

# REVIEW OF THE SUMMER 2019 EXAMINATION SERIES



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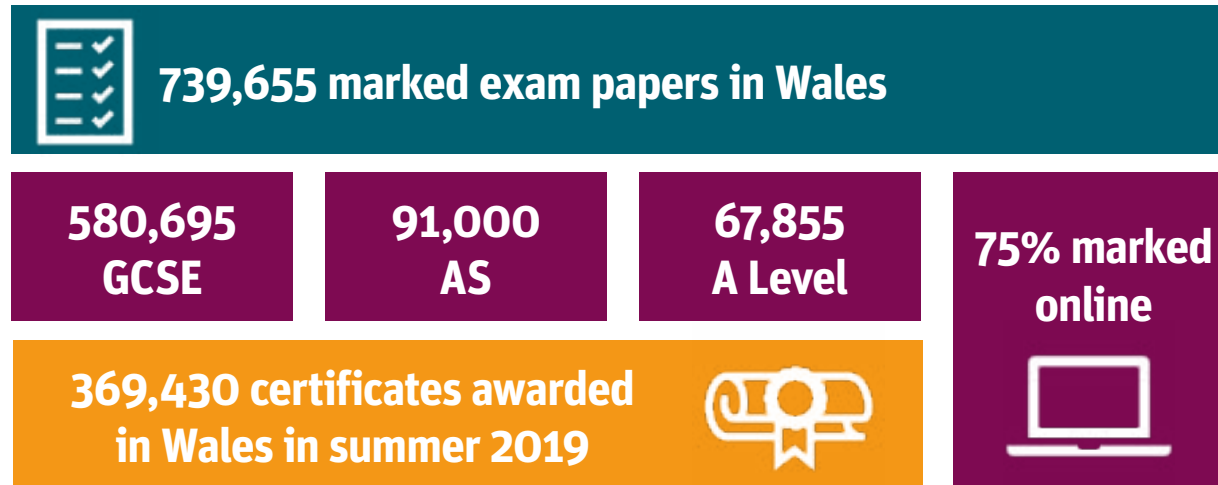
## Introduction

This report gives an overview of the summer 2019 examination series; our approach to overseeing the delivery, standard setting and awarding of assessments for general qualifications sat by learners in Wales.

The summer examination series is the main exam series that Qualifications Wales regulates. Our role in the series, as the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales, is to ensure appropriate processes are in place for the delivery of GCSE, AS and A level assessments and to scrutinise the award of these qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate.

Nearly 740,000 exam papers were marked in Wales in the 2019 summer series. GCSE scripts comprised just under 80% of this total with the remaining scripts split between AS and A level. 75% of the scripts awarded in Wales were marked by examiners using on-screen marking systems<sup>1</sup>.

Figure 1



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

The reformed qualifications have been introduced in three phases, so those awarded this summer are at different stages in their life cycle.

### Phase 3 – first teaching 2017

GCSEs: Business, Computer Science, Design & Technology, History, Media Studies, Religious Studies, Welsh Second Language.

GCEs: Design and Technology, Government and Politics, Law, Mathematics, Further Mathematics and Media Studies.

### Phase 2 – first teaching 2016

GCSEs: Art and Design, Drama, Food and Nutrition, French, Geography, German, Music, Physical Education, Spanish.

GCEs: Drama, French, Geography, German, Music, Physical Education, Religious Studies, Spanish, Welsh Second Language.

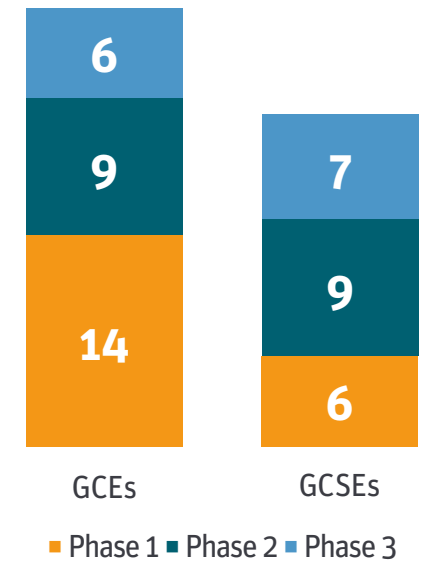
### Phase 1 – first teaching 2015

GCSEs: English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Mathematics-Numeracy, Welsh Language, Welsh Literature.

GCEs: Art and Design, Biology, Business, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, English Language, English Language and Literature, English Literature, History, Physics, Psychology, Sociology, Welsh Language.

Figure 2

### Number of reformed qualifications awarded in summer 2019





In all cases, for each GCE A level qualification, an AS award took place the previous year. In each phase, there have been some non standard delivery models:

- Phase one GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy were awarded for the first time in November 2016.
- A level Mathematics was awarded in full, one year after the start of teaching, to allow for the way it is delivered by many schools alongside A level Further Mathematics.

In relation to the Welsh Baccaulaureate Skills Challenge Certificates, the Advanced and Key Stage 4 Skills Challenge Certificates, were awarded for the third time, and the post-16 Skills Challenge Certificates at National and Foundation levels were awarded for the fourth time.

WJEC provides the reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels in Wales, and the Welsh Baccaulaureate. A small number of GCSEs and A levels, which have been developed for England, in subjects that have not been reformed in Wales, are provided by AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC (under the Eduqas brand).



EXAMS  
360°



[A closer look at Welsh Baccaulaureate](#)

## Preparing for the series

### Our regulatory approach

We took a close interest in WJEC's preparations for the summer exam series. We monitored their approach and, in particular, the identification and management of risks to the secure delivery of the series. All three phases of the reform programme have now been completed, so this series involved the greatest number of reformed qualifications.

Along with our fellow regulators, Ofqual and CCEA, we engaged with all awarding bodies that offer GCSEs and A levels, as well as the body that represents them, the Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ). Through this work we identified risks and issues, exchanged information and received regular updates.

### Joint working

A small number of qualifications have not been reformed and continue to be taken across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We regulate the non-reformed three-country qualifications alongside Ofqual and CCEA.

We sent a letter to the awarding bodies in June to set out our expectations for the summer. This referred to similar communications sent by Ofqual and CCEA. In 2017, we produced a joint statement and infographic to explain the main similarities and differences between the qualifications offered in each country<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup><https://qualificationswales.org/media/2436/3-countries-4pp-eng.pdf>

## Entries

In May, we produced a statistical release detailing the provisional entries for exams to be sat in the summer series<sup>3</sup>. The report includes tables of the provisional number of entries for GCSEs, Level 1/2 certificates and AS and A levels submitted by awarding bodies for the exams being sat between May and June 2019. It also includes provisional entries for the Skills Challenge Certificate. These figures are a useful indicator of potential changes in results that may develop due to fluctuations in entries from year to year.

## AS and A level entries

In Wales, A level entry figures decreased by 5.1% to 31,920, whilst AS entry fell by 8.0% to 41,410.

Table 1

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Total A Level entries</b>	38,480	37,640	35,530	33,640	31,920

*Source: 2015 to 2017 – Ofqual; 2018 to 2019 – Awarding Bodies*

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Total AS entries</b>	57,030	52,620	48,970	44,990	41,410

*Source: 2015 to 2017 – Ofqual; 2018 to 2019 – Awarding Bodies*

Entries for the reformed AS qualifications dropped 1.9%. Entries for the reformed A level qualifications rose 26.0% due to the first award of the phase three qualifications, which included the large entry Mathematics subject. Our Head of Research produced a blog about the change in AS and A level entries in the summer<sup>4</sup>. A fall in the numbers of 17 and 18-year-olds in Wales has been a major cause of the fall in entries. In addition, fewer 17-year-olds are taking four or more AS levels and the proportion of 18-year-olds taking one AS level has also reduced. This explains why the fall in AS entries has been faster than at A level.

