

Appeals for GCSE, AS and A level in Wales: Summer 2020 exam series



10 December 2020

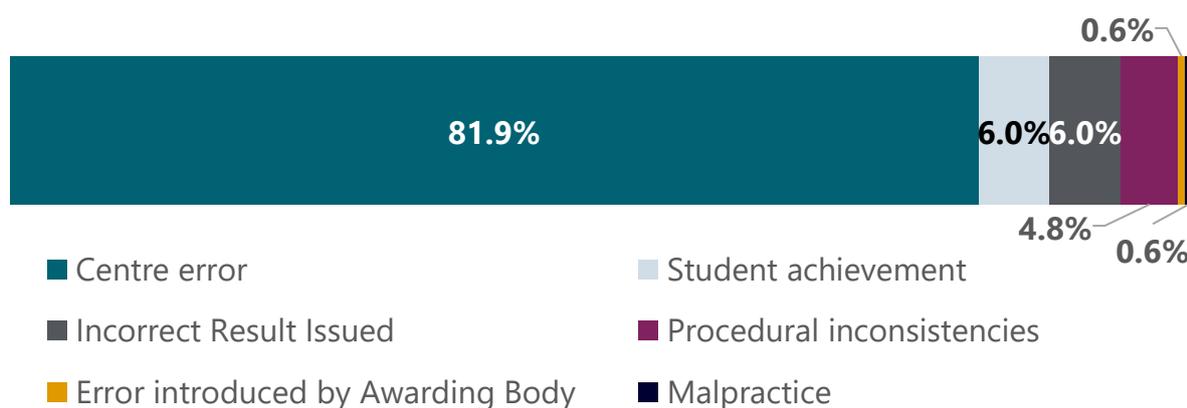
About this release

This official statistics release provides information on the number of GCSE and GCE (AS and A level) appeals made following the summer 2020 exam series, and the number of GCSE and GCE qualification grades challenged and changed as a result.

Key points

- Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic there have been substantial changes to the awarding and appeals processes. These changes mean that users should interpret differences between 2020 figures and other series with caution. This release describes the appeals in summer and additional data is available in the associated data tables.
- These statistics do not include data on appeals which were withdrawn. This is consistent with previous years.
- There were 166 GCSE and GCE appeals submitted following the summer 2020 exam series, 148 of which were upheld.
- 200 GCSE and GCE grades were challenged and 120 grades changed as a result of an appeal in summer 2020. 0.031% of all summer 2020 GCSE and GCE grades – about 1 in 3,300 - were changed due to an appeal.

Figure 1: Nature of appeal



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 9

Appeals relating to centre error (81.9%) were the most common in summer 2020.

Quick Links	Introduction	Statistics	Glossary	Background
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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 collected and reported on data for Wales for general qualifications. Before 2017/18, Ofqual collected and published data for Wales.

In this release, we present data on the number of appeals made to awarding bodies for the summer 2020 exam series. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic there have been substantial changes to the awarding and appeals processes. These changes mean that that users should interpret differences between 2020 figures and other series with caution. This release describes the appeals in summer 2020 and additional data, for previous years, is available in the associated data tables.

Following our user engagement exercise, we have included additional data tables which have statistics produced on an academic year basis, as opposed to summer series only.

In 2019 the target timescale to complete a preliminary appeal from the receipt of the application was changed from five to six weeks. This release uses the new timescale and revises the timescale statistics previously published for summer 2019. Also, where the grade was missing or unknown either before or after the appeal, this is counted as an appeal and a grade challenged, but not as a grade changed, nor are these cases included in the grade change magnitude statistics. This revises some previously published statistics. For this reason, and also because one appeal can challenge multiple grades and lead to several, or no, grade changes, the total number of appeals may not equal the total number of grades changed.

