

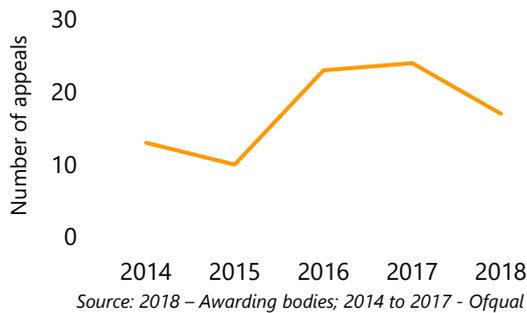


Appeals for GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: Summer 2018 exam series

11 April 2019

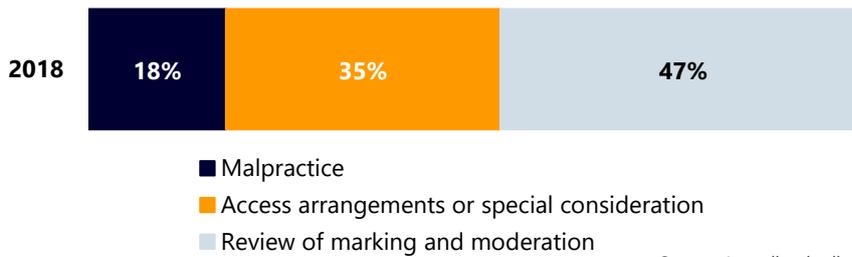
Highlights

Figure 1: Number of appeals submitted



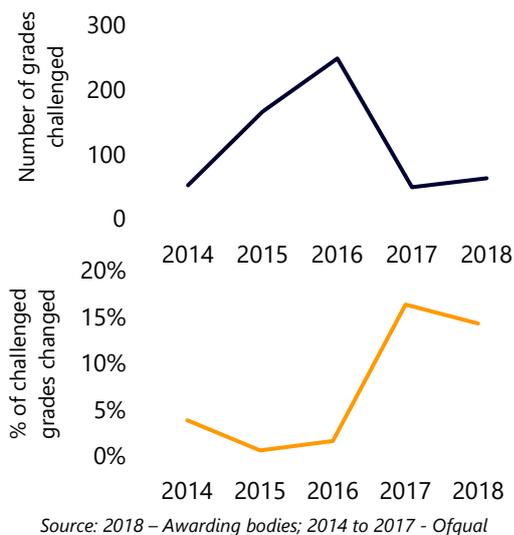
There were 17 GCSE and GCE appeals submitted following the summer 2018 exam series, 11 of which were upheld.

Figure 2: Nature of appeal



A review of marking and moderation outcome (47%) was the most common grounds for appeal in summer 2018.

Figure 3: Number of grades challenged and changed



65 GCSE and GCE grades were challenged and 10 grades changed as a result of an appeal in summer 2018. 0.002% of all summer 2018 GCSE and GCE grades – about 1 in 50,000 – were changed due to an appeal.

About this release

This statistical release provides information on the number of GCSE and GCE (AS and A level) appeals made following the summer 2018 exam series, and the number of GCSE and GCE qualification grades challenged and changed as a result. These statistics have been published as official statistics.

Contents

- Introduction..... [2](#)
- Statistics..... [5](#)
- Glossary of terms.....[10](#)
- Background notes..... [11](#)

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INTRODUCTION

Qualifications Wales is the regulator of non-degree qualifications and the qualification system in Wales. Under the [Qualifications Wales Act 2015](#), our principal aims are to ensure that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales and to promote public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualifications system.

From the 2017-18 academic year, we are collecting and reporting on data for Wales for general qualifications. Before 2017-18, Ofqual collected and published data for Wales. Comparisons made in this release are based on data collected and published by Ofqual for previous summer exam series.

In this release, we present data on the number of appeals made to awarding bodies for the summer 2018 exam series. Appeals should not be confused with the process of reviewing marking when a school or college is concerned about the accuracy of a candidate's results; this is known as a review of marking or moderation.

Qualifications Wales published information on the number of reviews for the summer 2018 exam series in December 2018¹.

THE APPEAL PROCESS

Appeals are made at the unit/component level and may represent one candidate, or several if multiple candidates can be linked together regarding the same potential issue. A single appeal may therefore involve:

- a single candidate appealing a single qualification grade;
- a single candidate appealing multiple qualification grades;
- multiple candidates appealing grades for the same qualification;
- multiple candidates appealing grades across multiple qualifications.

A candidate may be involved in more than one appeal in any given summer exam series.