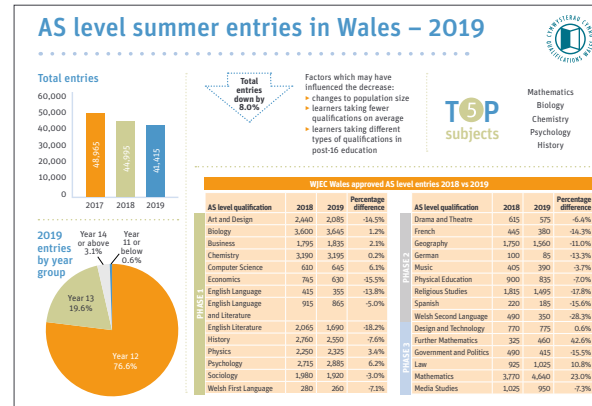
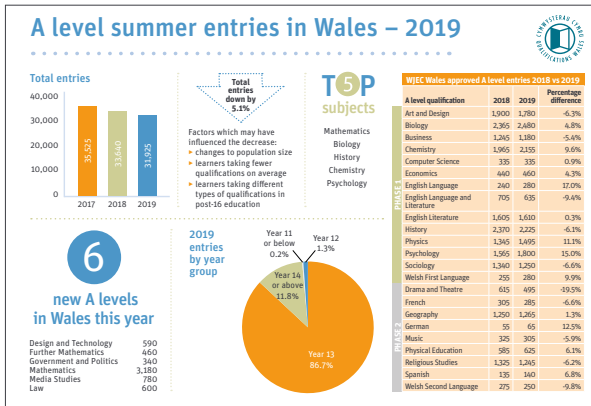
## BLOG

[Why are AS level and A level entries continuing to fall in Wales?](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/provisional-data-on-entries-for-summer-may-2019/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://qualificationswales.org/english/information-for-stakeholders/press-and-media/blogs-and-articles/why-are-as-level-and-a-level-entries-continuing-to-fall-in-wales/>

We published infographics on the A level and AS entries data.



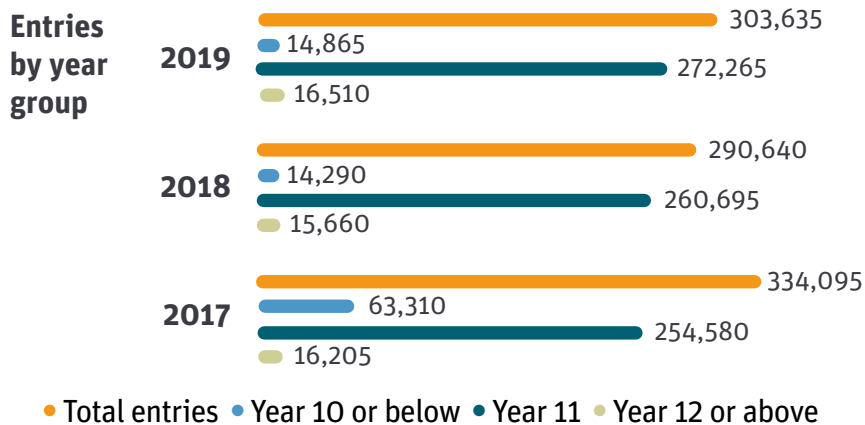
**INFO**

**Summer 2019 exam entries Infographics**

## GCSE entries

GCSE provisional summer entries increased 4.5% to 303,640 in 2019, primarily due to a rise in the number of students taking exams in year 11.

Figure 3

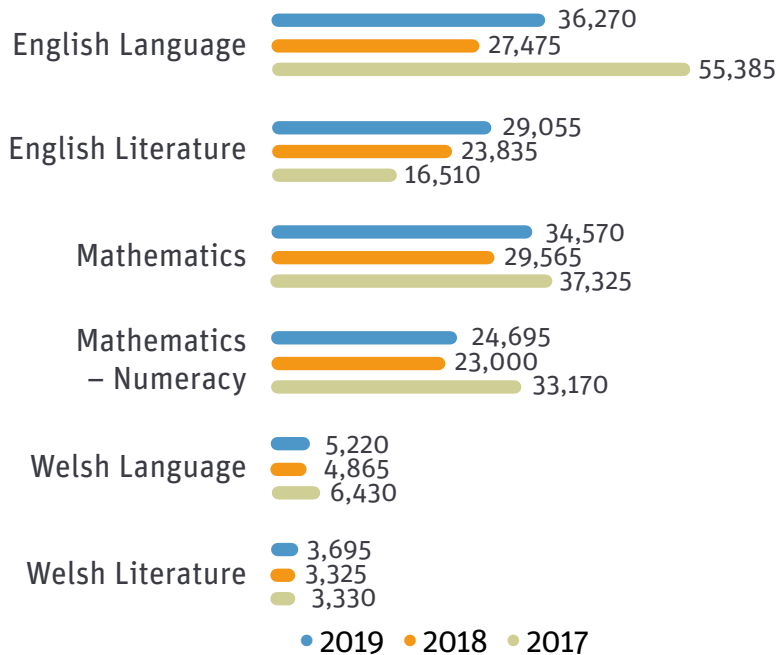




Two years ago, a record number of students in year 10 sat GCSEs early, which meant that a substantial number of last summer’s year 11 students achieved their GCSEs in English Language, Welsh Language, Mathematics and Mathematics – Numeracy before the summer 2018 exam series and therefore were not reported in the summer data. Now that Welsh Government has introduced a policy stating that, from summer 2019, only a student’s first result counts towards school performance tables, there have been some significant changes to school entry strategies.

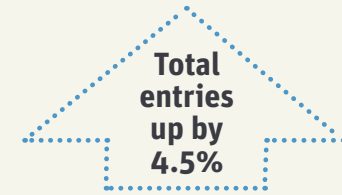
Figure 4

**Phase 1 approved GCSE entries 2017 to 2019**



Source: Provisional Summer 2019 exam entries for Wales

Overall this has resulted in an increase in the number of year 11s sitting GCSEs in the summer 2019.



The overall increase is driven by more year 11 entries.

This is likely due to:

- ▶ changes to population size
- ▶ changes to school performance measures

Changes in entries for the phase two approved GCSEs can be seen below, as well as entries for the final phase of reformed GCSEs introduced.

Table 2

Phase 2 approved GCSE entries 2018 vs 2019			
Approved GCSE	2018	2019	Percentage difference
Applied Science (Double Award)*	3,505	2,830	-19.3%
Applied Science (Single Award)	510	855	67.5%
Art and Design	7,740	8,875	14.7%
Biology	7,065	7,360	4.2%
Chemistry	6,825	7,250	6.3%
Drama	2,300	2,240	-2.7%
Food and Nutrition	1,960	2,120	8.3%
French	3,525	3,025	-14.2%
Geography	7,320	7,290	-0.5%
German	755	570	-24.7%
Music	2,145	2,185	1.8%
Physical Education	6,790	6,615	-2.6%
Physics	6,795	6,990	2.8%
Science (Double Award)*	39,050	40,050	2.6%
Spanish	1,100	1,425	29.7%

\* We have counted entries for double award science qualifications twice to reflect the fact that qualification size is equivalent to two GCSEs and to be consistent with how the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) are reporting qualifications this summer.



## new GCSEs in Wales this year

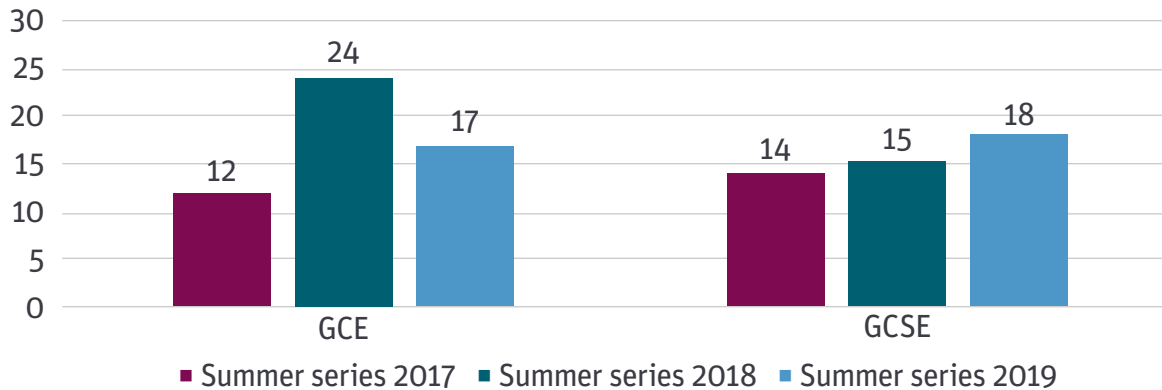
Business	2,950
Computer Science	1,950
Design and Technology	5,460
History	9,520
Media Studies	1,365
Physical Education (Short Course)	430
Religious Studies	9,905
Religious Studies (Short Course)	6,010
Welsh Second Language	19,670

## Monitoring ahead of the series

We planned a comprehensive programme of monitoring to oversee each stage of the assessment and awarding process. We monitored the production of examination papers and non-examination assessments in advance of the series. These processes usually took place autumn 2017 or spring 2018. We observed 35 Question Paper Evaluation Committee (QPEC) meetings considering assessments for this series. This is a slight reduction on observations for the 2018 series, which links to our planned level of monitoring for the first full series and first award of each qualification.

