

Evolving Landscapes of Accessibility in Educational Assessment: A Decade-Long Analysis of Cambridge International Access Arrangements (2015-2024)

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Purpose of the research

- This **longitudinal analysis** examines the evolution of access arrangement usage within the Cambridge International education system over the last decade.
- This research investigates **trends** in access arrangement utilisation, identifies **emerging patterns** in accommodation types and analyses the impact of **digital transformation** and **global developments** on accessibility provision in international education contexts.

What are Access Arrangements

- Definition (Cambridge): **“Pre-exam arrangements that minimise access barriers for candidates with special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries/illnesses. They enable candidates to demonstrate knowledge, skills and understanding without altering assessment demands.”** (Cambridge Handbook 2025)
- "Reasonable adjustments in exams are supports put in place for disabled students to reduce disadvantage" (UK Joint Council for Qualifications)
- Access arrangements must **not** give an **unfair advantage** and must avoid **undermining assessment objectives**.
- **Sustainable Development Goal 4** "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"

Methodology

Data sourcing

- Raw, unanonymised Cambridge data
- Entries (6.8m) and arrangements (400k) from 2015-2024

Cleaning and aggregation

- Combined **March, June** and **November** series data
- Combined **IGCSE/O level** data. **A level**

reported separately

Categorisation

- Grouped data into related areas e.g. qualification type / **delegated** and **non-delegated** / **traditional** vs **digital**

Analysis and visualisation

- Calculated annual totals and growth rates
- Generated charts to visualise longitudinal trends

and comparisons

Contextual research

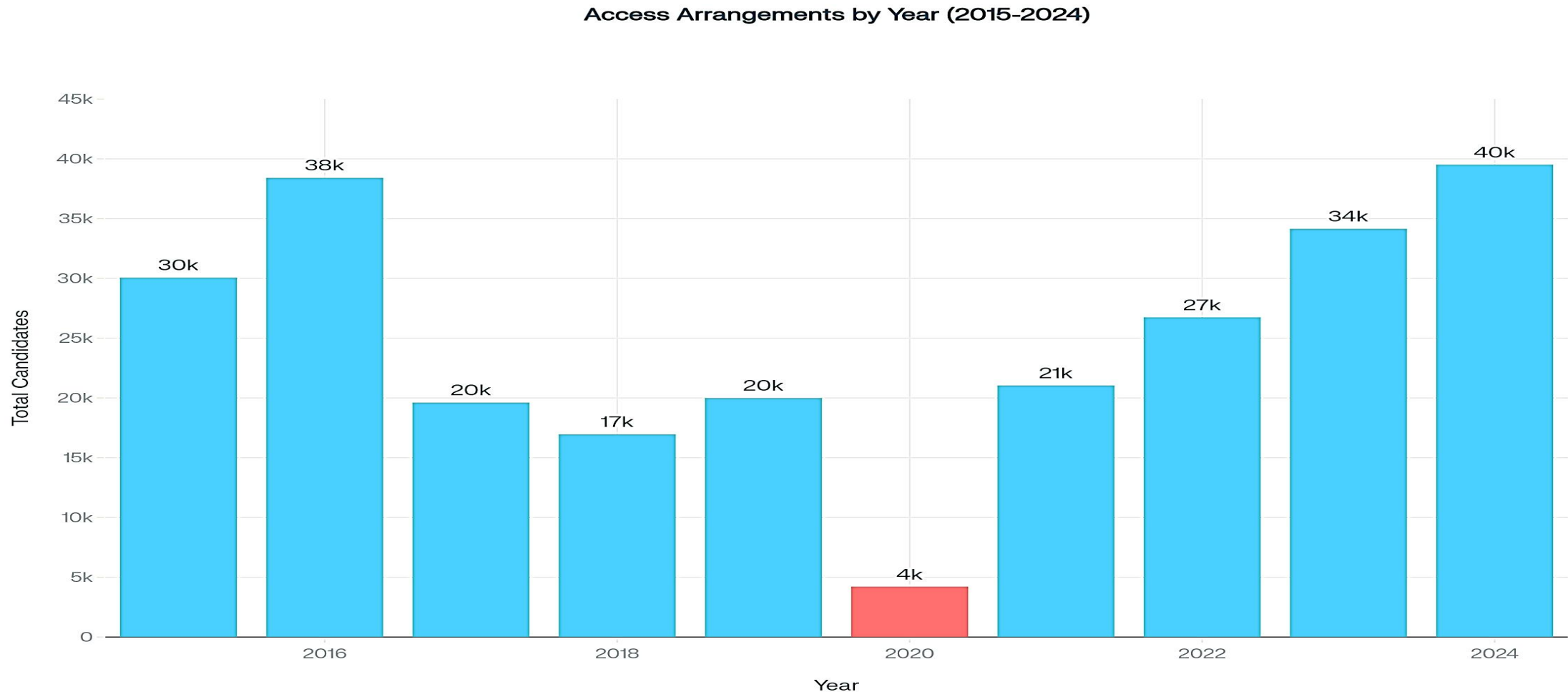
- Integrated findings from academic research and regulatory bodies

Access Arrangement Types (Cambridge 2025)

Centre-delegated	Colour naming
	Coloured overlays
	Coloured paper
	Extra time up to 25 percent
	Live speakers
	Prompter
	Reading aloud
	Reading pens
	Separate invigilation
	Simple translation dictionaries
	Supervised rest breaks
	Supplementary aids
	Transcript of candidate's work
	Visual aids
	Word processor (with spell check disabled)
	Other