It is possible that an appeal relates to member(s) of staff rather than candidate(s), for example when an appeal relates to a malpractice decision. In this circumstance there are no qualification grades being challenged.

¹ <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/reviews-of-marking-and-moderation-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-in-wales-summer-2018-exam-series/>

There are potentially two stages of appeal:

- **preliminary appeal** (previously known as 'stage 1' appeal): a review by a senior awarding body member who has not previously been involved with the particular case;
- **appeal hearing** (previously known as 'stage 2' appeal): applicants and awarding bodies present their case to a panel of three or more members, one of which must be independent of the awarding body.

An appeal may be upheld at either the preliminary appeal or the appeal hearing. An upheld appeal may result in a grade change for all, a subset, or none of the associated qualification grades. An appeal can result in a mark change without the change being large enough to result in a grade change.

As laid out in JCQ guidance², awarding bodies are compelled to consider appeals in relation to three areas of their work:

- **Appeals against results** – relating to an awarding body not following due procedures in conducting a clerical re-check, a review of marking or a review of moderation.
- **Appeals against malpractice decisions**
- **Appeals against decisions made in respect of access arrangements and special consideration**

Having been piloted on a small selection of GCE qualifications in 2016, new grounds to appeal marking errors following an initial review of marking or moderation were introduced in 2017. This applied to all AS, A level and a limited number of GCSE qualifications³ before being extended to cover all GCSE qualifications in 2019. This covers situations where a school or centre believes the following:

- an awarding body has not properly applied a mark scheme; and/or
- the mark could not have been given by a trained and standardised marker who had appropriate subject knowledge and who had exercised his/her academic judgement in a reasonable way.

Further details around the appeals process can be found in the background notes of this report.

² <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/appeals/>

³ GCSE English Language, GCSE English Literature, GCSE Mathematics, GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy, GCSE Welsh Language and GCSE Welsh Literature

Four awarding bodies offered both GCSE and GCE qualifications in Wales in the summer 2018 exam series:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Pearson Education Ltd (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)

This statistical release presents data on:

- the number and nature of appeals received and upheld by awarding bodies and the stage within which they were resolved;
- the number and type of grades being challenged and changed in the appeal process;
- the performance of awarding bodies in completing appeals within target timescales.

STATISTICS

NUMBER OF APPEALS RECEIVED AND PROPORTION OF APPEALS UPHELD

ARE APPEALS INCREASING OVER TIME?

Historical comparisons should be treated with caution; up to 2017 appeals against marking and moderation errors were not permitted and up to 2016 only one awarding body, WJEC, submitted appeals figures including malpractice and access arrangements/special consideration.

The number of GCSE appeals received following the summer series decreased for a second straight year in 2018 (Figure 5), down to 10 from a high of 13 in 2016. In contrast, the likelihood of a GCSE appeal being upheld increased for the second consecutive year (Figure 4); 70% of all GCSE appeals were upheld in summer 2018. This suggests that GCSE appeals are becoming more selective and better targeted at erroneous decisions and outcomes.

Figure 5: GCSE and GCE appeals received, summer 2014 to summer 2018

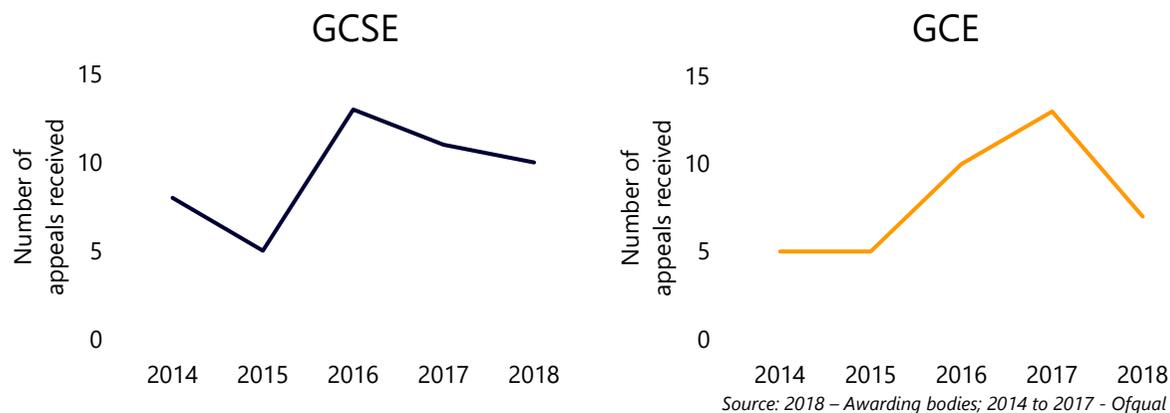
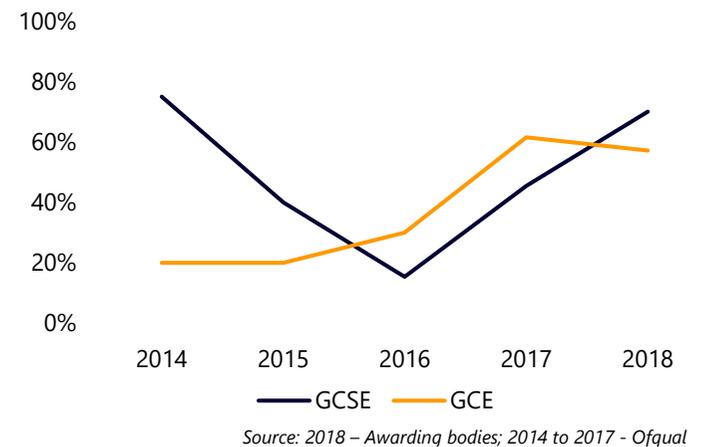