Figure 5

**QPEC meetings observed**



We also monitored some Continuing Professional Development training sessions for teachers and lecturers, provided by WJEC. This allowed us to gather information about the quality of the training provided and to ensure our regulations (Condition G4 of our Standard Conditions of Recognition<sup>5</sup>) regarding protecting the confidentiality and, therefore, validity of assessment materials were followed.

We completed a detailed report and gave feedback to WJEC following each monitoring activity. In most instances this feedback shared best practice for consideration. If feedback from a QPEC observation related to the suitability of any assessment or fairness to learners, follow up was arranged. In a few cases our feedback has led to WJEC reviewing aspects of the standard procedures followed.

<sup>5</sup> <https://qualificationswales.org/english/publications/standard-conditions-of-recognition/>

## Stakeholder communications

Ahead of the summer exams series, we continued our information campaign to raise awareness of the new GCSEs and GCEs being awarded in Wales. We sent a letter<sup>6</sup> to all schools and colleges in Wales, prior to the exams commencing. This gave an overview of where useful information to support the delivery of a safe and secure exam session could be found.

At the end of the exam session, we sent a further letter<sup>7</sup> outlining our role in the examination process and in particular our role in securing standards and ensuring fairness to learners. This letter also outlined the entries data published in our provisional entries data release, and what it might mean for national outcomes.

In the run-up to summer exams, we launched a new area of our website called **Exams 360**, designed to offer an all round look at the exam system. Content includes a series of **'A Closer Look At'** articles which build on those released in previous series. These give bite sized explanations of how qualifications are assessed, marked and awarded, and a summary of key changes to specific qualifications. Exams 360 also has a dedicated blog page which included contributions from guest writers as well as our own experts. The range of blog subjects expanded this year to include, for example, what to do when you have had a bad exam and dealing with exam stress. The website also offered practical tips for busy Exam Officers and students going through the exams process. The range of content was aimed at explaining aspects of the exam system to help interested stakeholders – such as teachers, learners and parents – understand them more clearly.

As in previous series, we gave briefings to the media to provide some context to results, explaining the changes to the new qualifications and the potential impact of these changes. In the run-up to both results days, we gave a series of briefings for key stakeholders. These focused on the main things to bear in mind when interpreting this year's results, including how awarding works, changes to qualifications and changes to the number and type of students sitting the exams. On both results days, we ran fresh content, including an overview to help people make sense of the results at national level. We also shared a range of short video explainers across social media channels on results days to engage audiences and navigate them to the Exams 360 content on our website<sup>8</sup>.



### A 360 look at the exam system

- > How are papers set?
- > What happens during marking?
- > Who decides the grades?
- > What's the role of Qualifications Wales?
- > Tips and guidance
- > Exams 360 blog page
- > A closer look at...
- > Winter series 2019/2020
- > Previous exam series

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/media/4707/030519-letter-to-centres-in-wales-summer-2019-exams.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/media/4724/letter-to-schools-in-wales-end-of-summer-series-june-2019-english.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/exams-360/a-360-look-at-the-exam-system/>

## Series delivery

### Access arrangements and special consideration requests

Awarding bodies make reasonable adjustments for learners with disabilities and learners who are disadvantaged at the time of the exam (for example, through injury or illness). These adjustments are known as ‘access arrangements’<sup>9</sup>. Access arrangements are agreed before the exam is sat and can include, for example, the provision of a modified paper (such as larger font sizes) and extra time for the exam.

If a learner has been absent from an exam due to illness, injury or bereavement, or their performance in an exam has been impacted by illness, injury or bereavement, special consideration can be requested by the school or college for the learner. The awarding body, where applicable, will estimate a mark for the learner, or adjust the mark given to the learner.

We now produce Wales only statistical releases, including data which used to be included in a three-country release published by Ofqual. We published two statistical releases after the summer exam series. These report on access arrangements and special consideration requests for GCSEs and A levels during the 2018/19 academic year<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> The Equality Act 2010 defines disability.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/access-arrangements-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-in-wales/> **and** <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/special-consideration-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-in-wales-summer-2018-exam-series/>

## Access arrangements

The number of access arrangements approved in Wales increased by 2.7% to 21,475 in 2018/19.

The most common approved access arrangement remains 25% extra time, which accounted for approximately two thirds of the Wales total in 2018/19. Approvals for this arrangement increased by 5.9% to 14,340 in 2018/19.

Table 3

Access Arrangements	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
25% extra time	10,280	10,700	11,945	13,260	13,540	14,340
Alternative accommodation	180	185	45	0	0	0
Bilingual dictionary with extra time	485	425	220	125	115	105
Computer reader/ Reader	4,350	4,530	4,860	5,285	5,140	5,105
Exam on coloured paper	230	335	390	600	330	*
Extra time > 25%	155	130	145	160	165	180
Oral language modifier	155	125	45	0	0	0
Practical assistant for practical paper	35	30	40	25	40	55
Practical assistant for written paper	40	30	50	40	50	65
Scribe	1,505	1,485	1,570	1,550	1,430	1,505
Sign language interpreter	5	0	0	0	0	0
Other	15	20	60	70	85	120
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,450</b>	<b>18,005</b>	<b>19,370</b>	<b>21,120</b>	<b>20,905</b>	<b>21,475</b>

Source: From 2017-18 JCQ; 2013-14 to 2016-17 – Ofqual

## Special consideration requests

There were 38,280 special consideration requests for the 2019 summer series in Wales – a decrease of 8.1% compared to the previous summer series.

The proportion of special consideration requests approved (90.1%) increased compared to last year (79.9%). The proportion of approved requests had been unusually low in 2018 due to a number of rejected group requests related to building work on school premises, which JCQ do not consider a valid reason to receive special consideration. The 2019 proportion is more in-line with pre-2018 figures. The proportion of total scripts and non-timetabled assessments receiving a special consideration request (3.4%) remained stable compared to corresponding figures for the 2017 and 2018 summer series.

Table 4

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Number of requests for special consideration</b>	38,755	32,940	40,925	41,650	38,280
<b>Number of requests approved</b>	36,710	31,625	38,925	33,280	34,480
<b>Percentage of requests approved</b>	94.7%	96.0%	95.1%	79.9%	90.1%
<b>Requests approved as a percentage of total scripts and non-timetabled assessments</b>	4.6%	2.8%	3.3%	3.2%	3.4%

Source: 2015 to 2017 – Ofqual; 2018 onwards – Awarding bodies

## Incidents relating to the summer series in 2019

Awarding bodies must notify us of any incident that is likely to lead to an adverse effect for students or threatens the integrity of a regulated qualification; for example, errors in assessment materials, or a breach in the security of an examination paper. Incidents that originate outside Wales may have the potential to impact upon Welsh students who are entered for the same qualification.

When we receive a notification, we check that the awarding body is taking appropriate steps to reduce the impact on learners in Wales and to prevent a recurrence.

## GCSE Computer Science

WJEC notified us of two issues in a GCSE Computer Science assessment. The wrong electronic file was issued for Unit 2, meaning that some centres could not run the version needed for question 9 of the assessment. WJEC made the decision to instruct centres to advise students not to answer the question affected. The second issue related to connectivity, which caused some delays whilst data updated.

We monitored WJEC’s immediate actions to ensure the impact on learners was minimised and centres were fully updated. We scrutinised WJEC’s approach to awarding to ensure that no candidates were advantaged or disadvantaged by the errors. WJEC identified suitable questions within the same unit to project performance for the question with the error. They also analysed performance to ensure that any candidates who produced work for the question were credited with the better mark of the comparison. We are satisfied that WJEC’s communications with centres, both at the time, around results days and since, was sufficient and appears to have been effective.

We continue to discuss WJEC’s actions and plans to ensure these errors do not reoccur in future series.

This section provides an overview of incidents received relating to A level, AS level and GCSE qualifications, for the 2019 summer series.

