access to the qualification, *i.e.*, they help to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty that places the candidate at a disadvantage in the assessment situation. The use of the arrangement will not be taken into consideration during the assessment of the candidate's work. Some arrangements can be approved internally by the school or centre; others need to be requested in advance through the awarding bodies.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) test and exam support website explains that “access arrangements are designed for a small number of pupils that may require additional arrangements to access the tests.” QCDA considers access arrangements to be “adjustments that schools must consider prior to the tests, and should be based primarily on normal classroom practice for pupils with particular needs. Schools must have evidence to show that resources are routinely committed to providing this support”.

Access arrangements might involve but not be limited to:

- changing assessment arrangements, for example allowing candidates extra time to complete the assessment;
- adapting assessment materials, for example providing materials in Braille;
- providing access facilitators during the assessment, such as a reader, a scribe or a sign interpreter;
- re-organising the assessment room, for example removing visual stimuli for an autistic candidate;
- alternative ways of presenting responses, such as a word processor.

¹ Joint Council for Qualifications

In the last few years there has been a rise in both the number of awarding-body-approved arrangements, and to some extent, centre-delegated arrangements. The reason for the rise is not obvious. One explanation could be centres' increased awareness and understanding of the type of access arrangements available for candidates with particular requirements so that more candidates had the arrangements they needed. However, the increase in the number of approved arrangements led to concern about the degree of rigour in the approval process.

1.2 SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

Special consideration, the focus of this research, is a post examination adjustment to the marks or grades of a candidate. Centres can request special consideration for candidates who were absent from a time-tabled component/unit due to illness or other acceptable reason or were present but disadvantaged as a result of a temporary illness, injury, indisposition or other unforeseen circumstances immediately before or during the examination period.

Special consideration may result in a relatively minor adjustment to the mark of the candidate, of up to five per cent of the maximum mark for the question paper. The size of the adjustment will depend on the candidate's circumstances during the examination and will reflect the difficulty faced by the candidate. The maximum adjustment (5%) is reserved for exceptional cases, for example candidates disadvantaged by the recent death of an immediate family member. Most adjustments for special consideration are smaller, for example two per cent of the maximum available mark for candidates with minor illnesses on the day of the examination.

When a student misses a component (or a unit) for an acceptable reason, an allowance can be made to account for it and an enhanced grade can be issued.

Special consideration cannot remove the difficulty which was faced by the candidate but instead attempts can be made to assist the student affected without giving an unfair advantage and it should be noted that a successful application will not necessarily change a candidate's grade.

Special consideration must be applied for following a specific examination series and applications are not considered once a candidate's achievement has been claimed and certificated and after the closing date for enquiries about results for the examination series in which the candidate has sat the examinations. Applications for special consideration should be submitted by the candidate's school and they will not be acceptable if submitted directly by parents or candidates.

1.2.1 Present but disadvantaged

Candidates who sat a component/unit are eligible for special consideration if they have been fully prepared and have covered the whole course but performance in the examination or in the production of coursework was affected by adverse circumstances beyond their control (JCQ, 2009). These include:

- temporary illness or accident/injury at the time of the assessment;
- bereavement at the time of the assessment;
- domestic crisis arising at the time of the assessment;
- serious disturbance during an examination, particularly where recorded materials are being used;

- other accidental events such as being given the wrong examination paper, being given a defective examination paper or tape, failure of practical equipment, failure of materials to arrive on time;
- participation in sporting events at international level at the time of certification;
- failure by the centre or awarding body to implement previously agreed access arrangements.

Appendix A presents a more exhaustive list of circumstances which might be eligible for special consideration.

A candidate will not be eligible for special consideration if:

- no evidence is supplied by the centre that the candidate has been affected at the time of the assessment by a particular condition;
- preparation for a component is affected by difficulties during the course, *e.g.*, disturbances through building work, lack of proper facilities.

1.2.2 Absent with good reason

When a candidate has missed a component/unit for acceptable reasons and can produce evidence of that, an adjustment may be made to the terminal or overall grade as long as the component/unit was missed in the terminal series and some minimum requirements have been satisfied.

Candidates must have covered the whole course and failure to prepare candidates is not an acceptable reason for an enhanced special consideration grade. In addition, for GCE qualifications, 50% of the total assessment must be completed before a special consideration enhancement may be considered; for GCSE qualifications, 35% of the total assessment must be completed. If too much of the examination has been missed the candidate will be graded on the marks scored and the certificate will be endorsed to show that not all of the components have been completed.

In the case of modular examinations taken in examination series prior to certification, candidates have to re-enter any missed units at a later date.

Recently, there have been claims about the number of students receiving extra marks in their GCSE and A-level examinations due to special consideration increasing considerably year on year. Although it has been acknowledged that allowances should be made for students who have been disadvantaged, great care needs to be taken to ensure reasons are genuine and that the system remains fair for all learners.

There might be a number of reasons for the increases in the numbers of special consideration applications.

Firstly, as Kathleen Tattersall, chairman of the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator, admitted “schools are increasingly wise to the rules”. In fact, there is possibly more awareness now than in previous years of the special consideration enhancements amongst teachers and parents and more information about the circumstances which might be eligible for special consideration. In addition, examination officers in schools and colleges work very hard to ensure that candidates get the fair access they are entitled to.

From 2004 to 2005 the rise in special consideration applications was considerably bigger than in previous years. The most likely reason for it was the fact that in September 2004, the JCQ published the regulations for access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special consideration for the 2004/2005 academic year.

These regulations included, for the first time, an explanation of how special consideration was applied. The press reported extensively on this and therefore most of the country caught onto the notion of special consideration.

Secondly, it should be noted that the figures reported by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (e.g. Ofqual (2009b), Ofqual (2010)) are the numbers of applications for special consideration and not the numbers of candidates receiving an enhancement. The fact that every year the number of modular qualifications increases leads to an increase in the number of applications: in a linear qualification a candidate can request special consideration in one or more papers/components but this counts as only one application; in a modular/unitised qualification a candidate can request special consideration in one or more units and each of these requests counts as one application.

Thirdly, the increases in applications can show increased inclusion, as awarding bodies are committed to meet the needs of those candidates that have been disadvantaged.

Finally, it could be argued that people are manipulating the system. In fact, there has been lots of criticism about how pupils and teachers might be abusing the system to boost results, helping schools climb in national league tables.

This research will focus on special consideration applications only and will provide evidence in relation to the claims regarding the increasing numbers of special consideration requests in the last few years at GCSE and A-level. It will also investigate the effect of the special consideration enhancements in the overall grade in a range of GCSE and A-level subjects.

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 DATA

GCSE and A-level candidates normally take exams from more than one awarding body and might apply for special consideration to one or more awarding bodies. In this research, only candidates who submitted an application for special consideration in subjects offered by the OCR awarding body were considered.

2.1.1 GCSE and A-level subjects and results

A range of GCSE and A-level subjects were selected for this research. The subjects were chosen because of their different nature and because their entries and numbers of special consideration requests were reasonably high.

At GCSE, eight contrasting subjects were chosen: four subjects that were assessed in a linear fashion and four unitised specifications.

Modular/unitised specifications

- English (Opening Minds)
- French²
- Mathematics C (graduated assessment)
- Science A (Twenty First Century)

Linear specifications

- History B (Modern World)
- Geography B (Avery Hill)
- Mathematics A (linear assessment)
- Religious Studies B (Philosophy and Ethics)

At A-level, four subjects were chosen:

- English literature
- Mathematics
- Chemistry
- History

OCR GCSE and A-level results in the subjects above from 2008 to 2009, both at specification level and at unit level and for all examination sessions, were obtained from EPS³. This data comprised candidate details (name, sex, date of birth and school) and assessment grade details (session, tier, final mark and final grade).

2.1.2 Special consideration data

Data on special consideration applications was obtained from EPS with the approval of the 'Qualifications Division' of OCR. This data comprised candidate details (name and school), assessment details (session and component/unit) and enhancement details (type of application, outcome and tariff applied).

Data covered all the examination sessions from 1998 to 2009.

² In this research GCSE French is considered a unitised specification. Although the specification is linear in the sense that all units must be taken in the same session, the entry operates as though it were modular.

³ OCR's examinations processing system.

As mentioned in the introductory section, there are two types of applications for special consideration: present but disadvantaged and absent with good reason. Analyses were carried out separately for each type of application.

A special consideration application can be approved, rejected, referred to centre or referred to grade review. In this research only approved and rejected applications were considered.

The tariff applied to an approved special consideration application varies from 0% up to 5% of the maximum mark for the unit/paper. When consideration is given but the addition of marks is considered inappropriate, the tariff applied is 0%. Appendix A provides a list of special consideration circumstances and the corresponding adjustments.

2.1.3 General attainment data

A measure of students' general attainment (proxy for ability) was computed using data from the National Pupil Database. The National Pupil Database, compiled by the Department for Education, holds national examination data for all candidates that sat an examination in an academic year.

By assigning marks to the GCSE grades (A*=8, A=7, B=6, C=5, D=4, E=3, F=2, G=1, U=0) it was possible to arrive to a total GCSE score for each student. A 'mean GCSE' indicator was calculated by dividing the total score by the number of subjects attempted. If a subject had been attempted twice, the highest grade was considered.

The mean GCSE score was used as a measure of prior attainment for students taking A-level subjects. For students taking GCSE subjects, a measure of concurrent attainment was used instead. For each GCSE subject, the concurrent measure was the mean GCSE score calculated excluding the grade in the subject under consideration.

2.2. METHODOLOGY

There are four main different types of analysis carried out in this research.

2.2.1 General statistics on special consideration applications

Descriptive statistics were used to investigate the patterns in the numbers of special consideration applications over time and by type of qualification and school type.

The categories for the school type are as follows:

- GCSE
 - Comprehensive schools
 - Secondary modern schools
 - Grammar schools
 - Independent schools
- A-level
 - Comprehensive schools
 - Grammar schools
 - Independent schools
 - Sixth form colleges
 - Further education / tertiary colleges

2.2.2. Impact of the special consideration enhancements in the examinations outcomes

To evaluate the impact of the special consideration enhancements in the examinations outcomes, grades and marks before and after the enhancements were required. The process of obtaining/calculating those depended on the type of special consideration application and on the type of assessment (linear vs. modular).

Present but disadvantaged

- Unitised specifications

The data sets downloaded from EPS contain, for each unit, the final grade and final UMS⁴ marks. Special consideration enhancements, if applied, are already accounted for. The raw marks before the enhancement are also available, but they need to be converted to UMS marks and the grade that would have been obtained before the enhancement computed.

To calculate the unit's grade before the enhancement, unit grade thresholds for all examination series considered in the analyses were needed. These were obtained from the examiner's reports in each of the subjects⁵.

Finally, to obtain the overall grade before the enhancement, it was necessary to aggregate the units that counted towards certification, that is, the overall UMS marks needed to be calculated and the overall grade computed using the specification aggregation thresholds.

- Linear specifications

For each component/paper in a linear specification, the same steps as before, except for the conversion of raw marks into UMS marks, were followed.

Absent with good reason

In both linear and modular specifications, and for those candidates who missed at least one component but met the requirements for an adjustment, EPS provides both the overall grade calculated with the marks scored in the units/components and the grade after the adjustment was applied (enhanced grade).

2.2.3 Relationship between predicted (or forecast) grades and special consideration applications

For each candidate, the overall mark in each individual GCSE and A-level subject was predicted as a function of the candidate's general attainment score using linear regression and, consequently, a predicted grade was calculated using each specification aggregation thresholds.

A comparison between the actual grade and the predicted grade was then carried out for candidates who requested a special consideration enhancement.

The data sets downloaded from EPS contain, for each subject, a forecast grade. This grade was predicted by the teachers and submitted to the awarding bodies prior to the examination. Therefore, a comparison between the actual grade and the forecast grade was also carried out for the candidates who requested a special consideration enhancement.

⁴ To make the unit results compatible and comparable (so that they can be added together to get the final grade, even if they were taken at different times), raw marks are converted to points on a uniform mark scale (UMS).

⁵ Examiners' reports can be downloaded from the OCR website or accessed in the Cambridge Assessment archives.

The forecast grades are normally used as a reference in order to assess the performance of the candidate. If a candidate obtained a much lower grade than forecasted, reasons for the underperformance might be sought out.

2.2.4 Effects of school type on special consideration applications

To investigate if there were differences at school level in terms of the numbers of special consideration applications, a logistic regression analysis was carried out.

Logistic regression is a type of regression analysis that is used when the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable (*i.e.* it takes only two values, which usually represent the occurrence or non-occurrence of some event) and the independent variables are continuous, categorical, or both. It is used to predict the probability that the 'event of interest' will occur as a function of the independent variables.

In this research, the dependent variable is the request of a special consideration enhancement: the variable will take the value 1 if the student applied for special consideration and 0 otherwise.

Due to the small numbers of applications for special consideration in each subject considered in this research, two groups of subjects were created: a) GCSE subjects (unitised and linear specifications); b) A-level subjects. A logistic regression analysis was carried out for each group.

The independent or explanatory variables are the mean GCSE score (proxy for students' ability) and the school type.

The form of the model is

$$\log\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2$$

where p is the probability that a student requests a special consideration enhancement and X_1 and X_2 are the independent variables (predictors). β_0 , β_1 and β_2 are the regression coefficients, which are estimated from the data.

A positive regression coefficient means that the variable increases the probability of the outcome, while a negative regression coefficient means that the variable decreases the probability of that outcome; a large regression coefficient means that the variable strongly influences the probability of that outcome; while a near-zero regression coefficient means that the variable has little influence on the probability of that outcome.

Exponentiation of the parameter estimates for the independent variables in the model yields the odds ratios. An odds ratio (OR) is defined as the relative amount by which the odds of the outcome increase (OR greater than 1) or decrease (OR less than 1) when the value of the predictor variable is increased by 1 unit. For categorical variables (*e.g.* school type) this represents the odds as compared to the baseline category, for example, the odds for a student in an independent school compared to the odds for a student in a comprehensive school.

3. RESULTS

The results of the analyses carried out in this research are presented in two sections. The first section contains the analysis of special consideration applications where candidates were present but disadvantaged. Section two contains the same analyses but for applications where candidates were absent with good reason.

Each section begins presenting summary statistics of special consideration applications from 2007 to 2009 (January and June sessions). This includes:

- numbers of special consideration applications;
- percentages of accepted and rejected special consideration applications;
- special consideration applications by type of qualification;
- approved special consideration applications by the tariff applied (only section one);
- numbers of candidates applying for special consideration;
- numbers and percentages of schools with at least one candidate applying for special consideration;
- numbers and percentages of schools with at least one candidate applying for special consideration by school type.

The above summary statistics are followed by detailed analyses of special consideration applications in individual subjects. Data for GCSEs and A-levels is presented separately. These analyses, based on data from the June 2009 session, include but are not limited to:

- numbers and percentages of special consideration applications in the session;
- numbers and percentages of approved special consideration applications by tariff (only section one);
- for each unit, numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade due to special consideration enhancements;
- for each unit, average increases in marks after special consideration enhancements;
- for the overall qualification, numbers and percentages of candidates who improved the overall grade due to special consideration enhancements.

In order to calculate the number of candidates who improved the overall grade in a subject, applications for special consideration in previous sessions need to be considered (as GCSE and A-level modules could have been taken in any available session through the two-year course). The analyses were restricted to those candidates who certificated for a GCSE or A-level in the June 2009 session and had taken any modules used for aggregation in 2008 or 2009 examination sessions (January, March or June).

Further analyses carried out for the overall qualification include:

- number of candidates with at least one special consideration application in any of the modules/papers that counted towards certification;
- average number of special consideration requests per candidate;

- differences in ability between candidates who applied for special consideration and candidates who did not;
- relationship between predicted/forecast grades in the subject and special consideration applications (present but disadvantaged applications only).

3.1 PRESENT BUT DISADVANTAGED

3.1.1 General Statistics

For the 2009 examinations series, the OCR awarding body received 80,189 requests for special consideration, a decrease of more than 4,000 applications from 2008. Around 92% of these requests were approved.

Although there was also a decrease in the total number of OCR examination papers sat by candidates in 2009 (6,802,840 entries) as compared to 2008 (7,376,504 entries), the decrease in special consideration applications was not in line with it (7.78% decrease in entries vs. 5.26% decrease in special consideration applications).

Appendix B presents all the special consideration applications received by OCR (all centres and all qualifications) from 1998 until 2009 and Tables 1 and 2 below display this information for the last three years. These figures show that special consideration applications have been increasing in the last few years.

Table 1: Numbers of special consideration applications, 2007-2009

Session	Year	Accepted	Rejected	Other ⁶	Total
January	2007	8757	202	385	9344
	2008	8358	118	523	8999
	2009	9898	189	1054	11141
June	2007	62900	2021	4124	69045
	2008	71047	1983	2609	75639
	2009	64001	2517	2530	69048
All	2007	71657	2223	4509	78389
	2008	79405	2101	3132	84638
	2009	73899	2706	3584	80189

The proportions of special consideration requests approved were similar in both sessions and in all three years (Table 2).

Tables 3 and 4 present the numbers of special consideration applications by type of qualification and by tariff in English schools only. Applications for qualifications other than GCSE or A-level (e.g. STEP, Entry Level, GNVQs) or applications from candidates in schools in Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland were not included in these analyses. Also, only approved and rejected applications were considered from this point onwards.

⁶ 'Other' includes applications referred to centre or referred to grade review.

Table 2: Percentages of accepted and rejected special consideration applications, 2007-2009

Session	Year	Accepted	Rejected	Other
January	2007	93.72	2.16	4.12
	2008	92.88	1.31	5.81
	2009	88.84	1.70	9.46
June	2007	91.10	2.93	5.97
	2008	93.93	2.62	3.45
	2009	92.69	3.65	3.66
All	2007	91.41	2.84	5.75
	2008	93.82	2.48	3.70
	2009	92.16	3.37	4.47

Table 3: Special consideration applications by type of qualification, 2007-2009

Session	Year	GCSE			A-level		
		Number of applications	% accepted	% rejected	Number of applications	% accepted	% rejected
January	2007	1770	99.10	0.90	6639	97.61	2.39
	2008	2908	98.93	1.07	5294	98.58	1.42
	2009	3268	97.95	2.05	6378	98.26	1.74
June	2007	31361	97.38	2.62	30358	96.91	3.09
	2008	37298	97.73	2.27	32731	96.68	3.32
	2009	33628	96.76	3.24	29408	95.86	4.14
All	2007	33131	97.47	2.53	36997	97.03	2.97
	2008	40206	97.82	2.18	38025	96.94	3.06
	2009	36896	96.87	3.13	35786	96.29	3.71

There were more special consideration requests at A-level than at GCSE as a proportion of the unit/specification entries for each qualification⁷ (1.35% of GCSE entries requested special consideration in June 2009 vs. 4.52% of A-level entries). One reason for this could be the fact that A-levels are high stakes examinations and therefore it is more important for candidates to get the 'extra marks'. It could also be the case that due to the modular structure of A-levels, candidates' examinations are spread over a wider period of time (e.g. candidates sit modules in different days, sessions or years), increasing the probability of a temporary illness, injury, or other unforeseen circumstances taking place.

Table 4: Percentages of approved special consideration applications by tariff and type of qualification, 2007-2009

(a) GCSE

Tariff	2007		2008		2009	
	January	June	January	June	January	June
0	4.79	4.98	8.27	4.20	0.28	6.49
1	53.93	29.07	29.30	15.91	28.18	15.61
2	30.84	36.36	39.59	48.72	50.83	39.52
3	4.68	12.25	13.59	13.80	7.94	17.89
4	4.10	12.80	7.44	14.21	8.87	15.75
5	1.65	4.54	1.81	3.15	3.91	4.74

⁷ Unit/specification entries for each qualification in June 2009 were obtained from the Information Services Platform.

(b) A-level

Tariff	2007		2008		2009	
	January	June	January	June	January	June
0	1.85	2.75	1.94	3.23	0.30	4.97
1	32.02	21.31	19.47	21.23	8.57	16.54
2	43.60	43.98	44.34	42.94	56.18	40.00
3	10.34	14.06	16.77	13.99	14.90	17.51
4	10.52	14.51	14.79	15.26	17.09	17.26
5	1.67	3.39	2.70	3.35	2.95	3.72

(c) GCSE and A-level

Tariff	2007		2008		2009	
	January	June	January	June	January	June
0	2.48	3.89	4.19	3.75	0.30	5.79
1	36.69	25.26	22.96	18.38	15.20	16.04
2	40.88	40.10	42.65	46.03	54.37	39.74
3	9.13	13.14	15.64	13.89	12.55	17.71
4	9.16	13.64	12.18	14.70	14.31	16.45
5	1.66	3.97	2.38	3.25	3.27	4.27

For both qualifications and in all sessions, the most popular tariff applied was 2% of the unit/component total mark.

Tables 5 and 6 present the numbers and percentages of candidates, in English schools only, who requested a special consideration enhancement. In the June session of each of the three years considered in this study, the percentages of A-level candidates with a request for special consideration almost doubled the percentages of GCSE candidates.

Table 5: Numbers of candidates who applied for special consideration, 2007-2009

Year	January			June		
	GCSE	A-level	Total	GCSE	A-level	Total ⁸
2007	1728	4825	6553	17820	12339	30159
2008	2610	3703	6313	20386	13437	33823
2009	2902	4383	7285	17773	13341	31114

Table 6: Percentages of candidates who applied for special consideration (as a percentage of the GCSE and A-level cohorts), 2007-2009

Year	January		June	
	GCSE	A-level	GCSE	A-level
2007	0.27	1.85	2.77	4.74
2008	0.41	1.36	3.17	4.94
2009	0.46	1.54	2.83	4.69

As mentioned in the methodology section, candidates normally take exams from more than one awarding body and might be applying for special consideration to one or more awarding bodies. These figures refer only to candidates applying to the OCR awarding body.