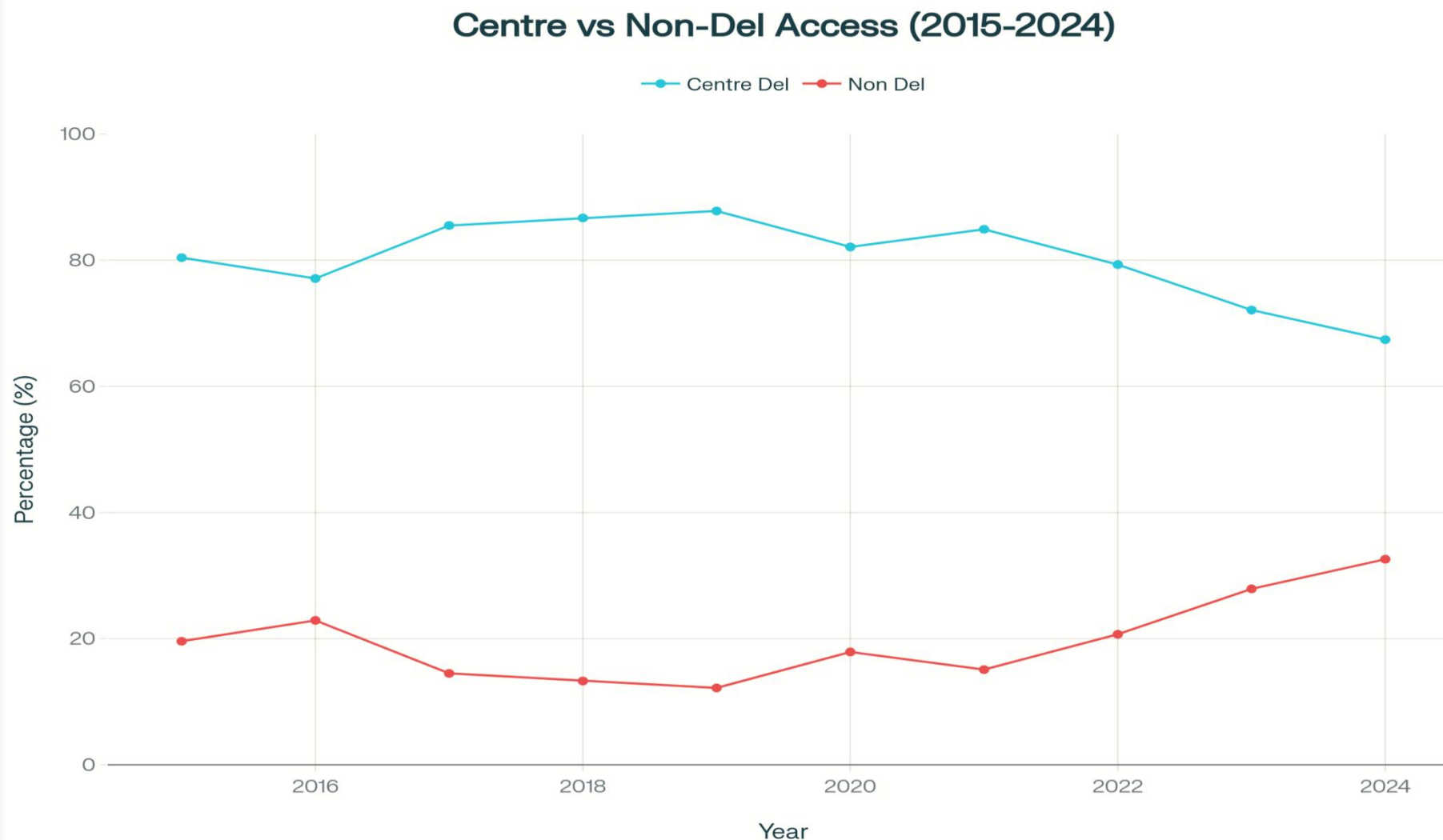
Non-delegated (exam board led)	Computer reader
	Exemption
	E-texts for literature exams
	Extra time over 25%
	Extra time over 25% (specify amount)
	Practical assistant
	Reader
	Scribe
	Voice-activated software
	Word processor (with spell check enabled)