Awarding bodies notified us of 119 incidents relating to the 2019 summer series, by the end of December 2019. This figure may not be exhaustive, because incidents may come to light at any point before or after an assessment is delivered. However, by a comparable point in 2018, we had been notified of 4 more incidents relating to the 2018 summer series, than we have received this year.

The graph below gives a breakdown of the type of incidents reported by awarding bodies, relating to the summer series:

Figure 6

**Incidents 2018/2019**

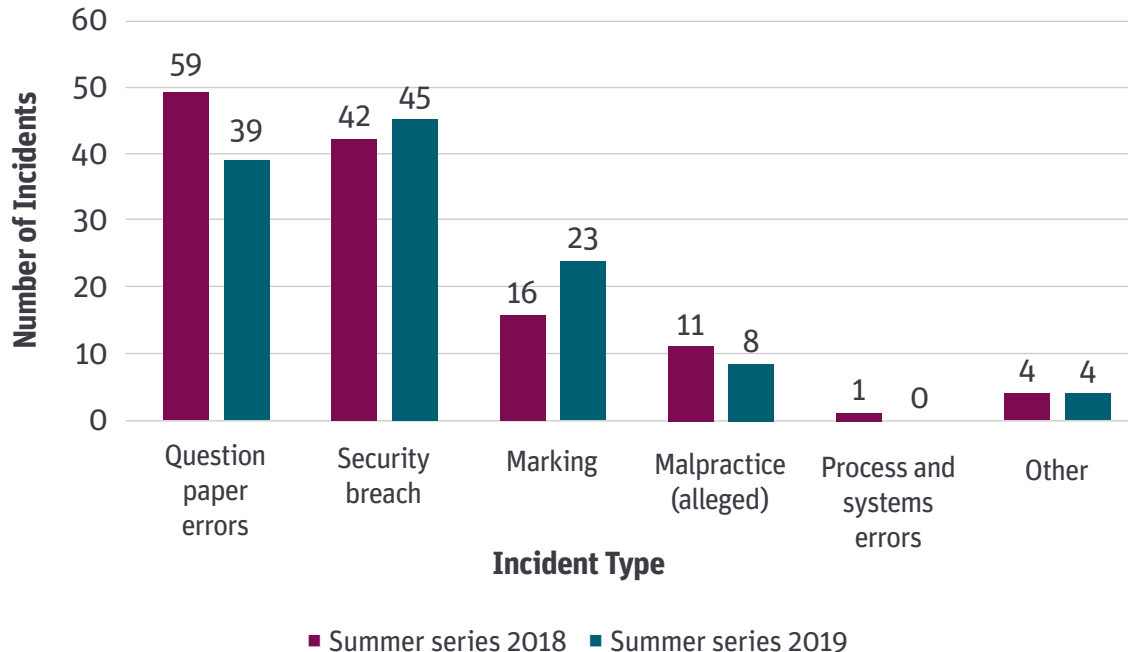
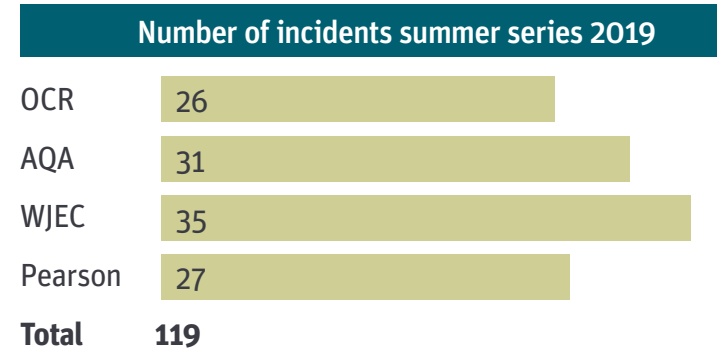


Figure 7



We categorise incidents as follows:

- Question paper errors – issues in any material used for assessment purposes, including the mark scheme.
- Security breach – any disclosure of confidential information or assessment materials.
- Malpractice – an intentional or reckless breach of the regulations, in Wales, that could undermine the integrity of an assessment.
- Marking – issues with the process of marking assessments and issuing results.
- Process and system errors – issues involving processes or systems employed by either the awarding body or an examination centre.
- Other – incidents that do not fit into any of the above categories.



## Question paper errors

Assessments are subject to internal quality assurance processes during their production, which on average takes 18 months. However, errors in question papers, Welsh translation and the modification process can occasionally occur.

When errors are detected before an assessment is sat, the awarding body sends an erratum notice to schools and colleges to minimise the impact on learners and reports the incident to us.

In very few cases, errors are discovered after the assessment has been sat. Awarding bodies report the incident to us, explaining what impact the error has had on learners and, where necessary, what actions they will take to ensure learners are not disadvantaged. For example, awarding bodies may amend a mark scheme to compensate for an error or credit all learners with marks in the most serious cases. These measures ensure no learners are disadvantaged.

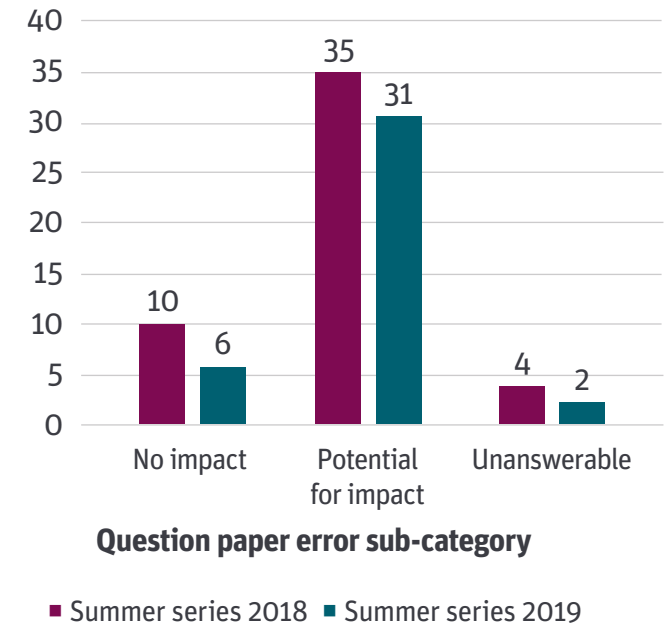
There were 39 question paper errors reported to us that related to the summer series, a reduction of 20% overall. 15% of the question paper errors reported to us did not have any impact on students' ability to answer the question. There were 31 incidents with a potential impact on learners, which we monitored to ensure no learners were disadvantaged.

In two cases, awarding bodies had to discount questions that were unanswerable or ineffective. This shows a reduction from last year.

- In one incident, learners could not open the file needed to complete a question in a GCSE Computer Science exam. Students received a projected mark for the affected question, based on their performance in other questions in the exam which assessed the same skills.
- In a second incident, a question in an A-level Physics paper was answerable using information provided in an optional question later in the same paper. All candidates were awarded the mark for this question.

Figure 8

### Question paper error incidents related to impact on learners



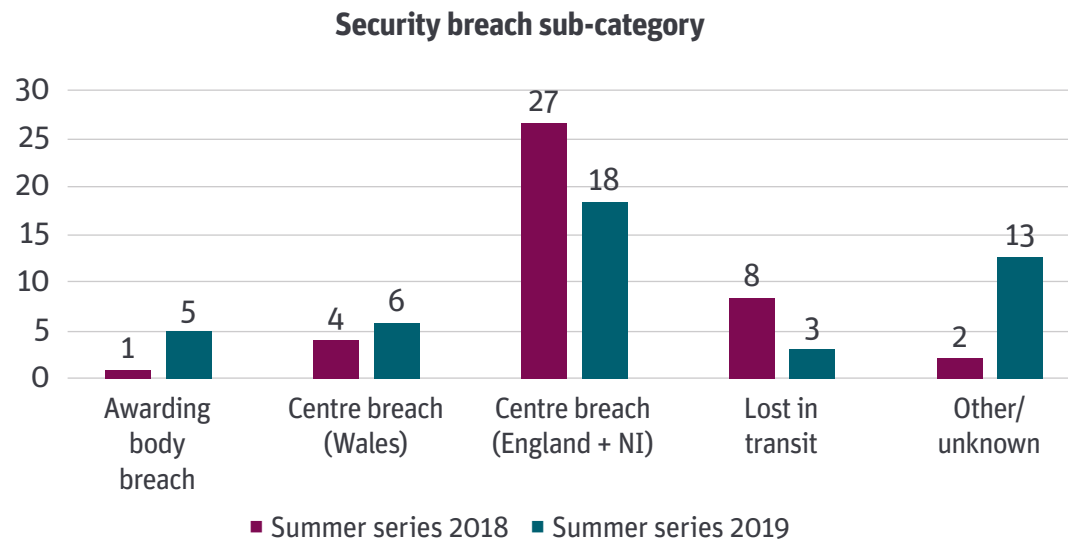
## Security breaches

Exam papers are kept securely by awarding bodies and by schools and colleges until the day of the exam. Occasionally a security breach occurs and is reported to us, along with actions the awarding body will undertake to mitigate the impact. These actions may include:

- monitoring social media to evaluate the scale of the breach;
- conducting statistical analyses of completed exam scripts from the centres affected, to detect any atypical performances;
- recalling and replacing the examination paper to be sat.

