

GCSE and A level enquiries about results: Subject level analyses

Summer 2015 exam series



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Introduction

Each exam series, Ofqual collects summary data relating to enquiries about results from the five¹ exam boards offering GCSE and A levels in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas, in order to produce official statistics reports². Following the exam series in summer 2015, Ofqual made two additional data requests to exam boards for the first time. Unit/subcomponent level data³ was requested for 1) all enquiry about result events and 2) enquiry about result events resulting in a change of two or more grades. This report describes analyses of the first dataset request; all events at a unit/subcomponent level⁴.

Unit/subcomponent level data allows for a more detailed investigation of behaviour relating to enquiries about results than available in the official statistics release, where the figures are reported at an overall level. This report therefore provides an overview of the number of enquiries made by subject for GCSE, AS and A levels, following the summer 2015 exam series. Also presented at subject level are the number of qualification grade changes, distributions of mark changes, and distributions of original qualification grades. This report also considers differences in the percentage of qualification grades challenged and changed across subjects and school⁵ types.

Although an overview covering all the subjects for which enquiries were submitted is given at the start of the next section, this report mainly focuses on English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects for GCSE and those subjects referred to by the Russell Group of Universities as 'facilitating subjects' for AS and A level⁶.

As this is the first time this data has been collected, it should be noted that no conclusions can be drawn as to whether the trends reported here are typical or not. We will be able to draw more informed inferences of any trends in the data over the coming years, when this data is collected after future exam series.

¹ AQA, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR), Pearson, and WJEC.

² E.g. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/512899/2016-03-31-enquiries-about-results-summer-2015.pdf

³ Enquiries are submitted at unit level, or, in cases where units have subcomponents with their own assessment, at subcomponent level.

⁴ Analysis of the second dataset can be found in *Analysis: grade change of 2 or more at* <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/markings-reviews-appeals-grade-boundaries-and-code-of-practice>

⁵ 'Schools' refers to both schools and colleges.

⁶ Please see the background notes section of this report for more information.

Results

Throughout this report, where the number of enquiries are reported, figures relate to the total number of unit and subcomponent enquiries. Where the number of qualification grades challenged are reported, figures relate to the number of qualifications where one or more enquiries have been submitted⁷.

Overview of all subjects

Figures 1 to 3 show the percentage of grades awarded in each GCSE (Figure 1), A level (Figure 2) and AS (Figure 3) subject that were challenged (blue lines) and changed⁸ (grey lines) following the enquiry process. These figures show large variation in the percentage of grades challenged across subjects, with higher percentages in the humanities⁹, English, and modern foreign languages¹⁰ (MFLs), compared to mathematics and the sciences. This trend is seen across all qualification levels. The percentage of qualification grades changed is more consistent across subjects and qualification levels, never rising above 3% of the total number of qualifications awarded.

⁷ Multiple enquiries can be submitted for the same qualification if the school decides to challenge the result of more than one unit/subcomponent for that qualification.

⁸ Throughout this report, where the number of grade changes are reported, these figures do not include students whose grades are still to be determined – see the background notes section of this report for more information.

⁹ History and geography.

¹⁰ French, German, and Spanish.

Figure 1. Percentage of GCSE grades challenged and changed for each subject.

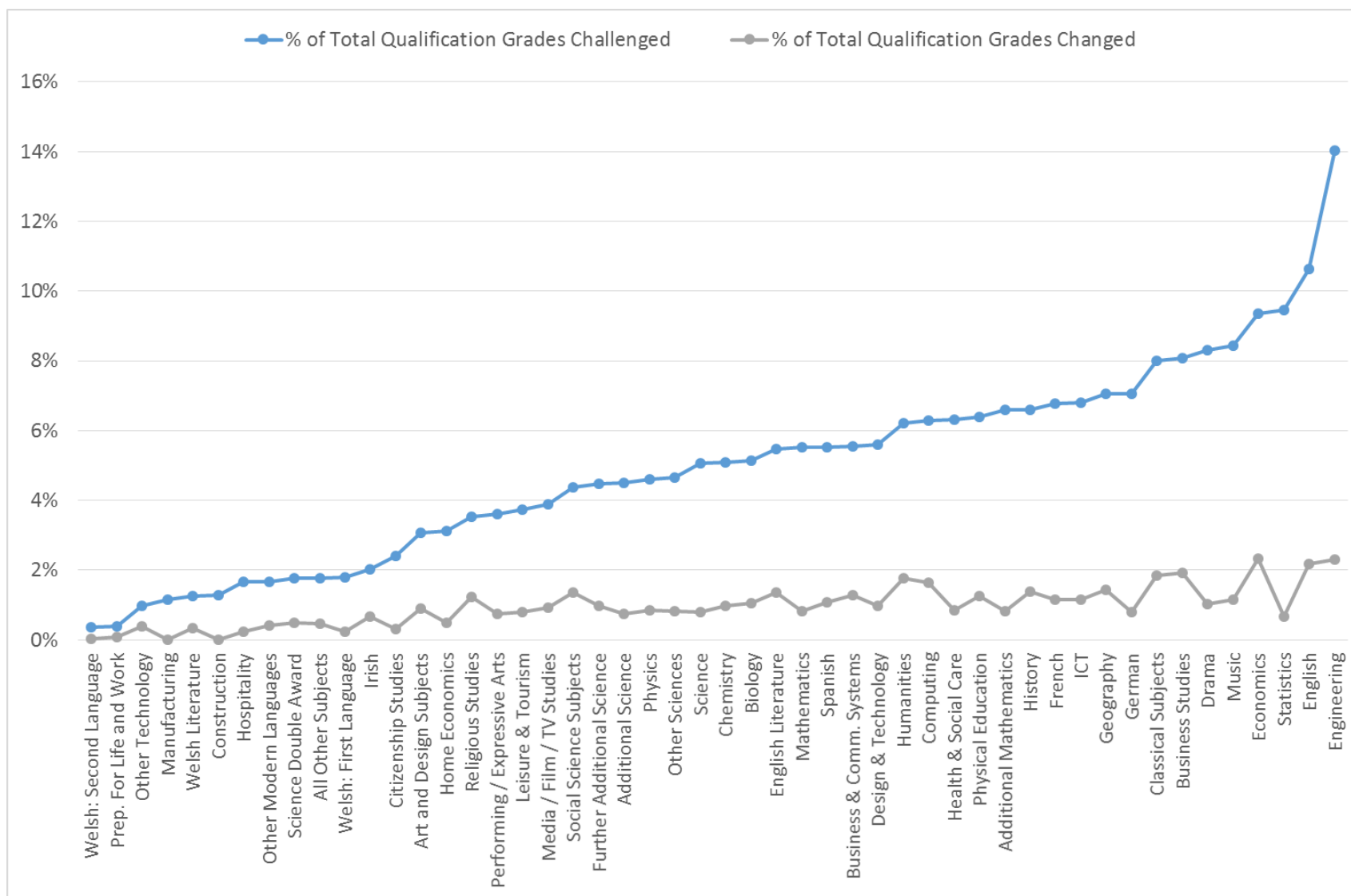


Figure 2. Percentage of A level grades challenged and changed for each subject.

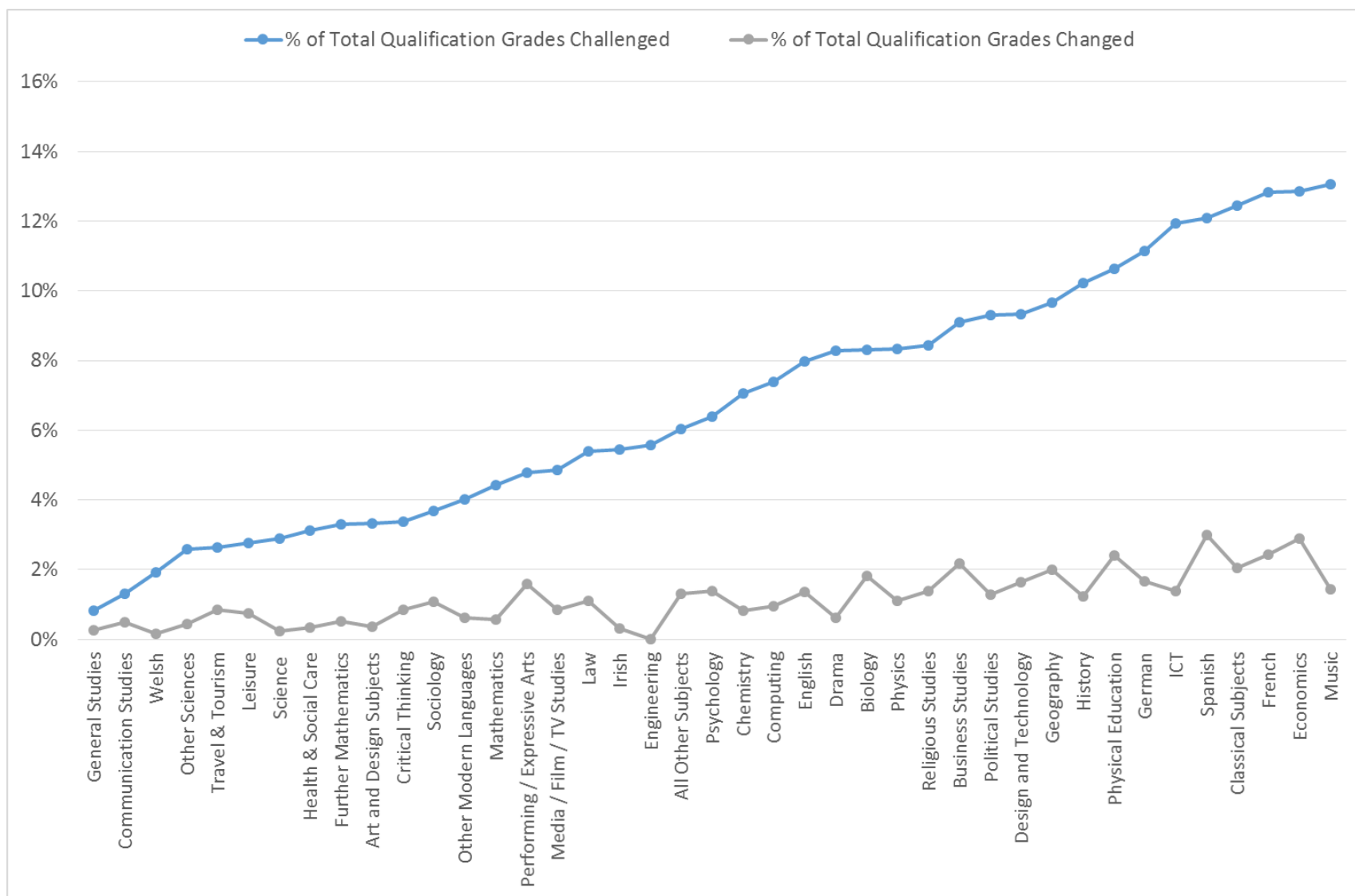
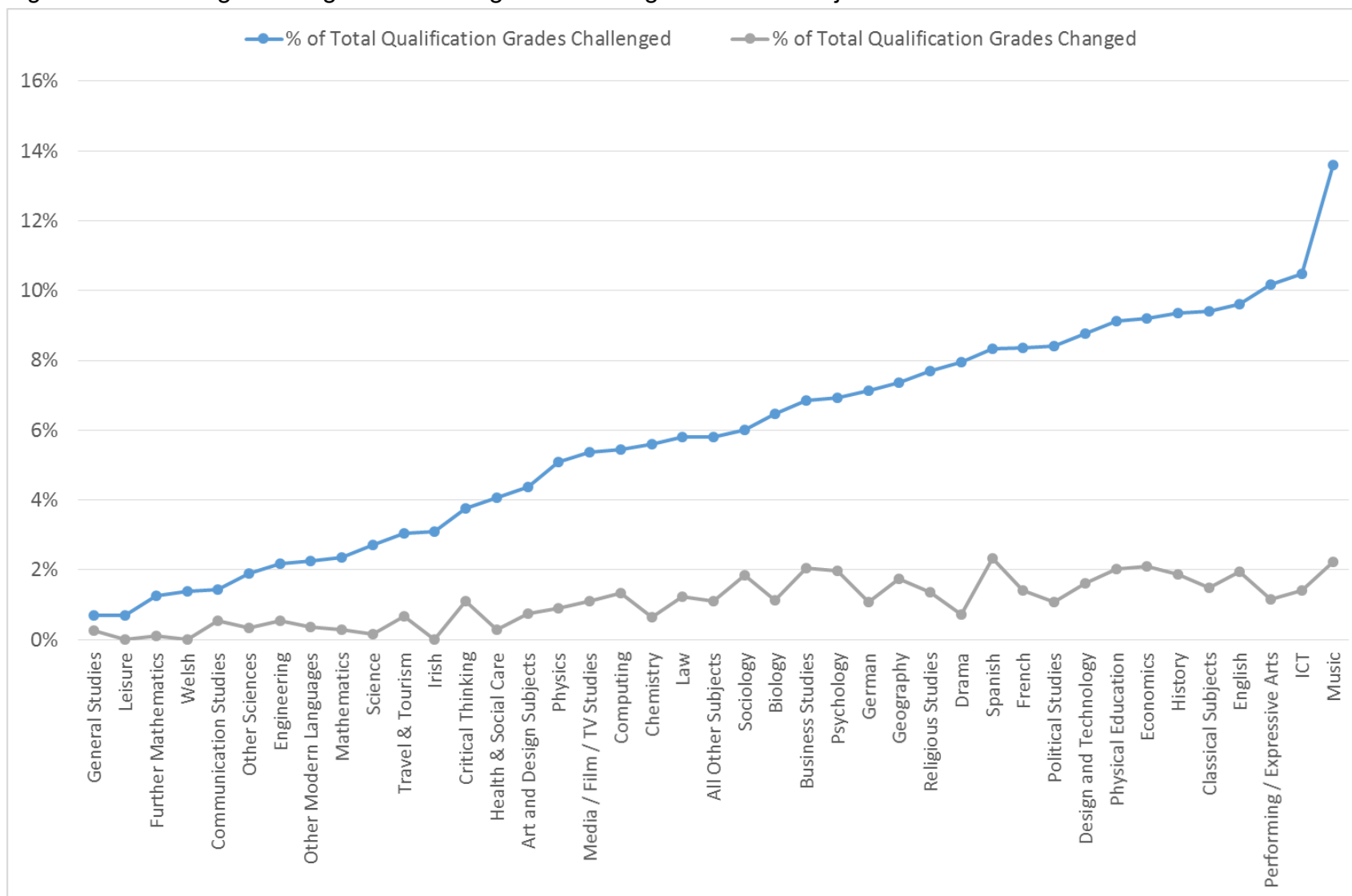


Figure 3. Percentage of AS grades challenged and changed for each subject.



Number of enquiries about results by service type

There were 344,862 enquires submitted for GCSE EBacc subjects following the summer 2015 exam series and 115,762 enquires submitted for AS and A level 'facilitating subjects'. Tables 1 and 2 show the breakdown of these figures across subject and service type. As shown, the majority of enquiries across all qualification levels were service 2 (priority and non-priority) requests.