Figure 4: Proportion of appeals upheld, summer 2014 to summer 2018



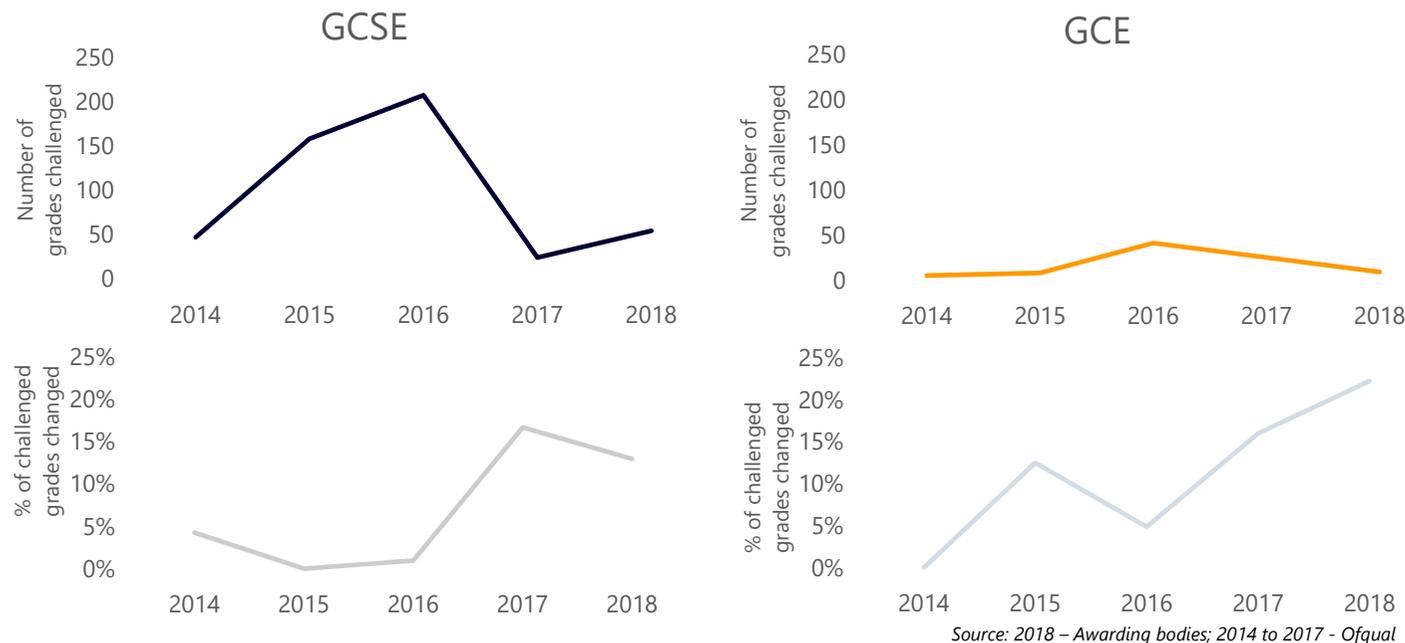
The number of GCE appeals received decreased to 7 in summer 2018 (Figure 5). This followed a four-year high of 13 in summer 2017, which was likely due to the introduction of new grounds for appealing review of marking and moderation outcomes. The proportion of GCE appeals upheld sustained its previous increase between 2016 and 2017.