Access Arrangement requests over the 10 years



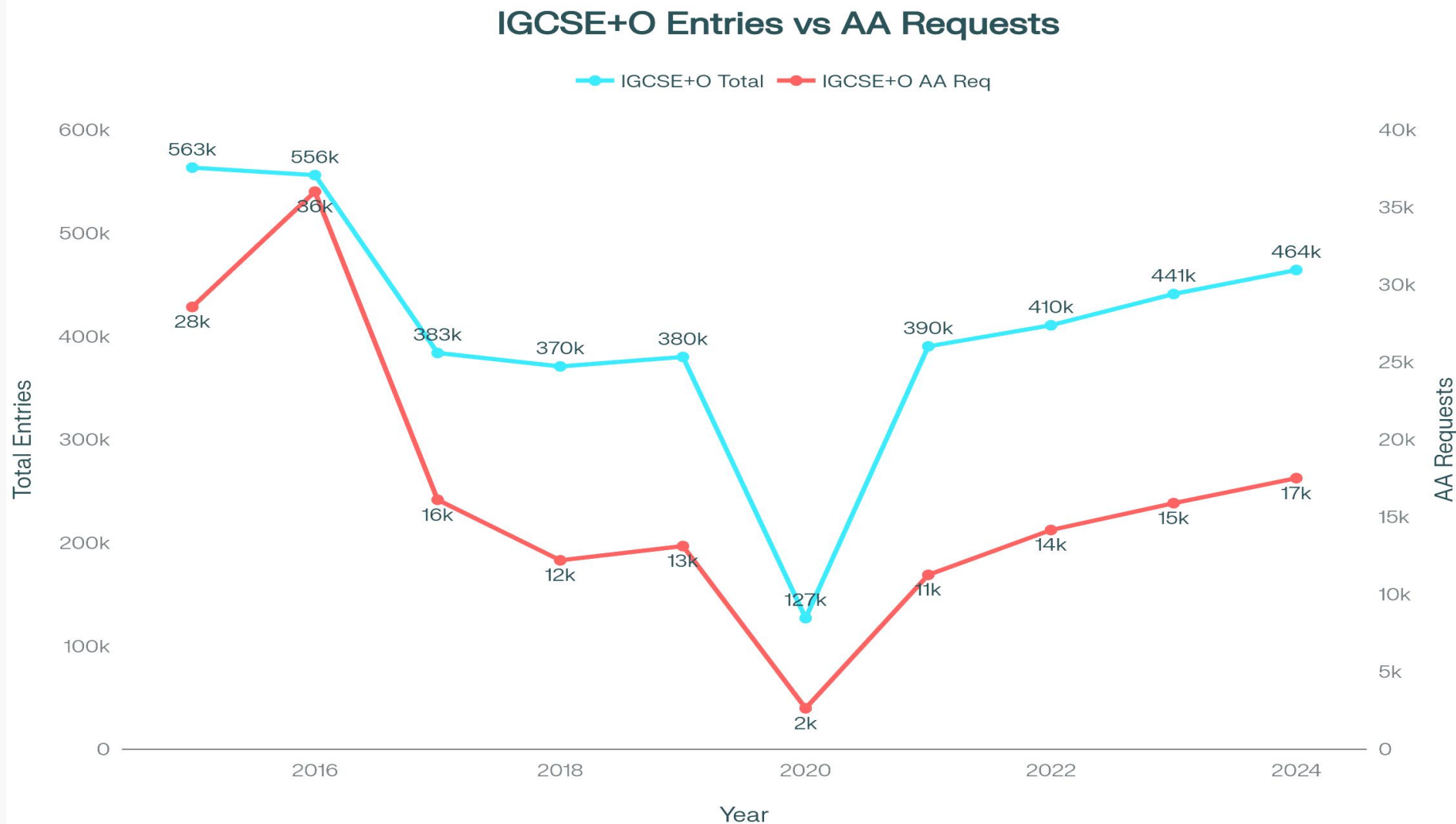
The Shifts in responsibility

- Total entries have grown
- Proportion managed by centres has increased
- 2015 – 80% delegated
- 2024 – 67% delegated



Growth in candidate support – IGCSE/O Level

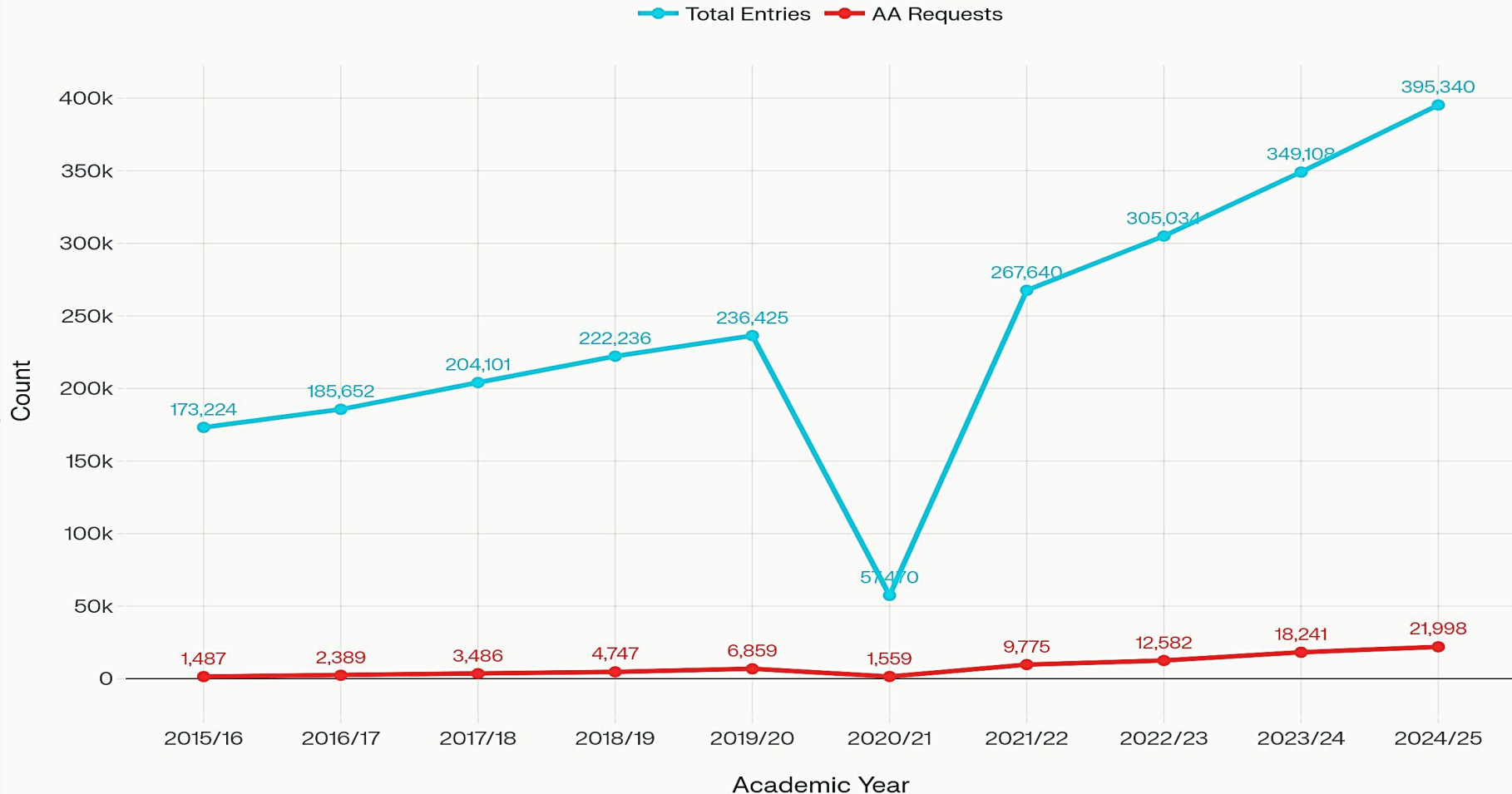
- Steady and consistent increase in AA requests since 2018
- Early drop in 2017 due to IGCSE syllabus withdrawal from UK.