Table 1. *The number of GCSE enquiries per subject across each service type.*

Subject	GCSE Service			Total
	1	2	3	
English/English language	380	50,869	12,971	64,220
English literature	144	30,552	3,743	34,439
Mathematics	707	77,523	0	78,230
Biology	56	10,440	1,540	12,036
Chemistry	58	9,191	1,858	11,107
Physics	74	9,075	1,237	10,386
Science	183	29,554	6,049	35,786
Additional science	167	22,741	4,246	27,154
Geography	96	16,108	5,873	22,077
History	109	18,933	4,264	23,306
French	118	9,550	3,624	13,292
German	25	3,558	1,004	4,587
Spanish	33	5,182	1,063	6,278
Total	2,150	293,276	47,472	342,898

Table 2. *The number of AS and A level enquiries per subject across each service type.*

Subject	AS Service					A Level Service				
	1	2	P2	3	Total	1	2	P2	3	Total
English	61	10,417	660	1,404	12,542	21	4,252	2,440	1,084	7,797
Mathematics	71	5,981	560	0	6,612	42	4,189	3,562	23	7,816
Further Mathematics	2	414	72	0	488	10	451	451	0	912
Biology	68	8,134	680	855	9,737	54	4,287	3,536	632	8,509
Chemistry	81	6,714	571	145	7,511	39	3,605	3,308	59	7,011
Physics	28	3,856	293	510	4,687	46	2,585	2,246	639	5,516
Geography	45	4,979	325	0	5,349	17	3,224	2,009	0	5,250
History	40	9,052	470	0	9,562	13	2,919	2,030	1,494	6,456
Classical Subjects	3	1,044	56	0	1,103	4	678	513	0	1,195
French	7	1,585	113	0	1,705	5	1,101	734	0	1,840
German	3	527	42	0	572	3	403	221	0	627
Spanish	2	1,332	94	0	1,428	5	863	669	0	1,537
Total	411	54,035	3,936	2,914	61,296	259	28,557	21,719	3,931	54,466

Number of grades challenged and changed

Tables 3 to 5 show a breakdown of the number of enquiries, grades challenged, and grades changed across subjects and qualification levels¹¹. At GCSE, English/English language had the highest percentage of grades challenged, followed by the humanities, French, and German. Mathematics, English literature, Spanish, and the sciences had the lowest percentages of grades challenged. At AS and A level, the highest percentage of grades challenged were in the MFLs, classics, and humanities and, at AS, English.

In terms of the percentage of grades changed, as may be expected, there was a general trend across all qualification levels such that the percentage of grades changed was slightly higher in subjects where the assessment is more subjective in nature (English, humanities, classics, and MFLs), than in subjects where the assessment is more objective (mathematics and the sciences).

At GCSE, the percentage of grades changed was highest in English and English language, followed by the humanities. The MFLs and sciences had similar percentages of grades changed.

At AS and A level, the percentage of grades changed was highest in Spanish and lowest in mathematics, further mathematics, physics and chemistry. The order of the other subjects in between (French, German, the humanities, classics, English, and biology) differs somewhat between AS and A level. Notably, English ranks second highest in terms of the percentage of AS grades changed with 2% of entries receiving a grade change following enquiries being made. However, this is not the case at A level where English ranks much lower (seventh out of twelve subjects) compared to other subjects in terms of the percentage of grades changed with 1.4% of entries receiving grade changes. Across all qualification levels, biology ranks higher than any of the other sciences in terms of the percentage of grades changed. This is most notable at A level, where it is the subject with the fifth highest percentage of grades changed - 1.8%.

¹¹ In these tables, the number of GCSE qualifications awarded in each subject is taken from the Joint Council for Qualification's (JCQ) GCSE results day report: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcses/2015/gcse-and-entry-level-certificate-results-summer-2015>. The number of AS and A level qualifications awarded in each subject is taken from JCQ's AS and A level results day report: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels/2015/a-as-and-aea-results-summer-2015>

Table 3. Number and percentage of GCSE grades challenged and changed relative to the total number of qualifications awarded.

GCSE subjects	Enquiries	Qual. grades challenged	Qual. grades changed	Total qual. awarded	% of total qual. grades challenged	% of total qual. grades changed	% of qual. grades challenged that were changed
English/English Language	64,220	55,335	11,390	520,524	10.6%	2.2%	20.6%
English Literature	34,439	23,892	5,960	436,546	5.5%	1.4%	24.9%
Mathematics	78,230	42,058	6,296	761,230	5.5%	0.8%	15.0%
Biology	12,036	7,157	1,482	139,199	5.1%	1.1%	20.7%
Chemistry	11,107	6,807	1,304	133,618	5.1%	1.0%	19.2%
Physics	10,386	6,165	1,148	133,610	4.6%	0.9%	18.6%
Science	35,786	20,036	3,126	395,484	5.1%	0.8%	15.6%
Additional Science	27,154	14,953	2,478	332,960	4.5%	0.7%	16.6%
Geography	22,077	16,066	3,272	228,075	7.0%	1.4%	20.4%
History	23,306	16,325	3,407	247,040	6.6%	1.4%	20.9%
French	13,292	10,694	1,813	157,699	6.8%	1.1%	17.0%
German	4,587	3,812	437	54,037	7.1%	0.8%	11.5%
Spanish	6,278	5,019	988	90,782	5.5%	1.1%	19.7%
Total	342,898	228,319	43,101	3,630,804	6.3%	1.2%	18.9%

Table 4. Number and percentage of A level grades challenged and changed relative to the total number of qualifications awarded.

AS level subjects	Enquiries	Qual. grades challenged	Qual. grades changed	Total qual. awarded	% of total qual. grades challenged	% of total qual. grades changed	% of qual. grades challenged that were changed
English	7,797	7,144	1219	89,499	8.0%	1.4%	17.1%
Mathematics	7,816	4,093	517	92,711	4.4%	0.6%	12.6%
Further mathematics	912	494	77	14,993	3.3%	0.5%	15.6%
Biology	8,509	5,254	1143	63,275	8.3%	1.8%	21.8%
Chemistry	7,011	3,715	437	52,644	7.1%	0.8%	11.8%
Physics	5,516	3,024	401	36,287	8.3%	1.1%	13.3%
Geography	5,250	3,596	739	37,195	9.7%	2.0%	20.6%
History	6,456	5,713	687	55,848	10.2%	1.2%	12.0%
Classical subjects	1,195	826	136	6,633	12.5%	2.1%	16.5%
French	1,840	1,326	251	10,328	12.8%	2.4%	18.9%
German	627	447	67	4,009	11.1%	1.7%	15.0%
Spanish	1,537	1,052	261	8,694	12.1%	3.0%	24.8%
Total	54,466	36,684	5,935	472,116	7.8%	1.3%	16.2%

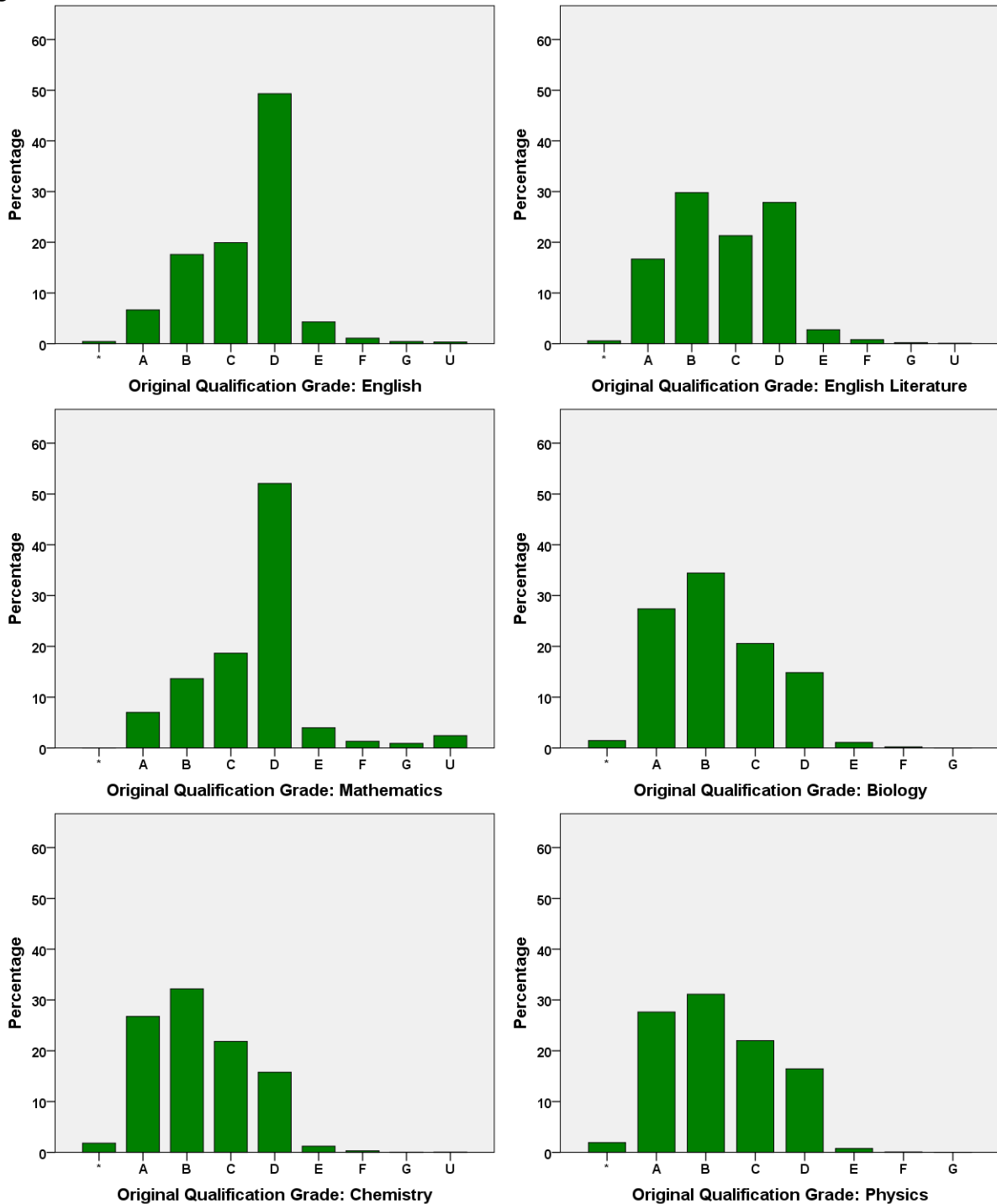
Table 5. Number and percentage of AS grades challenged and changed relative to the total number of qualifications awarded.

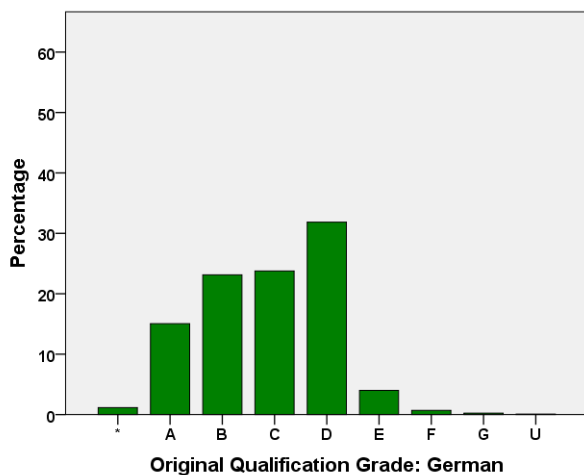
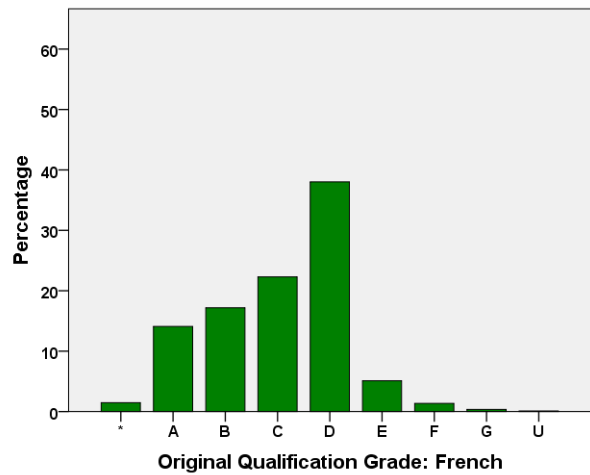
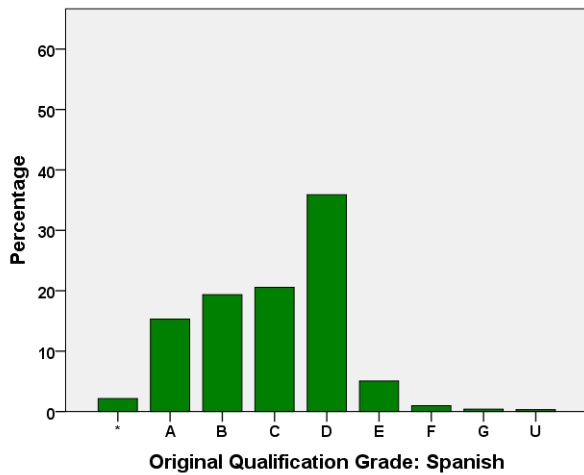
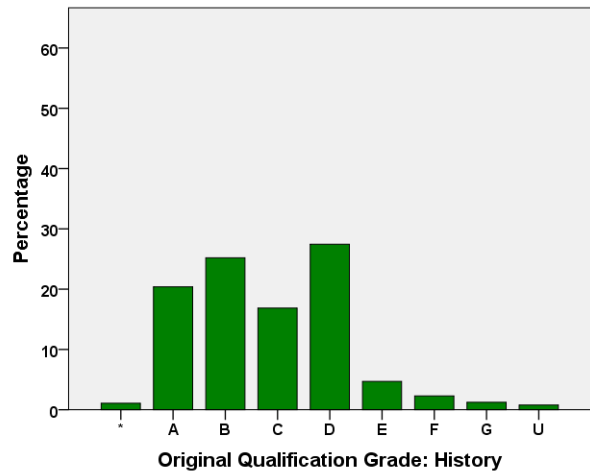
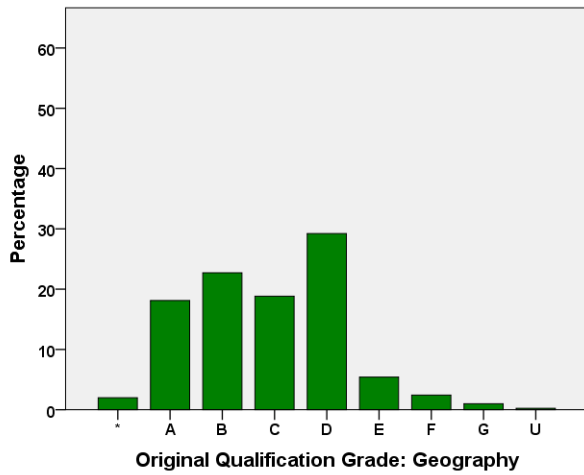
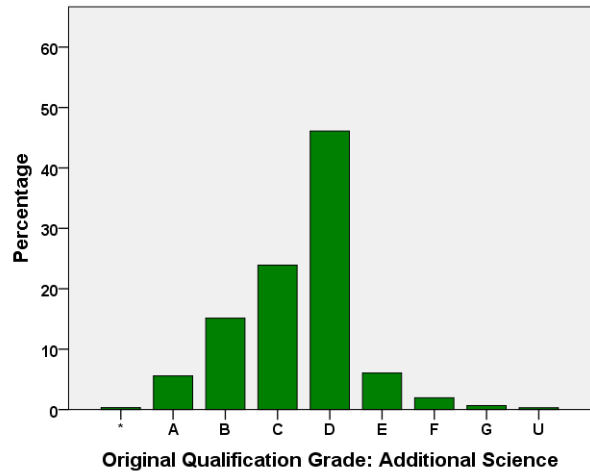
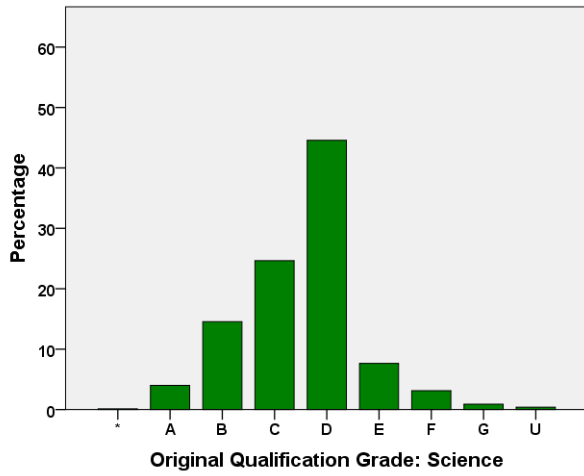
AS subjects	Enquiries	Qual. grades challenged	Qual. grades changed	Total qual. awarded	% of Total qual. grades challenged	% of total qual. grades changed	% of Qual. grades challenged that were changed
English	12,542	11,970	2,427	124,452	9.6%	2.0%	20.3%
Mathematics	6,612	3,907	456	165,311	2.4%	0.3%	11.7%
Further mathematics	488	343	31	27,034	1.3%	0.1%	9.0%
Biology	9,737	6,716	1,168	103,859	6.5%	1.1%	17.4%
Chemistry	7,511	4,902	570	87,621	5.6%	0.7%	11.6%
Physics	4,687	3,283	585	64,377	5.1%	0.9%	17.8%
Geography	5,349	4,115	979	55,801	7.4%	1.8%	23.8%
History	9,562	7,556	1,513	80,694	9.4%	1.9%	20.0%
Classical subjects	1,103	847	134	9,013	9.4%	1.5%	15.8%
French	1,705	1,415	238	16,917	8.4%	1.4%	16.8%
German	572	474	72	6,645	7.1%	1.1%	15.2%
Spanish	1,428	1,167	327	14,009	8.3%	2.3%	28.0%
Total	61,296	46,695	8,500	755,733	6.2%	1.1%	18.2%