Statistics

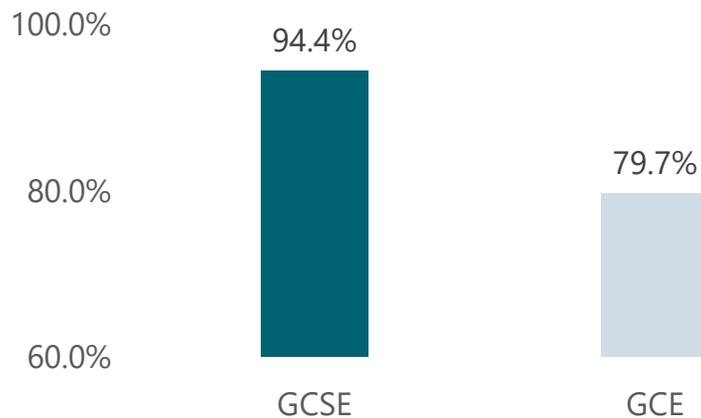
Number of appeals received, and proportion of appeals upheld

How many appeals were there in summer 2020?

Due to the substantial impact of COVID-19 in the appeals process, users should interpret differences between 2020 figures and other series with caution. This release presents statistics on the summer 2020 appeals, but statistics for previous years, including on a full academic year basis, are available in the data tables published alongside this release.

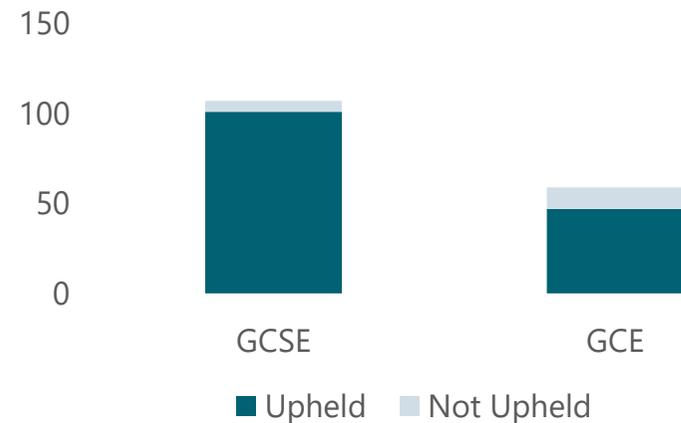
The number of appeals received following the 2020 summer series was 107 for GCSE and 59 for GCE (Figure 3). The likelihood of an appeal being upheld was 94.4% for GCSEs and 79.7% for GCEs (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Proportion of appeals upheld, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in tables 1 and 3

Figure 3: Number of GCSE and GCE appeals received, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in tables 1 and 3

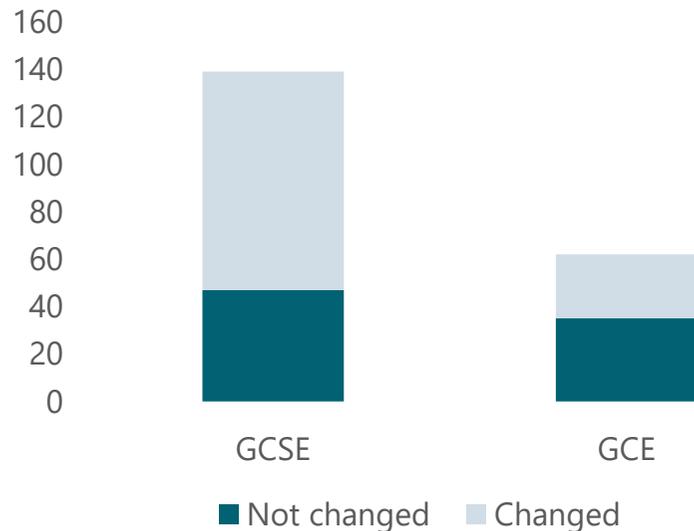
Grades challenged and changed

How many grades were challenged and how many were changed?

A single appeal may comprise of one or more qualification grades being contested. An upheld appeal may result in a grade change for some, all, or none of the associated qualification grades. A candidate may be involved in more than one appeal. In summer 2020, there were 195 Wales candidates whose grades were involved in an appeal. Only 0.031% of the 388,255 qualification grades certified in Wales during summer 2020 were changed as a result of an appeal, which is around one change for every 3,300 grades.