⁸ Candidates with applications for special consideration in qualifications other than GCSE or A-level (e.g. STEP, Entry Level, GNVQs) were not considered.

Table 7 displays the percentages of schools with at least one candidate requesting special consideration (as a percentage of the schools registered with the OCR awarding body). Tables 8 and 9 display the same percentages, for GCSE and A-level respectively, by school type.

Table 7: Percentages of schools with at least one candidate applying for special consideration (as a percentage of the schools registered with OCR), 2007-2009

Year	January		June	
	GCSE	A-level	GCSE	A-level
2007	7.17	35.63	63.24	70.60
2008	11.30	36.03	65.43	71.82
2009	13.41	38.56	62.36	71.53

Table 8: Percentages of schools with at least one GCSE candidate applying for special consideration by school type (as a percentage of the schools of each type registered with OCR), 2007-2009

(a) January

Year	January			
	Comprehensive	Grammar	Independent	Secondary Modern
2007	9.08	8.64	4.12	5.59
2008	14.55	14.38	7.18	7.36
2009	17.60	15.29	7.49	14.38

(b) June

Year	June			
	Comprehensive	Grammar	Independent	Secondary Modern
2007	71.81	83.33	62.36	61.49
2008	75.83	85.63	61.41	71.78
2009	71.38	86.62	63.14	66.25

In all June sessions, when most of the examinations are sat, around 85% of grammar schools offering OCR GCSE examinations submitted at least one request for special consideration. This contrasts with 70% of the comprehensives and only about 60% of independent schools.

Table 9: Percentages of schools with at least one A-level candidate applying for special consideration by school type (as a percentage of the schools of each type registered with OCR), 2007-2009

(a) January

Year	January				
	Comprehensive	FE/Tertiary College	Grammar	Independent	Sixth Form College
2007	31.92	35.18	50.00	39.88	65.41
2008	32.43	32.98	55.49	39.31	63.50
2009	35.29	29.51	58.18	41.39	69.06

(b) June

Year	June				
	Comprehensive	FE/Tertiary College	Grammar	Independent	Sixth Form College
2007	70.38	57.29	90.85	76.30	86.47
2008	70.28	65.96	91.46	76.53	91.24
2009	69.38	63.93	90.91	78.53	88.49

In the June sessions, around 90% of the grammar schools and sixth form colleges offering OCR A-level examinations had submitted at least one request for special consideration. This contrasts with 70% of the comprehensives and only about 60% of further education and tertiary colleges.

Note that 53.55% of the schools offering GCSEs submitted at least one request for special consideration in three consecutive years. This percentage increased to 58.87% among the schools that offer A-levels.

3.1.2 Individual GCSE subjects

Results are presented separately for linear and unitised GCSE qualifications. In a modular/unitised qualification a candidate can request special consideration in one or more units and each of these requests counts as one application. In a linear qualification a candidate can request special consideration in one or more papers/components but this counts as one application only.

3.1.2.1 Unitised GCSEs

The results of the analysis for all four unitised GCSE subjects presented in this section (English, French, mathematics and science) have been written to be almost self-contained and the content of each subsection follows the same order.

GCSE ENGLISH (1900)

The OCR GCSE in English (1900) has a unit-based structure. Units which are externally assessed by written examination contain two options: a foundation tier component and a higher tier component. The foundation tier assesses grades G to C and the higher tier assesses grades D to A*. Coursework units are not tiered. In order to certificate for a GCSE in this subject, at least four units must be taken. A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2003b).

In the June 2009 session there were 1843 applications for special consideration in GCSE English units⁹, which accounted for only 1.01% of the entries. Around 96% of them were accepted. Table 10 shows the numbers of applications in each GCSE English unit in the June 2009 session and Table 11 shows the percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

⁹ Not all applications were in units that counted towards certification.

Table 10: Special consideration applications in GCSE English units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2431	46822	771	751	97.41	1.65
2432	46895	931	909	97.64	1.99
2433	3119	38	38	100.00	1.22
2434	41111	62	37	59.68	0.15
2435	44054	41	39	95.12	0.09

Table 11: Percentages of approved special consideration requests by tariff in GCSE English units, June 2009

Unit	Tariff					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
2431	2.13	13.85	31.03	24.90	21.70	6.39
2432	2.20	10.34	43.78	20.24	18.81	4.62
2433	0.00	15.79	5.26	65.79	5.26	7.89
2434	0.00	5.41	29.73	45.95	18.92	0.00
2435	7.69	5.13	28.21	43.59	15.38	0.00
All units	2.20	11.72	36.92	24.24	19.67	5.24

Overall, more than 30% of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the unit's total mark and about 75% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the unit (see Appendix A for circumstances that may fall within each category).

Table 12 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade after the special consideration enhancement was applied. Depending on the unit, between 15% and 40% of the applications led to a grade improvement. The average number of UMS marks gained ranged between 1 and 3.5. Between 30% and 70% of the special consideration applications had achieved or improved the grade forecasted by the teachers. These percentages increased slightly after the enhancements were applied.

Table 12: Changes in UMS marks and grades for approved special consideration applications in GCSE English units, June 2009

Unit	Candidates with unit grade change	Percentage with unit grade change ¹⁰	UMS marks increase		Applications that had achieved forecast grade before SC enhancement	Applications that had achieved forecast grade after SC enhancement
			Mean	SD ¹¹		
2431	287	38.22	3.33	2.02	32.03	41.05
2432	226	24.86	2.60	1.62	36.50	36.61
2433	9	23.68	1.70	0.74	21.62	27.03
2434	9	24.32	1.41	1.12	70.27	72.97
2435	6	15.38	1.33	0.96	53.87	66.67

¹⁰ Percentage out of accepted applications.

¹¹ Standard Deviation.

For GCSE English and from this point onwards, only candidates who certificated in the June 2009 session and had taken any units used for aggregation in January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009 were considered in the analyses. There were a total of 46997 candidates who satisfied this criterion (out of the 47229 candidates who certificated in June 2009).

Only 189 of the 46997 candidates who obtained a GCSE in English in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, 0.40% of the subject's entry. Table 13 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 13: Changes in the overall GCSE English grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
A	A*	34
B	A	61
C	B	48
D	C	29
E	D	11
F	E	4
U	G	2

About 3% (n=1266) of the candidates who obtained the GCSE in June 2009 applied for special consideration in at least one unit in any of the four sessions considered¹² and 14.93% of the candidates who applied improved their grade.

As stated early, in modular qualifications, a candidate can request a special consideration enhancement in one or more units. The average number of applications per candidate was 1.63 applications (SD=0.66). Table 14 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Almost half of the candidates (43.49%) were granted special consideration in only one unit and about 52% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two units.

Table 14: Distribution of the number of approved special consideration applications in GCSE English, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	551	43.49
2	661	52.17
3	22	1.74
4+	32	2.53

There were significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE and excluding the attainment in English) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not, and in favour of those who applied. Table 15 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade.

¹² January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009.

Table 15: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A*	113	3.86
A	216	2.92
B	295	2.82
C	286	2.44
D	194	2.72
E	82	2.64
F	50	3.00
G	25	2.83
U	5	1.14

Table 15 shows that the percentages of candidates requesting special consideration in GCSE English were higher in the high attaining groups than in the low attaining groups.

The average increase in overall UMS marks in GCSE English due to the special consideration enhancement was 4.33 marks. Figure 1, which displays the distribution of the increase in UMS marks, shows that most of the candidates obtained an increase of less than two UMS marks. Therefore, it is not surprising that only a small percentage of the candidates who requested an enhancement improved their overall grade.

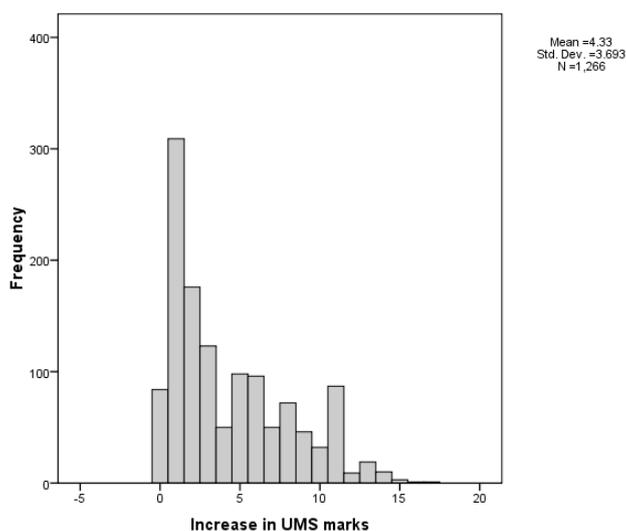


Figure 1: Distribution of the increase in UMS marks when applying for special consideration. GCSE English, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, only 26.37% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in this research based on their general attainment/ability (concurrent GCSE). It is worth pointing out that almost 20% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Teachers usually predict their students' grades prior to the examination. These forecast grades can be used as a reference in order to assess the performance of the candidate.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 39.03% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 8% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 12% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

Note that special consideration requests have to be submitted immediately after the examination has taken place and a direct comparison of forecast and actual grade is not possible at that point.

GCSE FRENCH (1925)

Assessment in GCSE French is by means of four units. Although the specification is linear, in the sense that all units must be taken in the same session and there is no facility for carrying over results in individual units, candidate entry operates as though it were modular, *i.e.*, candidates are entered for the units they will take according to the permitted combinations. Candidates must also be entered for certification for the specification to claim their overall grade. This is calculated by aggregation of the uniform marks they gain in their units. Therefore, in this research, GCSE French is considered a unitised specification.

In the listening, speaking, reading and writing units, there are papers for a foundation tier and for a higher tier. Candidates may enter any combination of foundation or higher tier papers to reflect their abilities. However, only one tier may be entered for each skill. Question papers offered at foundation tier target grades G to C. Question papers offered at higher tier target grades D to A*. Coursework units are not tiered.

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2000a).

In the June 2009 session there were 1965 applications for special consideration in GCSE French units¹³, which accounted for only 1.65% of the entries in the subject. Around 97% of them were accepted. Table 16 shows the numbers of applications in each GCSE French unit in the June 2009 session and Table 17 shows the percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

Table 16: Special consideration applications in GCSE French units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2351	29770	698	683	97.85	2.34
2352	26755	282	268	95.04	1.05
2353	29765	608	596	98.03	2.04
2354	10929	330	324	98.18	3.02
2355	3015	17	15	88.24	0.56
2356	18839	30	28	93.33	0.16

¹³ Not all applications were in units that counted towards certification.

Table 17: Percentages of approved special consideration applications by tariff in GCSE French units, June 2009

Unit	Tariff					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
2351	2.20	28.40	41.00	12.15	12.30	3.95
2352	1.87	7.84	67.16	9.33	12.31	1.49
2353	3.36	10.07	42.62	17.95	20.81	5.20
2354	3.70	7.10	48.46	18.83	19.44	2.47
2355	13.33	13.33	60.00	13.33	0.00	0.00
2356	0.00	3.57	64.29	14.29	14.29	3.57
All units	2.82	15.73	46.92	14.73	16.09	3.71

Overall, almost 50% of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the unit's total mark and about 80% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the unit.

Table 18 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade after the special consideration enhancement was applied. In most units (the exception was unit 2356, a coursework unit) between 15% and 35% of the applications led to an improvement in the unit grade. The average number of UMS marks gained ranged between 1.5 and 3. Between 25% and 50% of the special consideration applications (depending on the unit) had achieved or improved the grade forecasted by the teachers. These percentages increased slightly after the enhancements were applied.

Table 18: Changes in UMS marks and grades for approved special consideration applications in GCSE French units, June 2009

Unit	Candidates with unit grade change	Percentage with unit grade change ¹⁴	UMS marks increase		Applications that had achieved forecast grade before SC enhancement	Applications that had achieved forecast grade after SC enhancement
			Mean	SD		
2351	104	15.23	1.82	1.19	45.19	45.62
2352	89	33.21	1.97	1.06	36.94	37.69
2353	107	17.95	2.16	1.41	44.74	49.18
2354	59	18.21	1.76	1.06	30.61	33.64
2355	3	20.00	1.59	1.28	41.18	52.94
2356	27	96.43	2.96	1.48	25.00	25.00

For GCSE French and from this point onwards, only candidates who certificated in the June 2009 session were considered in the analyses.

Only 106 of the 29696 candidates who obtained a GCSE in French in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, 0.36% of the subject's entry. Table 19 displays the changes in the overall grades.

¹⁴ Percentage out of accepted applications.

Table 19: Changes in the overall GCSE French grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
A	A*	28
B	A	20
C	B	22
D	C	22
E	D	10
F	E	2
G	F	2

About 4% (n=1268) of the candidates who obtained the GCSE in June 2009 applied for special consideration in at least one unit and 8.36% of the candidates who applied improved their grade.

Each candidate could have applied for special consideration in one or more units. The average number of applications per candidate in this GCSE subject was 1.53 applications (SD=0.87). Table 20 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Almost 70% of the candidates were granted special consideration in only one unit, and about 15% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two or three. The percentage of candidates who applied for special consideration in all four units was higher than for other modular GCSEs (4.42%, compared to percentages ranging from 0.80 to 2.50), probably due to the structure of the qualification (all units being taken in the same session).

Table 20: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE French, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	859	67.74
2	195	15.38
3	158	12.46
4	56	4.42

There were significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE and excluding the attainment in French) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not, and in favour of those who applied.

Table 21 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration in this subject by grade. The percentages of candidates who applied for special consideration in GCSE French were higher in the high attaining groups than in the low attaining groups. In fact, those percentages decreased with the grade.

The average increase in overall UMS marks in GCSE French due to the special consideration enhancement was 3.00 marks. Figure 2, which displays the distribution of this increase, shows that most of the candidates obtained an increase less than two UMS marks.

Table 21: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A*	182	5.37
A	237	5.32
B	282	4.89
C	318	4.39
D	182	3.88
E	55	2.95
F	9	1.20
G	3	1.35
U	0	0.00

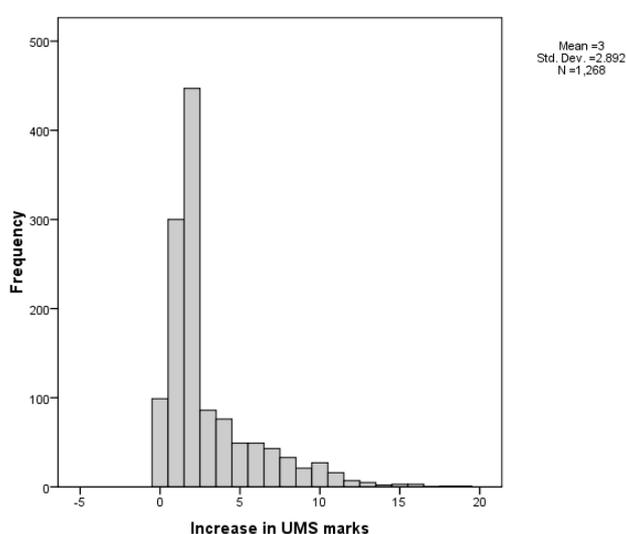


Figure 2: Distribution of the increase in UMS marks when applying for special consideration. GCSE French, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration in this subject, only 27.87% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in this research based on their attainment (concurrent GCSE). It is worth pointing out that almost 25% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 34.62% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' forecast grades. In about 5% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 9% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

GCSE MATHEMATICS C – GRADUATED ASSESSMENT (J517)

The GCSE mathematics C specification has been divided into a series of ten stages which are graduated in content and level of difficulty. Corresponding to each stage a module test was set.

Candidates normally take the course over two years and must enter at least two different module tests. Most modules are available in the January, March and June sessions and in most cases they target a pair of grades. All candidates have to take one terminal examination. The tier of entry for the terminal examination (foundation or higher) will determine the overall grades available to the candidate.

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2007b).

In the June 2009 session there were 1782 applications for special consideration in GCSE mathematics units¹⁵, which accounted for only 1.04% of the entries. Around 95% of them were accepted. Table 22 shows the number of applications in each GCSE mathematics unit in the June 2009 session and Table 23 shows the percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

Overall, around 60% of the applications were granted an increase of at least 2% of the total mark of the unit and about 80% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to both 1% and 2% of the total mark of the unit (Table 23).

Table 22: Special consideration applications in GCSE mathematics C units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
B271	1027	2	2	100.00	0.19
B272	2170	1	1	100.00	0.05
B273	3925	45	6	13.33	1.15
B274	6431	17	16	94.12	0.26
B275	11763	28	27	96.43	0.24
B276	21123	96	91	94.79	0.45
B277	25740	152	146	96.05	0.59
B278	18617	124	123	99.19	0.67
B279	14701	123	122	99.19	0.84
B280	6135	86	86	100.00	1.40
B281	27340	359	343	95.54	1.31
B282	31771	749	735	98.13	2.36

Table 24 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade after the special consideration enhancement was applied. Depending on the unit (there was a lot of variation), between 2% and 15% of the applications led to a grade improvement. Table 24 also shows the average number of UMS marks gained in each unit, which ranged between 1 and 7.

¹⁵ Not all applications were in units that counted towards certification.

Table 23: Percentages of approved special consideration applications by tariff in GCSE mathematics C units, June 2009

Unit	Tariff					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
B271	0.00	0.00	50.00	50.00	0.00	0.00
B272	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
B273	0.00	16.67	50.00	16.67	16.67	0.00
B274	5.88	23.53	29.41	11.76	17.65	11.76
B275	3.57	17.86	25.00	25.00	17.86	10.71
B276	6.59	9.89	35.16	35.16	9.89	3.30
B277	3.42	9.59	36.30	30.82	15.07	4.79
B278	3.25	9.76	40.65	29.27	13.01	4.07
B279	5.74	13.93	34.43	19.67	19.67	6.56
B280	9.30	10.47	31.40	19.77	23.26	5.81
B281	4.96	24.78	27.70	19.24	17.20	6.12
B282	1.90	43.67	20.68	16.19	14.15	3.40
All units	3.71	28.06	27.53	20.59	15.47	4.65

Table 24: Changes in UMS marks and grades for approved special consideration applications in GCSE mathematics C units, June 2009¹⁶

Unit	Candidates with unit grade change	Percentage with unit grade change ¹⁷	UMS marks increase	
			Mean	SD
B271	0	0.00	2.50	0.71
B272	0	0.00	1.00	-
B273	1	2.22	1.80	1.30
B274	1	5.88	1.87	1.12
B275	2	7.14	2.96	2.76
B276	12	12.50	2.27	1.93
B277	12	7.89	4.03	4.51
B278	13	10.48	3.63	3.99
B279	9	7.32	4.37	5.64
B280	6	6.98	7.05	8.34
B281	53	14.76	7.45	4.84
B282	97	12.95	5.36	3.52

For GCSE mathematics C and from this point onwards, only candidates who certificated in the June 2009 session and had taken any modules used for aggregation in January 2008, March 2008, June 2008, January 2009, March 2009 or June 2009 were considered in the analyses. There were a total of 58697 candidates who satisfied this criterion (out of the 59169 candidates who certificated in June 2009).

Only 115 of the 58697 candidates who obtained a GCSE in mathematics C in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, only 0.20% of the subject's entry. Table 25 displays the changes in the grades.

¹⁶ In this subject, units' forecast grades were only available for a very small percentage of the candidates. Therefore, the percentages of applications that achieved the forecast grade before and after the enhancements were applied are not presented here.

¹⁷ Percentage out of accepted applications.

It should be noted that around 2% of the candidates who were granted special consideration obtained an improvement of more than a grade (highlighted in grey in Table 25).

Table 25: Changes in the overall GCSE mathematics C grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
A	A*	12
B	A	17
C	A	1
C	B	26
D	C	27
E	D	15
F	E	10
G	F	4
U	E	1
U	G	2

About 3% (n=1853) of the candidates who obtained a GCSE in mathematics in June 2009 applied for special consideration in at least one unit in any of the six sessions considered¹⁸ and around 6.21% of the candidates who applied improved their grade.

Each candidate could have applied for special consideration in one or more units. The average number of applications per candidate was 1.25 (SD=0.58). Table 26 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Most of the candidates (81.44%) were granted special consideration in only one unit. It should be noted that candidates can sit units from this qualification in six sessions during the two year course, and therefore the likelihood of taking more than one unit in the same session was small (see Vidal Rodeiro and Nádas (2009) for more information on the patterns of uptake of GCSE mathematics C units).

Table 26: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE mathematics C, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	1509	81.44
2	244	13.17
3	86	4.64
4+	14	0.76

There were significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE and excluding attainment in mathematics) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not, and in favour of those who applied. Table 27 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade. The percentages of candidates requesting special consideration in this subject were higher in the high attaining groups than in the low attaining groups.

¹⁸ January 2008, March 2008, June 2008, January 2009, March 2009 or June 2009.

The average gain in overall marks in GCSE mathematics C due to the special consideration was 4.55 UMS marks. Figure 3, which displays the distribution of the increase in UMS marks, shows that most of the candidates who requested an enhancement obtained an increase of less than three UMS marks.