Original qualification grades subject to enquiry

The enquiries about results official statistical release showed that, for GCSE, schools submitted more enquiries for students whose original grade was a D than for any other grade. As Figure 4 shows, this trend is true for all EBacc subjects apart from English literature, biology, chemistry, and physics, where more enquiries were associated with an original qualification grade B. This is likely to reflect the ability profile of the students who typically take these subjects.

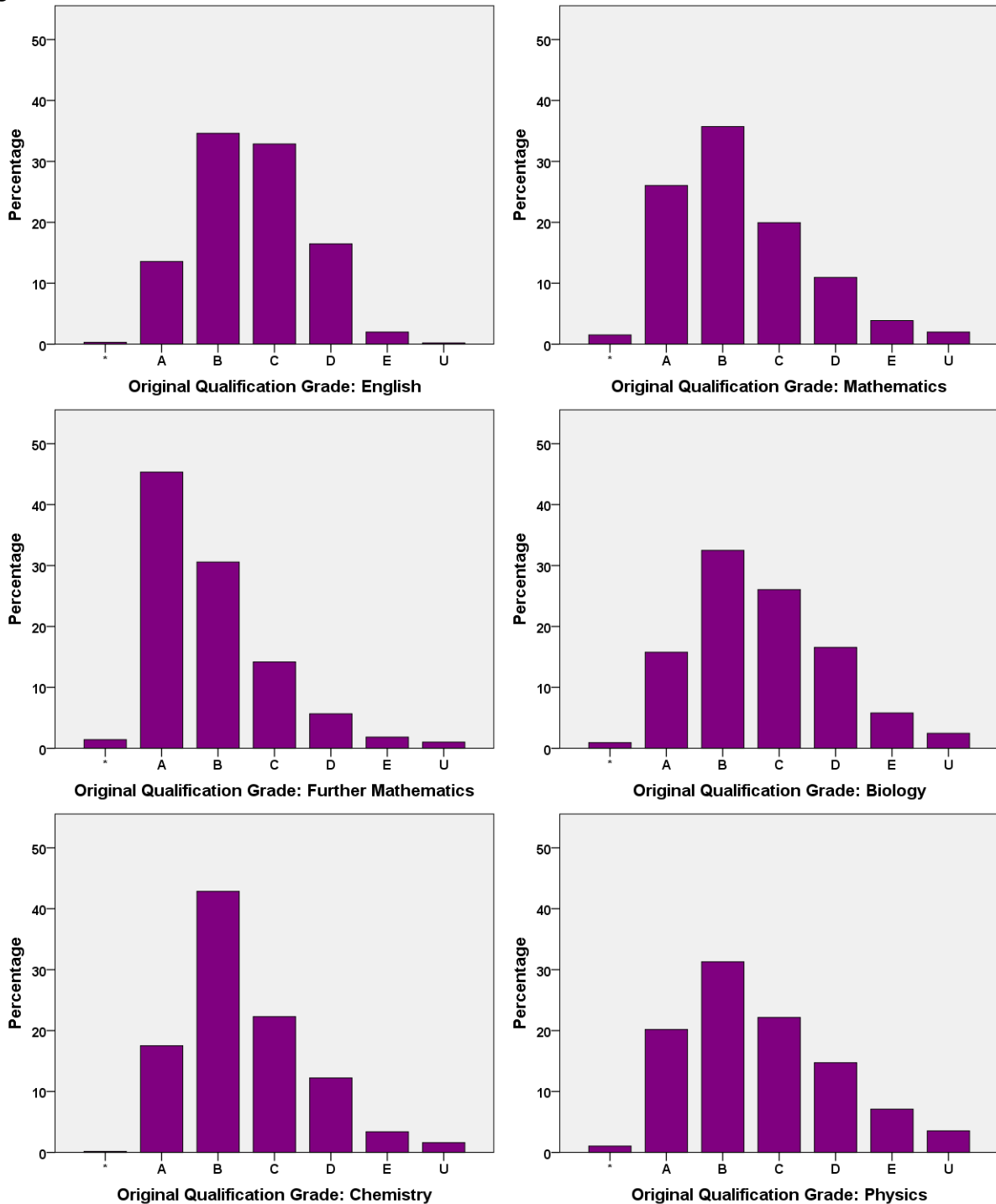
Figure 4. Percentage of enquiries associated with each original GCSE qualification grade.



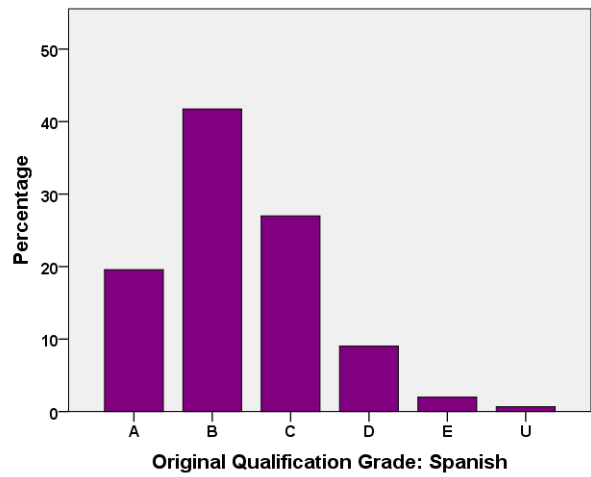
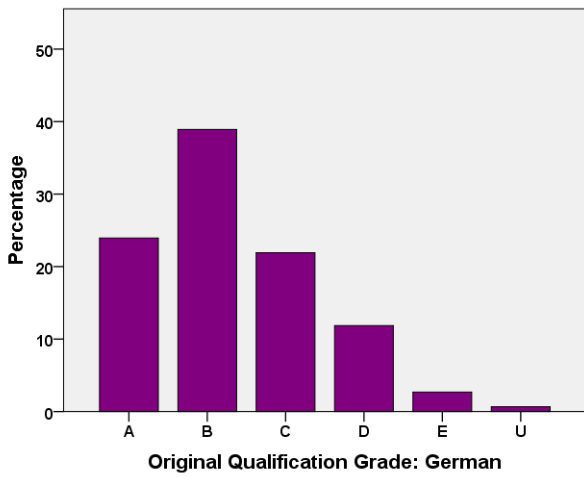
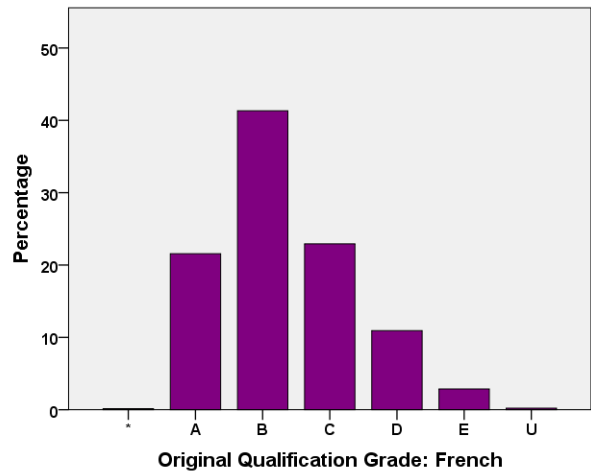
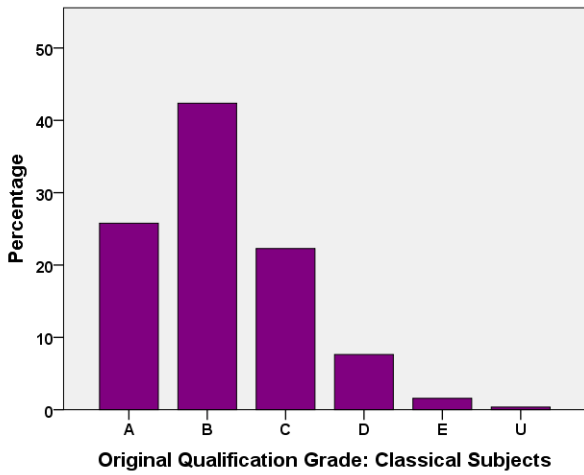
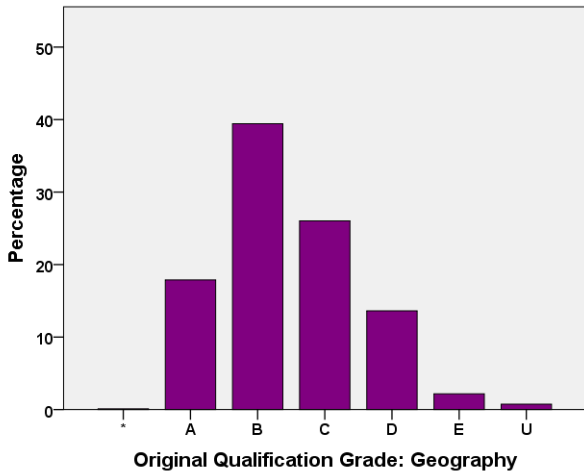


For A Level, more enquiries were associated with an original qualification grade B than any other grade, apart from further mathematics, where 45.3% of enquiries were associated with an original qualification grade A (see Figure 5). Again, this is likely to reflect the ability profile of students taking further mathematics.

Figure 5. Percentage of enquiries associated with each original A level qualification grade¹².