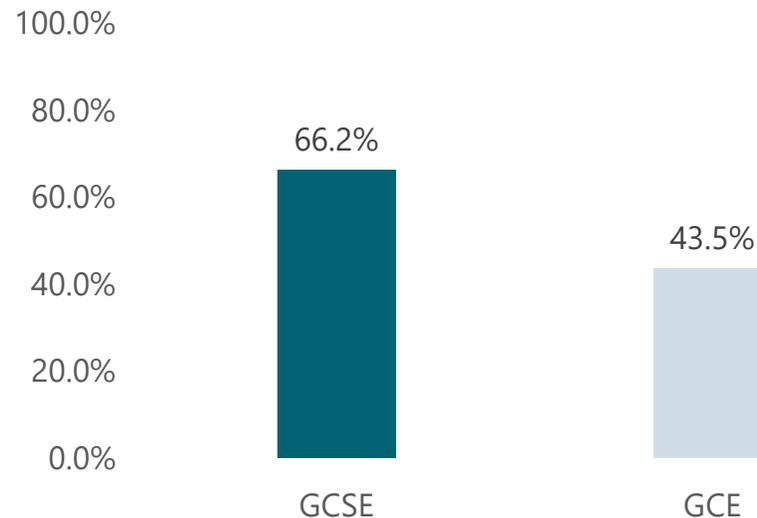
The number of qualification grades challenged was 140 for GCSE and 60 for GCE. Of these 66.2% were changed for GCSE and 43.5% were changed for GCE.

Figure 4: GCSE and GCE grades challenged, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in tables 1 and 3

Figure 5: Percentage of grades challenged which were changed, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in tables 1 and 3

Completion within awarding bodies target timescales

Are awarding bodies completing appeals on time?

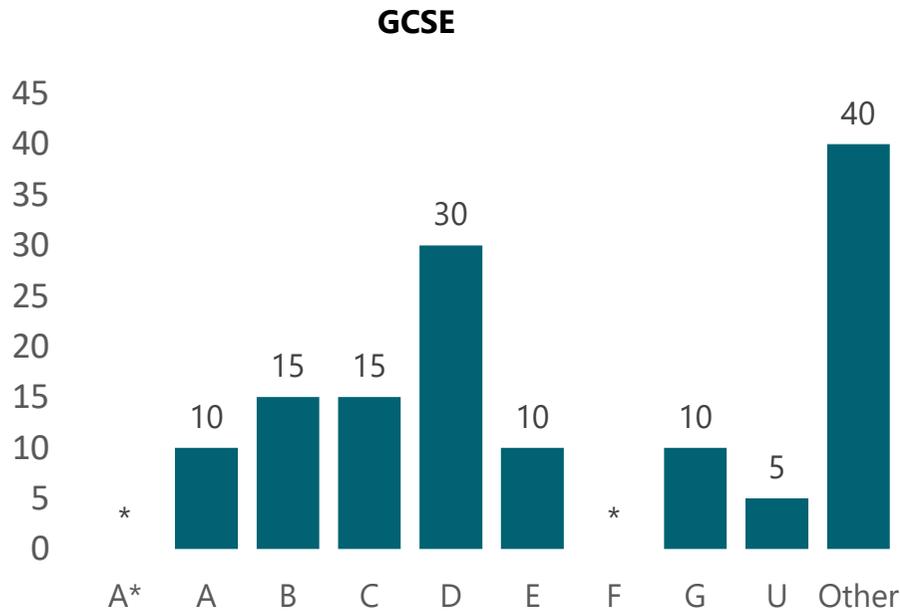
Awarding bodies have a target timescale of six weeks (prior to 2019 this was five weeks) to complete a preliminary appeal from the receipt of the application, and ten weeks to complete an appeal hearing from the receipt of a request for an appeal hearing. Where a preliminary appeal has progressed to an appeal hearing, each stage of the appeal has been counted separately.

In summer 2020, all preliminary appeals and appeals hearings were completed within the target timescale for GCSEs. For GCEs, 88.5% of preliminary appeals were completed within the target timescale, and all appeal hearings were completed within the target timescale.