Table 27: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A*	70	2.37
A	261	4.11
B	351	3.92
C	488	3.44
D	317	3.56
E	170	3.17
F	116	2.32
G	51	1.50
U	29	1.67

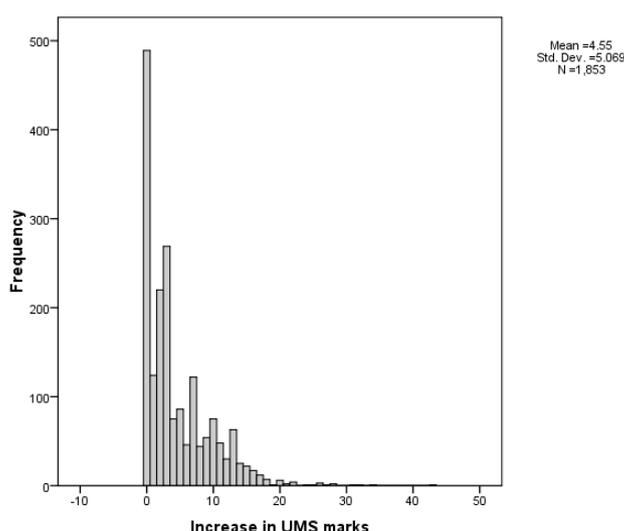


Figure 3: Distribution of the increase in UMS marks when applying for special consideration. GCSE Mathematics C, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, only 29.77% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in this research based on their general attainment (concurrent GCSE attainment). It is worth pointing out that almost 22% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 40.02% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 4% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 9% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

GCSE SCIENCE A – TWENTY FIRST CENTURY SCIENCE SUITE (J630)

GCSE science A (twenty first century) emphasises scientific literacy – the knowledge and understanding which candidates need to engage, as informed citizens, with science-based issues. This qualification uses contemporary, relevant contexts of interest to candidates, which can be approached through a range of teaching and learning activities.

This specification is assessed through five units. Candidates take all five units. Units 1, 2, 3, 4 are set in one of two tiers: foundation tier and higher tier. Foundation tier papers assess grades G to C and higher tier papers assess grades D to A*. Unit 5 (skills assessment) is not tiered.

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2009). Note that to claim this qualification, GCSE science (J630), candidates can take unit 1 from each of biology, chemistry and physics courses in the twenty first century science suite. Candidates following that route were not considered in this research.

In the June 2009 session there were 2540 applications for special consideration in GCSE science units¹⁹, which accounted for only 0.59% of the entries. Around 94% of them were accepted. Table 28 shows the numbers of applications in each GCSE science unit in the June 2009 session and Table 29 shows the percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

Table 28: Special consideration applications in GCSE science A units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
A211	35555	160	151	94.38	0.45
A212	73125	408	398	97.55	0.56
A213	86465	950	926	97.47	1.10
A214	120445	909	855	94.06	0.75
A219	111380	113	47	41.59	0.10

Table 29: Percentage of approved special consideration applications by tariff in GCSE science A units, June 2009

Unit	Tariff					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
A211	2.65	15.23	37.75	19.21	17.22	7.95
A212	2.76	6.78	54.52	18.59	13.07	4.27
A213	2.27	14.47	54.32	13.61	11.45	3.89
A214	3.16	11.46	43.16	19.65	17.19	5.38
A219	2.13	8.51	31.91	27.66	23.40	6.38
All units	2.69	12.03	48.84	17.25	14.39	4.80

Overall, around half of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark of the unit and about 80% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the unit.

Table 30 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade after the special consideration enhancement was applied. Over 20% of the applications led to an improvement in the unit grade, with the exception of unit A219 where only 9% of the applications led to a better grade.

¹⁹ Not all applications were in units that counted towards certification.

The average number of UMS marks gained was about one in all units (again, with the exception of unit A219, where the increase in UMS marks was, on average, 0.11). In general, among the applications for special consideration in science units, between 25% and 35% (depending on the unit) had achieved or improved the grade forecasted by the teachers. These percentages increased slightly after the enhancements were applied.

Table 30: Changes in UMS marks and grades for approved special consideration applications in GCSE science A units, June 2009

Unit	Candidates with unit grade change	Percentage with unit grade change ²⁰	UMS marks increase		Applications that had achieved forecast grade before SC enhancement	Applications that had achieved forecast grade after SC enhancement
			Mean	SD		
A211	36	23.84	0.99	0.79	34.90	36.91
A212	92	23.12	1.01	0.73	33.75	34.76
A213	197	21.27	0.98	0.81	34.22	35.72
A214	189	22.11	1.16	0.89	26.96	27.76
A219	4	8.51	0.11	0.78	33.96	37.74

For GCSE science A and from this point onwards, only candidates who certificated in the June 2009 session and had taken any modules used for aggregation in January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009 were considered in the analyses. There were a total of 109953 candidates who satisfied this criterion (out of the 110309 candidates who certificated in June 2009).

Only 81 of the 109953 candidates who obtained a GCSE in this science subject in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, only 0.07% of the subject's entry. Table 31 displays the changes in the grades.

Table 31: Changes in the overall GCSE science A grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
A	A*	8
B	A	19
C	B	19
D	C	15
E	D	7
F	E	9
G	F	4

About 2% (n=1766) of the candidates who obtained the GCSE in June 2009 applied for special consideration in at least one unit in any of the four sessions considered²¹ and 4.59% of the candidates who applied improved their grade.

Each candidate could have applied for special consideration in one or more units. The average number of applications per candidate was 1.35 applications (SD=0.70). Table 32 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Over 75% of the candidates were granted special consideration in only one unit and less than 2% of the candidates were granted special consideration in four units or more.

²⁰ Percentage out of accepted applications.

²¹ January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009.

There were significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE and excluding the attainment in the subject) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not, and in favour of those who applied. Table 33 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade.

Table 32: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE science A, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	1341	75.93
2	281	15.91
3	110	6.23
4+	34	1.93

Table 33: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A*	90	2.40
A	223	1.85
B	374	1.69
C	406	1.42
D	351	1.91
E	189	1.61
F	88	1.28
G	45	1.38
U	90	0.55

The percentages of candidates requesting special consideration in GCSE science A, although small, were slightly higher among the high attaining students than among the low attaining ones.

The average increase in overall UMS marks in GCSE science due to the special consideration was only 1.41 marks. Figure 4 shows the distribution of this increase.

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, only 20.67% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in this research based on their general attainment (concurrent GCSE attainment). It is worth pointing out that almost 24% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 25.44% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 2% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 17% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

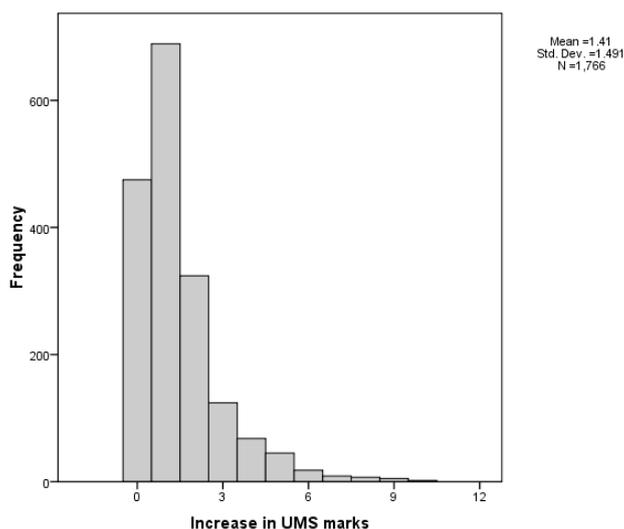


Figure 4: Distribution of the increase in UMS marks when applying for special consideration. GCSE science A, June 2009

3.1.2.2 Linear GCSEs

The results of the analysis for all four linear GCSE subjects presented in this section (history, geography, mathematics and religious studies) have been written to be almost self-contained and the content of each subsection follows the same order.

GCSE HISTORY B – MODERN WORLD (1937)

The scheme of assessment in GCSE history B consists of one tier covering the whole of the ability range. Candidates must complete three components: two written papers (with a total weighting of 75%) and a coursework component (weighting 25%). A candidate’s mark for each of the components taken is combined in the appropriate weighting to give the candidate’s total mark for the specification. The candidate’s grade is determined by this total mark.

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2000b).

Note: Candidates re-sitting the examination and carrying forward the coursework mark were not considered in this analysis (40 candidates out of 50661 – 0.08%).

In the June 2009 session there were 1932 applications for special consideration in GCSE history, which accounted for only 3.82% of the entries. Around 99% of them were accepted.

Table 34 shows the numbers and percentages of accepted applications by tariff. Almost half of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark of the paper/component and about 85% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the paper/component.

Table 34: Approved special consideration applications by tariff in GCSE history B, June 2009

Tariff	Number of applications	% of applications
0	135	7.07
1	326	17.08
2	902	47.25
3	282	14.77
4	211	11.05
5	53	2.77

Only 314 of the 50621 candidates who obtained a GCSE in this history specification in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, 0.62% of the subject's entry and about 16% of those requesting an enhancement. Table 35 displays the changes in the grades. It should be noted that around 1% of the candidates who were granted special consideration obtained an improvement of more than a grade (highlighted in grey).

Table 35: Changes in the overall GCSE history B grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
A	A*	70
C	A*	2
D	A*	1
B	A	77
C	B	77
D	C	39
E	D	30
F	E	12
G	F	5
U	G	1

In linear GCSE qualifications the number of candidates coincides with the number of applications (due to how data is recorded in OCR's examinations processing system). However, a candidate could have applied for special consideration in more than one paper/component.

The average number of applications per candidate in this subject was 1.45 applications (SD=0.54). Table 36 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Over 50% of the candidates were granted special consideration in only one component and about 45% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two components. Only about 1% of the candidates were granted special consideration in the three components (including coursework).

Table 36: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE history B, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	1049	54.92
2	835	43.71
3	26	1.36

Table 37 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade. There were no significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE and excluding attainment in this subject) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement in GCSE history and those who did not.

Table 37: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A*	259	3.59
A	409	3.88
B	437	4.28
C	341	4.17
D	227	3.94
E	140	4.11
F	58	3.08
G	28	2.97
U	11	1.88

The average increase in overall marks in GCSE history due to the special consideration was 2.47 marks. Figure 5, which displays the distribution of the increase in marks, shows that most of the candidates obtained an increase of less than three marks.

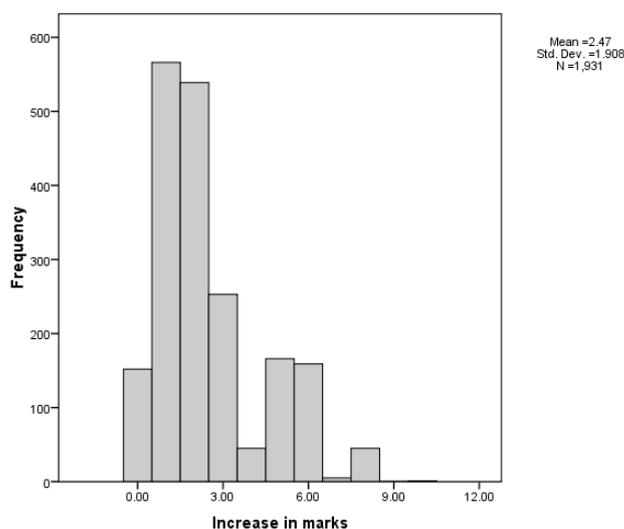


Figure 5: Distribution of the increase in marks when applying for special consideration. GCSE history B, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, about 30% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in the research based on their general attainment. It is worth pointing out that 30% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Teachers at school also predict their students' grades prior to the examination. These forecast grades can be used as a reference in order to assess the performance of the candidate. Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 39.56% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 8% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 21% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

GCSE GEOGRAPHY B – AVERY HILL (1987)

The scheme of assessment for GCSE geography B consists of two tiers, foundation and higher. The foundation tier assesses grades G to C and the higher tier assesses grades D to A*. In each tier, the candidates' knowledge and understanding of the key ideas, and the mastery of skills relating to the specification are assessed both in a terminal examination comprising two papers and in a coursework component.

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2000d).

Note: Candidates re-sitting the examination and carrying forward the coursework mark were not considered in this analysis (8 candidates out of 35916 – 0.02%)

In the June 2009 session there were 832 applications for special consideration in GCSE geography, which accounted for only 2.32% of the entries. Around 94% of them were accepted. Table 38 shows the numbers and percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

Table 38: Approved special consideration applications by tariff in GCSE geography B, June 2009

Tariff	Number of applications	% of applications
0	50	6.42
1	138	17.71
2	338	43.39
3	116	14.89
4	97	12.45
5	40	5.13

Almost half of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark of the paper/component and about 80% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the paper/component.

Only 126 of the 35908 candidates who obtained a GCSE in geography in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, only 0.35% of the subject's entry and about 15% of those requesting an enhancement. Table 39 displays the changes in the overall grades.

The average number of applications per candidate in GCSE geography was 1.37 applications (SD=0.61). Table 40 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Around 53% of the candidates were granted special consideration in one component and about 45% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two components. Only about 1% of the candidates were granted special consideration in the three components (including coursework).

Table 39: Changes in the overall GCSE geography B grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
A	A*	17
B	A	26
C	B	26
D	C	34
E	D	11
F	E	7
G	F	4
U	G	1

Table 40: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE geography B, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	416	53.40
2	357	45.82
3	6	0.77

There were significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not, and in favour of those who applied. Table 41 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade. Although the differences were small, the percentages of candidates applying for an enhancement in GCSE geography were higher in the high attaining groups than in the lower attaining groups.

Table 41: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A*	73	2.94
A	103	2.31
B	143	2.46
C	201	2.20
D	153	2.15
E	41	1.30
F	31	1.86
G	12	1.61
U	3	0.53

The average increase in overall marks in GCSE geography due to the special consideration was 2.73 marks. Figure 6, which displays the distribution of the increase in marks, shows that most of the candidates obtained an increase of less than three marks.

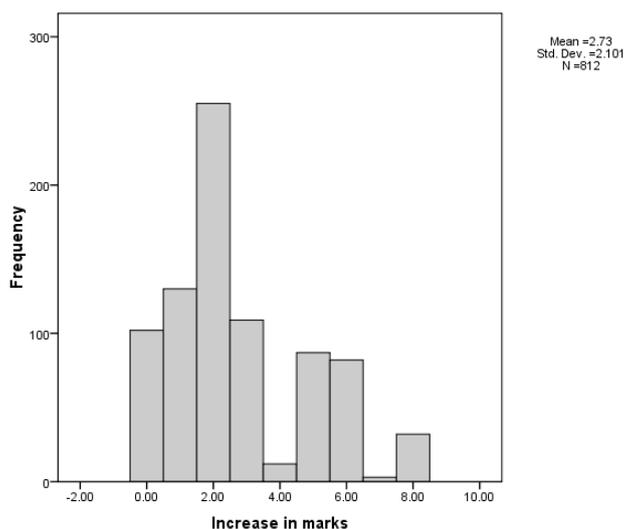


Figure 6: Distribution of the increase in marks when applying for special consideration. GCSE geography B, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, about 35% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in the research based on their prior attainment. It is worth pointing out that 20% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 48.33% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 12% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 10% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

GCSE MATHEMATICS A – LINEAR (J512)

The scheme of assessment in this subject consists of two tiers, foundation and higher, each one comprising two papers. The foundation tier assesses grades G to C and the higher tier assesses grades D to A*. This subject is identical in content but different in structure to the GCSE mathematics C (J517), which is unitised and has been investigated in section 3.1.2.1.

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2007a).

In the June 2009 session there were 555 applications for special consideration in GCSE mathematics A, which accounted for only 1.41% of the entries. Around 97% of them were accepted. Table 42 shows the numbers and percentages of accepted applications by tariff. Only around 30% of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark of the paper/component (contrasting with about 50% in other linear GCSE qualifications) and about 70% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the paper/component.

Table 42: Approved special consideration applications by tariff in GCSE mathematics A, June 2009

Tariff	Number of applications	% of applications
0	33	6.12
1	62	11.50
2	174	32.28
3	123	22.82
4	116	21.52
5	31	5.75

Only 81 of the 39467 candidates who obtained a GCSE in mathematics A in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, 0.21% of the subject's entry and about 15% of those requesting an enhancement. Table 43 displays the changes in the grades. It should be noted that around 2% of the candidates – 2 candidates – who were granted special consideration obtained an improvement of more than a grade (highlighted in grey).

Table 43: Changes in the overall GCSE mathematics A grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
A	A*	8
B	A	15
C	B	10
D	C	28
E	D	9
F	E	5
U	E	2
G	F	4

The average number of applications per candidate in this subject was 1.57 applications (SD=0.56). Table 44 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Over 60% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two components and about 40% of the candidates were granted special consideration in just one.

Table 44: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE mathematics A, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	203	37.87
2	333	62.13

Table 45 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade. There were no significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE and excluding attainment in this subject) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement in GCSE mathematics A and those who did not.

Table 45: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A*	26	1.21
A	69	1.96
B	77	1.85
C	164	1.44
D	96	1.34
E	41	1.07
F	36	1.31
G	17	0.78
U	10	0.56

The average increase in overall marks in GCSE mathematics A due to the special consideration was 4.08 marks. Figure 7 displays the distribution of the increase in marks.

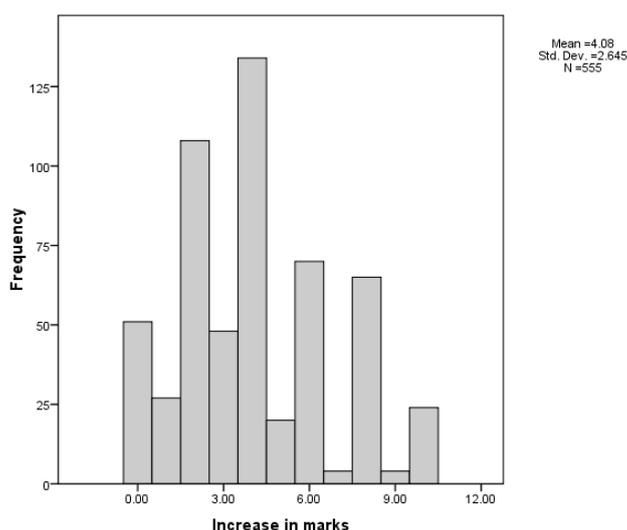


Figure 7: Distribution of the increase in marks when applying for special consideration. GCSE mathematics A, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, over 35% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in the research based on their general attainment. It is worth pointing out that about 35% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 36.22% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 8% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 14% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES B – PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS (1931)

The religious studies B specification at GCSE does not incorporate tiers and the scheme of assessment consists of one tier covering the whole of the ability range. Candidates may choose to be assessed by examination only (two papers) or by examination and internal assessment (two papers together with two pieces of coursework).

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2000c).

In the June 2009 session there were 190 applications for special consideration in GCSE religious studies, which accounted for only 0.55% of the entries. Around 92% of them were accepted. Table 46 shows the numbers and percentages of accepted applications by tariff. More than half of the applications (60.92%) were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark of the paper/component and about 85% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the paper/component.

Table 46: Approved special consideration applications by tariff in GCSE religious studies B, June 2009

Tariff	Number of applications	% of applications
0	4	2.30
1	15	8.62
2	106	60.92
3	22	12.64
4	18	10.34
5	9	5.17

Only 25 of the 34262 candidates who obtained a GCSE in religious studies in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, only 0.07% of the subject's entry and about 13% of those requesting an enhancement. Table 47 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 47: Changes in the overall GCSE religious studies B grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
A	A*	7
B	A	5
C	B	8
D	C	3
F	E	2

The average number of applications per candidate in this subject was 1.15 (SD=0.55). Table 48 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Around 75% of the candidates were granted special consideration in only one component and about 25% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two components. Only one candidate was granted special consideration in three components.

Table 48: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE religious studies B, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	131	75.29
2	42	24.14
3	1	0.57

Table 49 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade. There were no significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE and excluding attainment in this subject) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement in GCSE religious studies B and those who did not.

Table 49: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A*	22	0.33
A	45	0.63
B	42	0.60
C	36	0.66
D	16	0.41
E	7	0.35
F	5	0.43
G	1	0.16
U	0	0.00

The average increase in overall marks in GCSE religious studies B due to the special consideration was 3.82 marks. Figure 8, which displays the distribution of the increase in marks, shows that most of the candidates obtained an increase of three marks.

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, about 40% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in the research based on their general attainment. It is worth pointing out that over 10% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 19.63% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 8% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 35% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

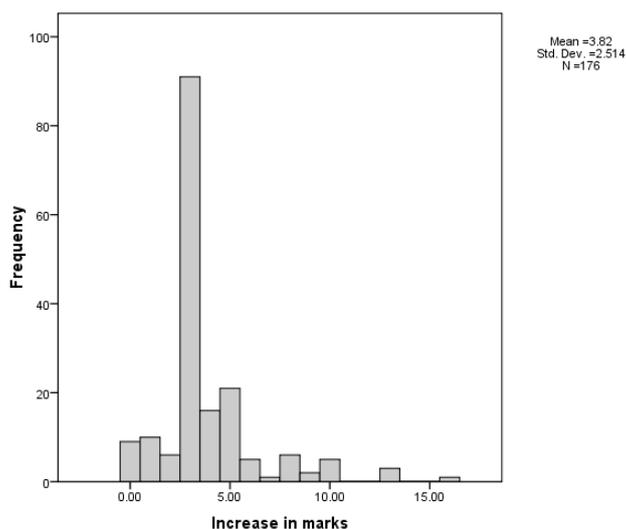


Figure 8: Distribution of the increase in marks when applying for special consideration. GCSE religious studies B, June 2009

3.1.3 Individual A-level subjects

The results of the analysis for all four A-level subjects presented in this section (English literature, mathematics, chemistry and history) have been written to be almost self-contained and the content of each subsection follows the same order.