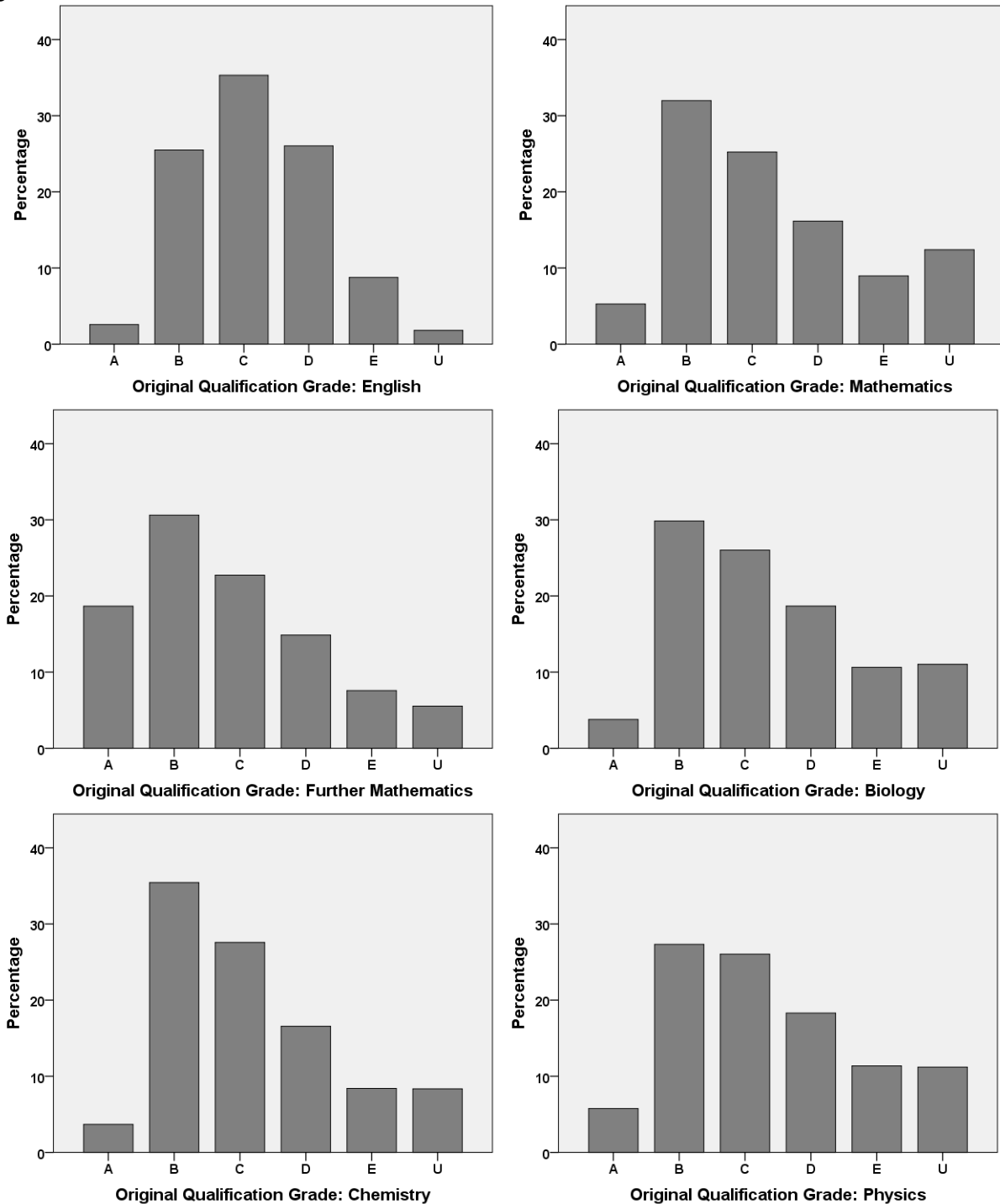


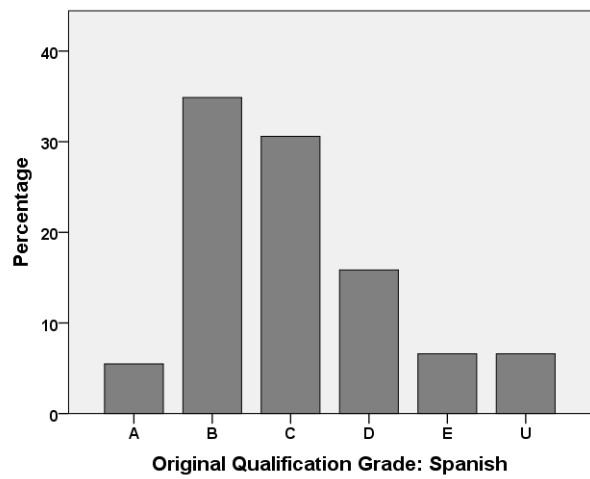
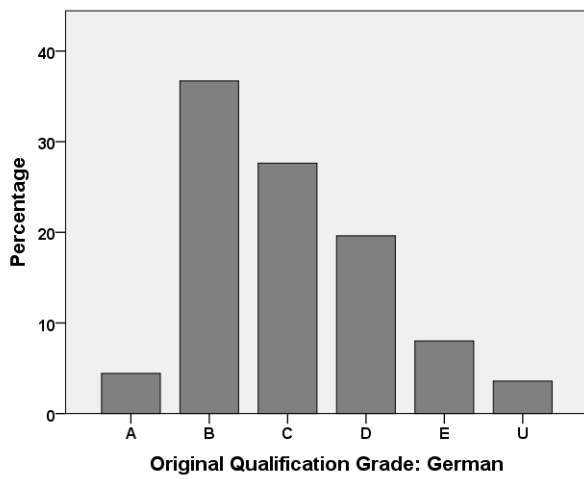
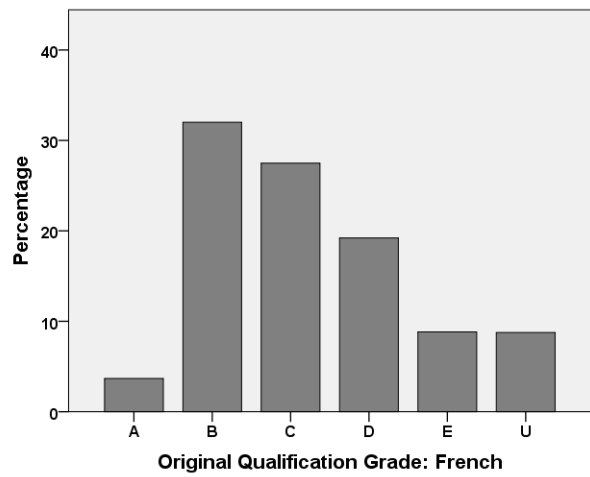
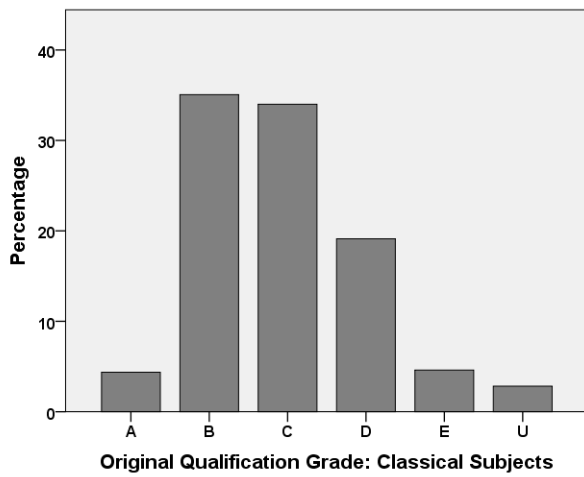
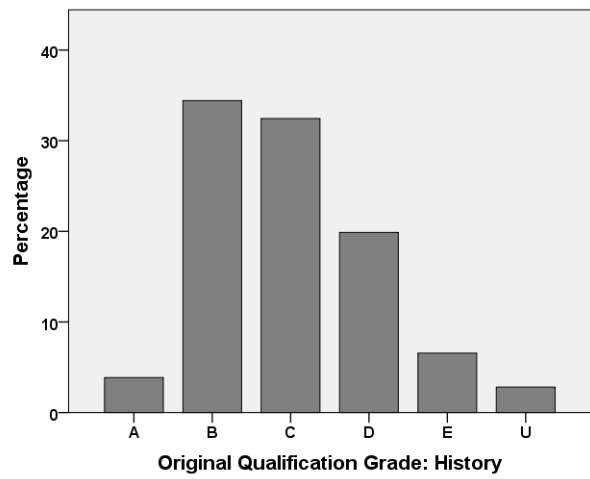
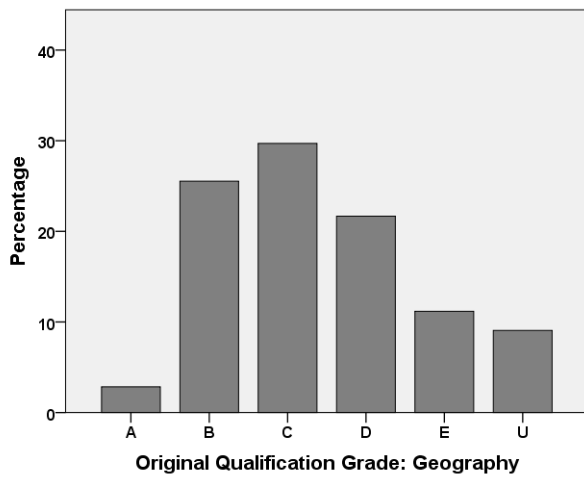
¹² A* is only included where enquiries were submitted for candidates who had an original grade of A*.



For AS, enquiries also tended to be associated with an original qualification grade B, although this trend was less distinct than at A level. Schools also submitted a large percentage of enquiries for students receiving a grade C, particularly in English and geography (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Percentage of enquiries associated with each original AS qualification grade.





Raw mark changes

Table 6 shows an analysis of unit/subcomponent raw mark¹³ changes following the enquiry process¹⁴. As shown, in the majority of cases (52.3%), there was no mark change. Three quarters (75.4%) of all enquiries resulted in a mark change of one mark or less, and less than 5% of enquiries (4.8%) resulted in a mark of change of five marks or more. When marks were changed, they were more likely to go up than down, with two thirds (66.4%) of the enquiries resulting in a mark change receiving an increase in marks.

Table 6. *Number and percentage of enquiries receiving each raw mark change following the enquiry process across each qualification level.*

	Raw mark change										
	<=-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	>=5
GCSE	2,598 (0.8%)	2,475 (0.7%)	5,422 (1.6%)	13,241 (3.9%)	32,345 (9.5%)	177,881 (52.3%)	48,371 (14.2%)	24,831 (7.3%)	13,015 (3.8%)	7,462 (2.2%)	12,330 (3.6%)
A level	370 (0.7%)	299 (0.6%)	636 (1.2%)	1,943 (3.6%)	4,651 (8.7%)	27,784 (52.2%)	6,784 (12.7%)	4,167 (7.8%)	2,201 (4.1%)	1,393 (2.6%)	3,024 (5.7%)
AS	427 (0.7%)	353 (0.6%)	816 (1.4%)	2,093 (3.5%)	5,067 (8.5%)	31,234 (52.2%)	7,589 (12.7%)	4,537 (7.6%)	2,712 (4.5%)	1,617 (2.7%)	3,421 (5.7%)
Total	3,395 (0.7%)	3,127 (0.7%)	6,874 (1.5%)	17,277 (3.8%)	42,063 (9.3%)	236,899 (52.3%)	62,744 (13.8%)	33,535 (7.4%)	17,928 (4.0%)	10,472 (2.3%)	18,775 (4.1%)

Figures 7 and 8 show the average absolute mark change¹⁵ across GCSE (Figure 7) and AS and A level subjects (Figure 8) for all enquiries. The average absolute mark change was never greater than two marks across all subjects and qualification levels. To put this in to context, the average unit/subcomponent maximum mark across all subjects and qualification levels was 72.5 marks.

As with the grade changes, there was a general trend across all qualification levels such that the average absolute mark change was slightly higher in subjects with more subjective assessment (English, humanities, classics and MFLs), than in those with more objective assessment (mathematics and the sciences). Full mark change distributions for each subject can be seen in Figure 9 (GCSE), Figure 10 (A level), and Figure 11 (AS).

¹³ A raw mark is the mark an examiner gives to a script.

¹⁴ Enquiries which had missing or inaccurate marks were removed before the analysis – see the background notes section for more information.

¹⁵ By absolute mark change we mean the mark change expressed as a positive value. For example, a mark change of -3 has an absolute value of 3. Absolute values are used to calculate the average mark change to avoid positive and negative mark change values cancelling each other out.

Figure 7. Average absolute raw mark changes for GCSE subjects.

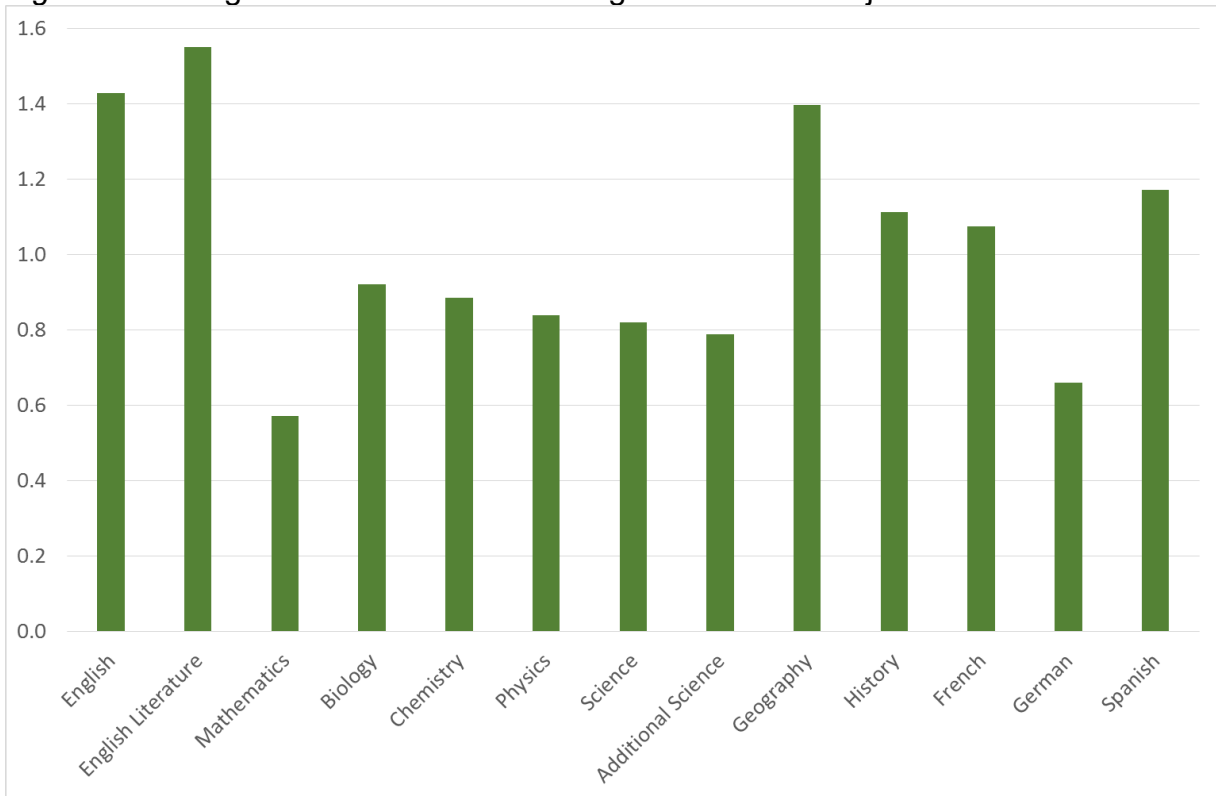


Figure 8. Average absolute raw mark changes for AS and A level subjects.