GRADES CHALLENGED AND CHANGED

ARE APPEALS LEADING TO MORE GRADES BEING CHALLENGED AND CHANGED OVER TIME?

A single appeal may comprise of one or more qualification grades being contested. An upheld appeal may result in a grade change for all, a subset, or none of the associated qualification grades. A candidate may be involved in more than one appeal. In summer 2018, there were 55 Wales candidates whose grades were involved in an appeal. Only 0.002% of the 369,430 qualification grades certified in Wales during summer 2018 were changed as a result of an appeal, which is approximately one change for every 50,000 grades.

Figure 6: GCSE and GCE grades challenged and changed due to an appeal, summer 2014 to summer 2018



The number of qualification grades challenged at GCSE more than doubled to 55 in summer 2018 having hit a four-year low in summer 2017 (Figure 6). The two most recent summer exam series have seen fewer GCSE grade challenges but an increased likelihood that the challenge will lead to a grade change. This aligns with trends in the number of GCSE appeals and upheld appeals presented on page 5.

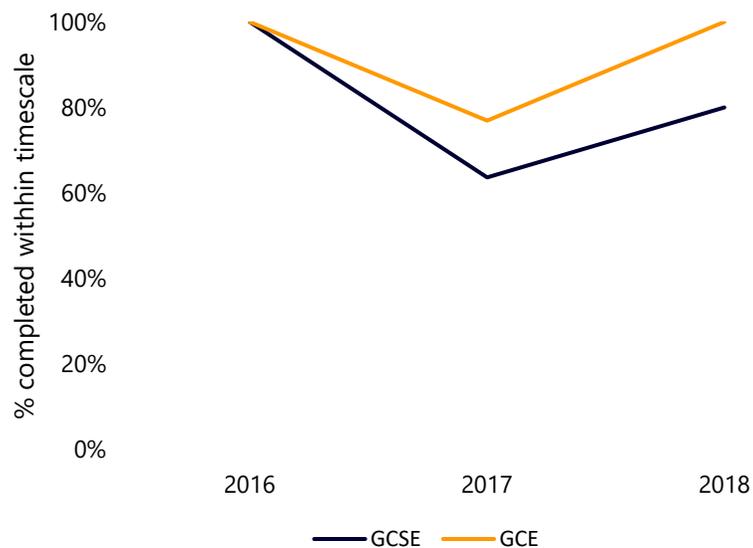
The number of GCE grades challenged decreased for a second consecutive year in summer 2018. However, the likelihood that a challenged GCE grade would be changed increased to over 20%, the highest over the past five summer exam series.

COMPLETION WITHIN AWARDING BODIES TARGET TIMESCALES

ARE AWARDING BODIES COMPLETING APPEALS ON TIME?

Awarding bodies have a target timescale of five weeks to complete a preliminary appeal from the receipt of the application, and ten weeks to complete an appeal hearing from the receipt of a request for an appeal hearing. Prior to 2017, the target timescale for completion was 50 days for either a preliminary appeal or an appeal hearing. Therefore, caution should be taken when making comparisons over time.

Figure 7: Percentage of preliminary appeals completed within target timescales, summer 2016 to summer 2018



Source: 2018 – Awarding bodies; 2016 to 2017 - Ofqual

Figure 7 omits percentages for GCSE and GCE appeal hearings completed within target timescale; no appeal has reached this stage across the three most recent summer exam series.

Between summer 2014 and summer 2016, all GCSE and GCE preliminary appeals were being completed within the original target timescale of 50 days. Data for summer 2014 and 2015 has been omitted from Figure 7.