A-LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE (7828)

The scheme of assessment in Advanced GCE English literature consists of six units of assessment. At Advanced Subsidiary GCE, candidates take three units, including a coursework unit. Candidates can take a further three units at A2, with the option to include another coursework unit, if they are seeking an Advanced GCE award. A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2004a).

In the June 2009 session there were 797 applications for special consideration in A-level English literature units²², which accounted for 3.25% of the entries. Around 95% of them were accepted. Table 50 shows the numbers of applications in each A-level English literature unit in the June 2009 session and Table 51 shows the percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

In all units, more than 30% of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark of the unit and more than 75% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the unit (see Appendix A for a list of individual circumstances that fall within each category).

²² Not all applications were in units that counted towards certification.

Table 50: Special consideration applications in A-level English literature units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2707	783	25	24	96.00	3.07
2708	714	25	21	84.00	2.94
2709	705	3	2	66.67	0.28
2710	6588	330	323	97.88	4.90
2711	5988	29	28	96.55	0.47
2712	959	54	39	72.22	4.07
2713	7571	331	321	96.98	4.24

Table 51: Percentages of approved special consideration applications by tariff in A-level English literature units, June 2009

Unit	Tariff					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
2707	0.00	4.35	43.48	26.09	17.39	8.70
2708	5.00	10.00	45.00	15.00	15.00	10.00
2709	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2710	2.48	23.29	36.96	18.32	15.84	3.11
2711	0.00	10.71	35.71	32.14	14.29	7.14
2712	2.63	26.32	31.58	18.42	15.79	5.26
2713	2.51	19.75	37.30	19.44	16.93	4.08
All units	2.40	20.51	37.28	19.44	16.25	4.13

Table 52 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade after the special consideration enhancement was applied (between 15% and 30% of the applications). The average number of UMS marks gained ranged between 2 and 3.5. Also, depending on the unit, between 35% and 55% of the special consideration requests had achieved or improved the grade forecasted by the teachers. These percentages increased slightly after the enhancements were applied.

Table 52: Changes in UMS marks and grades for approved special consideration applications in A-level English literature units, June 2009

Unit	Candidates with unit grade change	Percentage with unit grade change ²³	UMS marks increase		Applications that had achieved forecast grade before SC enhancement	Applications that had achieved forecast grade after SC enhancement
			Mean	SD		
2707	5	20.83	3.00	1.50	45.83	52.17
2708	6	28.57	3.05	1.57	40.00	40.00
2709	0	0.00	2.00	-	50.00	50.00
2710	50	15.48	2.09	0.96	46.81	47.72
2711	5	17.86	3.43	1.60	51.72	65.52
2712	5	12.82	2.18	1.01	35.85	41.51
2713	58	20.83	2.93	1.44	41.95	42.55

²³ Percentage out of accepted applications.

For A-level English literature and from this point onwards, only candidates who certificated in the June 2009 session and had taken any modules used for aggregation in January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009 were considered in the analyses. There were a total of 7797 candidates who satisfied this criterion (out of the 7852 candidates who certificated in June 2009).

Only 25 of the 7797 candidates who obtained an A-level in English literature in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, only 0.32% of the subject's entry. Table 53 displays the changes in the grades.

Table 53: Changes in the overall A-level English literature grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
B	A	12
C	B	8
D	C	5

About 9% (n=709) of the candidates who obtained the A-level in June 2009 applied for special consideration in at least one A-level unit in any of the four sessions considered²⁴ and around 3.50% of the candidates who applied improved their grade.

Each candidate could have applied for special consideration in one or more A-level units. The average number of applications per candidate was 1.81 applications (SD=0.99). Table 54 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Almost half of the candidates (45.42%) were granted special consideration in only one unit and about 37% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two units.

Table 54: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in A-level English literature, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	322	45.42
2	262	36.95
3	87	12.27
4	20	2.82
5	12	1.69
6+	6	0.84

There were significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not, and in favour of those who applied.

Table 55 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration in this A-level subject by grade. Those percentages were higher among the candidates who obtained a grade D or above (around 10%) than among those with a grade E (around 4%).

²⁴ January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009.

Table 55: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A	310	10.28
B	199	10.03
C	128	10.00
D	64	10.32
E	6	3.85
U	2	6.45

The average increase in overall UMS marks in A-level English literature due to the special consideration was 3.96 marks. Figure 9 shows the distribution of this increase.

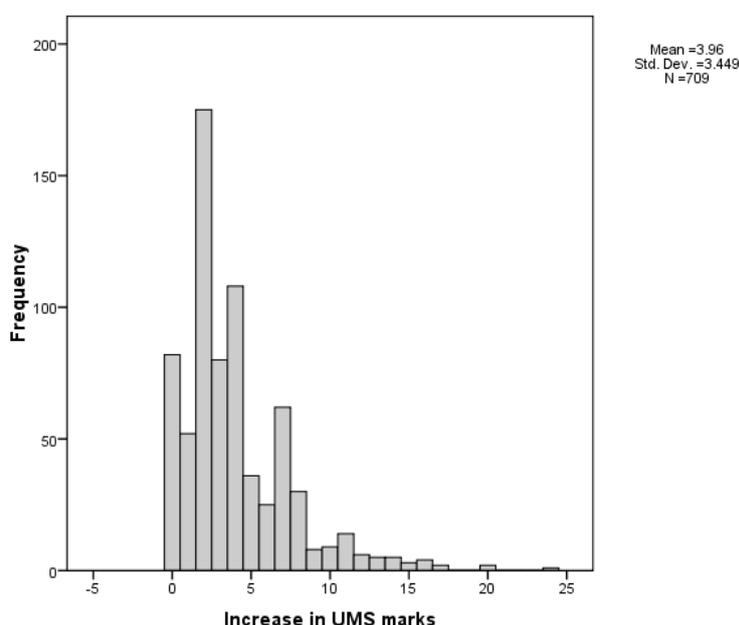


Figure 9: Distribution of the increase in UMS marks when applying for special consideration in A-level English literature, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, about 25% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in the research based on their prior attainment at GCSE. It is worth pointing out that around 15% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 21.22% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 2% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 10% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

A-LEVEL MATHEMATICS (7890)

The scheme of assessment in advanced GCE mathematics is by means of six units of assessment, all externally assessed by written examination and all contributing with the same weight to the certification. There is no requirement for assessed coursework for any of the units in this specification. A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2003a).

In the June 2009 session there were 1987 applications for special consideration in A-level mathematics units²⁵, which accounted for only 2.22% of the entries. Almost all applications (99.25%) were accepted. Table 56 shows the numbers of applications in each A-level mathematics unit in the June 2009 session and Table 57 shows the percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

Table 56: Special consideration applications in A-level mathematics units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
4721	14663	359	357	99.44	2.43
4722	20929	442	436	98.64	2.08
4723	7854	197	197	100.00	2.51
4724	10985	340	336	98.82	3.06
4728	9077	184	184	100.00	2.03
4729	2301	47	47	100.00	2.04
4732	14354	240	238	99.17	1.66
4733	2203	44	43	97.73	1.95
4736	6029	118	118	100.00	1.96
4737	918	16	16	100.00	1.74

Table 57: Percentages of approved special consideration applications by tariff in A-level mathematics units, June 2009

Unit	Tariff					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
4721	7.56	9.52	48.46	17.93	15.13	1.40
4722	10.78	12.84	40.60	15.37	17.20	3.21
4723	7.11	14.21	31.47	21.83	22.84	2.54
4724	7.14	13.69	41.07	16.07	18.75	3.27
4728	4.89	16.85	28.80	16.85	26.63	5.98
4729	17.02	4.26	31.91	19.15	25.53	2.13
4732	15.55	14.29	26.89	21.85	19.75	1.68
4733	4.65	16.28	23.26	23.26	30.23	2.33
4736	8.47	10.17	34.75	22.03	21.19	3.39
4737	12.50	0.00	37.50	31.25	18.75	0.00
All units	9.13	12.68	37.47	18.31	19.57	2.84

In most units, more than 30% of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark and more than 80% were granted an increase up to 3% (unit 4728 was an exception). The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the unit, with the exception of unit 4733 where the most common tariff was 4%.

²⁵ Not all applications were in units that counted towards certification.

Table 58 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade after the special consideration enhancement was applied. Depending on the unit, between 14% and 20% of the applications led to a grade improvement. Percentages for units 4728 and 4737 were slightly lower. The average number of UMS marks gained ranged between 1.5 and 3.0. Between 20% and 40% of the special consideration applications had achieved or improved the grade forecasted by the teachers. These percentages increased slightly after the enhancements were applied.

Table 58: Changes in UMS marks and grades for approved special consideration applications in A-level mathematics, June 2009

Unit	Candidates with unit grade change	% with unit grade change ²⁶	UMS marks increase		Applications that had achieved forecast grade before SC enhancement	Applications that had achieved forecast grade after SC enhancement
			Mean	SD		
4721	53	14.93	2.07	1.37	29.78	32.87
4722	64	14.81	1.97	1.50	31.12	34.78
4723	33	16.92	2.44	1.59	31.44	31.96
4724	50	14.79	2.24	1.55	29.88	30.77
4728	15	8.15	2.40	1.81	33.15	34.78
4729	9	19.15	1.91	1.50	23.40	23.40
4732	44	18.57	2.09	1.53	31.51	35.71
4733	7	16.67	2.43	1.23	37.21	37.21
4736	22	18.64	2.43	1.51	33.90	34.75
4737	1	6.25	2.81	1.76	37.50	37.50

For A-level mathematics and from this point onwards, only candidates who certificated in the June 2009 session and had taken any modules used for aggregation in January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009 were considered in the analyses. There were a total of 11499 candidates who satisfied this criterion (out of the 11741 candidates who certificated in June 2009).

Only 41 of the 11499 candidates who obtained an A-level in mathematics in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, only 0.36% of the subject's entry. Table 59 displays the changes in the grades.

Table 59: Changes in the overall A-level mathematics grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
B	A	17
C	B	12
D	C	9
E	D	2
U	E	1

About 7% (n=844) of the candidates who obtained the A-level in June 2009 applied for special consideration in at least one A-level unit in any of the four sessions considered²⁷ and around 4.86% of the candidates who applied improved their grade.

²⁶ Percentage out of accepted applications.

²⁷ January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009.

Each candidate could have applied for special consideration in one or more A-level units. The average number of applications per candidate in this subject was 2.12 applications (SD=1.47). Table 60 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Around 50% of the candidates were granted special consideration in only one component and about 20% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two or three components.

Table 60: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in A-level mathematics, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	400	47.39
2	175	20.73
3	155	18.36
4	48	5.69
5	38	4.50
6+	28	3.32

Table 61 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade. The percentages of candidates requesting special consideration in this subject were higher in the low attaining groups than in the high attaining groups (the reverse to what was found in all other GCSE and A-level subjects considered so far in this report). However, there were no significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement in A-level mathematics and those who did not.

Table 61: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A	345	6.74
B	193	8.75
C	143	8.86
D	92	9.27
E	49	9.26
U	22	11.28

The average increase in overall UMS marks in A-level mathematics due to the special consideration was 3.66 marks. Figure 10 shows the distribution of this increase.

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, about 35% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in the research based on their prior attainment at GCSE. It is worth pointing out that around 20% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 26.88% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 2% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 12% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

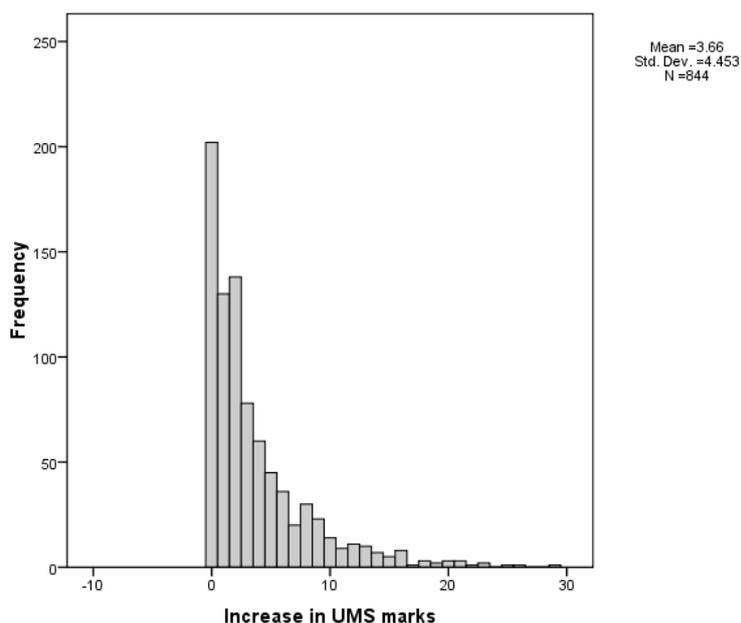


Figure 10: Distribution of the increase in UMS marks when applying for special consideration in A-level mathematics, June 2009

A-LEVEL CHEMISTRY (7882)

The advanced GCE chemistry specification is designed to be flexible. Candidates cover the material in the Advanced GCE chemistry subject criteria in compulsory modules. Optional modules give candidates the opportunity to explore an area of chemistry in greater depth. The assessment of experimental skills is flexible, with coursework and practical examination alternatives. Candidates take three units of assessment including an experimental skills component at AS, followed by three units of assessment, including an experimental skills component, at A2.

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2004b).

In the June 2009 session there were 1310 applications for special consideration in A-level chemistry units²⁸, which accounted for only 3.45% of the entries. Almost all applications (99.23%) were accepted. Table 62 shows the numbers of applications (candidates) in each A-level chemistry unit in the June 2009 session and Table 63 shows the percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

In each A-level chemistry unit, between 30% and 52% of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark and in all units, with the exception of unit 2811, more than 70% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the unit.

²⁸ Not all applications were in units that counted towards certification.

Table 62: Special consideration applications in A-level chemistry units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2811	3091	82	82	100.00	2.65
2812	2744	104	103	99.04	3.75
2813	3044	87	87	100.00	2.86
2814	6453	219	216	98.63	3.35
2815	11118	395	394	99.75	3.54
2816	11492	423	418	98.82	3.64

Table 63: Percentages of approved special consideration applications by tariff in A-level chemistry units, June 2009

Unit	Tariff					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
2811	7.32	8.54	32.93	14.63	30.49	6.10
2812	0.97	11.65	50.49	16.50	19.42	0.97
2813	1.15	10.34	51.72	10.34	21.84	4.60
2814	3.70	14.81	42.13	17.59	18.06	3.70
2815	3.55	18.53	34.77	16.50	22.59	4.06
2816	2.87	24.64	35.17	15.07	18.18	4.07
All units	3.10	17.66	39.22	15.36	20.69	3.97

Table 64 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade after the special consideration enhancement was applied. Depending on the unit, between 15% and 30% of the applications led to a grade improvement. The average number of UMS marks gained ranged between 1.5 and 3.0. Between 25% and 45% of the special consideration applications had achieved or improved the grade forecasted by their teachers. These percentages increased slightly after the enhancements were applied.

Table 64: Changes in UMS marks and grades for approved special consideration applications in A-level chemistry, June 2009

Unit	Candidates with unit grade change	% with unit grade change ²⁹	UMS marks increase		Applications that had achieved forecast grade before SC enhancement	Applications that had achieved forecast grade after SC enhancement
			Mean	SD		
2811	19	23.46	2.80	1.40	41.98	43.21
2812	13	12.75	2.07	0.90	39.81	39.81
2813	15	17.24	1.63	1.21	39.08	40.23
2814	57	26.51	2.48	1.20	27.52	30.28
2815	97	24.62	2.93	1.66	28.86	34.18
2816	71	16.99	1.94	1.34	38.72	43.47

For A-level chemistry and from this point onwards, only candidates who certificated in the June 2009 session and had taken any modules used for aggregation in January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009 were considered in the analyses. There were a total of 11897 candidates who satisfied this criterion (out of the 12174 candidates who certificated in June 2009).

²⁹ Percentage out of accepted applications.

Only 72 of the 11897 candidates who obtained an A-level in chemistry in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, only 0.61% of the subject's entry. Table 65 displays the changes in the grades.

Table 65: Changes in the overall A-level chemistry grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
B	A	20
C	B	23
D	C	17
E	D	10
U	E	2

About 9% (n=1077) of the candidates who obtained the A-level in June 2009 applied for special consideration in at least one A-level unit in any of the four sessions considered³⁰ and around 6.69% of the candidates who applied improved their grade.

Each candidate could have applied for special consideration in one or more A-level units. The average number of applications per candidate was 2.11 applications (SD=1.41). Table 66 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Around 50% of the candidates were granted special consideration in only one component and about 20% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two or three components.

Table 66: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in A-level chemistry, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	504	46.80
2	236	21.91
3	190	17.64
4	64	5.94
5	49	4.55
6+	34	3.15

There were significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not, in favour of those who did not apply. This is the opposite of what was found in most GCSE and A-level subjects considered in this report. Table 67 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade.

The average increase in overall UMS marks in A-level chemistry due to the special consideration was 3.97 marks. Figure 11 shows the distribution of this increase.

³⁰ January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009.

Table 67: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A	306	8.89
B	292	11.04
C	207	10.65
D	140	9.98
E	98	10.33
U	34	7.74

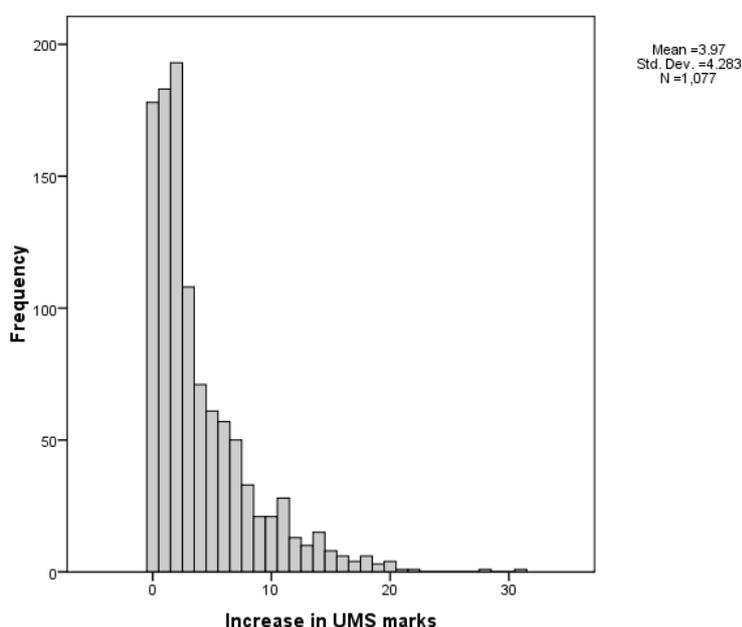


Figure 11: Distribution of the increase in UMS marks when applying for special consideration in A-level chemistry, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, about 35% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in the research based on their prior attainment at GCSE. It is worth pointing out that around 30% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 36.27% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 2% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 10% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

A-LEVEL HISTORY (7835)

The advanced GCE history specification is designed to offer candidates and centres the opportunity to select from a very wide variety of periods and topics in English, European and American History. Candidates take three units for AS GCE, followed by a further three units at A2 if they are seeking an Advanced GCE award. A range of options is available within each unit. Candidates must study one option in each chosen unit.

A detailed description of the qualification and its scheme of assessment can be found in OCR (2005).

In the June 2009 session there were 1136 applications for special consideration in A-level history units³¹, which accounted for only 2.70% of the entries. Around 92% were accepted, the lowest percentage found in A-level subjects in this study. Table 68 shows the numbers of applications in each A-level history unit in the June 2009 session and Table 69 shows the percentages of accepted applications by tariff.

Table 68: Special consideration applications in A-level history units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2580	89	4	4	100.00	4.49
2581	401	5	5	100.00	1.25
2582	1374	47	46	97.87	3.35
2583	852	31	31	100.00	3.64
2584	1002	34	34	100.00	3.39
2585	518	16	16	100.00	3.09
2586	1518	49	48	97.96	3.16
2587	560	17	17	100.00	3.04
2588	3150	144	125	86.81	3.97
2589	7467	251	248	98.80	3.32
2590	3055	98	96	97.96	3.14
2591	9365	363	328	90.36	3.50
2592	12405	67	37	55.22	0.30
2593	383	10	9	90.00	2.35

In most A-level history units, between 30% and 60% of the applications were granted an increase of 2% of the total mark and in all units, with the exception of unit 2582, more than 70% were granted an increase up to 3%. The most common tariff applied corresponded to 2% of the total mark of the unit, again with the exception of unit 2582 where the most common tariff was 4%.

Table 70 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates who improved their unit grade after the special consideration enhancement was applied. In most units between 15% and 40% of the applications led to an improvement in the grade. The average number of UMS marks gained ranged between 1.5 and 3.5.

³¹ Not all applications were in units that counted towards certification.