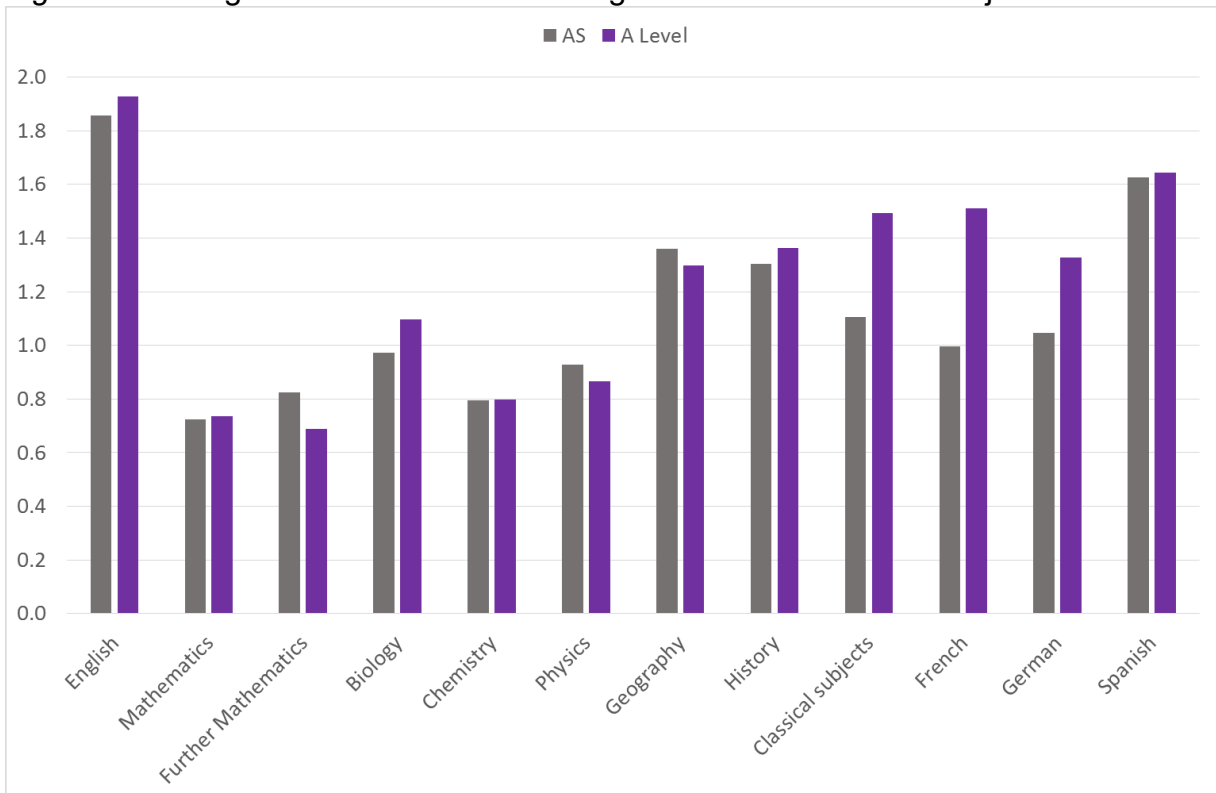
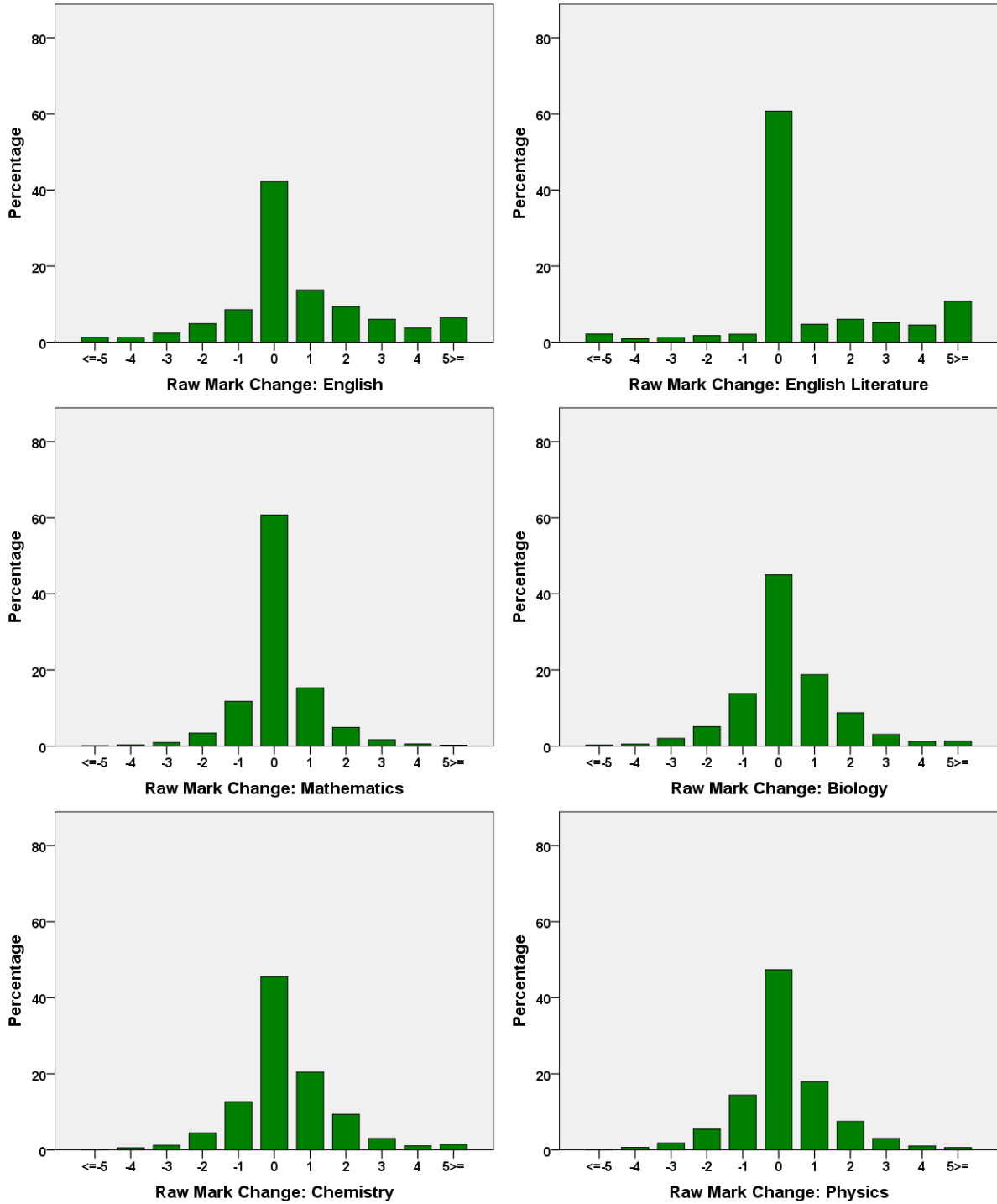


Figure 9. Percentage of GCSE enquiries receiving each mark change by subject.



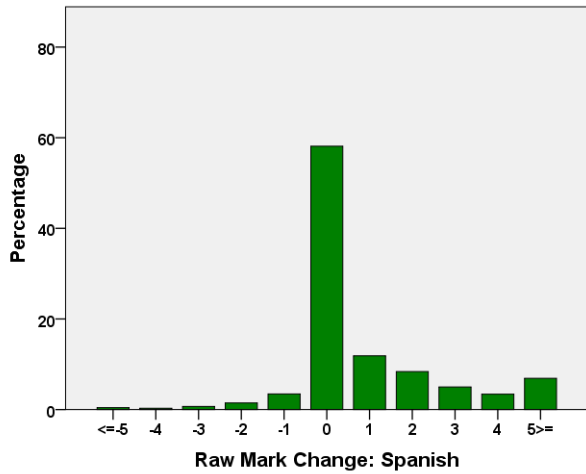
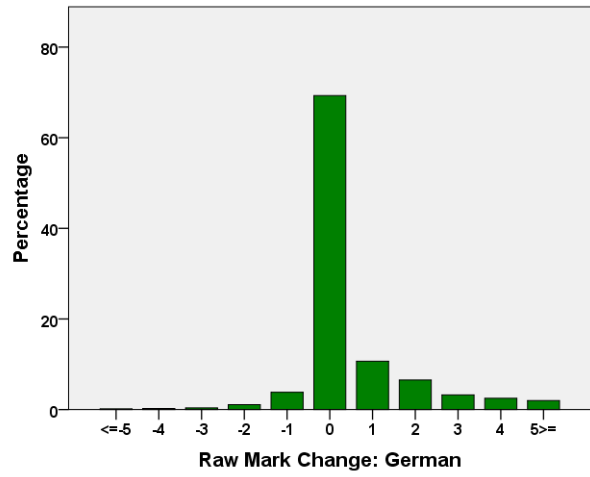
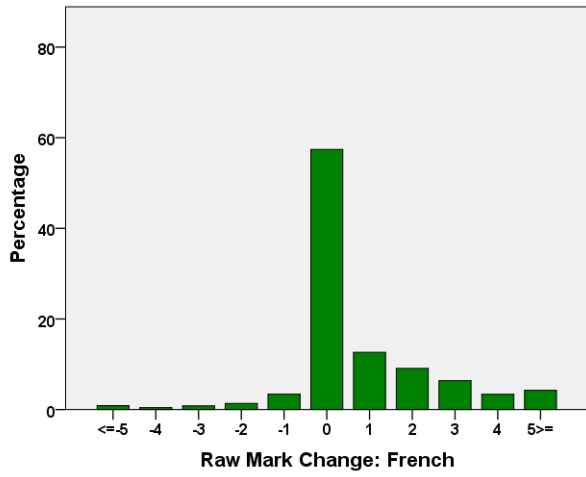
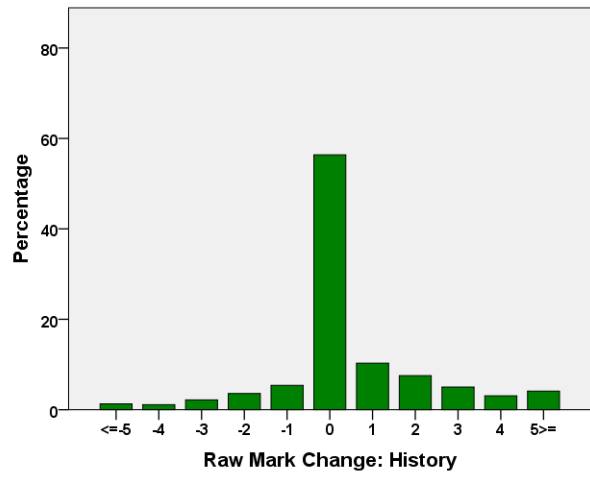
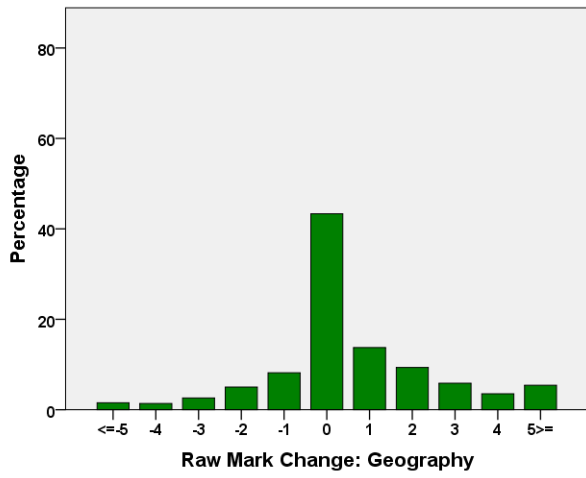
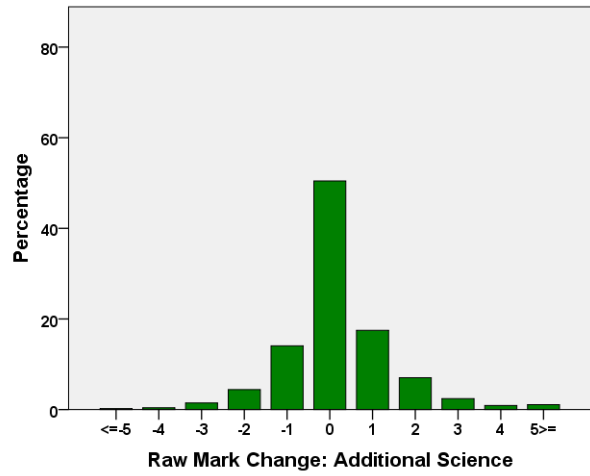
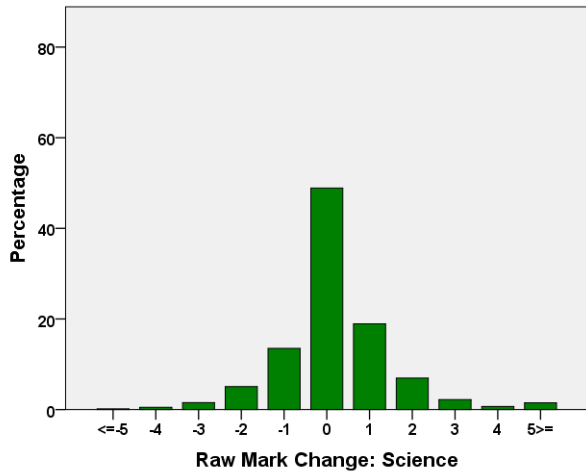
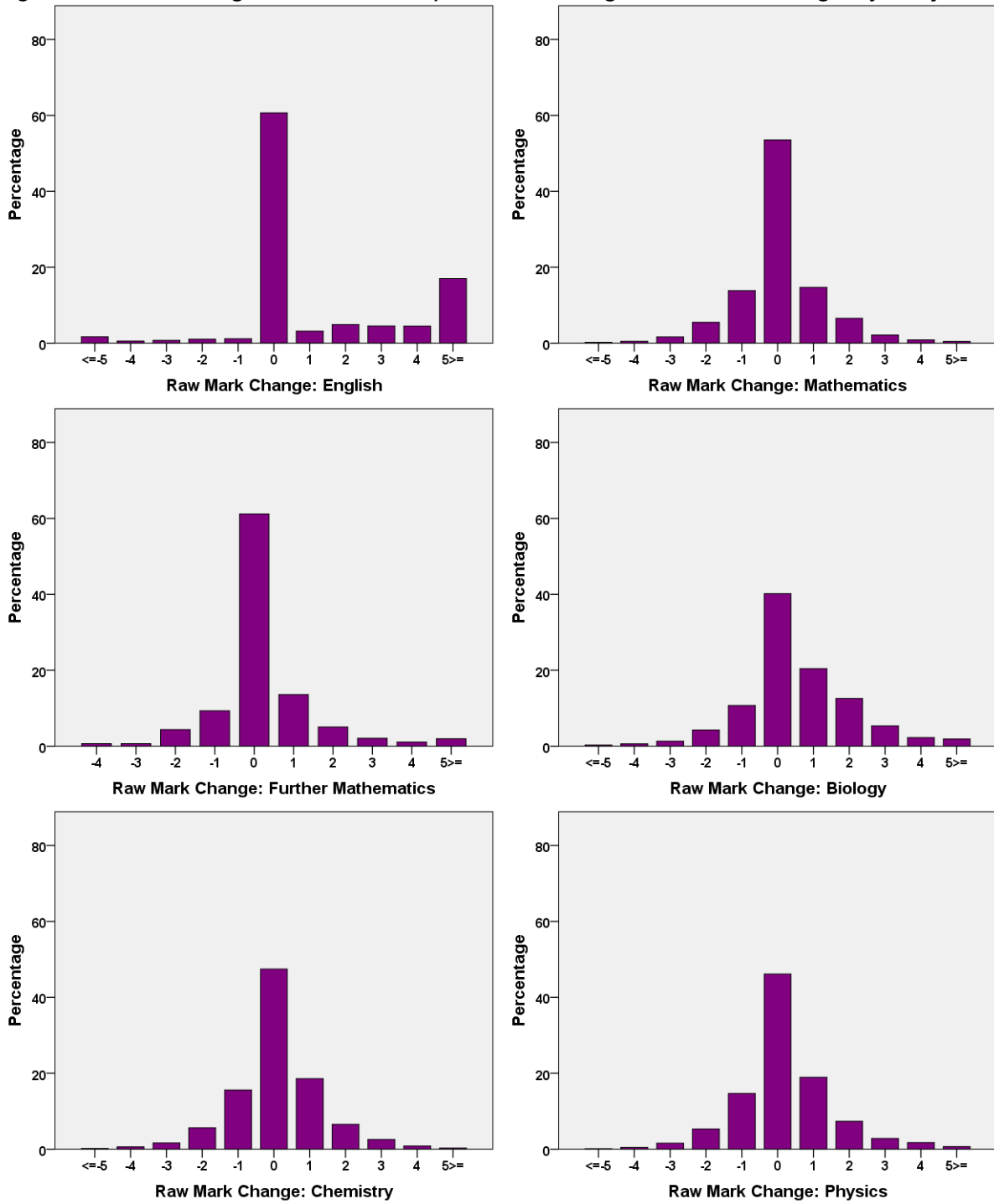


Figure 10. Percentage of A Level enquiries receiving each mark change by subject.