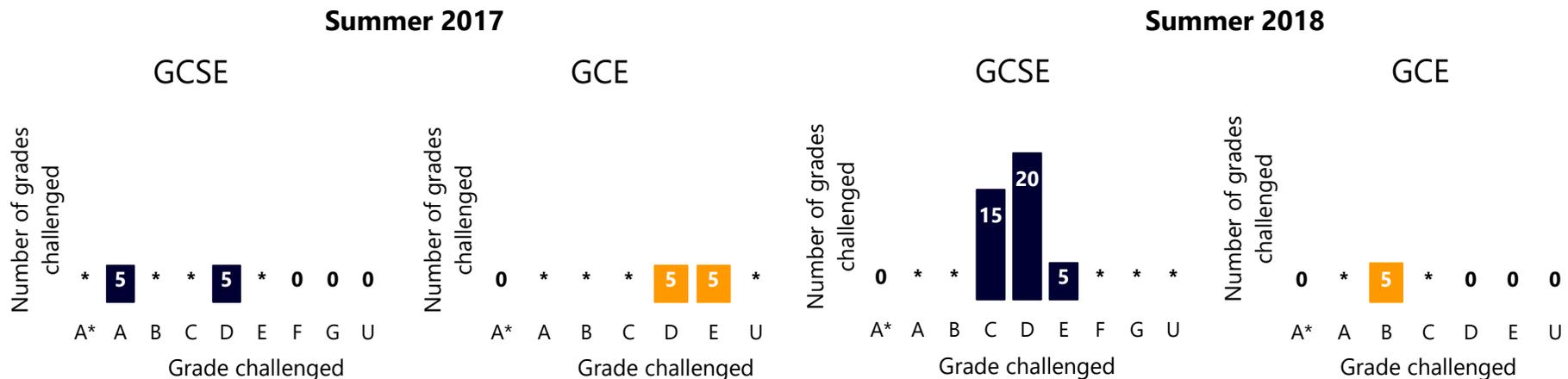
The proportion of GCSE preliminary appeals completed within target timescale increased to 80% in summer 2018. This is following a decrease down to 64% in summer 2017, which coincided with the introduction of a shorter target timeframe for preliminary appeals.

All GCE preliminary appeals were completed within target in summer 2018, up from 77% in summer 2017. As with GCSE, the dip in 2017 is likely related to an adjustment period following the introduction of stricter timeframe targets around preliminary appeals.

GRADES CHALLENGED AT APPEAL

DO APPEALS TEND TO BE TARGETTED AT PARTICULAR GRADES?

Figure 8: GCSE and GCE grades challenged at appeal, summer 2017 vs. 2018



Source: 2018 – Awarding bodies; 2017 – Ofqual

D was the most commonly appealed GCSE grade (37%) in summer 2018, followed by C (26%). The prominence of D is likely related to the importance of achieving a C grade for both students (progression opportunities) and schools (performance measures). Fewer GCSE grades were challenged in summer 2017, making it difficult to identify whether there is a systematic pattern in the qualification grades being challenged as part of an appeal across summer exam series. Grade D (28%), along with grade A (28%), were where GCSE appeals were most likely to be focused in summer 2017.

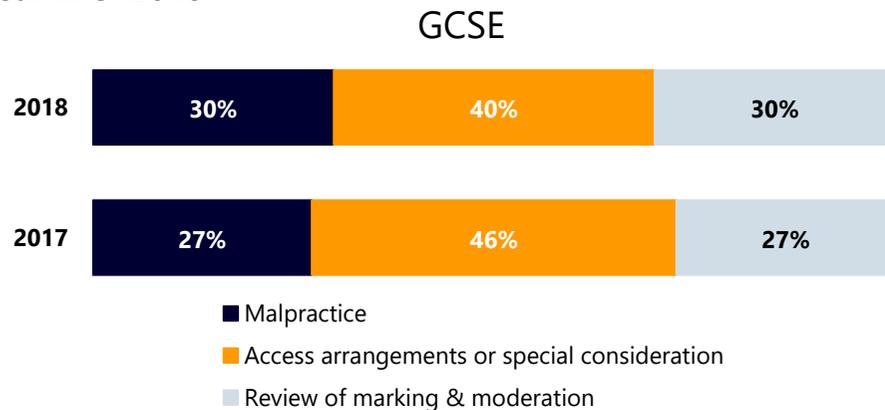
Relative to GCSE, the number of GCE grades challenged via an appeal was much lower in summer 2018. Grade B was the most likely GCE grade to be challenged through an appeal in summer 2018, in contrast to summer 2017 where grades D and E were the most challenged GCE grades. This year-on-year inconsistency in terms of the most likely GCE grade being challenged as part of an appeal could be related to the variety of different scenarios that might lead to an appeal being lodged, as well as the small numbers of cases and grades involved.

NATURE OF APPEALS

WHAT ASPECT OF THE QUALIFICATION SYSTEM GENERATES THE MOST APPEALS?

An appeal can be made for a range of reasons: to contest the outcome of a review of marking or moderation, a malpractice decision or a decision on an access arrangement or special consideration. Review or marking or moderation can be split down further into whether the appeal was on procedural grounds or related to a marking error (see accompanying data table 5).