Table 69: Percentages of approved special consideration applications by tariff in A-level history units, June 2009

Unit	Tariff					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
2580	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2581	0.00	20.00	60.00	0.00	20.00	0.00
2582	6.52	13.04	23.91	21.74	28.26	6.52
2583	0.00	22.58	35.48	16.13	22.58	3.23
2584	0.00	5.88	44.12	23.53	23.53	2.94
2585	0.00	18.75	56.25	6.25	18.75	0.00
2586	10.42	10.42	39.58	18.75	16.67	4.17
2587	5.88	17.65	29.41	17.65	29.41	0.00
2588	12.00	18.40	40.00	16.00	12.80	0.80
2589	8.87	9.68	38.31	17.34	22.98	2.82
2590	2.08	13.54	46.88	10.42	23.96	3.13
2591	9.45	17.07	35.67	17.99	17.68	2.13
2592	2.70	8.11	45.95	27.03	8.11	8.11
2593	11.11	33.33	44.44	0.00	11.11	0.00
All units	7.76	14.27	38.79	17.05	19.44	2.68

Table 70: Changes in UMS marks and grades for approved special consideration applications in A-level history, June 2009

Unit	Candidates with unit grade change	% with unit grade change ³²	UMS marks increase		Applications that had achieved forecast grade before SC enhancement	Applications that had achieved forecast grade after SC enhancement
			Mean	SD		
2580	1	25.00	2.00	0.00	50.00	50.00
2581	1	20.00	2.60	0.89	0.00	20.00
2582	11	24.44	3.29	1.53	40.00	44.44
2583	5	16.13	2.58	1.36	16.13	22.58
2584	7	20.59	2.71	1.40	20.59	32.35
2585	6	37.50	2.69	1.49	37.50	56.25
2586	17	36.17	3.08	1.90	27.08	27.08
2587	3	17.65	3.00	1.90	41.18	47.06
2588	29	23.20	2.75	1.87	29.17	31.94
2589	82	33.20	3.43	2.07	23.20	29.60
2590	26	27.08	3.49	2.32	29.59	32.65
2591	75	22.87	3.18	2.38	30.58	33.61
2592	9	24.32	2.97	1.40	15.15	19.70
2593	0	0.00	1.89	1.36	40.00	40.00

For A-level history and from this point onwards, only candidates who certificated in the June 2009 session and had taken any modules used for aggregation in January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009 were considered in the analyses. There were a total of 12878 candidates who satisfied this criterion (out of the 12889 candidates who certificated in June 2009).

Only 88 of the 12878 candidates who obtained an A-level in history in June 2009 improved their grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, that is, only 0.68% of the subject's entry. Table 71 displays the changes in the grades.

³² Percentage out of accepted applications.

Table 71: Changes in the overall A-level history grade, June 2009

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates
B	A	33
C	B	30
D	C	18
E	D	6
U	E	1

About 9% (n=1110) of the candidates who obtained the A-level in June 2009 applied for special consideration in at least one A-level unit in any of the four sessions considered³³ and around 7.92% of the candidates who applied improved their grade.

Each candidate could have applied for special consideration in one or more units. The average number of applications per candidate was 2.25 applications (SD=1.13). Table 72 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Around 30% of the candidates were granted special consideration in only one component and about 25% and 35% of the candidates were granted special consideration in two or three components, respectively.

Table 72: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in A-level history, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	400	32.25
2	175	24.32
3	155	35.41
4	48	4.23
5	38	2.61
6+	25	1.17

There were significant differences in the ability (measured by attainment at GCSE) between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not, in favour of those who did not apply. Table 73 shows the percentages of candidates who requested special consideration by grade. The percentages of candidates requesting special consideration in A-level history were very similar in each grade group.

Table 73: Numbers and percentages of candidates applying for special consideration by grade, June 2009

Grade	Candidates requesting special consideration	Percentage in the grade group
A	269	9.15
B	335	9.53
C	278	9.32
D	158	9.30
E	61	11.32
U	9	9.89

³³ January 2008, June 2008, January 2009 or June 2009.

The average increase in overall UMS marks in A-level history due to the special consideration was 4.83 marks. Figure 12 shows the distribution of this increase.

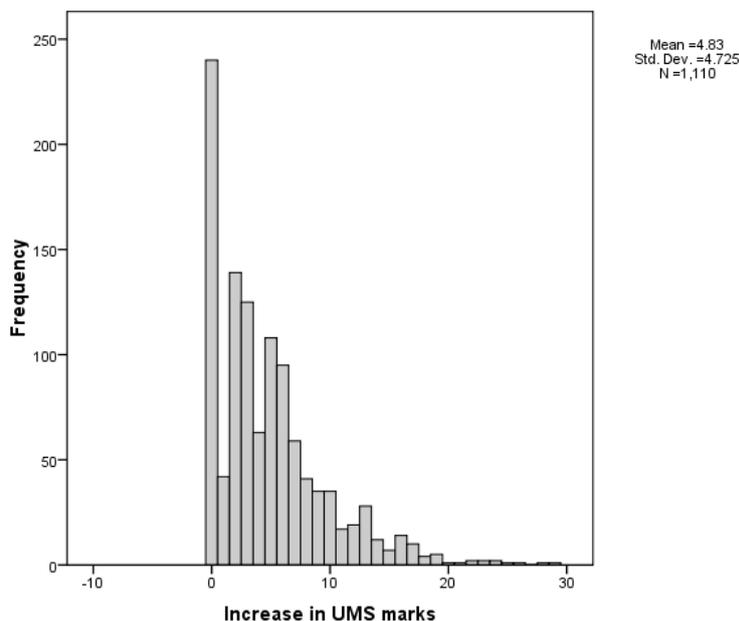


Figure 12: Distribution of the increase in UMS marks when applying for special consideration in A-level history, June 2009

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration, about 30% had obtained a grade lower than the predicted grade in the research based on their prior attainment at GCSE. It is worth pointing out that around 25% of candidates requesting special consideration enhancements had obtained a grade higher than the predicted one.

Among the candidates who requested special consideration, 32.76% had underperformed in relation to their teachers' predictions. In about 2.5% of the special consideration applications, the enhancement led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade. About 15% of the candidates who applied for special consideration had obtained a grade higher than the forecasted one.

3.1.4 School type analyses

This section investigates the effect of the type of school on the probability of requesting a special consideration enhancement at GCSE and at A-level.

Due to the small numbers of applications for special consideration in each individual subject considered in this research, all GCSE subjects (unitised and linear specifications) and all A-level subjects were grouped together. A logistic regression analysis was carried out for each group.

3.1.4.1 GCSE subjects

The probability of applying for special consideration in at least one GCSE unit or GCSE paper/component was very low, ranging from 0.01 to 0.05. However, it increased slightly with mean GCSE attainment.

Figure 13 and Table 74 present, respectively, the probability of requesting special consideration by school type and the odds ratios for the school type effect. Both show that candidates in independent schools were more likely to submit a request for special consideration than candidates in state schools³⁴. Figures in bold in Table 74 are significant at the 0.05 level.

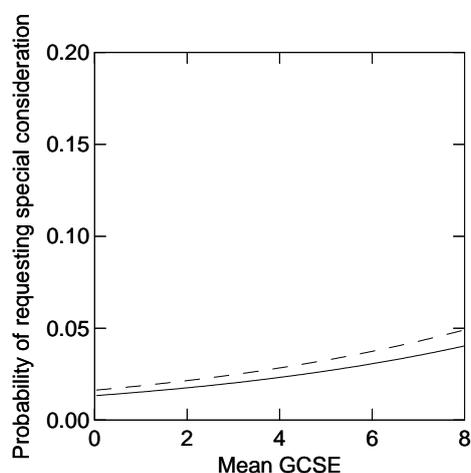


Figure 13: Probability of requesting special consideration in GCSE subjects by school type (solid line for state schools and dashed line for independent schools)

Table 74: Odds ratios for the school type effect at GCSE

	Comprehensive	Grammar	Independent	Secondary Modern
Comprehensive	-	0.99	0.67	1.00
Grammar	1.01	-	0.68	1.01
Independent	1.49	1.47	-	1.49
Secondary Modern	1.00	0.99	0.67	-

3.1.4.2 A-level

The probability of applying for special consideration in at least one A-level unit was very low, ranging from 0.06 to 0.11 (slightly higher than at GCSE). However, at A-level this probability did not increase significantly with mean GCSE attainment.

Figure 14 and Table 75 present, respectively, the probability of requesting special consideration by school type and the odds ratios for the school type effect. Figures in bold in Table 75 are significant at the 0.05 level.

Figure 14 shows that the probability of applying for special consideration in at least one A-level unit was higher in independent schools than in any other type of school, independently of the candidates' abilities.

³⁴ 'State' schools include comprehensive schools, grammar schools and secondary modern schools.

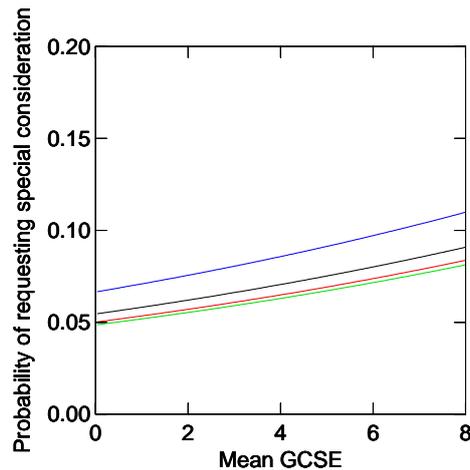


Figure 14: Probability of requesting special consideration in A-level subjects by school type (red - FE/tertiary colleges; green - sixth form colleges; black - state³⁵ schools; blue - independent schools)

Table 75 shows, in particular, that the odds of a student from an independent school applying for special consideration were higher than the odds of a student in any other type of school (with the exception of grammar schools, where there were no differences). On the contrary, the odds of a student from a comprehensive school applying for special consideration were lower than the odds of a student in any other type of school (with the exception of FE/tertiary colleges). Furthermore, in FE/tertiary and sixth form colleges the odds of a student applying for special consideration were lower than the odds of a student in a grammar school.

Table 75: Odds ratios for the school type effect at A-level

	Comprehensive	Grammar	Independent	FE/Tertiary	Sixth Form
Comprehensive		0.70	0.72	0.99	0.87
Grammar	1.43		1.03	1.43	1.25
Independent	1.39	0.97		1.39	1.22
FE/Tertiary	1.01	0.70	0.72		0.88
Sixth Form	1.15	0.80	0.82	1.14	

³⁵ 'State' schools include comprehensive schools and grammar schools.

3.2 ABSENT WITH GOOD REASON

3.2.1 General Statistics

For the 2009 examination series, the OCR awarding body received 6,288 applications for special consideration where candidates were absent, an increase of about 1,000 applications from 2008. Around 80% of the requests were approved. The percentage of approved applications was more than 10% smaller than the percentage of approved applications where the candidate was present but disadvantaged (around 92% in all sessions and years).

Tables B4-B6 in Appendix B present all the special consideration applications (absent with good reason) received by OCR from 1998 until 2009 and Tables 76 and 77 below display this information for the last three years. These figures show that the number of special consideration applications have been increasing in the past few years.

Table 76: Numbers of special consideration applications, 2007-2009

Session	Year	Accepted	Rejected	Other ³⁶	Total
January	2007	42	6	158	206
	2008	60	2	222	284
	2009	61	394	4	459
June	2007	4092	30	827	4949
	2008	4185	50	766	5001
	2009	4857	856	116	5829
All	2007	4134	36	985	5155
	2008	4245	52	988	5285
	2009	4918	1250	120	6288

Table 77: Percentages of accepted and rejected special consideration applications, 2007-2009

Session	Year	Accepted	Rejected	Other
January	2007	20.39	2.91	76.70
	2008	21.13	0.70	78.17
	2009	13.29	85.84	0.87
June	2007	82.68	0.61	16.71
	2008	83.68	1.00	15.32
	2009	83.32	14.69	1.99
All	2007	80.19	0.70	19.11
	2008	80.32	0.98	18.69
	2009	78.21	19.88	1.91

Note that the percentages of accepted applications in the January sessions shown in Table 77 are fairly small. This is probably due to the fact that units/components missed in examination series prior to certification have to be re-entered at a later date.

Table 78 presents the number of special consideration applications by type of qualification in English schools only. Applications for qualifications other than GCSE or A-level (e.g. STEP, Entry Level, GNVQs) or applications from candidates in schools in Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland were not included in these analyses. Also, only approved and rejected applications were considered from this point onwards.

³⁶ 'Other' includes applications referred to centre or referred to grade review.

Prior to 2009, when candidates missed a unit/component but they were not aggregating in that session, the applications were referred to the centre. This changed in 2009; when OCR issued revised working instructions for special consideration, those applications were instead rejected by the awarding body. This explains the big increases in the percentages of rejected applications in 2009 shown in Tables 77 and 78.

Table 78: Special consideration applications by type of qualification, 2007-2009

Session	Year	GCSE			A-level		
		Number of applications	% accepted	% rejected	Number of applications	% accepted	% rejected
January	2007	43	88.37	11.63	3	66.67	33.33
	2008	47	97.87	2.13	11	90.91	9.09
	2009	358	12.85	87.15	85	12.94	87.06
June	2007	3256	99.45	0.55	963	98.75	1.25
	2008	3327	99.10	0.90	831	97.23	2.77
	2009	3997	85.11	14.89	1685	81.60	18.40
All	2007	3299	99.30	0.70	966	98.65	1.35
	2008	3374	99.08	0.92	842	97.15	2.85
	2009	4355	79.17	20.83	1770	78.31	21.69

The percentages of special consideration requests when the candidates were absent, as a proportion of the unit/specification entries for each qualification, were fairly similar for both GCSE and A-level (0.16% vs. 0.10%).

Tables 79 and 80 present the numbers and percentages of candidates, in English schools only, who requested a special consideration enhancement after not being able to attend an exam paper/unit.

Table 79: Numbers of candidates who applied for special consideration, 2007-2009

Year	January			June		
	GCSE	A-level	Total	GCSE	A-level	Total ³⁷
2007	43	3	46	2566	672	3273
2008	45	10	55	2592	586	3192
2009	335	68	403	2918	1071	4005

Table 80: Percentages of candidates who applied for special consideration (as a percentage of the GCSE and A-level cohorts), 2007-2009

Year	January		June	
	GCSE	A-level	GCSE	A-level
2007	0.01	0.00	0.40	0.26
2008	0.01	0.00	0.40	0.22
2009	0.05	0.02	0.46	0.38

In the June sessions, and contrary to the findings for candidates who were present but disadvantaged (section 3.1.1), the percentages of the A-level candidates missing at least one unit/component examination and requesting a special consideration enhancement were slightly lower than the percentages of GCSE candidates.

³⁷ Candidates with applications for special consideration in qualifications other than GCSE or A-level (e.g. STEP, Entry Level, GNVQs) were not considered.

Table 81 presents the percentages of schools with at least one candidate requesting special consideration (as a percentage of the schools registered with the OCR awarding body). Tables 82 and 83 display the same percentages for GCSE and A-level, respectively, by school type.

Table 81: Percentages of schools with at least one candidate applying for special consideration (as a percentage of the schools registered with OCR), 2007-2009

Year	January		June	
	GCSE	A-level	GCSE	A-level
2007	0.83	0.12	34.69	17.81
2008	0.89	0.31	34.73	15.89
2009	2.91	2.25	36.40	23.68

Table 82: Percentages of schools with at least one GCSE candidate applying for special consideration by school type (as a percentage of the schools registered with OCR), 2007-2009

(a) January

Year	January			
	Comprehensive	Grammar	Independent	Secondary Modern
2007	1.11	0.62	0.43	0.62
2008	1.14	0.00	0.70	1.23
2009	3.86	1.27	1.55	3.75

(b) June

Year	June			
	Comprehensive	Grammar	Independent	Secondary Modern
2007	43.94	30.25	16.90	36.02
2008	45.31	28.75	16.62	33.74
2009	47.44	29.30	17.51	36.88

In the June sessions, around 45% of comprehensive schools offering OCR GCSE examinations submitted at least one application for special consideration; this contrast with 17% of independent schools and 40% of grammar schools. These patterns are different from those encountered for special consideration applications when the candidates were present but disadvantaged (section 3.1.1).

Table 83: Percentages of schools with at least one A-level candidate applying for special consideration by school type (as a percentage of the schools registered with OCR), 2007-2009

(a) January

Year	January				
	Comprehensive	FE/Tertiary	Grammar	Independent	Sixth Form College
2007	0.00	0.00	0.61	0.00	0.75
2008	0.36	0.53	0.00	0.00	0.73
2009	2.76	0.55	1.82	1.16	6.47

(b) June

Year	June				
	Comprehensive	FE/Tertiary	Grammar	Independent	Sixth Form College
2007	14.52	25.63	25.61	15.22	55.64
2008	13.33	28.72	18.29	10.50	47.45
2009	22.28	35.52	30.30	16.25	57.55

Among the schools offering OCR A-level examinations, the percentages submitting at least one request for special consideration when the candidates missed one unit/component were much lower than when the candidates were present. For example, in June 2009, 30.30% vs. 90.91% grammar schools and 22.28% vs. 69.38% comprehensive schools.

3.2.2 Individual GCSE subjects

As before, results are presented separately for unitised and linear GCSE subjects. Descriptions of the subjects and their scheme of assessment can be found in the equivalent section in the present but disadvantaged analysis (section 3.1.2).

3.2.2.1 Unitised GCSEs

The results of the analysis for all four unitised GCSE subjects (English, French, mathematics and science) are presented in this section. They mirror, when possible, what was done in section 3.1.2.1 for applications made by candidates who were present but disadvantaged.

GCSE ENGLISH (1900)

In the June 2009 session there were 198 applications for special consideration in GCSE English units where the candidates failed to be present for the examination. Table 84 shows the numbers of applications in each GCSE English unit in June 2009 together with the percentages of accepted applications.

Table 84: Special consideration applications in GCSE English units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2431	46822	103	101	98.06	0.22
2432	46895	88	86	97.73	0.19
2433	3119	5	3	60.00	0.16
2434	41111	1	1	100.00	0.00
2435	44054	1	1	100.00	0.00

For each unit, the numbers of candidates who missed the assessment were smaller than the numbers of candidates who were present but disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control (see section 3.1.2.1). As a proportion of the entries, the percentages of this type of applications were around 90% smaller than those from applications when candidates were present but disadvantaged.

Only 164 of the candidates who obtained a GCSE in June 2009 applied for special consideration after failing to be present in at least one unit of the qualification. 127 of them (77.44%) improved their overall grade in the subject after the enhancement was approved. This accounts for 0.27% of the candidates who certificated in this subject in the June 2009 session.

It is not surprising that the percentages of candidates with a missing unit who improved their grades after a special consideration enhancement were much higher than those of candidates who were present but disadvantaged. The reasoning for this is that when a special consideration enhancement is approved after the candidate missed a unit, an enhanced grade (based on performance on other units of the specification) is issued. The adjustment therefore is usually bigger than up to 5% of the total mark in the unit missed.

Table 85 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 85: Changes in the overall GCSE English grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
A	A*	1	0.62
C	A*	11	6.79
E	A*	1	0.62
F	A*	4	2.47
A	A	1	0.62
C	A	4	2.47
D	A	3	1.85
F	A	7	4.32
B	B	7	4.32
D	B	13	8.02
F	B	3	1.85
G	B	6	3.70
C	C	7	4.32
E	C	23	14.2
F	C	1	0.62
G	C	11	6.79
D	D	11	6.79
E	D	11	6.79
F	D	6	3.70
G	D	3	1.85
E	E	3	1.85
F	E	3	1.85
G	E	3	1.85
U	E	3	1.85
F	F	3	1.85
G	F	3	1.85
U	F	1	0.62
G	G	3	1.85
U	G	4	2.47
U	U	2	1.23

There were differences in ability between the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement after missing a unit and those who did not, and in favour of those who did not apply. This result is opposed to the one found for candidates applying for special consideration when present but disadvantaged. Figure 15 shows the grade distribution in GCSE English for both groups of students mentioned above. Both distributions were different³⁸, with the median being significantly higher for the group of students who did not apply for special consideration.

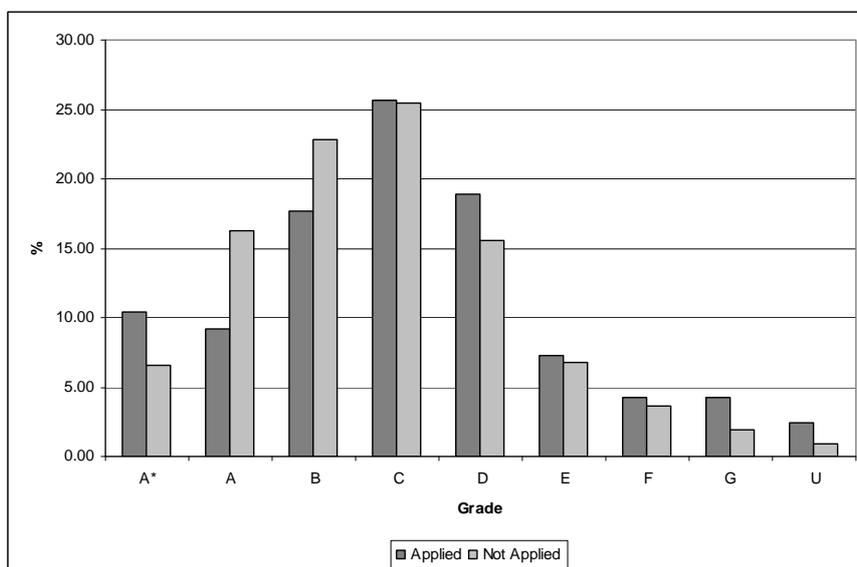


Figure 15: Grade distribution in GCSE English by special consideration requests, June 2009

GCSE FRENCH (1925)

In the June 2009 session there were 116 applications for special consideration in GCSE French units when the candidates failed to be present for the examination. Table 86 shows the numbers of applications in each of these units together with the percentages of accepted applications.

Table 86: Special consideration applications in GCSE French units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2351	29770	40	38	95.00	0.13
2352	26755	9	7	77.78	0.03
2353	29765	50	47	94.00	0.17
2354	10929	16	14	87.50	0.15
2355	3015	1	1	100.00	0.03
2356	18839	0	0	0.00	0.00

For each unit, the numbers of candidates who missed the examination were smaller than the numbers of candidates who were present during the assessment but were disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control (see section 3.1.2.1).