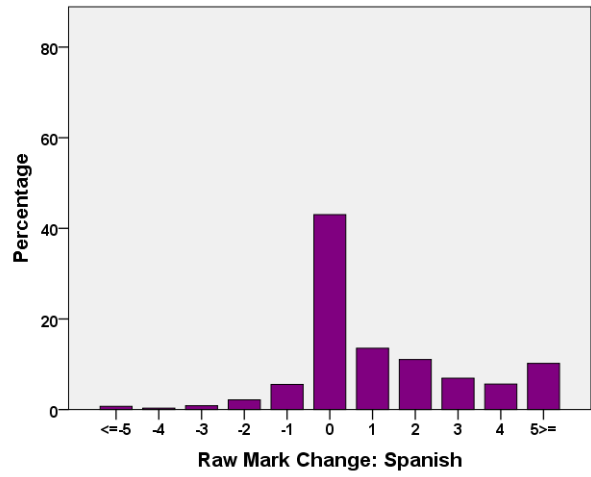
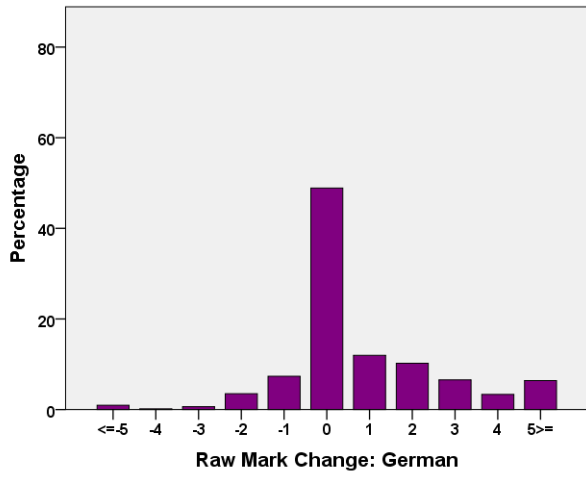
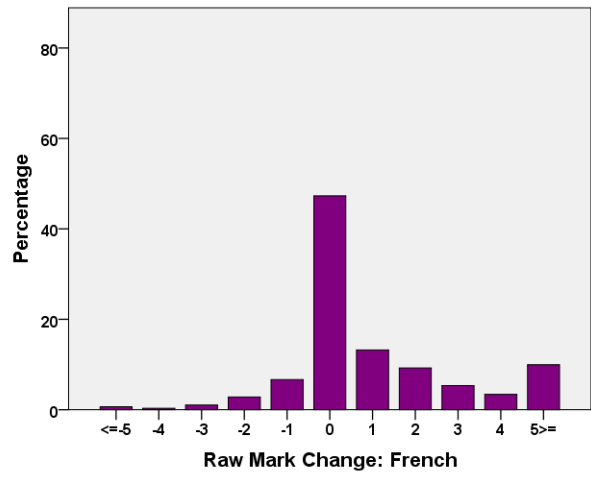
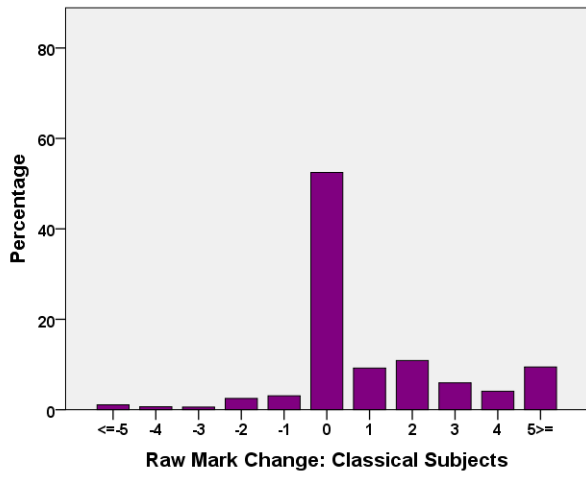
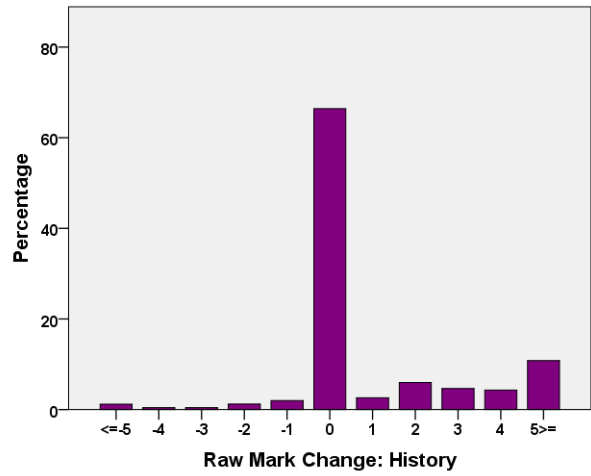
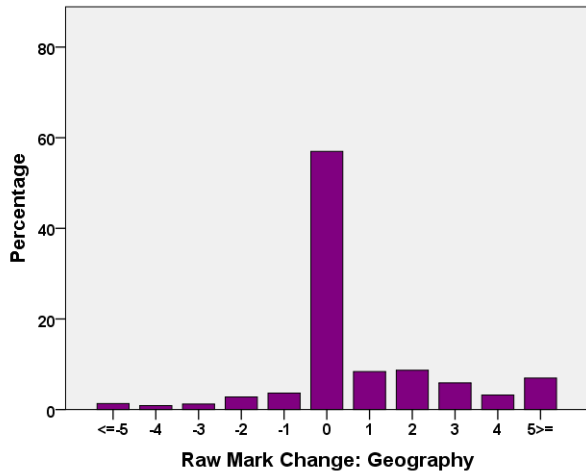
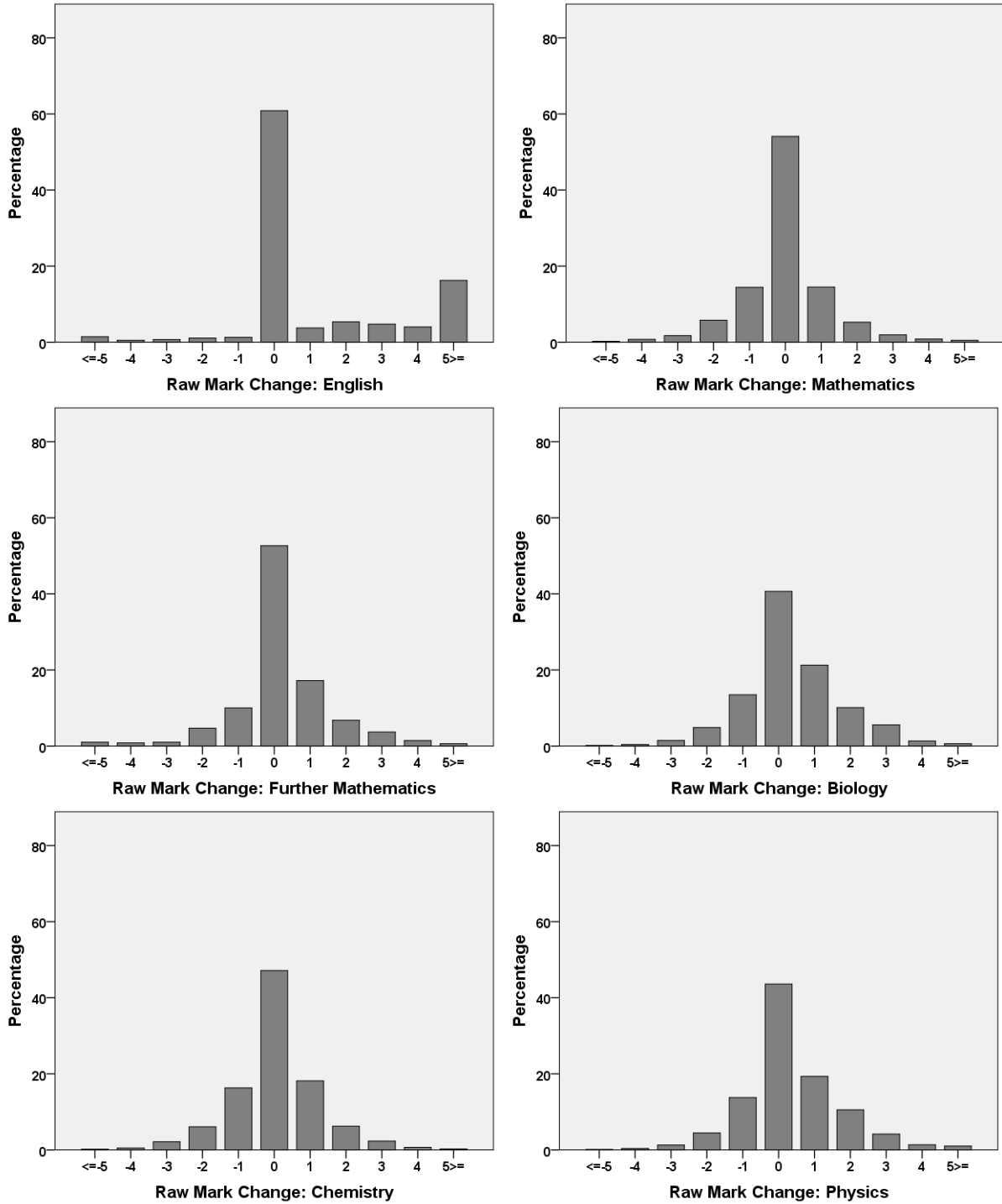
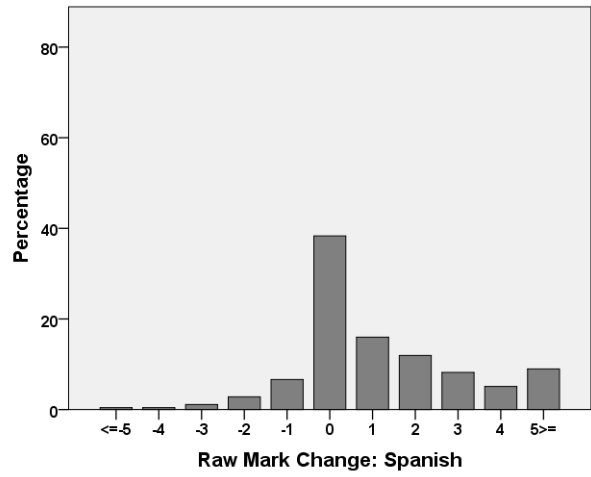
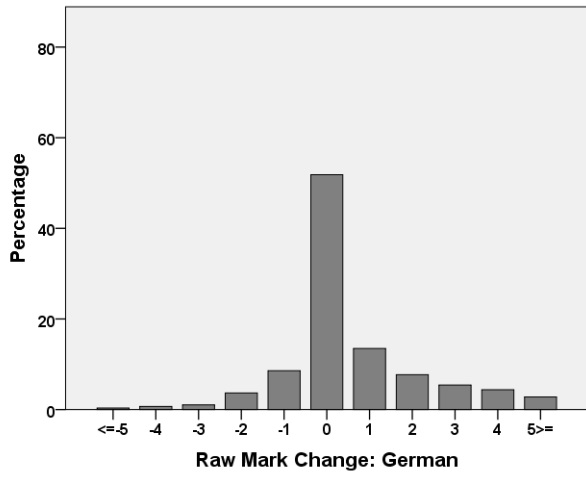
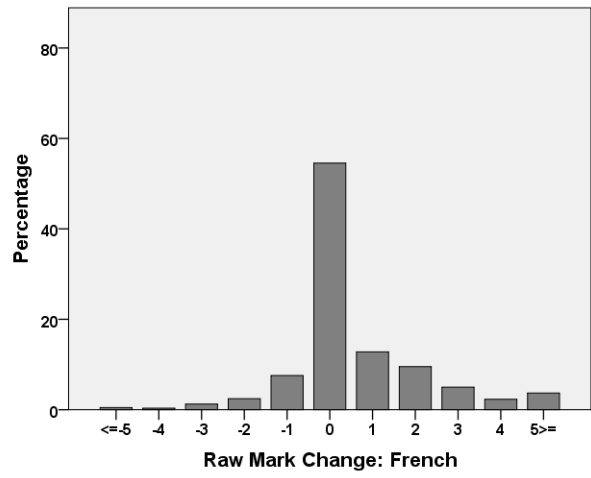
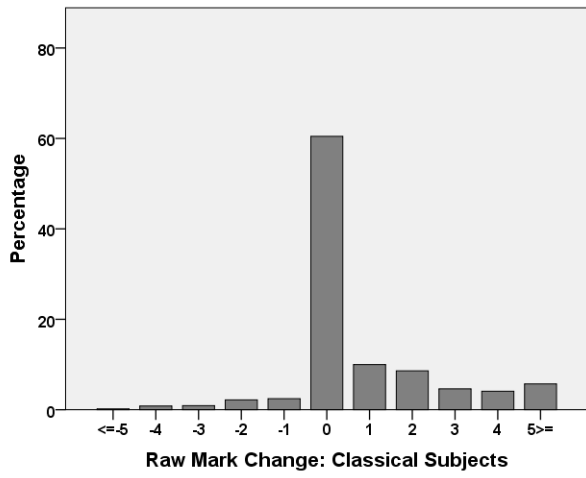
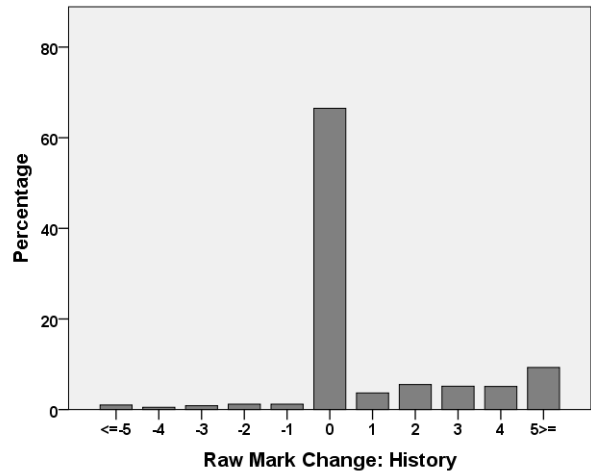
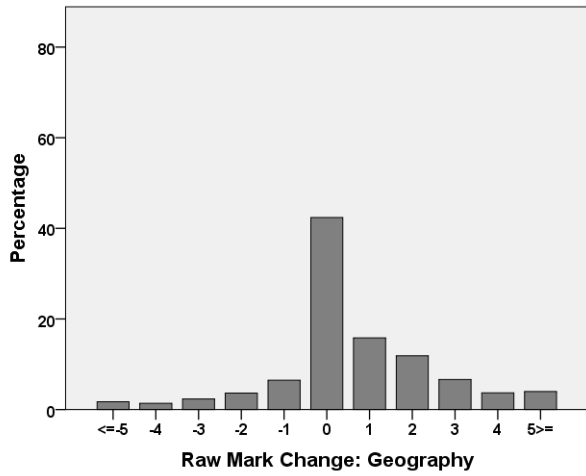


Figure 11. Percentage of AS enquiries receiving each mark change by subject.





School type differences

Figures 12 and 13 show differences in the percentage of GCSE (Figure 12) and A level (Figure 13) qualification grades challenged (blue lines) and changed (grey lines) across the following school types:

- Secondary comprehensive and middles schools,
- Secondary selective schools,
- Secondary modern schools¹⁶,
- City academies,
- Independent schools,
- Further education (FE) establishments, sixth form colleges, and tertiary colleges,
- All other schools including free schools, special schools, studio schools, overseas students, and private students.

Overall, independent schools tended to submit a greater percentage of their qualification entries¹⁷ for an enquiry relative to other school types, at both GCSE (9.0%) and A level (11.9%). The remaining school types submitted 4.4% to 6.5% of their GCSE qualification entries, and 5.4% to 8.6% of their A level qualification entries for an enquiry.

Looking at this another way, across all schools and colleges, enquiries were submitted for 1 in 16 GCSE entries and 1 in 13 A levels. Independent schools submitted enquiries for 1 in 11 GCSE entries and 1 in 8 A level entries. And FE, sixth form and tertiary colleges submitted enquiries for 1 in 22 GCSEs and 1 in 19 A levels.

We do not have any information which might explain these differences. We have, though, considered the percentage of grades challenged by school type for each subject.