Figure 9: Nature of GCSE appeals, summer 2017 vs. summer 2018



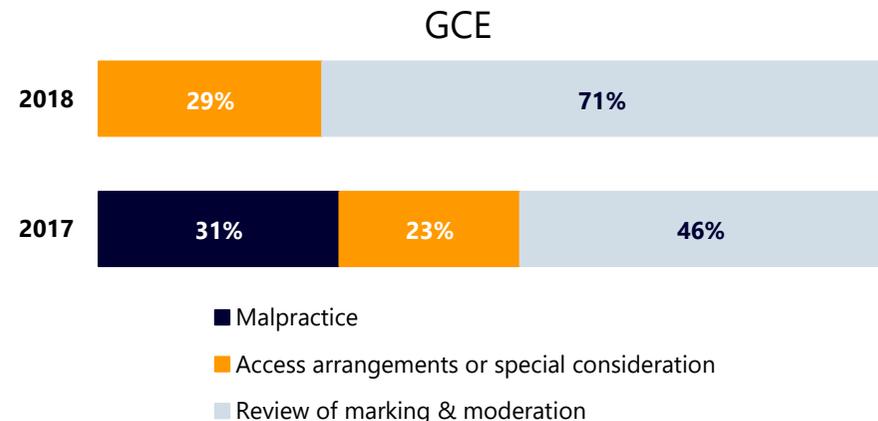
Source: 2018 – Awarding bodies; 2017 - Ofqual

GCE appeals tend to be more focused on the outcomes of a review of marking and moderation process; this accounted for 71% of all GCE appeals received following the 2018 summer exam series, up from 46% in summer 2017.

All of the summer 2018 GCE review of marking and moderation appeals were challenging a marking error arising from the review of marking service (see accompanying data table 5).

Access arrangements or special consideration has been the largest single category of GCSE appeal over the last two summer exam series. In summer 2018 40% of all GCSE appeals were relating to an access arrangement or special consideration decision, slightly down from 46% in summer 2017.

Figure 10: Nature of GCE appeals, summer 2017 vs. summer 2018



Source: 2018 – Awarding bodies; 2017 - Ofqual

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Awarding Body

An organisation that develops qualifications, specifies and monitors assessments and issues awards to learners, formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences), following an assessment and validation procedure. In other parts of the UK these are known as Awarding Organisations or Exam Boards.

GCSEs

General Certificates of Secondary Education are available in a wide range of subjects. GCSEs are the main Level 1 and Level 2 general qualifications at age 14-16 in Wales. They can be used as a basis for higher level study or training, or direct entry into employment.

A level

General Certificate of Education Advanced Level, also known as a GCE A level. Qualifications taken, after GCSEs, in a range of subjects, usually taken at age 16-18 and typically a two-year course of study. They are used as a basis for admissions to higher education, further training or entry into employment.

Advanced Subsidiary (AS)

A qualification that forms the first part of an A level qualification. It may be taken as a free-standing qualification. In Wales and Northern Ireland it contributes to the A level result. In England, AS qualifications cannot contribute to A levels.

Centre

A body undertaking the delivery of an assessment (and potentially other activities) to learners on behalf of an awarding body. Centres are typically educational institutions, training providers, or employers.

BACKGROUND NOTES

On 21 November 2017 the National Assembly for Wales approved the Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2017⁴ which named Qualifications Wales as one of the bodies that are in scope of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007⁵. Qualifications Wales operates in compliance with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics⁶ and has published this statistical release as Official Statistics.

The Reviews of Marking and Moderation Process

Qualifications Wales has published requirements for GCSE and GCE qualifications which set out our expectations for how awarding bodies carry out reviews of marking, moderation and appeals⁷. Awarding bodies must meet these rules and publish detailed information and guidance for schools and colleges on their arrangements for reviews of marking, moderation and appeals following the issue of results.

Awarding bodies issue results for summer exams in August. If a school or college is concerned about the accuracy of a candidate's result or a group of candidates' results, it can ask the awarding body to review the marking or moderation undertaken. Until recently the process by which schools raised concerns about results was known as the 'enquiry about results' process. More information on [reviews of marking for the summer 2018 exam series](#) was published by Qualifications Wales in December 2018.

Appeals

Our *Additional Standard Conditions of Recognition for GCSE / GCE qualifications*⁸ regulatory document lays out conditions that recognised awarding bodies must comply with when offering GCSE and GCE qualifications; section I covers the appeals process. All awarding bodies offering general qualifications in Wales are members of The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), who produce appeals guidance⁹ that meets the requirements of qualification regulators in all three UK countries.