³⁸ A Wilcoxon test was used to compare the grade distributions of both groups of students.

Only 98 of the candidates who obtained a GCSE in this subject in June 2009 applied for special consideration after failing to be present in at least one unit of the qualification. 92 of them (93.88%) improved their overall grade in the subject after the enhancement was approved. This accounts for 0.31% of the candidates who certificated in this subject in the June 2009 session. Table 87 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 87: Changes in the overall GCSE French grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
B	A*	9	9.18
D	A*	2	2.04
C	A	13	13.27
E	A	2	2.04
B	B	1	1.02
C	B	9	9.18
D	B	11	11.22
E	B	3	3.06
C	C	1	1.02
D	C	12	12.24
E	C	5	5.10
D	D	1	1.02
E	D	12	12.24
F	D	2	2.04
E	E	1	1.02
F	E	9	9.18
G	E	1	1.02
G	F	2	2.04
G	G	2	2.04

There were not significant differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement after missing a unit/component in GCSE French and those who did not. Figure 16 shows the grade distribution in GCSE French for both groups of students mentioned above. There was no statistical evidence to show that both distributions were different.

GCSE MATHEMATICS C – GRADUATED ASSESSMENT (J517)

In the June 2009 session there were 213 applications for special consideration in GCSE mathematics C units when the candidates failed to be present for the examination. Table 88 shows the numbers of applications in each of these units together with the percentages of accepted applications.

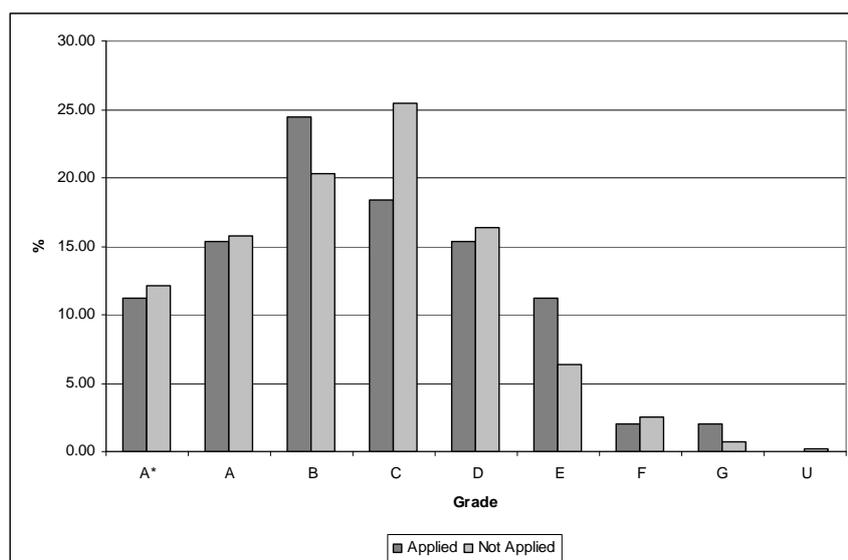


Figure 16: Grade distribution in GCSE French by special consideration requests, June 2009

Table 88: Special consideration applications in GCSE mathematics C units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
B271	1027	2	1	50.00	0.19
B272	2170	0	0	0.00	0.00
B273	3925	2	2	100.00	0.05
B274	6431	4	1	25.00	0.06
B275	11763	11	2	18.18	0.09
B276	21123	17	10	58.82	0.08
B277	25740	30	27	90.00	0.12
B278	18617	17	13	76.47	0.09
B279	14701	8	8	100.00	0.05
B280	6135	7	7	100.00	0.11
B281	27340	62	60	96.77	0.23
B282	31771	53	53	100.00	0.17

In all units, the numbers of candidates who were not able to take the assessment were smaller than the numbers of candidates who were present but disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control (see section 3.1.2.1).

Only 172 of the candidates who certificated in June 2009 applied for special consideration after failing to be present in at least one unit of the qualification. 116 of them (67.44%) improved their overall grade in the subject after the enhancement was approved. This accounts for 0.20% of the candidates who certificated. Table 89 displays the changes in the overall grades.

There were differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement after missing at least one unit and those who did not, and in favour of those who did not apply. This result is opposed to the one found for candidates applying for special consideration when present but disadvantaged.

Figure 17 shows the grade distribution in GCSE mathematics C for both groups of students mentioned above. Both distributions were different³⁹, with the median being significantly higher for the group of students who did not apply for special consideration.

Table 89: Changes in the overall GCSE mathematics C grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
E	A*	7	4.07
A	A	1	0.58
E	A	10	5.81
U	A	1	0.58
B	B	7	4.07
C	B	1	0.58
D	B	1	0.58
E	B	1	0.58
U	B	15	8.72
C	C	9	5.23
D	C	5	2.91
F	C	3	1.74
U	C	4	2.33
D	D	14	8.14
E	D	2	1.16
F	D	1	0.58
G	D	13	7.56
U	D	8	4.65
E	E	7	4.07
F	E	2	1.16
G	E	12	6.98
U	E	2	1.16
F	F	3	1.74
G	F	6	3.49
U	F	15	8.72
G	G	7	4.07
U	G	7	4.07
U	U	8	4.65

GCSE SCIENCE A – TWENTY FIRST CENTURY SCIENCE SUITE (J630)

In the June 2009 session there were 358 applications for special consideration in GCSE science A units when the candidates failed to be present for the examination. Table 90 shows the numbers of applications in each of these units together with the percentages of accepted applications.

³⁹ A Wilcoxon test was used to compare the grade distributions of both groups of students.

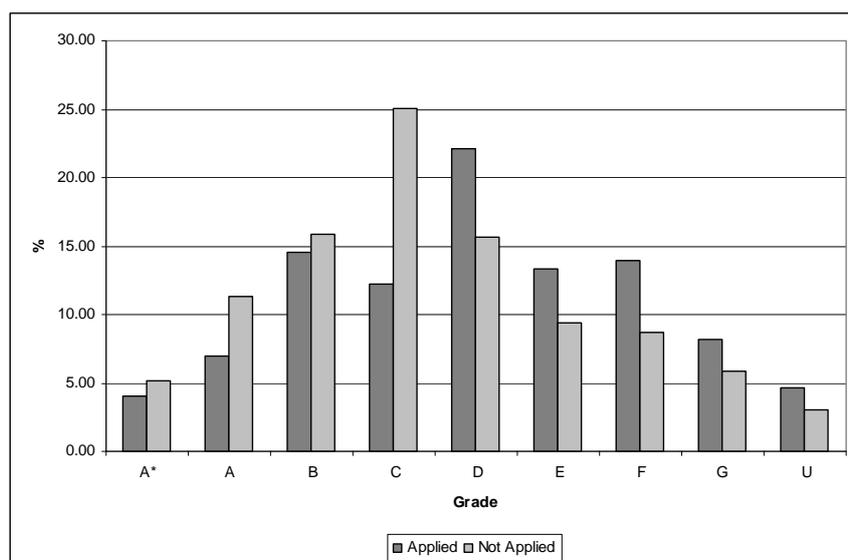


Figure 17: Grade distribution in GCSE mathematics C by special consideration requests, June 2009

Table 90: Special consideration applications in GCSE science A units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
A211	35555	15	9	60.00	0.04
A212	73125	61	34	55.74	0.08
A213	86465	122	98	80.33	0.14
A214	120445	155	116	74.84	0.13
A219	111380	5	1	20.00	0.00

In all units, the numbers of candidates who were not present during the assessment were smaller than the numbers of candidates who were present but were disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control (see section 3.1.2.1).

Only 251 of the candidates who certificated in June 2009 applied for special consideration after failing to be present in at least one unit of the qualification. 147 of them (58.57%) improved their overall grade in the subject after the enhancement was approved. This accounts for 0.13% of the candidates who certificated in this subject in the June 2009 session. Table 91 displays the changes in the overall grades.

There were differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement after missing at least one unit and those who did not, and in favour of those who did not apply. This result is opposed to the one found for candidates applying for special consideration when present but disadvantaged. Figure 18 shows the grade distribution in GCSE science for both groups of students mentioned above. Both distributions were different⁴⁰, with the median being significantly higher for the group of students who did not apply for special consideration.

⁴⁰ A Wilcoxon test was used to compare the grade distributions of both groups of students.

Table 91: Changes in the overall GCSE science A grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
A*	A*	1	0.40
B	A*	1	0.40
A	A	3	1.20
C	A	6	2.39
D	A	1	0.40
B	B	11	4.38
C	B	10	3.98
D	B	10	3.98
E	B	2	0.80
C	C	16	6.37
D	C	30	11.95
E	C	4	1.59
D	D	17	6.77
E	D	40	15.94
F	D	3	1.20
G	D	1	0.40
E	E	26	10.36
F	E	25	9.96
G	E	4	1.59
F	F	11	4.38
G	F	8	3.19
G	G	12	4.78
U	G	2	0.80
U	U	7	2.79

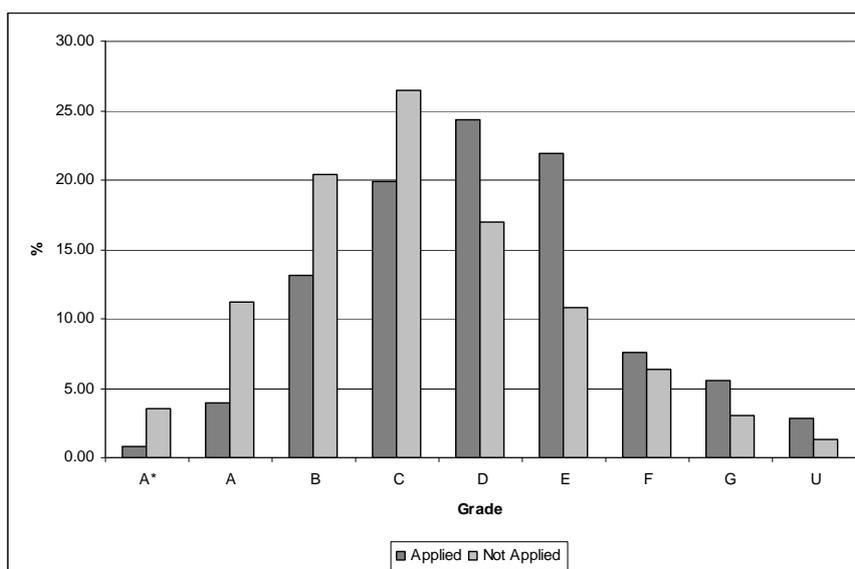


Figure 18: Grade distribution in GCSE science A by special consideration requests, June 2009

3.2.2.2 Linear GCSEs

The results of the analysis for all four linear GCSE subjects (history, geography, mathematics and religious studies) are presented in this section. They mirror, when possible, what was done in section 3.1.2.2 for applications made by candidates who were present but disadvantaged.

GCSE HISTORY B – MODERN WORLD (1937)

In the June 2009 session there were 134 special consideration requests in this GCSE history specification, which accounted for only 0.26% of the entries. 78.36% of them were accepted.

As stated in section 3.1.2.2, in linear GCSEs the number of candidates requesting special consideration coincides with the number of applications due to how applications data is recorded in OCR's examinations processing system. However, a candidate could have applied for special consideration in more than one paper/component. The average number of applications per candidate in this subject was 1.11 (SD=0.50). Table 92 shows the distribution of the number of applications. More than 80% of the candidates applied for a special consideration enhancement in only one paper/component. It should be noted that due to the fact that, at GCSE level, 35% of the total assessment needs to be completed before a candidate is eligible for a special consideration adjustment, candidates could have only missed one component in this subject. There are, however, exceptional circumstances when an enhanced grade could have been awarded (JCQ, 2009).

Table 92: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE history B, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	109	81.34
2	25	18.66

Out of the 134 candidates who missed a time-tabled paper/component and applied for special consideration, 103 (76.87%) improved their grade. This accounts for 0.20% of the candidates who obtained a GCSE in history B in June 2009. Table 93 displays the changes in the overall grades.

There were differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement after missing at least one paper/component and those who did not, and in favour of those who did not apply. Figure 19 shows the grade distribution in GCSE history B for both groups of students mentioned above. Both distributions were different⁴¹, with the median being significantly higher for the group of students who did not apply for special consideration.

⁴¹ A Wilcoxon test was used to compare the grade distributions of both groups of students.

Table 93: Changes in the overall GCSE history B grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
A*	A*	1	0.75
B	A*	3	2.24
C	A*	8	5.97
D	A*	3	2.24
E	A*	2	1.49
C	A	2	1.49
D	A	3	2.24
E	A	6	4.48
G	A	2	1.49
B	B	2	1.49
D	B	5	3.73
E	B	6	4.48
F	B	7	5.22
E	C	8	5.97
F	C	8	5.97
U	C	1	0.75
F	D	16	11.94
G	D	1	0.75
F	E	3	2.24
G	E	8	5.97
F	F	1	0.75
G	F	3	2.24
U	F	5	3.73
G	G	7	5.22
U	G	3	2.24
U	U	20	14.93

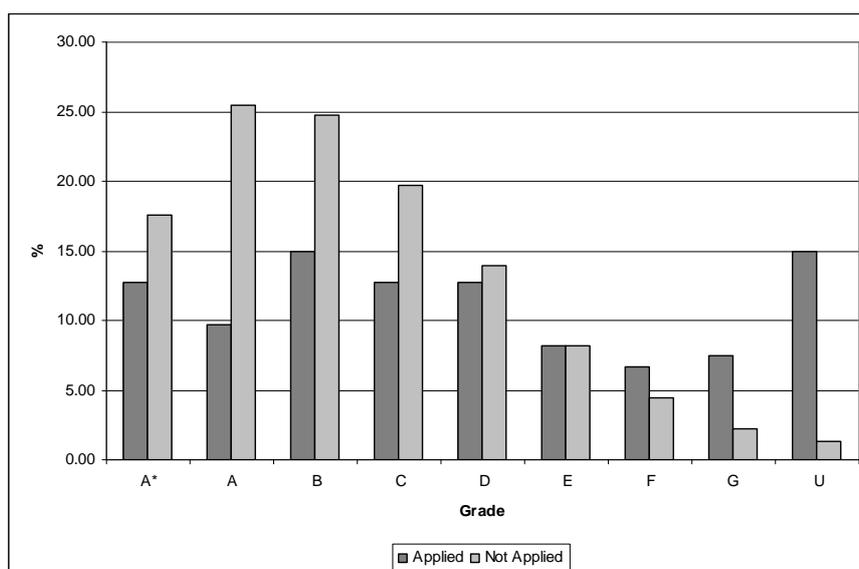


Figure 19: Grade distribution in GCSE history B by special consideration requests, June 2009

GCSE GEOGRAPHY B – AVERY HILL (1987)

In the June 2009 session there were 124 special consideration requests in GCSE geography, which accounted for only 0.35% of the entries. 72.58% of them were accepted.

The average number of applications per candidate in this subject was 1.23 (SD=0.50). Table 94 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Around 75% of the candidates applied for a special consideration enhancement in only one paper/component. It should be noted that due to the fact that, at GCSE level, 35% of the total assessment needs to be completed before a candidate is eligible for a special consideration adjustment, candidates taking this subject could have missed only one externally examined component and the coursework component.

Table 94: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE geography B, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	95	76.61
2	29	23.39

Out of the 124 candidates who missed a time-tabled paper/component and applied for special consideration, 83 (66.94%) improved their grade. This accounts for 0.23% of the candidates who obtained a GCSE in geography B in June 2009. Table 95 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 95: Changes in the overall GCSE geography B grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
A	A	2	1.61
B	A	1	0.81
C	A	1	0.81
D	A	13	10.48
D	B	7	5.65
E	B	4	3.23
D	C	4	3.23
E	C	8	6.45
F	C	10	8.06
D	D	2	1.61
E	D	6	4.84
F	D	5	4.03
G	D	6	4.84
U	D	2	1.61
G	E	6	4.84
F	F	1	0.81
G	F	3	2.42
U	F	4	3.23
U	G	3	2.42
U	U	36	29.03

There were differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement after missing at least a paper/component and those who did not, and in favour of those who did not apply. This result is opposed to the one found for candidates applying for special consideration when present but disadvantaged. Figure 20 shows the grade distribution in GCSE geography B for both groups of students mentioned above. Both distributions were different⁴², with the median being significantly higher for the group of students who did not apply for special consideration.

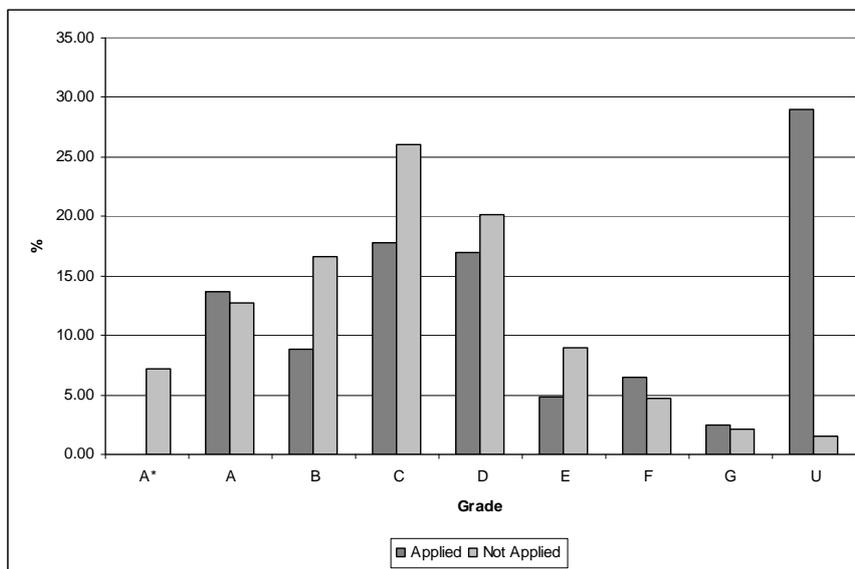


Figure 20: Grade distribution in GCSE geography B by special consideration requests, June 2009

GCSE MATHEMATICS A – LINEAR (J512)

In the June 2009 session there were 110 special consideration requests in GCSE mathematics A, which accounted for only 0.28% of the entries. 96.36% of them were accepted. The percentage of approved applications in this subject was much higher than for any other GCSE subject (either linear or unitised) considered in section 3.2.2 of this report.

The scheme of assessment for this subject consists of two tiers, foundation and higher, each one comprising two papers. Each paper weights 50% of the assessment. Due to the minimum requirements rule, to apply for an enhanced grade in this subject candidates had to sit one of the papers and therefore, were only able to request special consideration in one paper/component.

Out of the 110 candidates who missed a time-tabled paper/component and applied for special consideration, 95 (86.36%) improved their grade. This accounts for 0.24% of the candidates who obtained a GCSE in mathematics A in June 2009. Table 96 displays the changes in the overall grades.

⁴² A Wilcoxon test was used to compare the grade distributions of both groups of students.

Table 96: Changes in the overall GCSE mathematics A grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
C	A*	3	2.73
C	A	1	0.91
D	A	3	2.73
C	B	1	0.91
D	B	5	4.55
C	C	1	0.91
E	C	4	3.64
F	C	16	14.55
G	C	2	1.82
D	D	2	1.82
E	D	1	0.91
G	D	15	13.64
G	E	13	11.82
U	E	7	6.36
F	F	1	0.91
U	F	11	10.00
G	G	2	1.82
U	G	12	10.91
U	U	10	9.09

There were differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement after missing at least one paper/component and those who did not, and in favour of those who did not apply. Figure 21 shows the grade distribution in GCSE mathematics A for both groups of students mentioned above. Both distributions were different⁴³, with the median being significantly higher for the group of students who did not apply for special consideration.

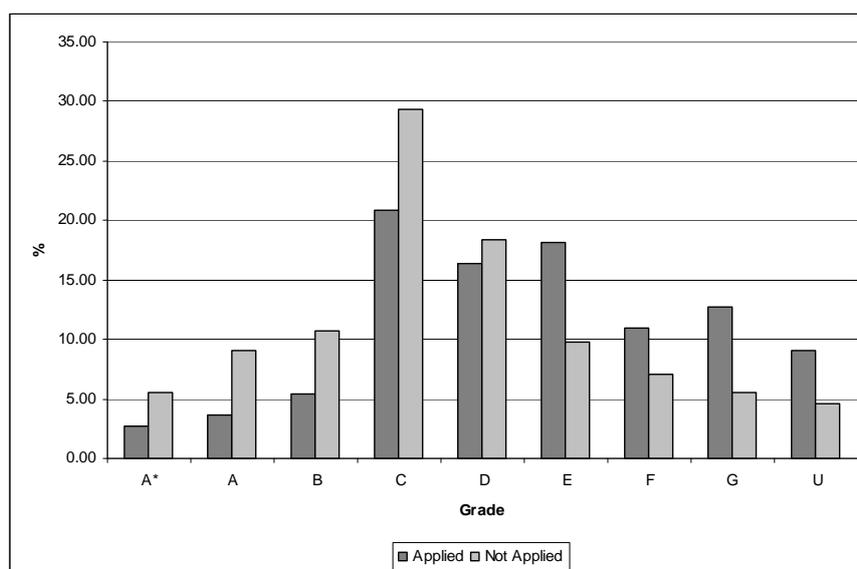


Figure 21: Grade distribution in GCSE mathematics A by special consideration requests, June 2009

⁴³ A Wilcoxon test was used to compare the grade distributions of both groups of students.