We closely monitor the actions awarding bodies take to investigate breaches, conduct statistical analysis to identify candidates who may have been unfairly advantaged, and sanction the individuals or centres involved.

Figure 9



The majority of security breaches this year originated in centres (53%). Only six of these originated from centres in Wales. The increasing proportion of security breaches classed as other/unknown reflects the growing number of security breaches initially identified by awarding bodies on social media or via other electronic networks. The source of these breaches may be individual candidates, rather than centre or awarding body staff. This summer, 19 (42%) of security breaches involved electronic communication of confidential information, which can increase the scale and impact of a single breach, and the potential damage to public confidence. awarding bodies' use of technology to identify and investigate these breaches is encouraging.

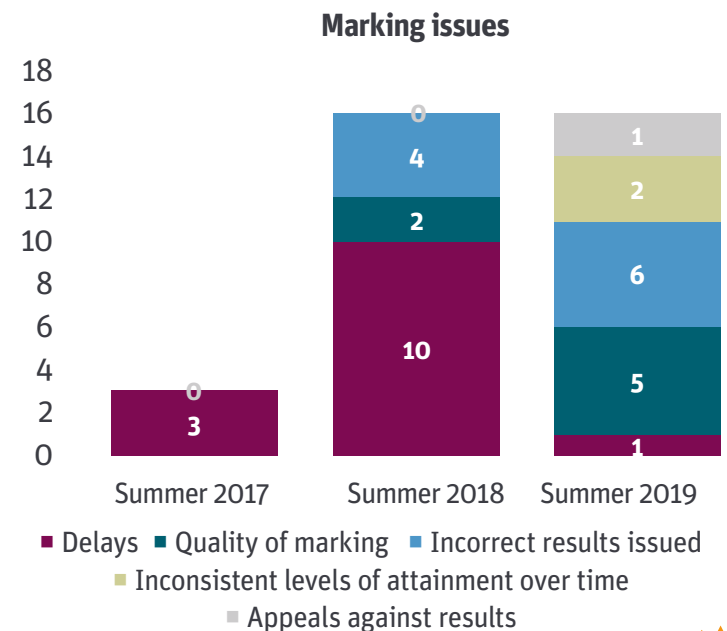
There was a small increase in incidents concerning potential security breaches by awarding body staff. We welcome awarding bodies notifying us of potential security breaches at an early stage. On investigation, awarding bodies found no evidence that any of these incidents had led to a breach of confidential materials to learners.

There is some evidence that work undertaken by awarding bodies last year to improve security in transit has been effective.

### Marking

We are notified by awarding bodies if there are any issues in relation to the progress of marking during the summer series, the quality of marking, or the accuracy of results issued. We were notified of six incidents with a potential impact on standards for particular qualifications. In all of these cases, we monitored the awarding bodies' response, to ensure learners were treated fairly and to confirm that there was no wider impact on standards.

Figure 10



## Malpractice

We require awarding bodies to take all reasonable steps to prevent malpractice by students and centres, and to investigate allegations thoroughly. If evidence of malpractice is found, awarding bodies are required to impose appropriate sanctions.

We published a statistical release in January 2020, that presents data on the number of malpractice penalties and offences in Wales for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in summer 2019.<sup>11</sup> The release contains details about the types of malpractice reported by awarding bodies and any penalties they have imposed.

200 penalties were issued to students for malpractice in summer 2019, down 5.7% compared to 210 penalties in 2018. The number of penalties issued to students in summer 2019 represents approximately one penalty for every 5,500 GCSE, AS and A level entries, which is a marginal improvement over the summer 2018 exam series. Proportionately, more penalties were issued relating to GCSEs than AS and A levels.

Taking a mobile phone into an exam room continues to be the most common malpractice offence, making up 54.0% of all penalties issued.

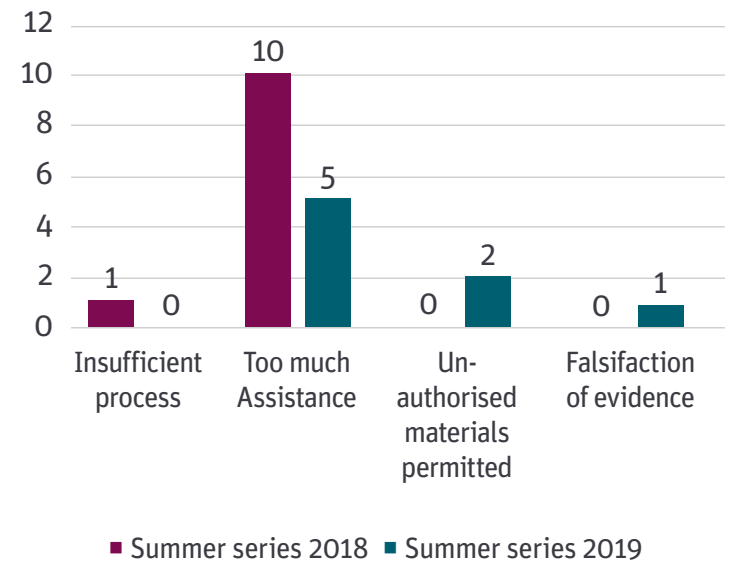
### Alleged malpractice reported to us during the exam series

Where an alleged malpractice case could affect standards or public confidence, an awarding body must report this to us promptly during the examination series, as an incident. We closely monitor the actions taken by awarding bodies in respect of these cases. The awarding bodies reported eight incidents to us during the examination series. They made findings of centre staff malpractice or maladministration in respect of six incidents. One investigation is still ongoing.

Proportionate sanctions were imposed in all cases of confirmed malpractice or maladministration. The awarding bodies also took steps to ensure that alleged malpractice did not advantage or disadvantage learners in Wales, such as requiring learners to complete a replacement assessment, applying special consideration, and issuing qualification results based on projected marks.

Figure 11

### Reported Malpractice 2018 & 2019



[ICQ's report of the Independent Commission on Examination Malpractice was published in summer 2019. This emphasises the many key roles involved in successful examinations systems.](https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/malpractice-in-gcse-as-and-a-level-in-wales-summer-2019-exam-series/)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/malpractice-in-gcse-as-and-a-level-in-wales-summer-2019-exam-series/>

### Monitoring during the series

As well as the the monitoring of the production of assessment material, including examination papers and non-examination assessments, which took place ahead of the series, we also observed moderator and examiner standardisation meetings. These meetings ensure that there is a good understanding of the mark scheme which has to be followed and is important in setting the standards for marking and moderating.

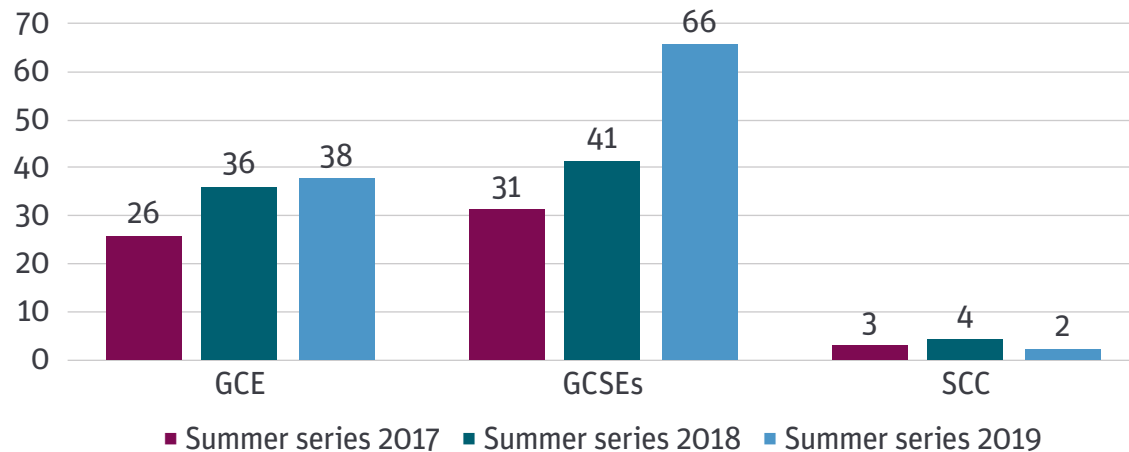
In these meetings, there is an opportunity to adjust the mark schemes to ensure credit is given to candidates fairly. Mark schemes are not finalised until this standardisation process is completed. We observed 66 meetings for GCSE subjects and 38 for AS and A level. We also monitored the moderation of the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate, attending two meetings.