⁴ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2017/1142/pdfs/wsi_20171142_mi.pdf

⁵ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/pdfs/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

⁶ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

⁷ <https://qualificationswales.org/english/publications/additional-standard-conditions-of-recognition-for-gcse-gce-qualifications/>

⁸ <https://qualificationswales.org/english/publications/additional-standard-conditions-of-recognition-for-gcse-gce-qualifications/>

⁹ <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/appeals/>

If a school is unsatisfied with the result of a review of marking, review of moderation, a malpractice decision, or a judgement on access arrangements or special considerations, it can make an appeal to the awarding body. An appeal can be in relation to the outcomes of one or more candidates, if they are all thought to be affected by the same issue. Prior to 2017, appeals against reviews of marking and reviews of moderation decisions were only allowed where a school or college believed there has been a procedural failure by the awarding body (i.e. the awarding body had not applied its procedures consistently or followed them correctly and/or fairly).

Following a pilot in 2016 in GCE geography, physics and religious studies, the grounds on which a result could be appealed were extended for all AS, A level, Extended Project and a limited number of GCSE qualifications¹⁰ in 2017. This enabled schools and colleges to appeal the mark a student was given if they believed a marking or moderation error was not corrected when the original result was reviewed or if they thought there was an error in the review itself. The new grounds for appeal were extended to include all GCSE qualifications in 2018.

Schools and colleges may submit appeals regarding an awarding body's decisions about malpractice if, they believe the awarding body's procedures were not followed, new evidence has come to light or, the decision was unreasonable given existing evidence, or they believe the sanction was disproportionate. Schools and colleges may also submit appeals related to access arrangements and special consideration if they believe due procedures have not been followed correctly.

All awarding bodies offering general qualifications in Wales have a two-stage appeal process:

- a preliminary appeal (formerly referred to as a 'stage 1' appeal) - a review of the case by a senior member of the awarding body who has not been involved previously with the same case.
- an appeal hearing (formerly referred to as a 'stage 2' appeal) – applicants and awarding bodies present their case to a panel, which the awarding body convenes. The panel comprises at least three members, one of whom must be independent (i.e. someone who is not, and has not at any time during the previous five years, been a member of the board or its committees, or an employee or examiner at the awarding body). A school or college can request an appeal hearing only after going through a preliminary appeal.

¹⁰ GCSE English Language, GCSE English Literature, GCSE Mathematics, GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy, GCSE Welsh Language and GCSE Welsh Literature

In 2017, exam boards committed to complete a preliminary appeal in 5 calendar weeks and an appeal hearing with 10 calendar days from the receipt of the request for an appeal hearing (previously the target was 50 days for either process). In some cases appeals are not resolved in the target timescale. Sometimes, this occurs to allow a fair appeal hearing with appropriate evidence, and for individuals to be present from both the school or college and the exam board.

Appeals against results must be made within 30 calendar days of the awarding body issuing the outcome of the clerical re-check, review of marking or review of moderation. For decisions made with respect to malpractice, access arrangements or special consideration, the appeal request must be made within two calendar weeks of receiving the original decision.

Awarding bodies charge a fee for each stage of an appeal against the outcome of a clerical re-check, a review of marking or a review of moderation. Details of these fees can be obtained from the awarding body concerned. The fee will be refunded/waived if the appeal is upheld.

The Examination Procedures Review Service

If the appellant remains dissatisfied with the decision of an appeal hearing, a further appeal may be made to the Examination Procedures Review Service (EPRS)¹¹ within 21 days of receiving the outcome from the awarding body. EPRS is a Qualifications Wales function set up to ensure that schools, colleges, candidates and parents are satisfied that grades issued by an awarding body are fair and accurate. Qualifications Wales will review each application and arrange a review hearing if appropriate. Qualification Wales will look at whether the awarding body has followed the appropriate procedures and used them properly and fairly. Qualifications Wales will only look at whether or not the rules about the exam, how it was marked and how the qualification was graded, have been properly followed. If the awarding body has not followed its own procedures or has not secured the outcomes required by Qualifications Wales' regulations and a candidate had been disadvantaged, the application to EPRS may be allowed. Awarding bodies must give due regard to the outcome of EPRS hearings, both in respect of results issued to the candidate making the application and, where appropriate, other potentially affected results. Statistics on cases proceeding to EPRS are outside the scope of this report.

¹¹ <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/eprs/>

Qualification Reforms

Following a Welsh Government review of qualifications for 14-19-year-olds¹² in 2012, a new set of reformed qualifications for GCSEs, AS, and A levels have been introduced in Wales. These reformed qualifications have been designed specifically to meet the needs of learners in Wales.