Growth in candidate support – AS/A Level

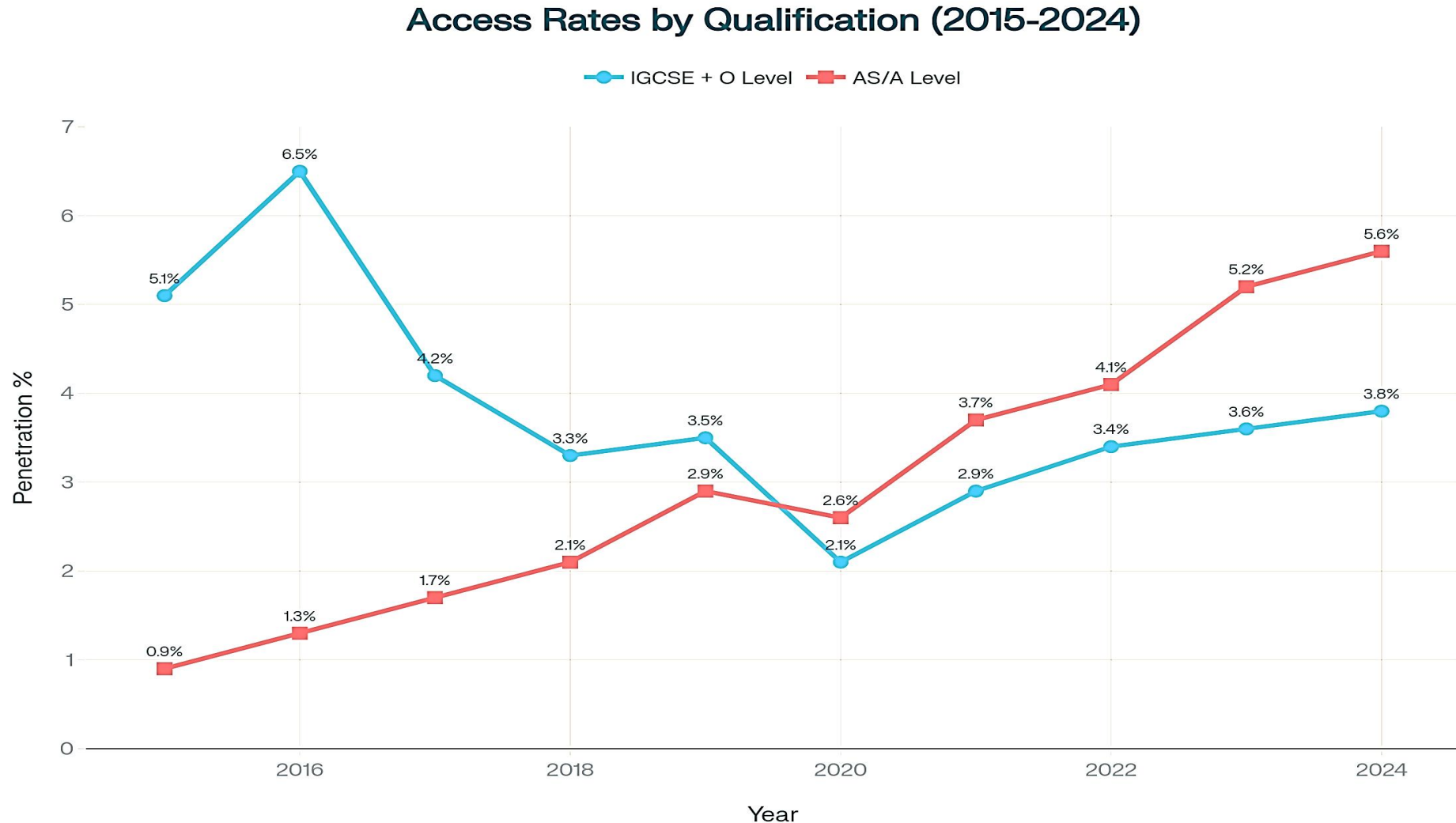
AS/A Level Entries & Requests

- Higher stakes leaving qualification
- Sharper increase in requests from 1.5k to 22k
- Skewed by increased entries from the US.