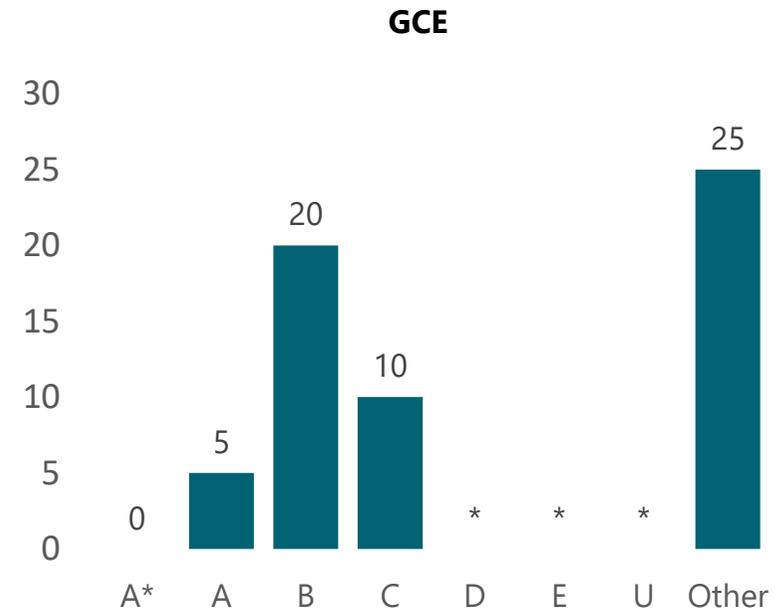
Grades challenged at appeal

Do appeals tend to be targeted at particular grades?

Figure 6: GCSE and GCE grades challenged at appeal, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 11



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 11

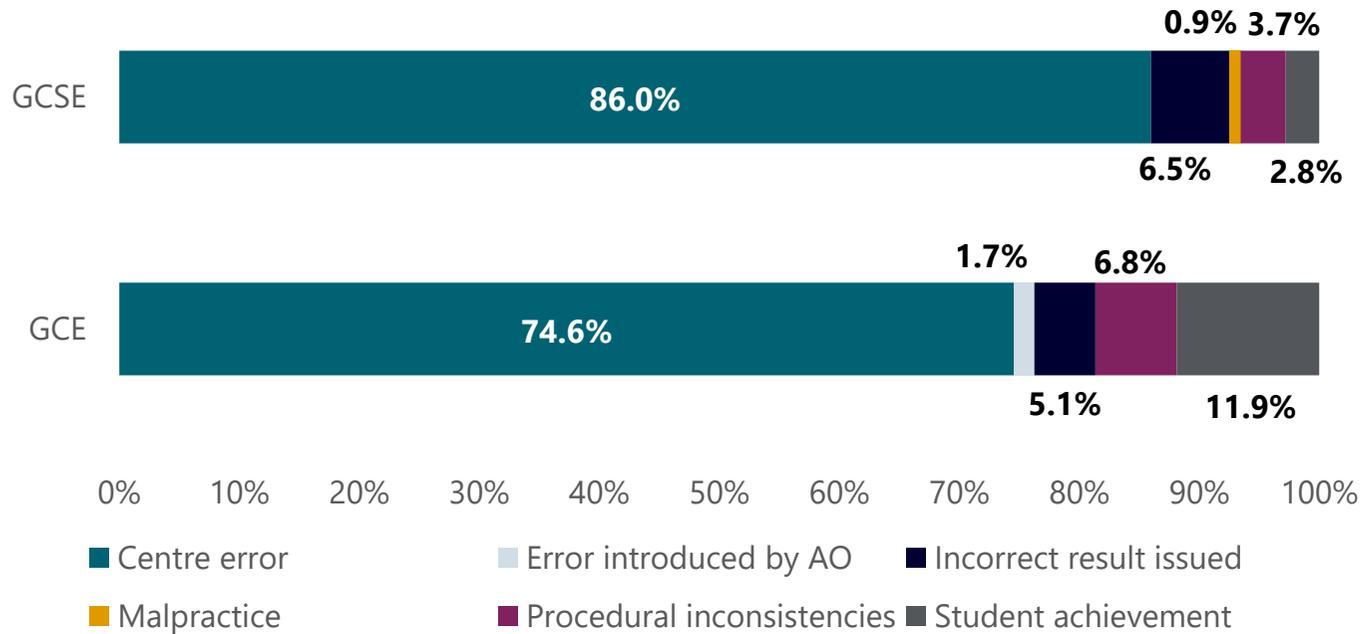
Where an appeal has been made relating to a double award qualification, each grade has been counted separately. For example, where the grade challenged is CD, this has been counted as one challenge at grade C and one challenge at grade D. The 'Other' grade category relates to cases where there were no pre-appeal grades, or for GCSEs using the 9-1 grading scale. D was the most commonly appealed GCSE grade (20.1%) in summer 2020, followed by B (10.8%). For GCEs, grade B was the most likely GCE grades to be challenged through an appeal in summer 2020 (29.0%).