Figure 12 shows that, when considering GCSE enquiries by subject and school type, independent schools tended to submit the greatest percentage of their qualification entries for an enquiry for the majority of subjects. This is the case for seven out of the thirteen subjects – English, English literature, chemistry, geography, history, German, and Spanish. In subjects where this is not the case, independent schools still rank relatively highly compared to other school types in terms of the percentage of grades challenged. Secondary modern schools have the highest percentage of grades challenged in biology, physics, and additional science, whilst secondary

¹⁶ Secondary modern schools are included as their own category for the GCSE analysis only as their entry was relatively small for A level (0.9% of the total A level entry). For A level, they are included in the 'all other schools' category.

¹⁷ Total qualification entries were calculated according to candidate level data received from the exam boards at the beginning of August as this includes school type information which the JCQ results day reports do not.

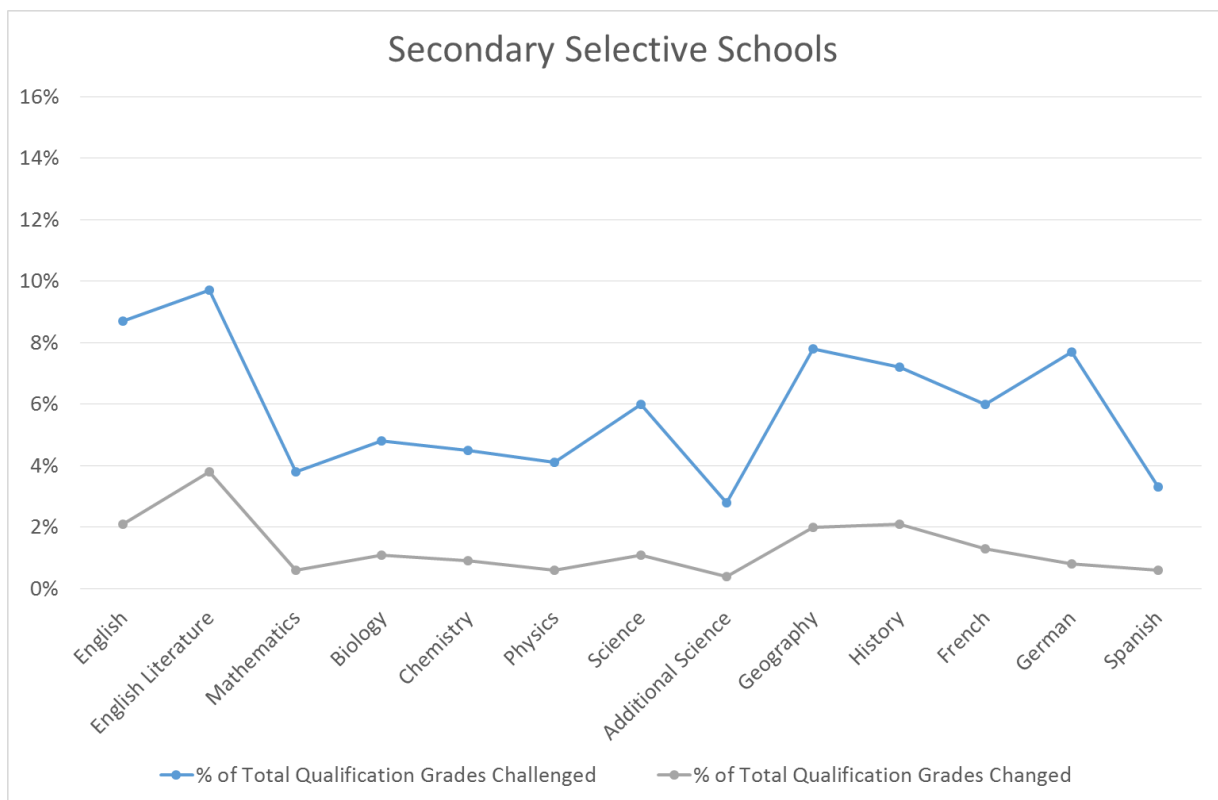
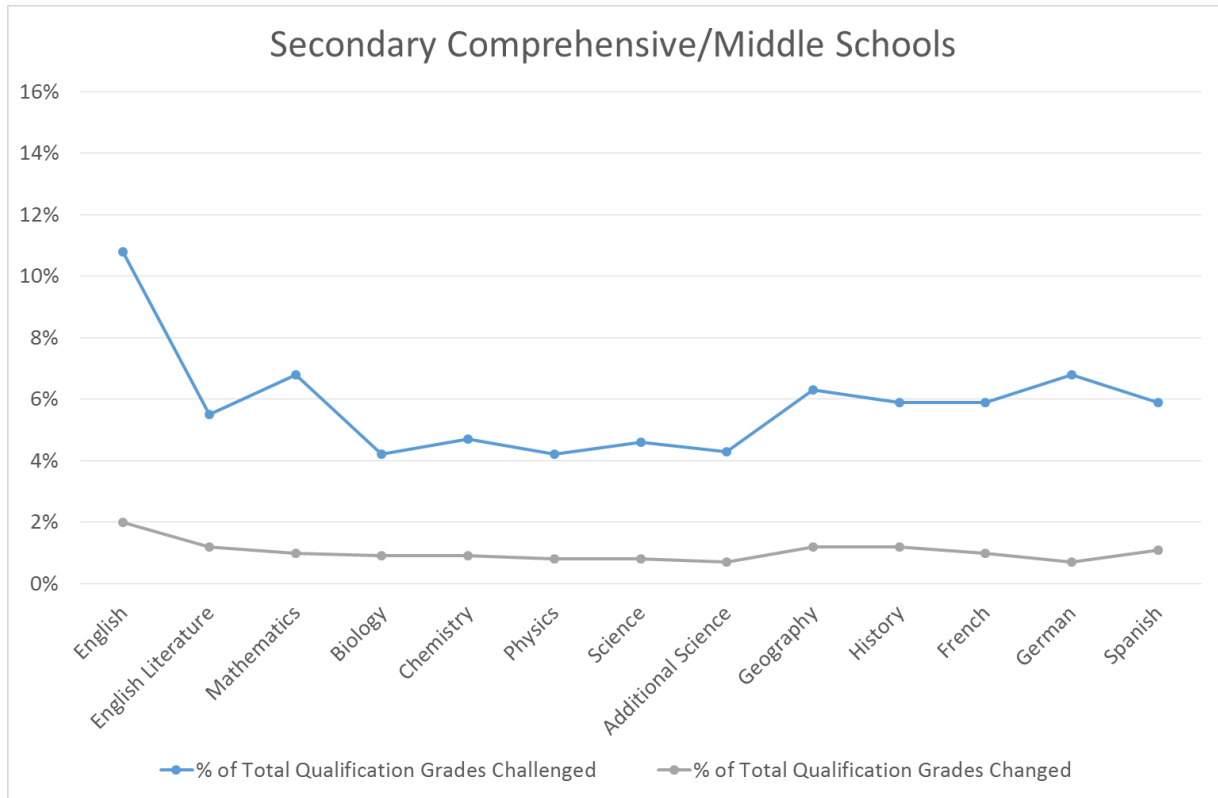
comprehensive and middle schools have the highest percentage of grades challenged in mathematics. For French, 'other' schools submitted the greatest percentage of entries for an enquiry, but the number of French entries made by schools in this category is relatively small (1.0% of the total entry in French). Independent schools and city academies have the highest percentage of grades challenged in French after 'other' schools.

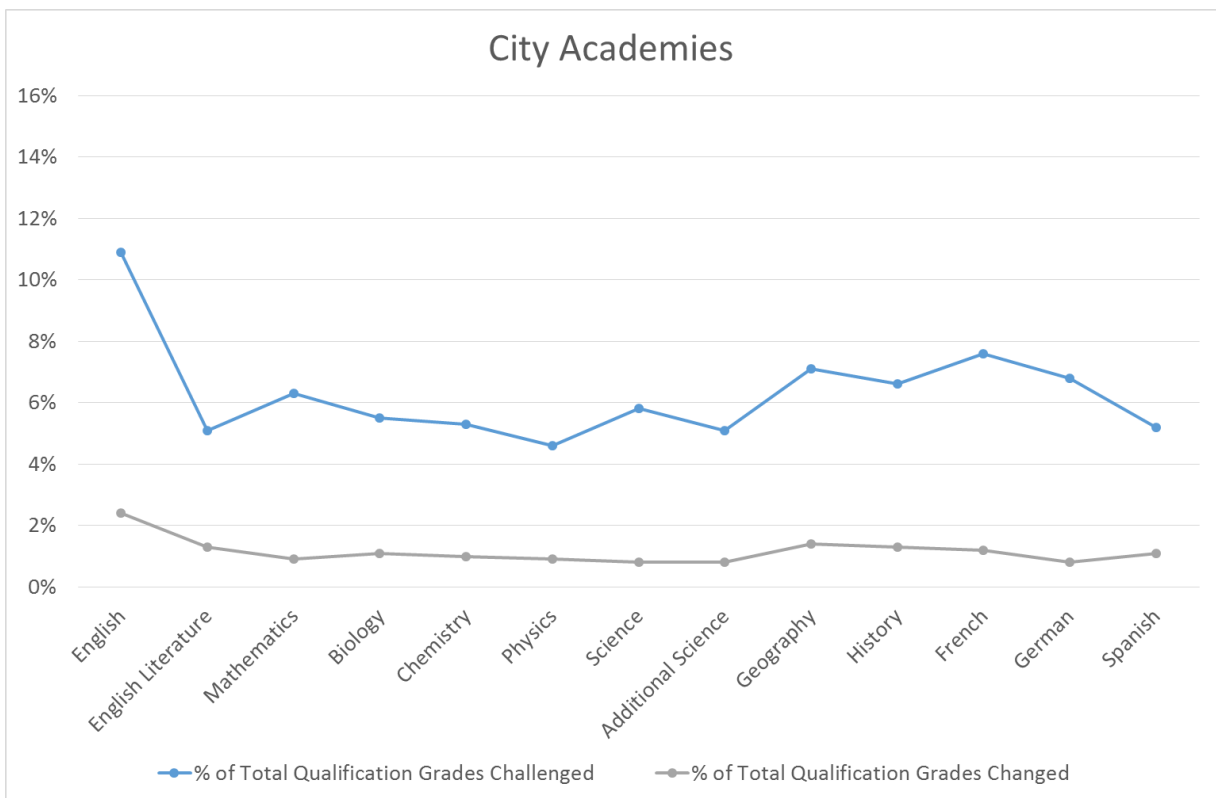
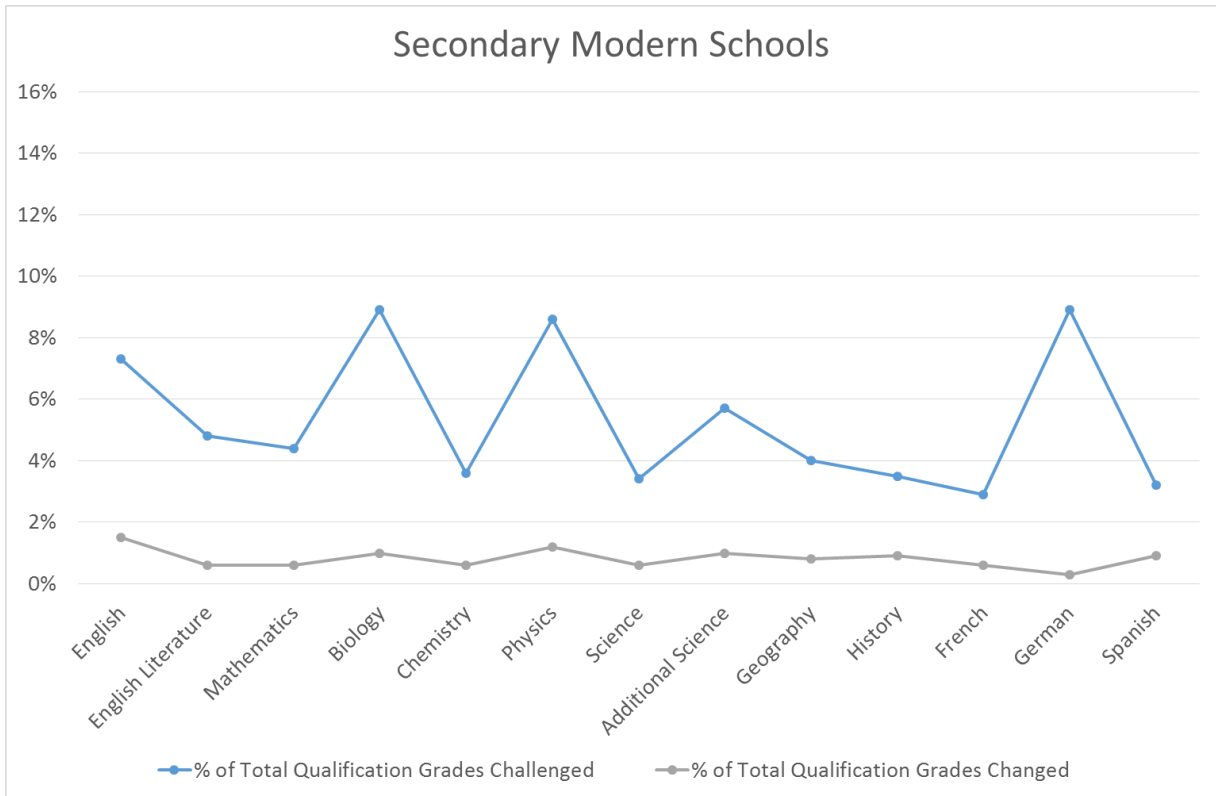
At A level, the trends across subjects are more consistent: independent schools tended to submit the greatest percentage of their qualification entries for an enquiry across all subjects, and consistently more than other school types. An exception to this is further mathematics, where 'other' schools have the highest percentage of grades challenged. However, the number of entries from 'other' schools is low (0.8% of the total entry in further mathematics), and independent schools have the second highest percentage of grades challenged.