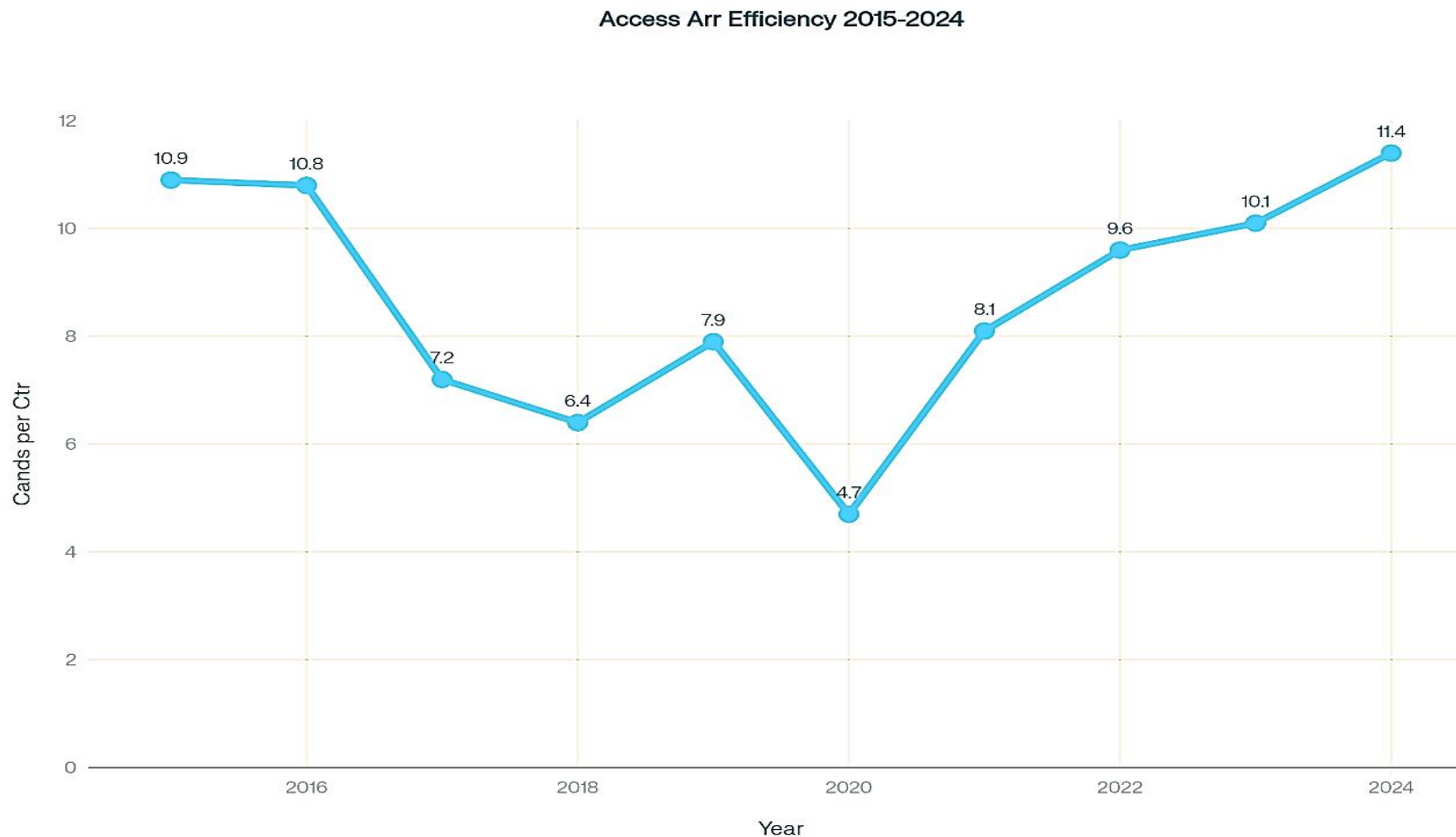
Percentage of candidates requesting AAs

- Growth across all qualification types since 2018
- Sharper growth with AS/A level