In all cases where paper errors had been seen, we attended the relevant standardisation event to be satisfied that appropriate actions had been taken to ensure that no candidates were advantaged or disadvantaged. In all cases, we were satisfied this was the case.



Figure 12

**Standardisation events observed**



We also monitored social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter which are increasingly popular routes for comment for many candidates. We did this to identify trends relating to particular exams for us to consider as part of our monitoring intelligence on the exam series.

## Have Your Say questionnaire

We ran an online questionnaire, Have Your Say, again in 2019, to gather views on the GCSE, AS and A level exams from students and teachers.

The online questionnaire was open between May and July. Respondents could comment on any exam, but the reformed GCSE, AS and A level exams were the focus. The questionnaire was carried out to gather immediate feedback about the exams, that may be useful when combined with other information.

254 people completed the questionnaire, which is a substantial reduction on summer 2018. Of these 254, 180 were from teachers and lecturers; far more than the number from students. We asked about the difficulty of the exams, whether they assessed the specification fairly, whether students were given enough time, and for general comments on the qualifications. The questions were the same as in the previous series.



## GCSE MFL

There was some media attention, in both Wales and England, which suggested that uptake in MFL qualifications was affected by the perceived level of difficulty of the reformed qualifications. This coincided with the first exam for GCSE French and we saw an increase in responses to our Have Your Say questionnaire. This continued throughout the series, to some extent. Responses were analysed and common themes emerged which related to concerns over the level of challenge presented by the assessment, as well as the breadth in the MFL specifications in general.

We discussed these perceptions with WJEC. We scrutinised the award of these qualifications and it was noted that grade boundaries were lower in GCSE French than they have been in the previous series. We were satisfied that the award was fair to candidates.

We are considering the concerns raised about the MFL assessments, as well as information received from other activities on the reformed specifications. We will be working with WJEC to explore any actions that might be necessary to improve the experience for learners in the reformed specifications.

## Findings of the questionnaire

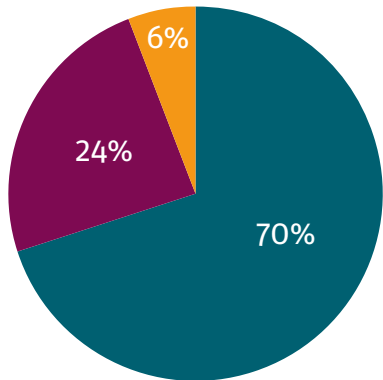
The responses to the questions were analysed separately for learners and teachers.

Figure 13

### Learner responses

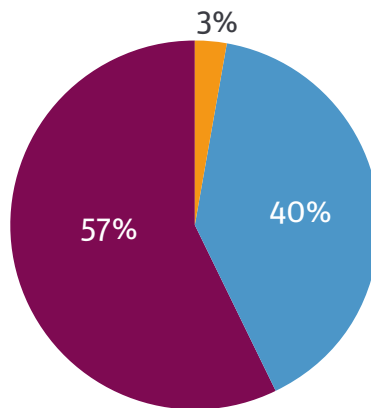
Did the exam paper(s) cover the topics in the specification?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Other



I felt that the exam(s)...

■ Was (were) too easy  
 ■ Was (were) too difficult  
 ■ Was (were) about right



Did you have enough time to complete the exam(s)?

■ Yes, I had the right amount of time  
 ■ No, I did not have enough time  
 ■ No, I had too much time

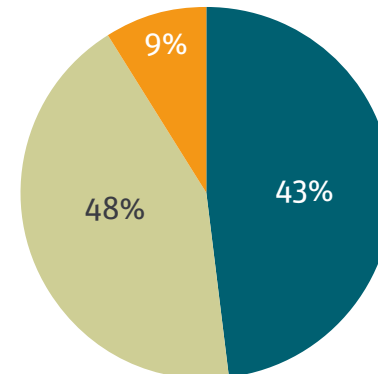
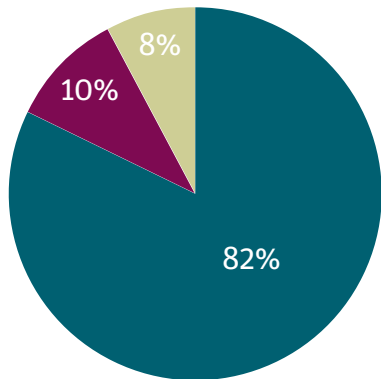


Figure 14

**Teacher responses**

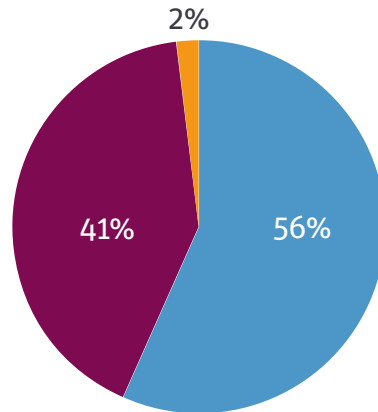
Did the exam paper(s) cover the topics in the specification?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Other



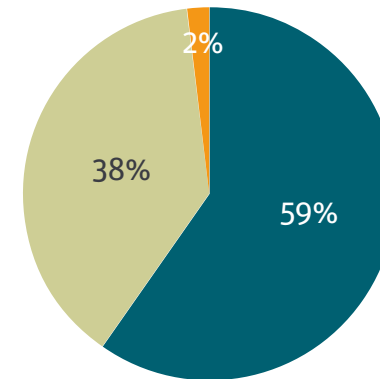
I felt that the exam(s)...

■ Was (were) too easy  
 ■ Was (were) too difficult  
 ■ Was (were) about right



Was there sufficient time allocated for candidates to complete the exam(s)?

■ Yes, I had the right amount of time  
 ■ No, I did not have enough time  
 ■ No, I had too much time



32 responses were received for AS level qualifications and 26 for A levels.

The subjects with over 2 responses are shown in the table below:

Table 5

GCE AS Level	AS - Number of responses	% of all AS responses
AS Biology	4	12.5%
AS History	3	9.4%
AS Physics	3	9.4%
AS Psychology	3	9.4%
GCE A2 Level	A2 – number of responses	% of all A2 responses
A2 French	7	26.9%



196 responses were received for GCSE. Subjects with over 2 responses are shown in the table below:

Table 6

GCSE	Responses	% responses
Art and Design	4	2%
Chemistry	4	2%
Computer Science	11	5.6%
Design and Technology	3	1.5%
Double Award Science	3	1.5%
English Language	8	4%
English Literature	3	1.5%
French	95	48.5%
History	8	4%
Mathematics - Numeracy	5	2.6%
Music	3	1.5%
Physics	5	2.6%
Spanish	12	6.1%
Welsh Second Language	12	6.1%

Responses focused on a range of qualifications, but the greatest response, by far, related to GCSE French. These responses were consistent in suggesting that the reformed qualification provided a high level of challenge to candidates.

We shared all the qualification-specific comments with WJEC to consider and we are using the information gathered to inform our monitoring and research work.

We have reviewed and evaluated the questionnaire. It is clear that engagement with practitioners is higher than with candidates, though overall the number of responses is low. We will continue to seek to gather feedback about the live exams and we will explore alternative ways of doing this in future series.

There are limitations to the data collected from the questionnaire. The open-ended nature of the questionnaire, and the self-selecting nature of the small responding sample, means that further statistical analysis would not be valid.