The reformed qualifications were introduced for first teaching in three phases. Phase 1 qualifications were taught from September 2015, Phase 2 from September 2016 and Phase 3 from September 2017. Information about these changes, and a list of subjects affected can be found on our website¹³.

In parallel to the reforms in Wales, new GCSEs, AS and A levels were also introduced for England. In some low take-up subjects, reformed qualifications have been developed for England, but not for Wales. Where this is the case, the qualifications reformed for England can be offered as part of publicly funded courses in Wales.

GCSE, AS and A level qualifications reformed for Wales and for England remain comparable, they are the same size and are accessible to the same range of learners. There are, however, some key design differences between them. GCSE qualifications reformed for Wales continue to be graded A*-G, whereas GCSEs reformed for England have moved to a 9-1 grading system. Results from AS qualifications reformed for Wales contribute 40 per cent towards an A level grade. Results for AS qualifications no longer count towards the new A levels designed for England.

Data Source

AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC provided disaggregated data on appeals for GCSE (all full courses, short courses, applied and double awards), AS and A level assessments taken in the summer 2018 exam series. Prior to the 2017-18 academic year, awarding bodies reported their Wales data to Ofqual.

Up to summer 2016, awarding bodies submitted aggregated appeals data to Ofqual. This meant that the accuracy of published appeals data was reliant upon awarding bodies correctly calculating aggregate totals before reporting their data. From summer 2016 onwards, the awarding bodies provided disaggregated appeals data. Therefore, all the summer 2016 and summer 2017 reported figures reported have been calculated by Ofqual for Wales, and from summer 2018 onwards will be

¹² Welsh Government (2014) Review of Qualifications 14-19. [online]. Available from: <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf> [Accessed 22/03/19].

¹³ <http://qualificationswales.org/english/qualifications/gcses-and-a-levels/gq-reform/what-subjects-are-available/>

calculated by us. Caution should be taken when making comparisons of historical data against summer 2016 onwards because of a change in methodology.

Limitations of data

Data included in this release is submitted to us by awarding bodies. Therefore, Qualifications Wales cannot guarantee that the information received is correct. Qualifications Wales compares the data over time and checks for systematic issues. Quality assurance procedures are carried out to ensure the accuracy of the data and challenge or question it, where necessary. Qualifications Wales continuously manages this process by:

- Ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them and are fully consulted during the initial design and any subsequent change phases;
- Reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- Being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same provider;
- Actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers.

The publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Data has been collected at an appropriate point when it is reasonably complete. For summer 2018 appeals, this was 19 February 2019.

Geographical Coverage

This release presents data on GCSE, AS and A level appeals of marking for the summer 2018 exam series for centres located in Wales.

Revisions

Once published, data on the number of reviews of marking is not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or correct an error.

Completeness of the data

Awarding bodies send Qualifications Wales appeals data for all regulated GCSE, AS and A level qualification. Qualifications Wales contacts any awarding body that does not return a complete set of data within the collection period, to make sure the data is as complete as possible.

Rounding and Confidentiality

To protect confidentiality, and in accordance with Qualifications Wales's interim statistical outputs policy¹⁴, numbers of candidates, grades challenged and grades changed greater than five are rounded to the nearest 5. Numbers of appeals greater than five are not rounded since appeals can consist of one or more candidates. Appeal and grade figures fewer than 5 but greater than 0 are replaced with a *. This is to ensure that data does not reveal an individual candidate. All percentages within the commentary are based on actual figures. Figures have been rounded independently and therefore may not sum to the total.

Users of these statistics

These statistics are likely to be of interest to Qualifications Wales, Ofqual and other qualifications regulators, awarding bodies, and the Welsh Government. We welcome feedback from users, so expect to gain a better understanding of who our users are over time. Qualifications Wales uses these statistics to monitor the qualification system.

Related statistics and publications

A number of statistical releases relate to this one, including:

- Ofqual's 'Appeals for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2018 exam series' release¹⁵
- Qualifications Wales 'Reviews of marking and moderation for GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: Summer 2018 exam series' release¹⁶

Useful information

A glossary of terms is available on page 10 to help you interpret this release. You can find information about future publications on the Welsh Government [website](#).

The [QiW register](#) gives information on approved and designated qualifications which are eligible for public funding in Wales.

Next update

April 2020 (provisional).

¹⁴ <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/interim-statistical-outputs-policy/>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/appeals-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2018-exam-series>

¹⁶ <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/reviews-of-marking-and-moderation-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-in-wales-summer-2018-exam-series/>

User feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to statistics@qualificationswales.org

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