Ratio of candidates to centres

- Steady increase in candidates with AAs per centre

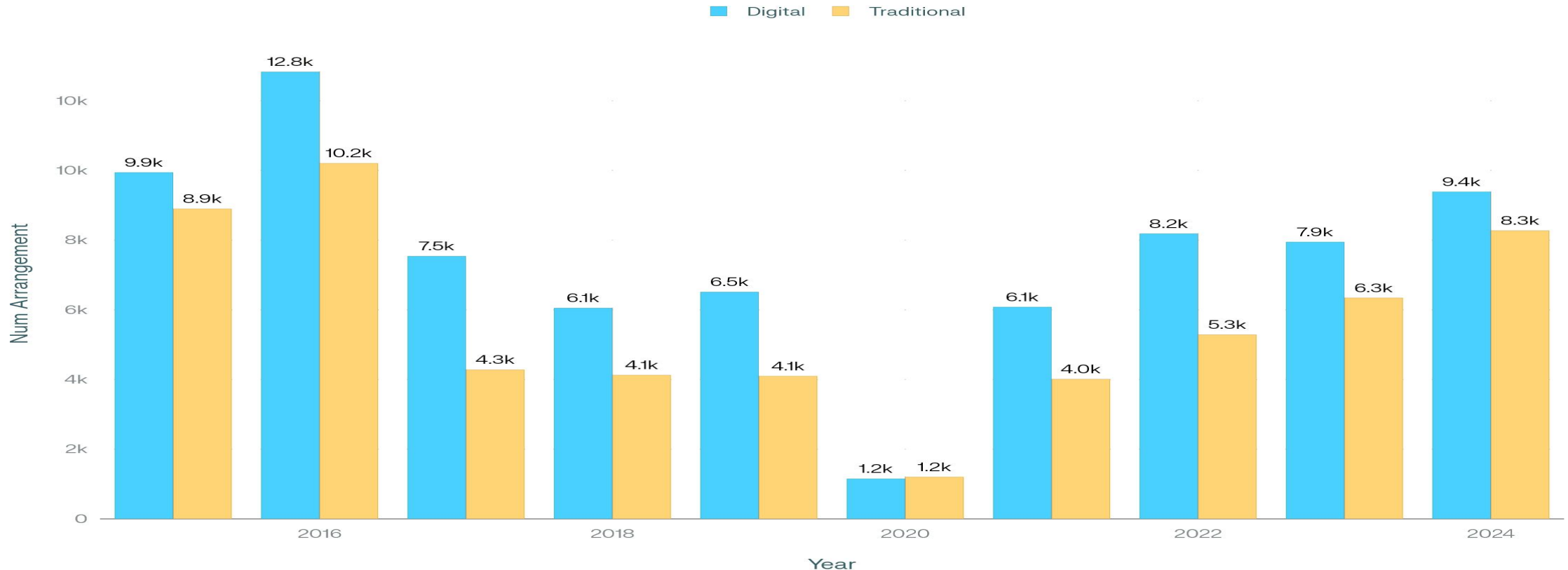


Trends in digital vs traditional arrangements

Digital: Computer reader, Word processor (spell check disabled), Word processor (spell check enabled), Voice-activated software, Reading pens

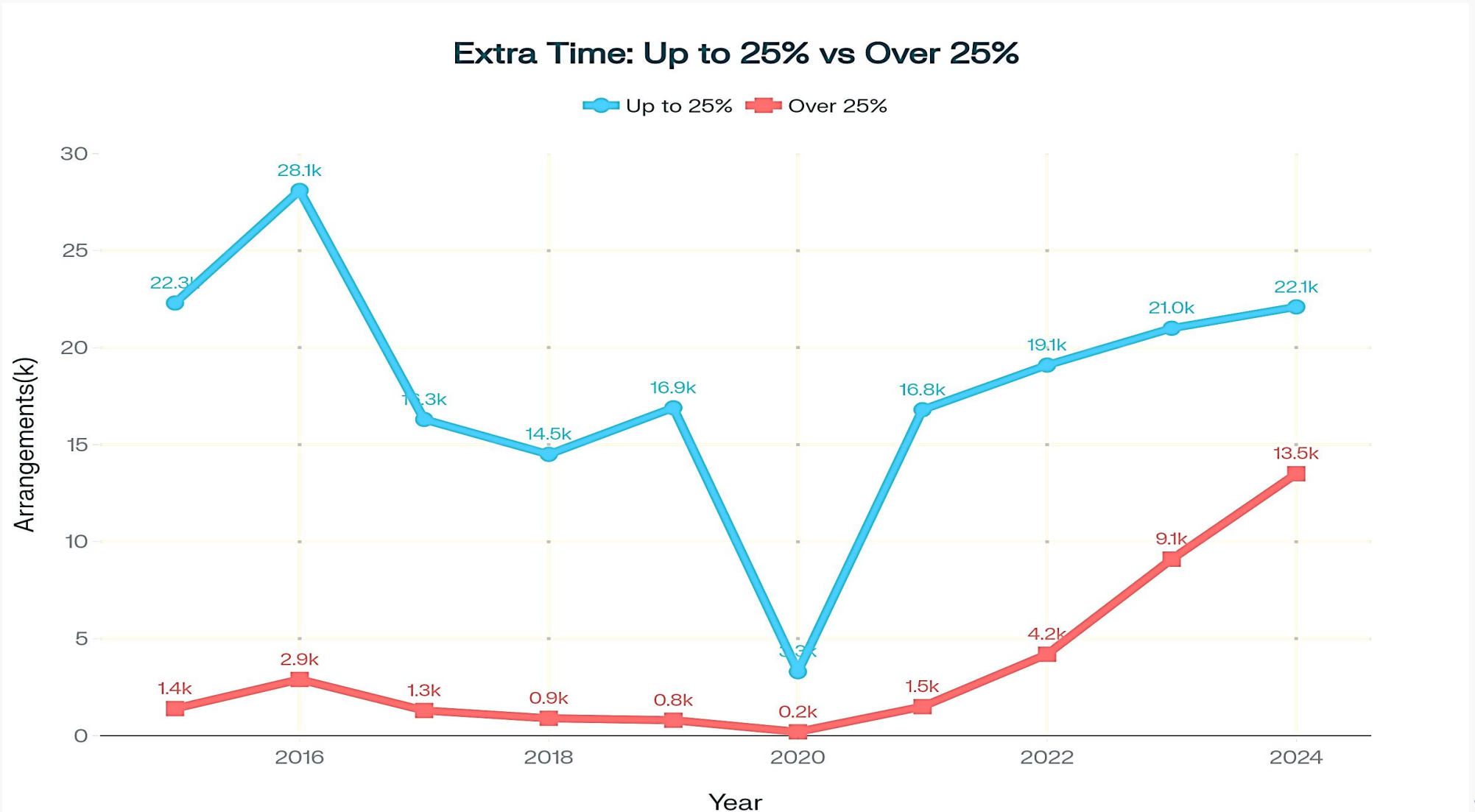
Traditional: Reader, Scribe, Prompter, Practical assistant, Reading aloud