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES B – PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS (1931)

In the June 2009 session there were 114 special consideration requests in GCSE religious studies B, which accounted for only 0.33% of the entries. 95.61% of them were accepted.

Table 97 shows the distribution of the number of applications. Only one candidate requested special consideration after failing to be present in two papers/components. It should be noted that due to the fact that, at GCSE level, 35% of the total assessment needs to be completed before a candidate is eligible for a special consideration adjustment, religious studies candidates could have missed one externally examined component (option A – no coursework) or one externally examined component and the coursework (option B – with internal assessment).

Table 97: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in GCSE religious studies B, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	113	99.12
2	1	0.88

Out of the 114 candidates who missed a time-tabled paper/component and applied for special consideration, 109 (95.61%) improved their grade. This accounts for 0.32% of the candidates who obtained a GCSE in religious studies B in June 2009. Table 98 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 98: Changes in the overall GCSE religious studies B grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
C	A*	1	0.88
D	A*	10	8.77
D	A	5	4.39
E	A	17	14.91
D	B	2	1.75
E	B	18	15.79
F	B	4	3.51
E	C	2	1.75
F	C	17	14.91
D	D	1	0.88
E	D	1	0.88
F	D	15	13.16
G	D	4	3.51
E	E	1	0.88
G	E	7	6.14
F	F	2	1.75
G	F	2	1.75
U	G	4	3.51
U	U	1	0.88

There were differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement after missing at least one paper/component and those who did not, and in favour of those who did not apply. Figure 22 shows the grade distribution in GCSE religious studies B for both groups of students mentioned above. Both distributions were different⁴⁴, with the median being significantly higher for the group of students who did not apply for special consideration.

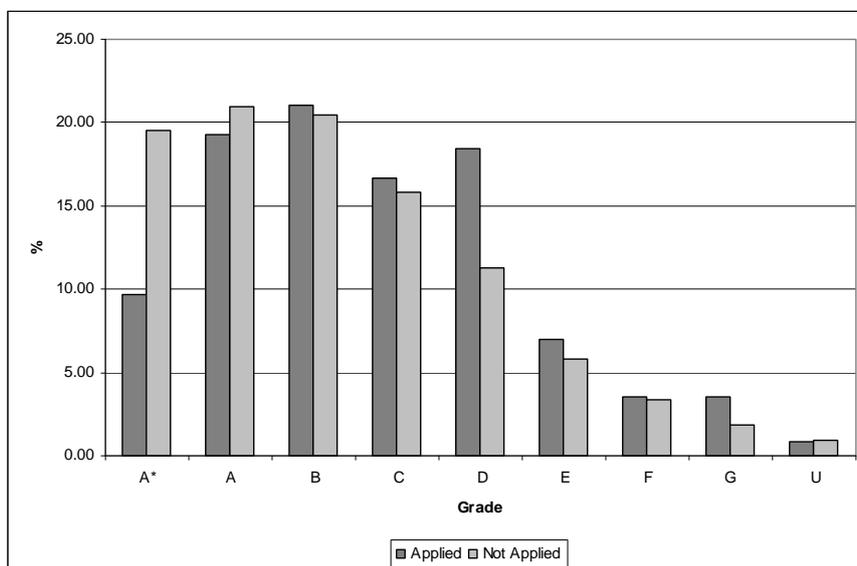


Figure 22: Grade distribution in GCSE religious studies B by special consideration requests, June 2009

3.2.3 Individual A-level subjects

The results of the analysis for all four A-level subjects (English literature, mathematics, chemistry and history) are presented in this section. They mirror, when possible, what was done in section 3.1.3 for applications made by candidates who were present but disadvantaged.

A-LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE (7828)

In the June 2009 session there were 41 applications for special consideration in A-level English literature units when the candidates failed to be present for the examination. Table 99 shows the numbers of applications in each of the units in June 2009 together with the percentages of accepted applications.

For each unit, the numbers of candidates who were not present during the assessment were much smaller than the numbers of candidates who were present but disadvantaged. In fact, the total number of applications submitted by English literature candidates who were present but disadvantaged was about 20 times higher than the total number of applications submitted by candidates who were absent in at least one unit.

⁴⁴ A Wilcoxon test was used to compare the grade distributions of both groups of students.

Table 99: Special consideration applications in A-level English literature units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2707	783	1	1	100.00	0.13
2708	714	0	0	0.00	0.00
2709	705	0	0	0.00	0.00
2710	6588	16	16	100.00	0.24
2711	5988	0	0	0.00	0.00
2712	959	2	2	100.00	0.21
2713	7571	22	22	100.00	0.29

Table 100 shows the distribution of the number of applications per candidate in this subject. More than 30% applied for a special consideration enhancement after being absent from two units (percentage higher than for candidates taking GCSE subjects). It should be noted that due to the A-level minimum requirements, 50% of the total assessment needs to be completed (with at least one A2 unit completed) before a candidate is eligible for a special consideration adjustment; candidates could have missed more than one unit in this subject and still be eligible for an adjustment.

Table 100: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in A-level English literature, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	23	67.65
2	11	32.35

Only 32 of the candidates who obtained an A-level in this subject in June 2009 applied for special consideration after failing to be present in at least one unit of the qualification. 29 of them (90.63%) improved their overall grade in the subject after the enhancement was approved. This accounts for 0.37% of the total entry for the subject. Table 101 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 101: Changes in the overall A-level English literature grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
A	A	1	3.03
A	B	2	6.06
A	C	5	15.15
A	D	5	15.15
B	B	2	6.06
B	C	2	6.06
C	D	6	18.18
C	E	2	6.06
D	D	2	6.06
D	E	5	15.15
E	U	1	3.03

There were no differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not. Figure 23 shows the grade distribution in A-level English literature for both groups of students but there is no statistical evidence to indicate that both distributions were different.

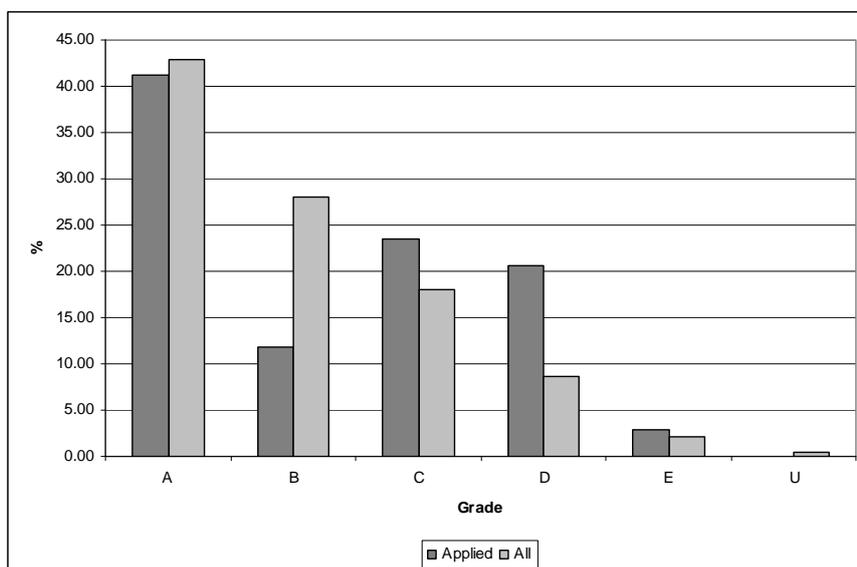


Figure 23: Grade distribution in A-level English literature by special consideration requests, June 2009

A-LEVEL MATHEMATICS (7890)

In the June 2009 session there were 81 applications for special consideration in A-level mathematics units when the candidates failed to be present for the examination. 83.95% of them were accepted. Table 102 shows the numbers of applications in each of the units in June 2009 together with the percentages of accepted applications.

Table 102: Special consideration applications in A-level mathematics units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
4721	14663	6	6	100.00	0.04
4722	20929	15	12	80.00	0.07
4723	7854	5	4	80.00	0.06
4724	10985	8	8	100.00	0.07
4728	9077	7	5	71.43	0.08
4729	2301	2	2	100.00	0.09
4732	14354	19	18	94.74	0.13
4733	2203	3	3	100.00	0.14
4736	6029	16	10	62.50	0.27
4737	918	0	0	0.00	0.00

For each unit, the numbers of candidates who missed the assessment were much smaller than the numbers of candidates who were present but were disadvantaged. In fact, the total number of applications submitted by A-level mathematics candidates who were present but disadvantaged was about 25 times higher than the total number of applications submitted by candidates who were absent in at least one unit.

Table 103 shows the distribution of the number of applications per candidate in this subject. More than 80% applied for a special consideration enhancement after being absent in only one unit. However, it should be noted that due to the A-level minimum requirements, 50% of the total assessment needs to be completed (with at least one A2 unit completed) before a candidate is eligible for a special consideration adjustment; candidates could have missed more than one unit in this subject and still be eligible for an adjustment.

Table 103: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in A-level mathematics, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	21	84.00
2	3	12.00
4	1	4.00

Only 25 of the candidates who obtained an A-level in this subject in June 2009 applied for special consideration after failing to be present in at least one unit of the qualification. 15 of them (60.00%) improved their overall grade in the subject after the enhancement was approved. This accounts for 0.13% of the total entry for the subject. Table 104 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 104: Changes in the overall A-level mathematics grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
A	A	4	16.00
B	A	4	16.00
B	B	3	12.00
C	A	1	4.00
C	B	3	12.00
C	C	2	8.00
D	A	1	4.00
D	C	4	16.00
E	E	1	4.00
U	E	2	8.00

There were no differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not. Figure 24 shows the grade distribution in A-level mathematics for both groups of students but there is no statistical evidence to indicate that both distributions were different.

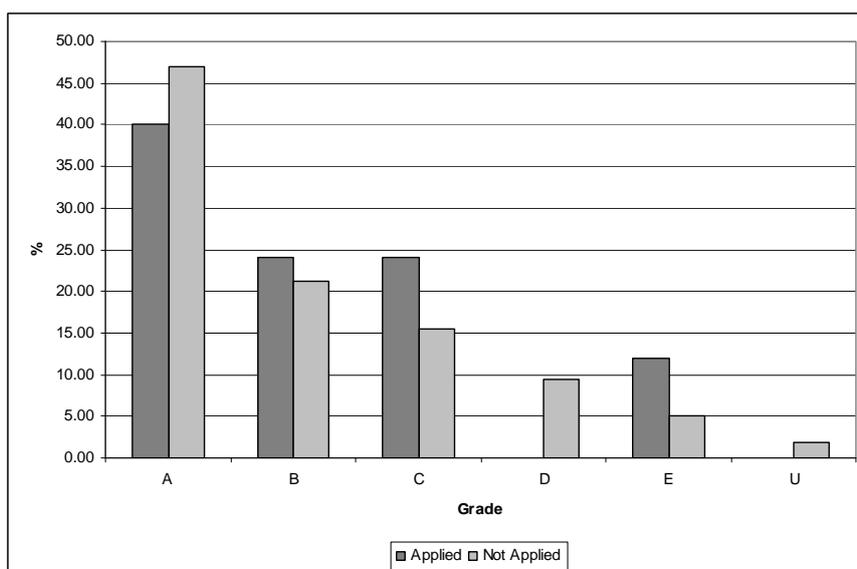


Figure 24: Grade distribution in A-level mathematics by special consideration requests, June 2009

A-LEVEL CHEMISTRY (7882)

In the June 2009 session there were 86 applications for special consideration in A-level chemistry units for which the candidates failed to be present for the examination. 96.51% of the applications were accepted. Table 105 shows the numbers of applications in each of the units in June 2009 together with the percentages of accepted applications.

Table 105: Special consideration applications in A-level chemistry units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2811	3091	2	1	50.00	0.06
2812	2744	0	0	0.00	0.00
2813	3044	6	6	100.00	0.20
2814	6453	12	11	91.67	0.19
2815	11118	44	44	100.00	0.40
2816	11492	22	21	95.45	0.19

For each unit, the numbers of candidates who were absent during the assessment were much smaller than the numbers of candidates who were present but disadvantaged. In fact, the total number of applications submitted by A-level chemistry candidates who were present but disadvantaged was about 15 times higher than the total number of applications submitted by candidates who were absent in at least one unit.

Table 106 shows the distribution of the number of applications per candidate in this subject. 75% of the candidates applied for a special consideration enhancement after being absent from only one unit. However, it should be noted that due to the A-level minimum requirements, 50% of the total assessment needs to be completed (with at least one A2 unit completed) before a candidate is eligible for a special consideration adjustment; candidates could have been absent from more than one unit in this subject and still be eligible for an adjustment. In fact, 23% of the candidates applying for an enhanced grade were not present in two units of the qualification.

Table 106: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in A-level chemistry, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	36	75.00
2	11	23.00
4	1	2.00

Only 48 of the candidates who obtained an A-level in this subject in June 2009 applied for special consideration after failing to be present in at least one unit of the qualification. 32 of them (66.67%) improved their overall grade in the subject after the enhancement was approved. This accounts for 0.26% of the total entry for the subject. Table 107 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 107: Changes in the overall A-level chemistry grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a grade change)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
A	A	2	4.26
A	B	9	19.15
A	C	1	2.13
A	D	4	8.51
B	B	2	4.26
B	C	4	8.51
B	D	3	6.38
C	C	4	8.51
C	D	2	4.26
D	D	2	4.26
D	E	6	12.77
E	E	5	10.64
E	U	2	4.26
U	U	1	2.13

There were no differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not. Figure 25 shows the grade distribution in A-level chemistry for both groups of students but there is no statistical evidence to indicate that both distributions were different.

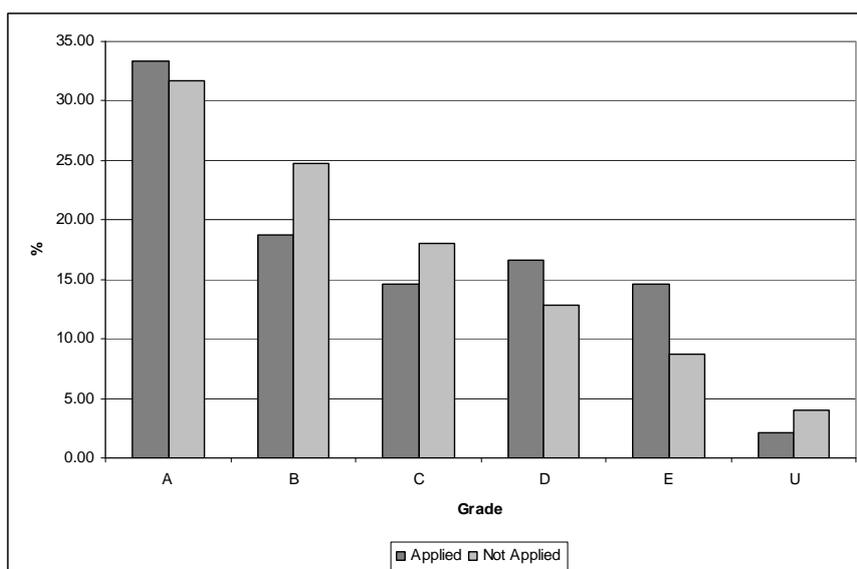


Figure 25: Grade distribution in A-level chemistry by special consideration requests, June 2009

A-LEVEL HISTORY (7835)

In the June 2009 session there were 77 applications for special consideration in A-level history units for which the candidates failed to be present for the examination. 98.70% of the applications were accepted. Table 108 shows the numbers of applications in each of the units in June 2009 together with the percentages of accepted applications.

Table 108: Numbers of special consideration applications in A-level history units, June 2009

Unit	Number of entries	Number of applications	Number of accepted applications	% accepted applications	% of applications in the unit
2580	89	1	1	100.00	1.12
2581	401	0	0	0.00	0.00
2582	1374	2	2	100.00	0.15
2583	852	0	0	0.00	0.00
2584	1002	1	1	100.00	0.10
2585	518	0	0	0.00	0.00
2586	1518	2	2	100.00	0.13
2587	560	0	0	0.00	0.00
2588	3150	13	13	100.00	0.41
2589	7467	19	19	100.00	0.25
2590	3055	8	8	100.00	0.26
2591	9365	30	30	100.00	0.32
2592	12405	1	0	0.00	0.01
2593	383	0	0	0.00	0.00

For each unit, the numbers of candidates who were not present during the assessment were much smaller than the numbers of present but disadvantaged candidates. In fact, the total number of applications submitted by A-level history candidates who were present but disadvantaged was about 15 times higher than the total number of applications submitted by candidates who were absent in at least one unit.

Table 109 shows the distribution of the number of applications per candidate in this subject. Around 65% of the candidates applied for a special consideration enhancement after being absent from only one unit. However, it should be noted that due to the A-level minimum requirements, 50% of the total assessment needs to be completed (with at least one A2 unit completed) before a candidate is eligible for a special consideration adjustment; candidates could have been absent from more than one unit in this subject and still be eligible for an adjustment. In fact, over 30% of the candidates applying for an enhanced grade were not present in two units of the assessment.

Table 109: Distribution of the number of special consideration applications in A-level history, June 2009

Number of applications	Candidates	
	Number	Percentage
1	39	66.10
2	19	32.20
3	1	1.69

Only 59 of the candidates who obtained an A-level in this subject in June 2009 applied for special consideration after failing to be present in at least one unit of the qualification. 50 of them (84.75%) improved their overall grade in the subject after the enhancement was approved. This accounts for 0.39% of the total entry for the subject. Table 110 displays the changes in the overall grades.

Table 110: Changes in the overall A-level history grade, June 2009 (highlighted in grey are those instances without a change in the grades)

Grade before special consideration enhancement	Grade after special consideration enhancement	Number of candidates	% of candidates
A	A	3	5.08
A	B	3	5.08
A	C	4	6.78
A	D	4	6.78
B	B	2	3.39
B	C	6	10.17
B	D	3	5.08
B	E	2	3.39
C	C	1	1.69
C	D	7	11.86
C	E	6	10.17
C	U	1	1.69
D	D	2	3.39
D	E	9	15.25
D	U	1	1.69
E	E	1	1.69
E	U	4	6.78

There were no differences in ability among the students who applied for a special consideration enhancement and those who did not. Figure 26 shows the grade distribution in A-level history for both groups of students but there is no statistical evidence to indicate that both distributions were different.

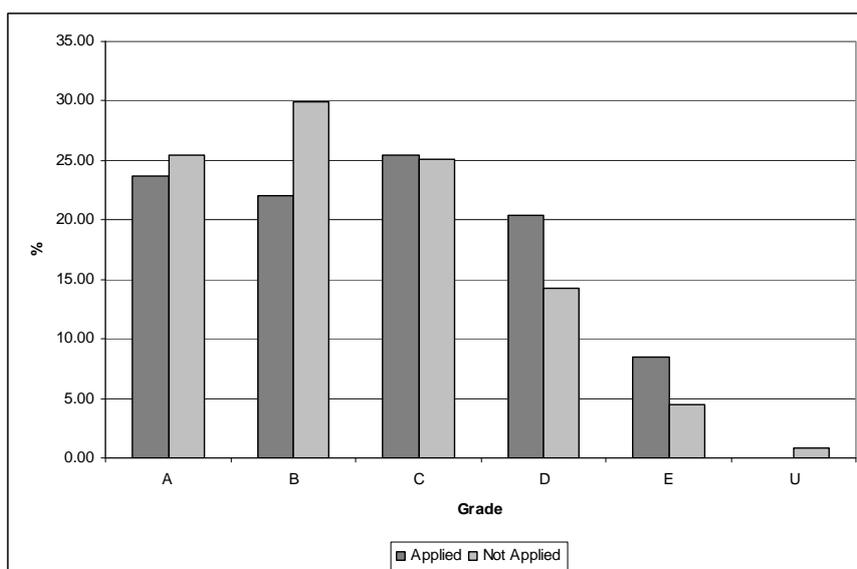


Figure 26: Grade distribution in A-level history by special consideration requests, June 2009

3.3 SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS

The tables presented in this section show summary statistics for special consideration applications in the fourteen GCSE and A-level subjects investigated in this research. Tables S1-S3 refer to applications where candidates were present but disadvantaged. Tables S4-S6 refer to applications where candidates were absent with good reason.

3.3.1 Present but disadvantaged

In 2009, for individual GCSE and A-level subjects, the percentages of special consideration requests, as a proportion of the entries in the subjects, were fairly small (ranging from 0.55% to 3.82%).

Tables S1 and S2 show that, at GCSE, the percentages of candidates with at least one application for special consideration (unit or paper/component) were below 5% for all subjects considered in this research. At A-level, the percentages of candidates with at least one application were slightly higher but below 10% for all subjects (see Table S3).

The percentages of candidates with at least one application for special consideration were higher in modular/unitised qualifications than in linear qualifications. Percentages were higher at A-level than at GCSE in all subjects considered. This was consistent with the overall figures presented in section 3.1.1.

To further evaluate the impact of the new modular qualifications at GCSE on the number of special consideration applications, data from GCSE English (1500) in 2003 (last certification of the linear specification) and data from GCSE English (1900) in 2004 (first certification of the unitised specification) was analysed.