## Standard setting, awarding and results

### GCSE, AS and A level standard setting

A small number of new qualifications, designed specifically for learners in Wales, were awarded for the first time in summer 2019. We scrutinised WJEC's process for setting appropriate grade boundaries for these qualifications closely throughout the awarding period.

Where new qualifications were awarded for the first time, our priority was that students were not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged as a result of any changes. For these qualifications we required WJEC to use the established approaches to awarding which can compensate in situations where a small drop in performance may occur when new qualifications are introduced. It is the approach that was used successfully in the previous summers when awarding the new qualifications.

For qualifications being awarded for the second time or more, we required WJEC to maintain the standard set in the earlier awards. Our priority then is to ensure that appropriate standards are set and maintained over time and across all qualifications, to be fair to students past, present and future. Senior examiners at WJEC set grade boundaries using both statistical information and examples of students' work to establish where key grade boundaries should be set for each qualification.

Where the cohort of students taking the qualification is similar to previous years, we expect results to be similar. Awarding bodies produce predictions for outcomes of each qualification and outcomes are expected to be in line with these predictions. However, there are no quotas or allocations to be filled and we expect to see some variation in the outcomes. If results vary more than we might normally expect, we require evidence to support a genuine change in student attainment, whether positive or negative.

EXAMS  
360°

A closer look at grade boundaries

Where awarding bodies provide us with evidence to support an improvement or indeed a decline in student attainment, we consider whether the evidence justifies the proposed change to outcomes. This process is outlined in our data exchange document<sup>12</sup>. As the regulator, we review the award outcomes and, where an award is ‘out of tolerance’, we review the evidence submitted by the awarding body to decide whether the award is justified. In reviewing the evidence, we are mindful of the following three principles:

- 1. fairness for learners;**
- 2. public confidence in the results being issued; and**
- 3. maintenance of standards.**

The same approach to setting and maintaining standards is used by regulators in England and Northern Ireland for GCSEs and A levels. Details of the approach used by WJEC for approved qualifications in Wales can be found on WJEC’s [website](#).

The established approach will produce similar results year-on-year if the cohort for the subject remains similar in terms of its overall ability. However, when a qualification changes, there can be more year-on-year variability than usual in the results for individual schools and colleges, as they may have taken different approaches to delivering the new qualification. This variability can be due to a variety of factors, including a change in entry strategy or a change in approach to delivering a qualification. For new qualifications, familiarity with the assessment arrangements can also play a part. As expected, some variability was seen for individual schools and colleges this year.

We published a blog on how we should interpret changes in school exam results this summer. The blog reminded the public that school exam results ultimately represent the performances of the learners in the exams. These performances are influenced by the learners themselves as well as the school and other factors, such as unanticipated events. The aim of the blog was to encourage appropriate consideration of changes in exam results as part of wider evidence about the school.

## EXAMS 360°

[Who decides the grades?](#)

## BLOG

[How should we interpret changes in school exam results?](#)

<sup>12</sup><https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/wales-summer-2019-data-exchange/>

Qualifications that have either not been reformed only in England continue to be awarded across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We worked closely with the qualifications regulators in those countries (Ofqual in England and CCEA in Northern Ireland) as part of an existing three-country regulatory approach.

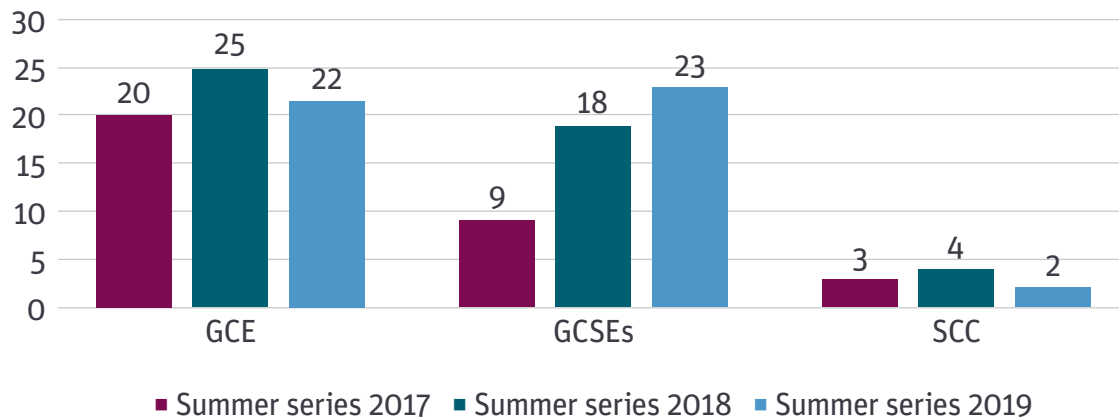
### Monitoring


Our comprehensive programme of monitoring continued with the awarding process. Again, we focused our attention on the reformed GCSEs and AS/A levels and the Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications that contribute to the Welsh Baccalaurate.

We observed meetings of awarding committees for almost all new GCSE and A level subjects. We attended 23 awarding meetings for GCSE subjects and 22 for AS and A level. We also monitored the awarding of the Skills Challenge Certificates, attending two awarding meetings.

Figure 15

**Awarding meetings observed**





Our monitoring focused on WJEC's compliance with our regulations and requirements. All the meetings we observed complied with our requirements, though there are some areas that could be improved. We wrote detailed reports of our monitoring and feedback was provided to WJEC. Where necessary, further discussions about procedures will follow.

In summer 2019, 8 GCSE qualifications were awarded out of tolerance of the predictions, at one or more key grades. Two AS/A levels were awarded out of tolerance. In some cases this resulted in outcomes above prediction at those grades, in some, they were below prediction. In all cases, we were satisfied with the rationale provided by WJEC.

## GCSE English Language

Entries for English Language summer 2019 were very different to previous summer series. The proportion of year 11 candidates sitting the qualification for the first time was much higher than in summer 2018. This was due to changes to school entry strategies linked to changes in school performance measures. In 2018 many year 11 candidates had already sat the qualification at least once by the summer of year 11, whereas in summer 2019, most of the year 11 cohort had not entered the qualification at an earlier series and were therefore entering the qualification for the first time. We considered the potential impact of this on outcomes during our preparation work with WJEC.

At the award meeting the committee proposed grade boundaries, following scrutiny of student work, which they considered to represent the appropriate standard for each key grade boundary. Although the final grade boundaries

were lower than those awarded in summer 2018, national outcomes in summer 2019 were lower than in previous series. We scrutinised the awarding process and were satisfied that the award was fair to learners.

However, the fall in best grade outcomes for the 2019 year 11 cohort of more than 4% is of concern and we want to understand the factors that may have had an impact on the outcomes and believe there is a growing need for further work. We want to explore whether the qualification is functioning as intended as well as considering the concerns expressed by the awarding committee about the standard of writing seen at award.

We will be working with WJEC and other key stakeholders to take forward this work.

## Results

On both the GCSE and AS / A level results days we published an overview of results on our website along with infographics highlighting the important themes from the data<sup>13</sup>.

### AS and A levels

The headlines for AS and A level summer 2019 results were:

1. The overall number of AS and A level qualifications taken fell again this year. To take account of this, it is important to consider the change in numbers sitting the qualifications this year.
2. Care should be taken when interpreting relatively small changes in year-on-year results due to the year-on-year changes in numbers taking the qualifications.
3. The actual number of grades awarded at A\*, A\* and A, and A\* to E was broadly stable, with small shifts which we would expect and that can be considered normal.
4. The overall percentages of A level grades awarded at both A\* and A in Wales rose. Although the percentages achieving these grades increased, it is important to consider the change in numbers sitting the qualifications this year.
5. The overall percentages of AS level grades awarded at both A and A to E in Wales were very stable in comparison to last year.



<sup>13</sup><https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/exams-360/a-360-look-at-the-exam-system/summer-2019/results-overview/>

## GCSEs

The overall Wales GCSE performance was broadly stable.