Digital vs Traditional Access (2015-24)



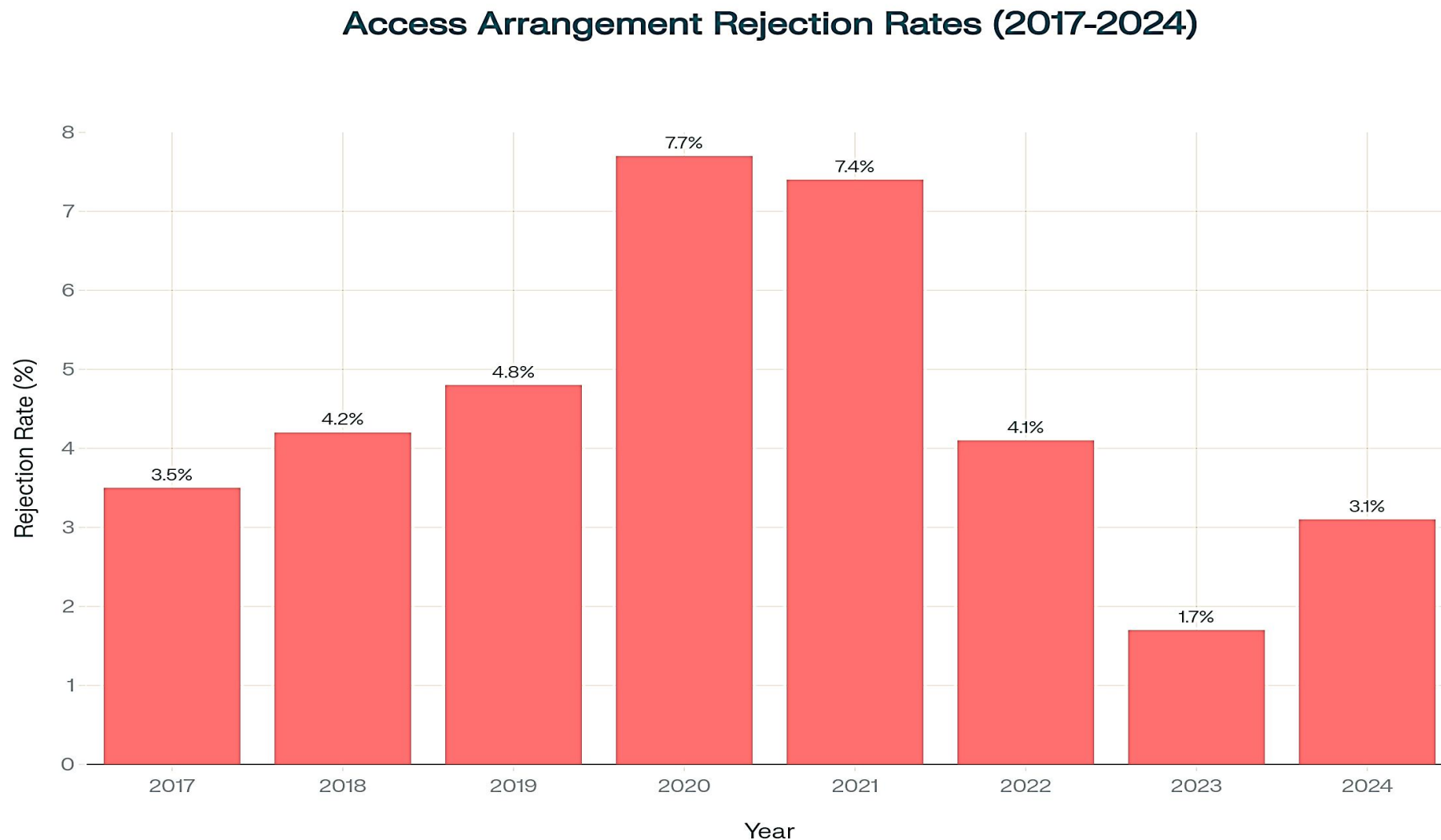
The Extra Time effect

- Significant growth for Extra time over 25% , especially **post pandemic**
- **US** entry growth
- Diagnosis of **multiple needs**