Nature of appeals

What aspect of the qualification system generates the most appeals?

In summer 2020 an appeal could be made for a range of reasons. Appeals relating to centre error were the most common type of appeal in summer 2020 for GCSE (86.0%) and GCE (74.6%). The second most common reason for appeals was incorrect result issued (6.5%) for GCSE and student achievement (11.9%) for GCE.

Figure 7: Nature of appeals, summer 2020



Source: QW data collection from awarding bodies, data available in table 9

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 2017](#) which named Qualifications Wales as one of the bodies that are in scope of the [Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007](#). We have developed our processes to ensure we are meeting fully our obligations as an official statistics producer, including complying with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#), allowing this statistical release to be published formally as official statistics.

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 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.

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. However, in summer 2020 there were no exams and so no marks in the awarding process. For this reason, this release has no statistics on mark changes.

Following the cancellation of exams in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the JCQ appeals guidance has been changed. As laid out in JCQ guidance, 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 qualifications¹ 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. For the summer 2020 exam series additional categories of appeals were added:

- **Centre error** – The Head of Centre believes an administrative or procedural error was made in submitting the centre assessment data to WJEC
- **Error introduced by awarding body** – The Head of Centre believes that WJEC introduced an error into the centre assessment data submitted to it
- **Incorrect result issued** – The Head of Centre believes that a result issued by WJEC was incorrectly allocated and / or communicated to a learner
- **Procedural inconsistencies** – That there was some other procedural failing on the part of WJEC
- **Student achievement** - The awarding body was asked to consider evidence of previous student achievement, for example, mock examination results

Four awarding bodies offered both GCSE and GCE qualifications in Wales in the summer 2020 exam series:

¹ GCSE English Language, GCSE English Literature, GCSE Mathematics, GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy, GCSE Welsh Language and GCSE Welsh Literature

- 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

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 appeals. 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.

Appeals

Our [Standard Conditions of Recognition for GCSE and GCE qualifications](#) 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 guidance](#) that meets the requirements of qualification regulators in all three UK countries.

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 qualifications² 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.

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

² GCSE English Language, GCSE English Literature, GCSE Mathematics, GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy, GCSE Welsh Language and GCSE Welsh Literature

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) 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.

Qualification Reforms

Following a [Welsh Government review of qualifications for 14-19-year-olds](#) 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 website](#).

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

From summer 2018, AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC have provided disaggregated data on appeals for GCSE (all full courses, short courses, applied and double awards), AS and A level assessments. 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 have been 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 2020 appeals, this was 19 November 2020.

Geographical Coverage

This release presents data on GCSE, AS and A level appeals of marking for the summer 2020 exam series for centres located in Wales.

Revisions

Once published, data on the number of appeals 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 [Statistical Outputs Policy](#), 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. Qualifications Wales uses these statistics to monitor the qualification system.

Related statistics and publications

Further statistics on qualifications in Wales, and the UK more widely, can be found in the links below:

- [Qualifications Wales](#)
- [Welsh Government](#)
- [Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation](#)
- [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment \(CCEA\) Regulation](#)
- [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#)

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

Next update

April 2022 (provisional).

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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