Table S1: Summary statistics for special consideration applications in unitised GCSE subjects, June 2009

Subject	Candidates	Candidates with at least one SC application	Candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement ⁴⁵	% of candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement ⁴⁶	UMS marks increase
English	46997	1266 (2.69%)	189 (14.93%)	0.40%	3.96
French	29696	1268 (4.27%)	106 (8.36%)	0.36%	3.00
Mathematics	58697	1853 (3.16%)	115 (6.21%)	0.20%	4.55
Science	109953	1766 (1.61%)	81 (4.59%)	0.07%	1.41

Table S2: Summary statistics for special consideration applications in linear GCSE subjects, June 2009

Subject	Candidates	Candidates with at least one SC application	Candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement	% of candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement
History	50621	1932 (3.82%)	314 (16.25%)	0.62%
Geography	35908	832 (1.41%)	126 (15.14%)	0.35%
Mathematics	39467	555 (1.41%)	81 (14.59%)	0.20%
Religious Studies	34262	190 (0.55%)	25 (13.15%)	0.07%

There were 2970 applications for special consideration in English units in the June 2004 session. In June 2003, there were 1356 applications for special consideration in the English linear assessment. There seems to be a very high increase in the numbers of applications (more than double) in this subject from 2003 to 2004.

However, in linear qualifications, a candidate could have applied for special consideration in more than one paper/component⁴⁷. If we had counted the numbers of papers/components where candidates applied for special consideration in June 2003, there would have been 2795 applications, a very similar number to the applications submitted in June 2004.

As a percentage of the entry in GCSE English in June 2003 and 2004, 2.10% and 2.60% of the candidates, respectively, applied for a special consideration enhancement.

⁴⁵ As a percentage of the candidates with at least one application.

⁴⁶ As a percentage of the entries in the subject.

⁴⁷ For certification in English GCSE in June 2004, candidates needed to sit at least four units. For certification in English GCSE in June 2003, candidates needed to sit four papers/components.

This brief analysis showed that the method of counting applications in different assessment routes (linear vs. modular) led to a greater increase in the numbers of special consideration applications than the actual one.

Table S3: Summary statistics for special consideration applications in A-level subjects, June 2009

Subject	Candidates	Candidates with at least one SC application	Candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement	% of candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement	UMS marks increase
English literature	7797	709 (9.09%)	25 (3.53%)	0.32%	3.96
Mathematics	11499	844 (7.34%)	41 (4.86%)	0.36%	3.66
Chemistry	11897	1077 (9.05%)	72 (6.69%)	0.61%	3.97
History	12878	1110 (8.62%)	88 (7.93%)	0.68%	4.83

In all subjects, both at GCSE and A-level, the percentages of candidates out of the total entry who improved their overall grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, were very low (less than 1%).

At GCSE, the percentages of candidates improving their grade, as a percentage of the candidates submitting at least one special consideration request, were higher for linear qualifications than for modular qualifications. Percentages for A-level candidates were in line with the percentages for modular GCSEs.

3.3.2 Absent with good reason

Tables S4 and S5 show that, at GCSE, the percentages of candidates with at least one application for special consideration (unit or paper/component) were very small (below 0.50%) for all subjects. At A-level (Table S6), the percentages of candidates with at least one application were slightly higher but still below 0.50% for all subjects.

At GCSE, the percentages of candidates with at least one application for special consideration in modular/unitised qualifications were very similar to those in linear qualifications. Percentages at A-level were very similar to those at GCSE. This was consistent with the overall figures presented in section 3.2.1.

The percentages of candidates with a missing unit/component who improved their grades after a special consideration enhancement (as a proportion of the candidates with at least one application) were much higher than those of candidates who were present but disadvantaged.

In all subjects, both at GCSE and A-level, the percentages of candidates, out of the total entry, who improved their overall grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement, were fairly low (all below 0.50%).

Table S4: Summary statistics for special consideration applications in unitised GCSE subjects, June 2009

Subject	Candidates	Candidates with at least one SC application	Candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement ⁴⁸	% of candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement ⁴⁹
English	46997	164 (0.35%)	127 (77.44%)	0.27%
French	29696	98 (0.33%)	92 (93.88)	0.31%
Mathematics	58697	172 (0.29%)	116 (67.44%)	0.20%
Science	109953	251 (0.23%)	147 (58.57%)	0.13%

Table S5: Summary statistics for special consideration applications in linear GCSE subjects, June 2009

Subject	Candidates	Candidates with at least one SC application	Candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement	% of candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement
History	50621	134 (0.26%)	103 (76.87%)	0.20%
Geography	35908	124 (0.35%)	83 (66.94%)	0.23%
Mathematics	39467	110 (0.28%)	95 (86.36%)	0.24%
Religious Studies	34262	114 (0.33%)	109 (95.61%)	0.32%

Table S6: Summary statistics for special consideration applications in A-level subjects, June 2009

Subject	Candidates	Candidates with at least one SC application	Candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement	% of candidates who improved overall grade after SC enhancement
English literature	7797	32 (0.41%)	29 (90.63%)	0.37%
Mathematics	11499	25 (0.21%)	15 (60.00%)	0.13%
Chemistry	11897	48 (0.40%)	32 (66.67%)	0.26%
History	12878	59 (0.45%)	50 (84.75%)	0.39%

⁴⁸ As a percentage of the candidates with at least one application.

⁴⁹ As a percentage of the entries in the subject.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

It was surprising to find such scarce literature about special consideration, a practice that is fairly common nationally and internationally at secondary school and university. In particular, very little academic writing or research addressing the issue of special consideration in higher education was found (e.g. Croucher, 1995; De Lambert and Williams, 2006; Thompson, Phillips and De Lange, 2006) and there was no academic discussion about this practice in English secondary schools.

In England, awarding bodies make provision for schools to present a case for special consideration if there were circumstances which may have affected a candidate's performance in an examination. Alternatively, schools may provide evidence which outlines reasons for a candidate's non-attendance at an examination.

However, the area of special consideration is a complex one because a very fine balance is required between allowing candidates (who were disadvantaged for reasons out of their control) enhancements which enable them to be placed on an equal footing with other candidates but not advantaging them to the extent that the assessment objectives of a particular examination are compromised.

Numbers of special consideration applications

The special consideration figures published by Ofqual in their statistical bulletins (e.g. Ofqual, 2010) and normally discussed in news articles are the number of requests for special consideration rather than the number of candidates who applied for enhancements. In this research, both sets of figures were reported. It should be noted that an individual candidate may require special consideration in a number of examination units/papers. It also should be pointed out that in a modular/unitised qualification (e.g. A-levels or new GCSEs) a candidate can request special consideration in one or more units and each of these requests counts as one application. In a linear qualification a candidate can also request a special consideration enhancement in one or more components but this counts as one application only.

The overall picture presented in this report is clear: the numbers of special consideration applications have been increasing in the last few years. For present but disadvantaged candidates, applications increased from about 30,000 in 2000 to about 80,000 in 2009. It should be noted that there were very big increases prior to 2005, in particular from 2004 to 2005, and since then applications have been rising at a steadier pace. For absent with good reason candidates, applications increased from about 4,500 in 2000 to about 6,250 in 2009.

The proportions of approved special consideration requests when candidates were present but disadvantaged were fairly high (over 90% in most years). However, the percentages of approved applications were about 10% lower for absent candidates. One of the reasons for this might be that units/components missed in examination series prior to certification had to be re-entered at a later date and applications in those units/components were rejected even though the candidate might have had a good reason for missing the assessment.

For present but disadvantaged candidates, the research showed that there were more special consideration requests at A-level than at GCSE as a proportion of the unit/specification entries (4.52% of A-level entries vs. 1.35% of GCSE entries requested special consideration in June 2009). One reason for this could be the fact that A-levels are high stakes examinations (e.g. performance at A-level might affect university applications) and therefore it might be more important for candidates to get the 'extra marks'. It could also be the case that due to the modular structure of A-levels, candidates' examinations were spread over a wider period of time increasing the chances of a temporary illness, injury, or other unforeseen circumstances to take place. On the contrary, there were fewer applications for special consideration after missing a time-tabled unit/component for acceptable reasons among A-level students than among GCSE students (0.10% of A-level entries vs. 0.16% of GCSE entries). It could be the case that A-level students, due to the high stakes nature of the qualification, were more likely to tolerate unfortunate situations or minor illnesses and do their exams regardless, whereas GCSE students may have been more inclined to not take the exam.

For individual GCSE and A-level subjects, the percentages of special consideration requests as a proportion of the entries in the subjects were fairly small (ranging from 0.55% to 3.82% for present but disadvantaged students and from 0.08% to 0.35% for absent with good reason students).

In all ten GCSE subjects investigated in this research, the percentages of present but disadvantaged candidates with at least one application for special consideration were below 5%. At A-level, those percentages were slightly higher but below 10% for all subjects. The equivalent percentages for students who missed a time-tabled examination ranged from 0.28% to 0.35% at GCSE and from 0.21% to 0.45% at A-level.

In this research, students taking examinations in quantitative subjects submitted very similar numbers of special consideration requests as those taking examinations in qualitative subjects. However, Croucher (1995) found the opposite when researching the numbers of special consideration requests at Macquarie University in Sydney. His research showed that from 1979 to 1993 students studying quantitative subjects were submitting special consideration requests at several times the rate of those in qualitative areas.

There were more applications for special consideration, as a percentage of the entries, in modular/unitised qualifications than in linear ones. This might be partly explained by the fact that with the introduction of modular specifications there are more points in the year when a candidate might have a problem (as examinations are spread over a wider period of time with candidates sitting modules in different days, sessions and even years).

It is worth pointing out that this research showed that the method of counting applications in different assessment routes (linear vs. modular) usually leads to greater increases in the numbers of special consideration request than the actual ones.

This study also shows marked differences in special consideration applications between schools. Around 85% of grammar schools and 90% of sixth form colleges submitted at least one request for special consideration for present but disadvantaged candidates. This contrasts with 70% of the comprehensives and only about 60% of independent schools and further education and tertiary colleges. These patterns were different from the ones encountered for absent candidates: in GCSE examinations around 45% of comprehensive schools submitted at least one application for special consideration whilst only 17% of independent schools and 40% of grammar schools did so; at A-level, 60% of sixth form colleges submitted at least a request for an enhanced grade. This contrasts with 22% of the comprehensives and only 16% of the independent schools. Around 35% of further

education and tertiary colleges and 30% of grammar schools offering A-level examinations submitted at least one request for special consideration for absent candidates.

In most of the GCSE subjects investigated in this research, with the exception of history, mathematics A and religious studies, and in all but one A-level subjects (mathematics), there were significant differences in ability among the students who applied for special consideration when present but disadvantaged and those who did not. The differences were in favour of those who applied, with the percentages of candidates requesting special consideration being higher in the high attaining groups than in the low attaining groups. When candidates were absent with good reason, the opposite was found in all GCSE subjects with the exception of French, that is, the differences in ability were in favour of those who did not apply for an enhancement. However, in all A-level subjects investigated in the research there were no differences in ability between the two groups of students.

Impact of the special consideration enhancements

This research has confirmed that for present but disadvantaged candidates the special consideration enhancements were minor adjustments to their marks, with the most popular tariff applied being 2% of the unit/component total mark (this tariff corresponds to circumstances such as minor illnesses at the time of the examination). Therefore, it was not surprising that the percentages of students who improved their overall grades after a special consideration enhancement were very small: both at GCSE and A-level, the percentages of candidates (out of the total entry) who improved their overall grade as a result of a special consideration enhancement were lower than 1%.

It was not unexpected either that the percentages of candidates with a missing unit/component who improved their grades after a special consideration enhancement were much higher than those of candidates who were present but disadvantaged. The reasoning for this is that when a special consideration enhancement is approved after the candidate missed a unit/component, an enhanced grade, based on performance on other units/components of the specification, is issued. The adjustment therefore is usually bigger than up to 5% of the total mark in the unit/component missed.

At GCSE, the percentages of present but disadvantaged candidates improving their grade (as a percentage of the candidates submitting at least one special consideration request) were higher for linear qualifications than for modular qualifications. Percentages for A-level candidates were in line with the percentages for modular GCSEs. However, the percentages of candidates who missed a time-tabled unit in a modular/unitised qualification (A-levels and new GCSEs) were very similar to those who missed a paper/component in a linear qualification.

Among the candidates who applied for special consideration after being disadvantaged as a result of a temporary illness, injury, indisposition or other unforeseen circumstances, percentages ranging from 25% to 40% had obtained a grade lower than predicted in the research based on their general ability. However, between 10% and 25% of the candidates requesting enhancements had obtained a grade higher than predicted. Similar results were obtained for the grades predicted by teachers (forecast grades submitted by schools to awarding bodies prior to the examination). The special consideration enhancements led to the achievement of at least the forecast grade in 2% to 12% of the special consideration applications (depending on the subject).

It should be noted that the special consideration requests have to be submitted immediately after the examination has taken place and a direct comparison of predicted/forecast grades and actual grade is not possible at that point.

Other issues

There has been lots of criticism about how pupils and teachers might be abusing the system to boost results, helping schools climb national league tables, but there is no measure of how frequently such behaviour might occur. However, as shown in this research, the percentages of pupils improving their grades after a special consideration enhancement are so small that this claim seems not to have a strong base.

On the other hand, a survey by Eve and Bromley (1981) revealed that 59% of US college students regarded it as dishonest to feign an illness to avoid taking an examination. It may, therefore, be not too surprising that some students will go to great lengths to avoid or delay taking an examination, or provide evidence to explain a poor performance. In England, claiming special consideration by submitting false information could lead to malpractice.

It might be worth investigating the reverse situation: are deserving students being denied justifiable special consideration? There might be a level of abuse which might be justifiable in order to 'rescue' the careers of those worthy candidates whose genuine illness on the wrong day could change the course of their careers.

One of the biggest concerns in relation to special consideration enhancements is the size of the rewards. However, this is a very difficult issue as awarding bodies cannot compromise the assessments and need to be fair with all candidates.

Another concern is related to making judgements on decisions about special consideration applications as there might be a subjective factor when granting an adjustment. The decisions are made by the awarding body based on various factors which will be different from one candidate to another. These might include the severity of the circumstances or the date of the examination in relation to the circumstances. Although each case is assessed individually, the best written rules will still require someone to decide on which side of a dividing line each case lies.

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Appendix A: Synopsis of special consideration adjustments (JCQ, 2009)

The following circumstances (note that this is not an exhaustive list) must apply at the time of the assessment and be supported by appropriate and up to date evidence. The examples listed below are provided for illustrative purposes only and it is up to the awarding body to decide how much special consideration should be applied.

5% This is the maximum allowance and will be reserved for the most exceptional cases, such as:

- terminal illness of the candidate;
- terminal illness of a parent/guardian/carer;
- very recent death of a member of the immediate family;
- very serious and disruptive domestic crises leading to acute anxiety about the family.

4% Very serious problems such as:

- life-threatening illness of candidate or member of immediate family;
- major surgery at or near the time of examination;
- severe disease;
- severe injury arising from a car accident;
- very recent death of member of extended family;
- severe or permanent bodily injury occurring at the time of the examinations;
- serious domestic crisis at the time of examinations.

3% A more common category, many more cases will fall into this group, including:

- **recent** traumatic experience such as death of a close friend or distant relative;
- **recent** illness of a more serious nature;
- flare-up of severe congenital conditions such as epilepsy, diabetes, severe asthmatic attack;
- **recently** broken limbs;
- organ disease;
- physical assault trauma before an examination;
- recent domestic crisis;
- witnessing a distressing event on the day of the examination.

2% Probably the most common category of allowance. The majority of cases might fall within this category:

- illness at the time of the assessment;
- broken limb on the mend;
- recent viral illness;
- concussion;
- effect of pregnancy (not pregnancy per se);
- hay fever on the day of the examination;
- extreme distress on the day of the examination;
- allowance on last paper taken in a day when a candidate has exceeded 5 hours 30 minutes at Level 1 or Level 2 (GCSE) or 6 hours at Level 3 (GCE).

1% Reserved for more minor problems:

- noise during examination which is more than momentary;
- illness of another candidate in the examination room;
- stress or anxiety for which medication has been prescribed;
- minor ailments;
- headache;
- minor upset arising from administration problems, such as wrong time allocated.

0% Consideration was given but addition of marks was considered inappropriate.

Appendix B: Special consideration applications from 1998 to 2009

Tables B1-B6 include the special consideration applications received by OCR (all centres and all qualifications) from 1998⁵⁰ until 2009.

PRESENT BUT DISADVANTAGED

Table B1: Numbers and percentages of special consideration applications, 1998-2009

Year	Numbers of applications				Percentages of accepted/rejected applications		
	Accepted	Rejected	Other	Total	Accepted	Rejected	Other
1998	1	0	0	1	100.00	0.00	0.00
1999	14471	259	450	15180	95.33	1.71	2.96
2000	27546	398	1314	29258	94.15	1.36	4.49
2001	40133	884	3559	44576	90.03	1.98	7.98
2002	45168	1749	6202	53119	85.03	3.29	11.68
2003	47966	700	3489	52155	91.97	1.34	6.69
2004	51528	599	4943	57070	90.29	1.05	8.66
2005	65745	1626	3528	70899	92.73	2.29	4.98
2006	64400	3382	4837	72619	88.68	4.66	6.66
2007	71657	2223	4509	78389	91.41	2.84	5.75
2008	79405	2101	3132	84638	93.82	2.48	3.70
2009	73899	2706	3584	80189	92.16	3.37	4.47

Table B2: Numbers of special consideration applications by session, 1998-2009

Year	January				June			
	Accepted	Rejected	Other	Total	Accepted	Rejected	Other	Total
1998	-	-	-	-	1	0	0	1
1999	798	1	5	804	13673	258	445	14376
2000	513	2	12	527	27033	396	1302	28731
2001	1436	3	500	1939	38697	881	3059	42637
2002	2918	121	521	3560	42250	1628	5681	49559
2003	3478	21	517	4016	44488	679	2972	48139
2004	3957	43	692	4692	47571	556	4251	52378
2005	5554	71	644	6269	60191	1555	2884	64630
2006	7847	86	344	8277	56553	3296	4493	64342
2007	8757	202	385	9344	62900	2021	4124	69045
2008	8358	118	523	8999	71047	1983	2609	75639
2009	9898	189	1054	11141	64001	2517	2530	69048

⁵⁰ Data was not available for the years prior to 1998.

Table B3: Percentages of accepted and rejected special consideration applications by session, 1998-2009

Year	January			June		
	Accepted	Rejected	Other	Accepted	Rejected	Other
1998	-	-	-	100.00	0.00	0.00
1999	99.25	0.12	0.62	95.11	1.79	3.10
2000	97.34	0.38	2.28	94.09	1.38	4.53
2001	74.06	0.15	25.79	90.76	2.07	7.17
2002	81.97	3.40	14.63	85.25	3.28	11.46
2003	86.60	0.52	12.87	92.42	1.41	6.17
2004	84.34	0.92	14.75	90.82	1.06	8.12
2005	88.59	1.13	10.27	93.13	2.41	4.46
2006	94.80	1.04	4.16	87.89	5.12	6.98
2007	93.72	2.16	4.12	91.10	2.93	5.97
2008	92.88	1.31	5.81	93.93	2.62	3.45
2009	88.84	1.70	9.46	92.69	3.65	3.66

ABSENT WITH GOOD REASON

Table B4: Numbers and percentages of special consideration applications, 1998-2009

Year	Numbers of applications				Percentages of accepted/rejected applications		
	Accepted	Rejected	Other	Total	Accepted	Rejected	Other
1998	106	0	0	106	100.00	0.00	0.00
1999	732	14	7	753	97.21	1.86	0.93
2000	4150	86	228	4464	92.97	1.93	5.11
2001	4649	258	138	5045	92.15	5.11	2.74
2002	4200	340	803	5343	78.61	6.36	15.03
2003	4581	432	543	5556	82.45	7.78	9.77
2004	4189	603	466	5258	79.67	11.47	8.86
2005	4820	565	612	5997	80.37	9.42	10.21
2006	3789	154	1013	4956	76.45	3.11	20.44
2007	4134	36	985	5155	80.19	0.70	19.11
2008	4245	52	988	5285	80.32	0.98	18.69
2009	4918	1250	120	6288	78.21	19.88	1.91

Table B5: Numbers of special consideration applications by session, 1998-2009

Year	January				June			
	Accepted	Rejected	Other	Total	Accepted	Rejected	Other	Total
1998	1	0	0	1	105	0	0	105
1999	34	0	0	34	698	14	7	719
2000	38	0	0	38	4112	86	228	4426
2001	32	0	0	32	4617	258	138	5013
2002	254	1	3	258	3946	339	800	5085
2003	24	0	156	180	4557	432	387	5376
2004	49	9	121	179	4140	594	345	5079
2005	30	1	148	179	4790	564	464	5818
2006	40	23	239	302	3749	131	774	4654
2007	42	6	158	206	4092	30	827	4949
2008	60	2	222	284	4185	50	766	5001
2009	61	394	4	459	4857	856	116	5829

Table B6: Percentages of accepted and rejected special consideration applications by session, 1998-2009

Year	January			June		
	Accepted	Rejected	Other	Accepted	Rejected	Other
1998	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00
1999	100.00	0.00	0.00	97.08	1.95	0.97
2000	100.00	0.00	0.00	92.91	1.94	5.15
2001	100.00	0.00	0.00	92.10	5.15	2.75
2002	98.45	0.39	1.16	77.60	6.67	15.73
2003	13.33	0.00	86.67	84.77	8.04	7.20
2004	27.37	5.03	67.60	81.51	11.70	6.79
2005	16.76	0.56	82.68	82.33	9.69	7.98
2006	13.25	7.62	79.14	80.55	2.81	16.63
2007	20.39	2.91	76.70	82.68	0.61	16.71
2008	21.13	0.70	78.17	83.68	1.00	15.32
2009	13.29	85.84	0.87	83.32	14.69	1.99