### The headlines for GCSE summer 2019 results were:

1. In Wales, the proportion of grades awarded at A\* to A and above has decreased slightly. At C and above, the proportion has increased 1.2 percentage points and at G and above, the increase was 0.8 percentage points.
2. The results published by JCQ are for exams that were sat this summer, in Wales and across the UK, by students of all ages. So, for 16-year-olds in Wales, these results do not give a full picture of all the GCSEs they have achieved, because they don't include any grades for GCSEs they may have achieved in previous exam series.
3. There was an increase in the number of entries, reflecting an increase in the population of 16-year-olds and changes to school performance measures.
4. The cohort of students sitting GCSE exams in some core subjects this summer was very different to previous years.
5. Results in English Language for 16-year-olds across the 2018/19 academic year show a drop of 4.1 percentage points at A\*-C compared to 2017/18 – once students' best grades are taken into account.
6. There is drop of 11.7 percentage points in outcomes at grade C for GCSE Welsh Second Language compared to 2018. The cohort of students sitting the new GCSE Welsh Second Language this summer is different to previous years. The new qualification is the only Welsh Second Language qualification available to schools this summer. In previous years, schools could enter students for the legacy full and short course GCSEs in Welsh Second Language or Applied Welsh Second Language.

It is important to remember that these results are only for exams sat in Wales this summer by students of all ages. They do not give a full or accurate picture of the GCSEs achieved by 16-year-olds in Wales. The cohort of students sitting GCSE exams in some core subjects this summer was very different to previous years.

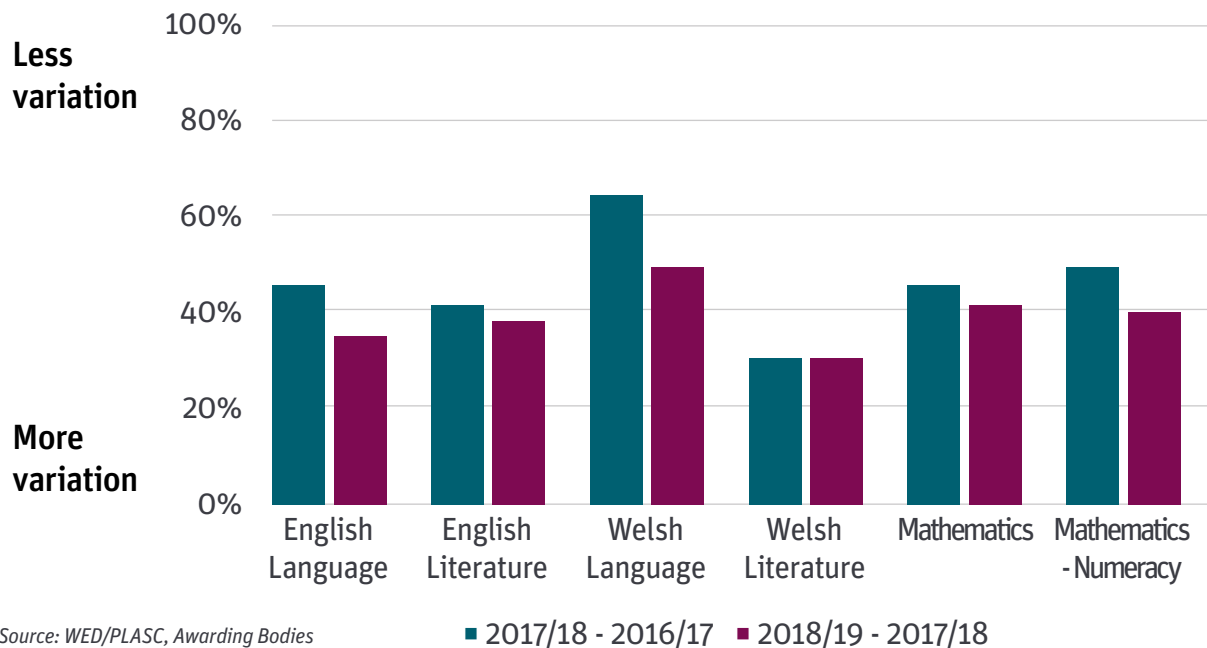
## Centre Level Results

Stakeholder feedback highlighted to us the interest centres have on the variation they see in their results. We published experimental statistics<sup>14</sup> to support centres in interpreting changes in the results and placing these context.

To ensure valid comparisons this release analysed centre level year 11 results in phase one GCSEs on a best grade basis for centres with at least twenty entries in each year. This illustrated how changes to early entry practice was associated with more variation in centre level results. For example, for GCSE English Language, a centre may be concerned that their results at C or above have change by five percentage points but looking at the release shows that 33.0% of centres saw a change of five percentage points or less in 2019-18 which is down from 45.1% in 2017-18.

**Percentage of centres that saw a change of 5 percentage points or less at Grade A\*-C.**

Figure 16



Source: WED/PLASC, Awarding Bodies

<sup>14</sup> <https://qualificationswales.org/english/publications/centre-level-results-summer-2019-wales/>



## Post results

### Incorrect results issued

As part of the incident notification process, awarding bodies must notify us of cases where incorrect results have been issued. These errors may occur due to awarding bodies' IT system issues or administrative errors. There were four incidents reported to us relating to the summer series; all were rectified, with corrected results issued to affected candidates. There were no adverse effects on any of these candidates. Awarding bodies were also required to inform us of what steps they will be taking to prevent future recurrences, wherever possible.

### Reviews of marking and moderation

We have published a statistical release for Wales only statistics on reviews of marking and moderation for GCSE and AS and A level qualifications.<sup>15</sup>

In the summer 2019 exam series, 9,355 reviews of marking were requested for GCSE assessments in Wales, compared to 8,865 last year – an increase of 5.5%. Part of this increase in review requests was due to the 8.0% increase in GCSE entries this summer.

There were 2,900 reviews requested for AS and A level assessments during the same period, compared to 2,960 in 2018, a decrease of 2.0%. Although entries fell, other factors, such as requirements for entry to Higher Education, could be influencing decisions on review requests for AS and A level.

<sup>15</sup> <https://qualificationswales.org/english/publications/reviews-of-marking-and-moderation-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-in-wales-summer-2019-exam-series/>

## INFO

### Review of marking and moderation- Summer 2019

#### Headlines

2.1% (up from 1.8%) of all GCSE grades certificated in the 2019 Summer exam series were challenged and 0.4% (up from 0.2%) were changed.

2.6% (down from 2.7%) of all GCE grades certificated in the 2019 Summer exam series were challenged and 0.4% (unchanged from last year) were changed.

The most commonly challenged grade for GCSE (A\*-G) was D (48.3% down from 58.1%). For AS and A levels, the most commonly challenged grade was grade B (37.3% up from 33.5%).

Overall, 73.4% (up from 72.3%) of GCSE and GCE reviews resulted in no mark change. It is important to note that a mark change does not necessarily result in a grade change.

At GCSE, of the reviews requested, 82.7% (down from 84.2%) resulted in no grade change. At AS and A level, 84.0% (up from 82.5%) of the reviews resulted in no grade change.

## Conclusion

Our monitoring of the preparation for, and delivery of the summer 2019 series, suggests that the exam series was successfully delivered. Generally, there were few issues that occurred which had the potential to have a significant adverse effect for learners in Wales. When issues did arise, we oversaw the awarding bodies' actions to ensure that they took appropriate action to protect learners, maintain standards and issued timely and accurate results. We closely monitored the standard setting in the reformed Wales-only GCSE, AS and A level qualifications, and we are content that standards have been appropriately carried forward.

We continuously review our approach to regulating and monitoring the delivery and award of general qualifications. Following the 2019 summer exams series we have identified areas to undertake further work. Some of this work is related to exploration of the reformed GCSEs in Modern Foreign Languages and other work will consider aspects of GCSE in English Language. Ongoing work will continue with the aim of ensuring that future exam series will continue to be successfully delivered.

We retain our focus on WJEC's work, and will check preparations for the future awarding of the Wales GCSEs and A levels. We will review WJEC's readiness for the challenges and risks identified. We will adapt our programme of monitoring on the basis of findings of any evaluation and research work to inform actions as necessary. We will run a questionnaire of some sort again in summer 2020 for students and teachers to feed back on the qualifications.

We are already discussing with WJEC, the other awarding bodies and fellow regulators the arrangements for the summer 2020 series. We will be using information gathered during summer 2019 and ongoing research to inform our discussions. As in previous years, we will publish our approach to the summer 2020 examination series.

### Our future work includes:

- Updating the 2019-20 monitoring plan and refining our regulatory processes
- Evaluating current methodologies used to award qualifications and identifying opportunities for further research into potential improvements
- Investigating methodologies for monitoring comparability over time both within Wales and across the UK.
- Further consideration of relevant issues in GCSE English Language, GCSE Computer Science and GCSE MFL.
- We will continue to work closely with other regulators and awarding bodies to reduce the risks of malpractice, to protect our exam system.