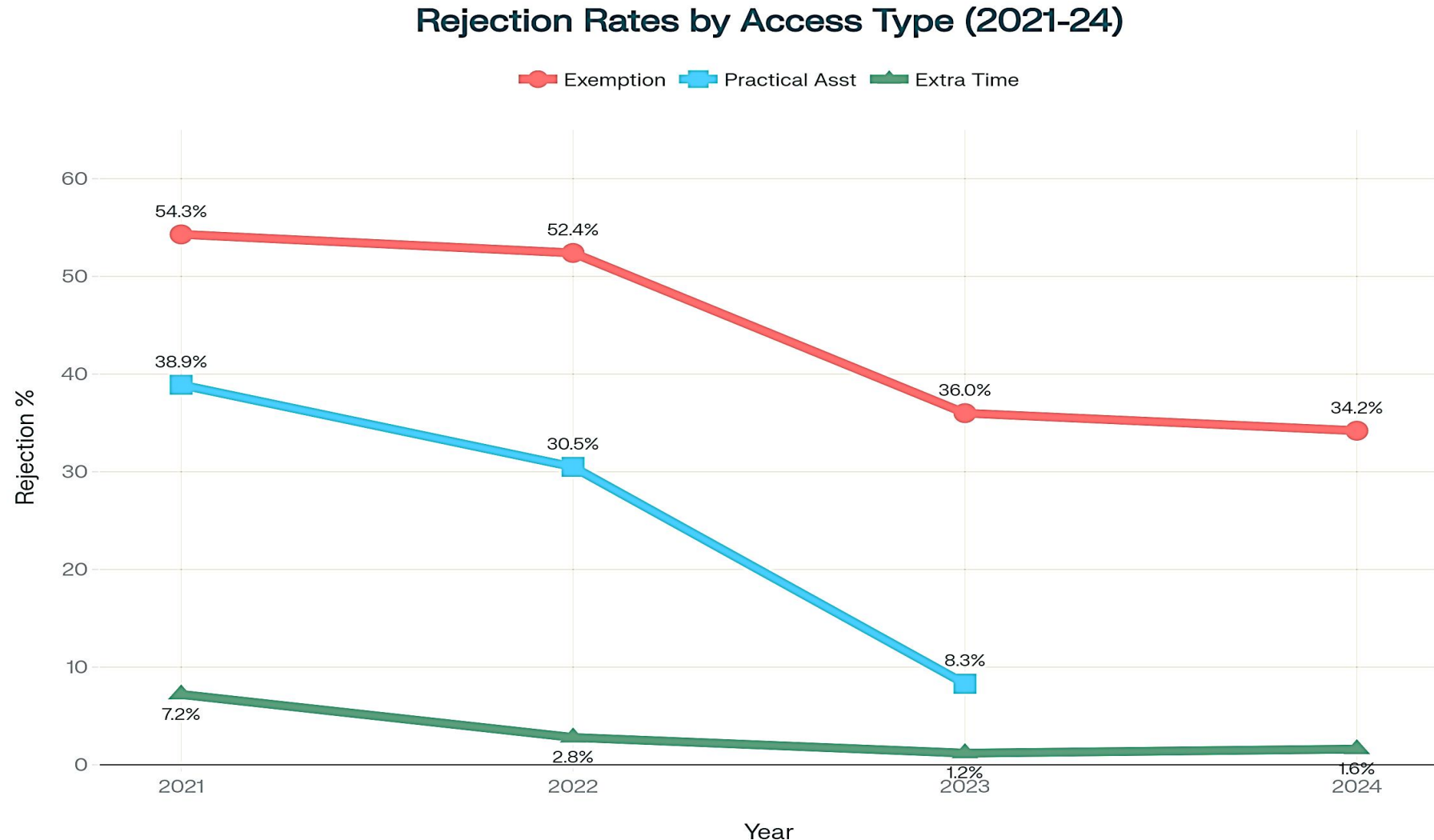
Applications rejected for non-delegated requests

- Low rejection rates overall
- Pandemic increase in rejections



Rejection rate by arrangement types

- **Exemptions** incurred most rejections - Burden of proof is significant
- Specialist evidence often unsatisfactory



Summary - Key drivers of change

Digitisation

- Cheaper resources
- Improved internet connectivity
- Availability of Mobile technology
- Confidence in usage
- Traditional methods still important

Sustainable Development Goal 4

- Emphasis on inclusive education
- Improved diagnosis of 'hidden' conditions

Post covid effects

- Growth in remote learning resources
- Anxiety effects leading to increase use of extra time, prompts, rest breaks and individual supervision

Government policy

- E.g. Individual Education Plans, right to access

Where do we go from here?

Improved awareness

- Training for all educators
- Identify needs early

Guidance

- Have clear government backed guidance and policies on accessibility
- Provide step by step guidance to centres for whole candidate journey

Engagement

- Work with key stakeholders early – e.g. medical assessors, psychologists, parents, SEND coordinators, equipment suppliers

Urban/ rural divide

- Mobile SEN & medical assessment services
- Low bandwidth internet solutions
- Traditional methods still important

Assessment Design

- Universal design principles

Reading and resources

- Cambridge Assessment International Education. (2024). Cambridge Handbook 2025.
- Joint Council for Qualifications. (2024). Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments.
- Ofqual. (2024). Access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level: 2023 to 2024 academic year. GOV.UK.
- Sireci, S. G., Li, S., & Scarpatti, S. (n.d.). The effects of test accommodation on test performance: A review of the literature (Center for Educational Assessment Research Report No. 485). University of Massachusetts Amherst, School of Education.
- United States Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Byun, S. Y., Meece, J. L., & Irvin, M. J. (2012). Rural-nonrural disparities in postsecondary educational attainment revisited. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(3), 412-437.

Thank you