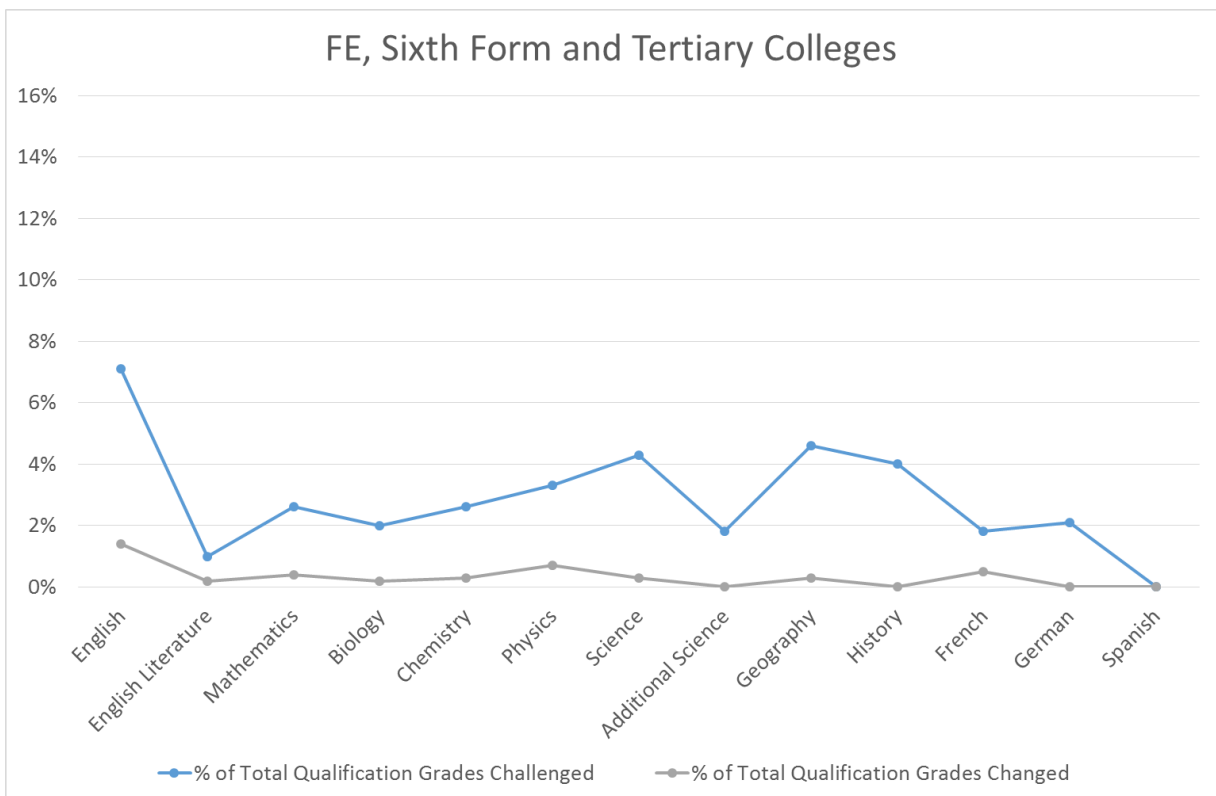
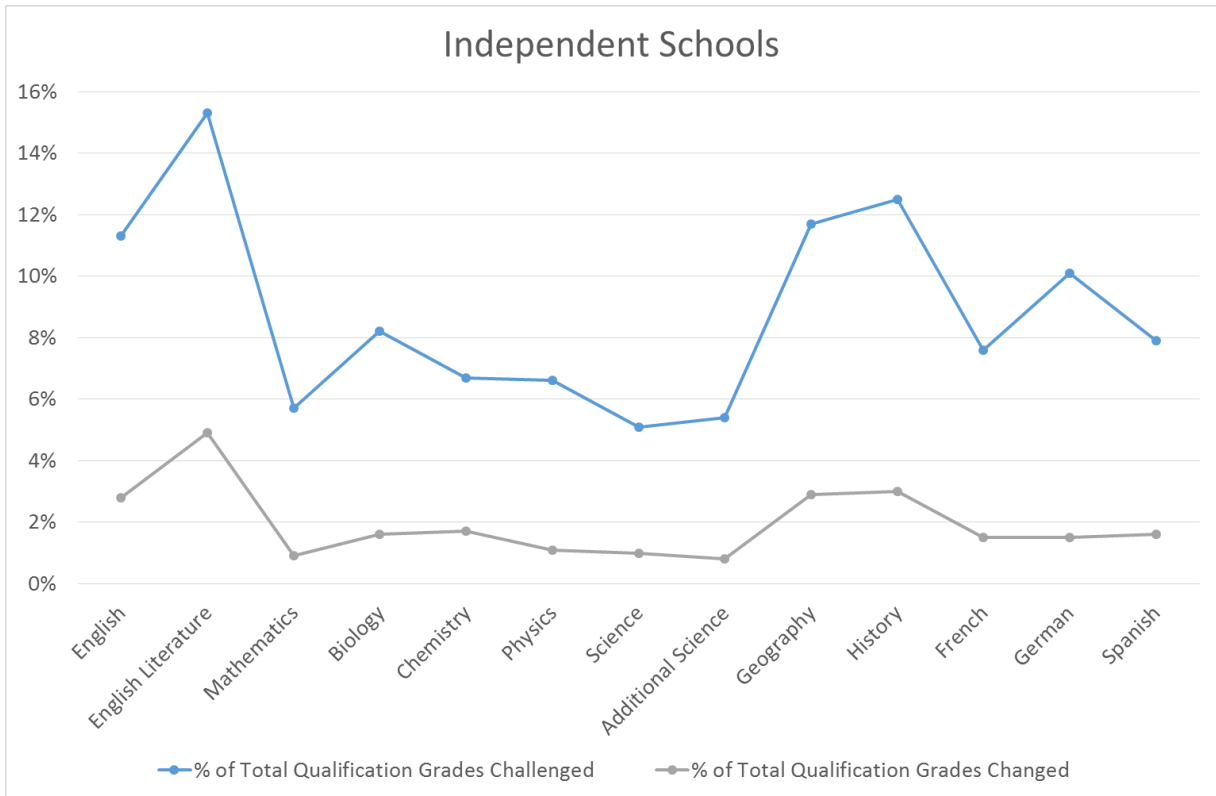
Tables 7 and 8 show the percentage of grades challenged that were changed in each GCSE (Table 7) and A level (Table 8) subject by school type. Overall, at GCSE, secondary selective schools have the highest percentage of grade changes relative to grades challenged (25.0%) closely followed by independent schools (23.1%). Secondary modern and FE, sixth form and tertiary colleges have the lowest percentage of grade changes (17.1% and 17.0% respectively). Of the seven subjects where independent schools submit the highest percentage of entry to enquiry (English, English literature, chemistry, geography, history, German, and Spanish), they have the highest percentage of grade changes in English only, although they rank relatively highly in terms of grade changes in the other subjects.

Overall, at A level, secondary selective schools again have the highest percentage of grade changes relative to grades challenged. Independent schools, city academies, secondary comprehensive/middle schools and 'other' schools have similar rates of grade changes (16.1% to 16.6%) and FE, sixth form and tertiary colleges again have the lowest percentage of grade changes (15.1%). Despite independent schools submitting the highest percentage of entry to enquiry for all subjects apart from French, they do not have the highest percentage of grade changes in any subject. Nor do they consistently rank highly in terms of grade changes across subjects when compared to the other school types.

Figure 12. Percentage of GCSE grades challenged and changed for each subject by school type.







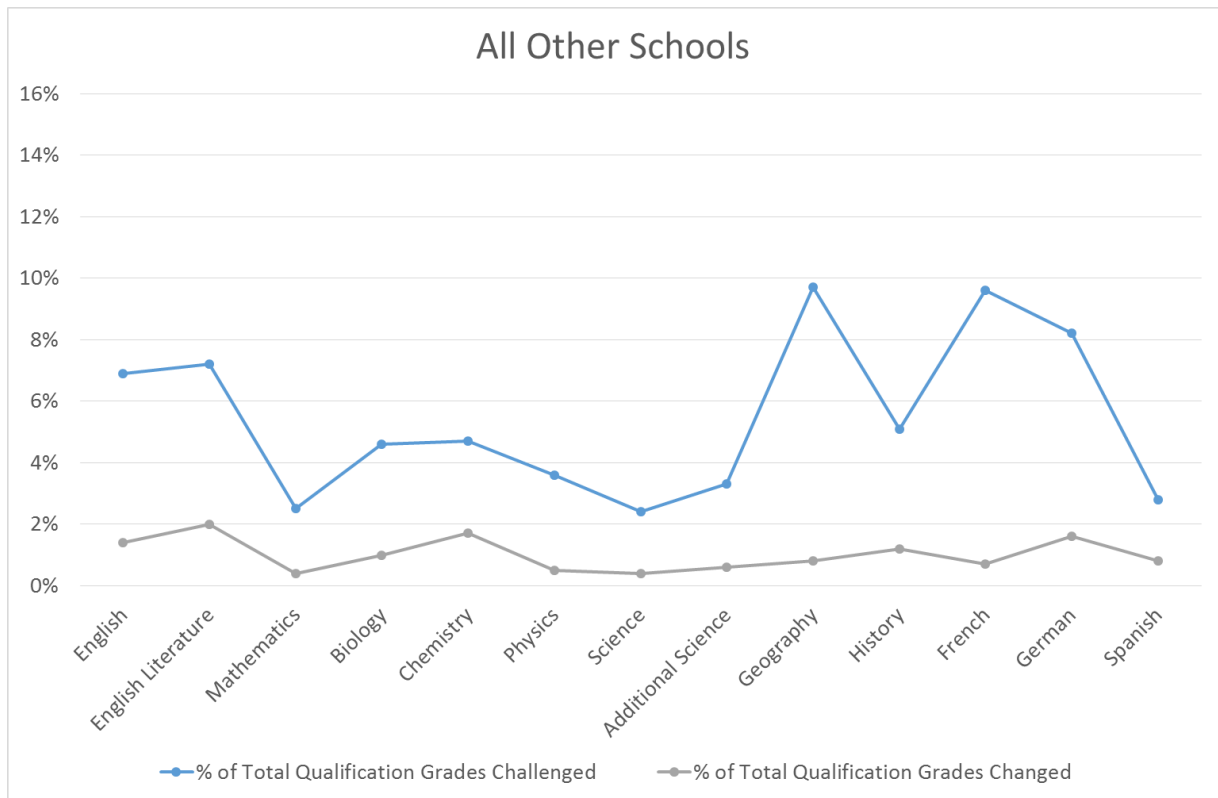
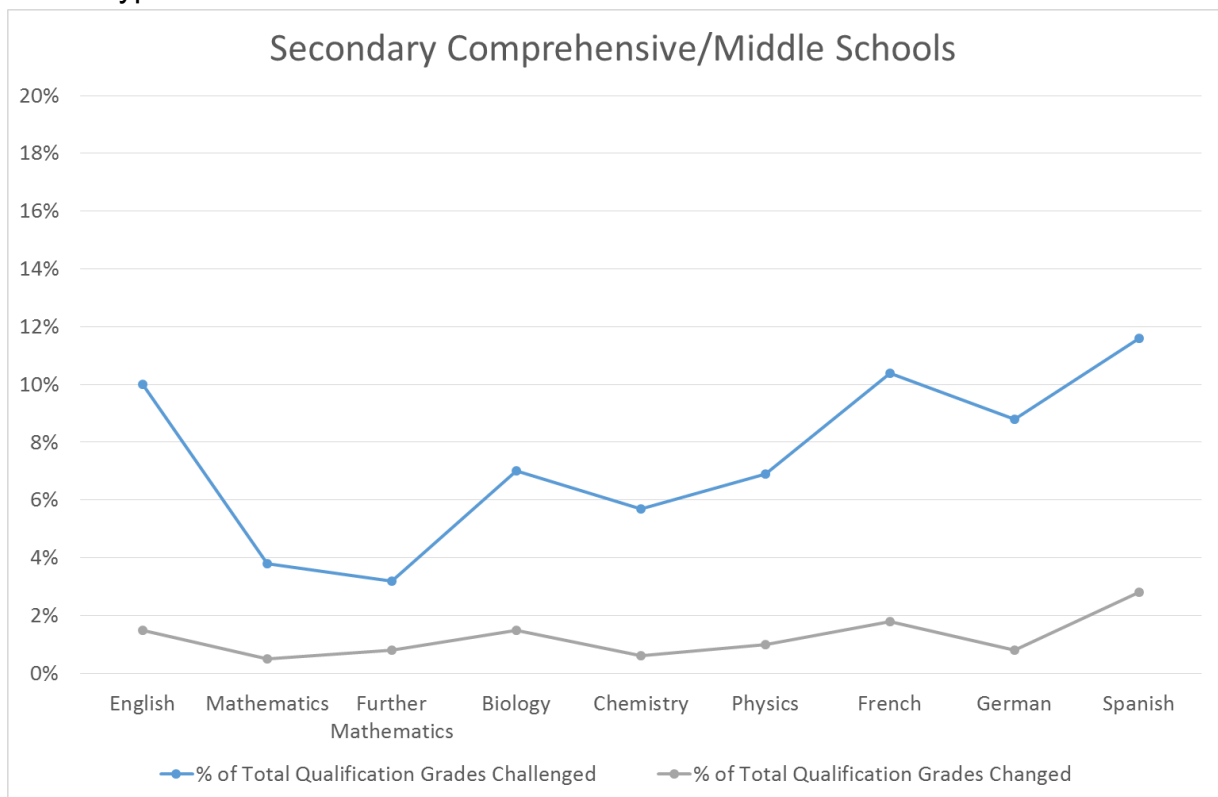
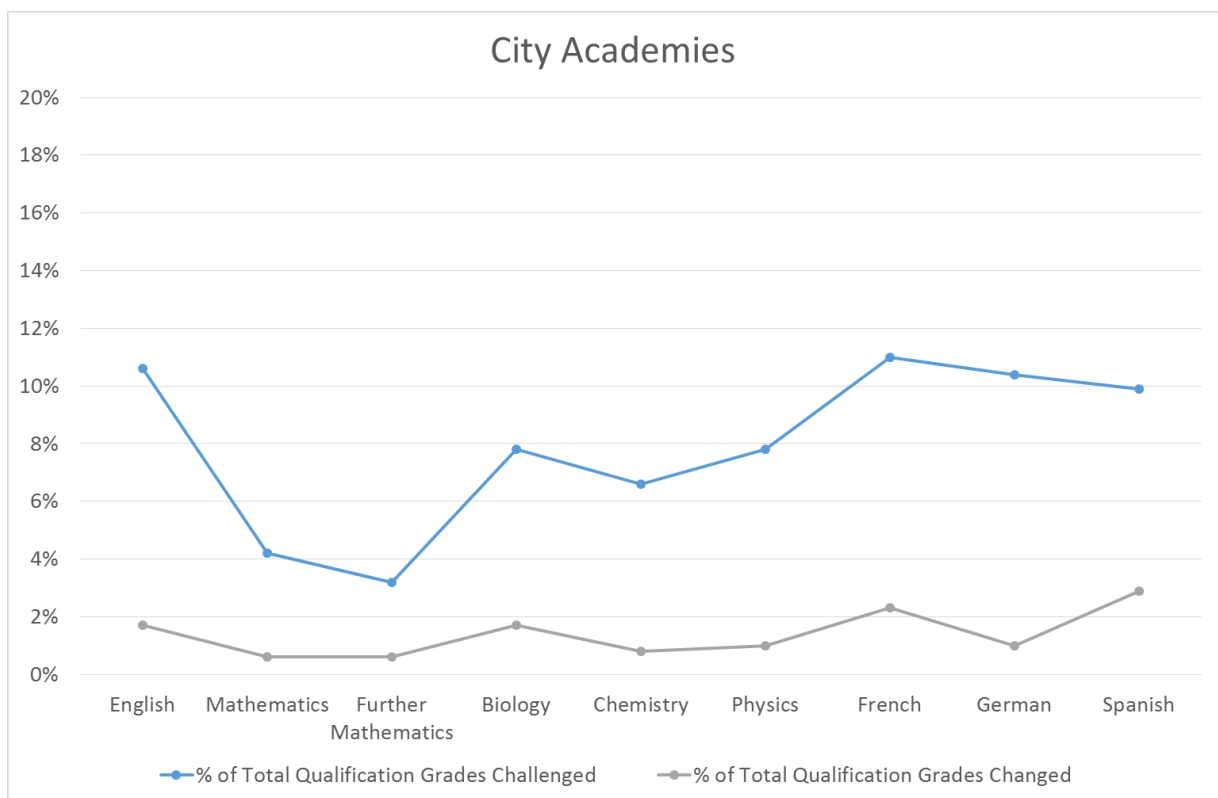
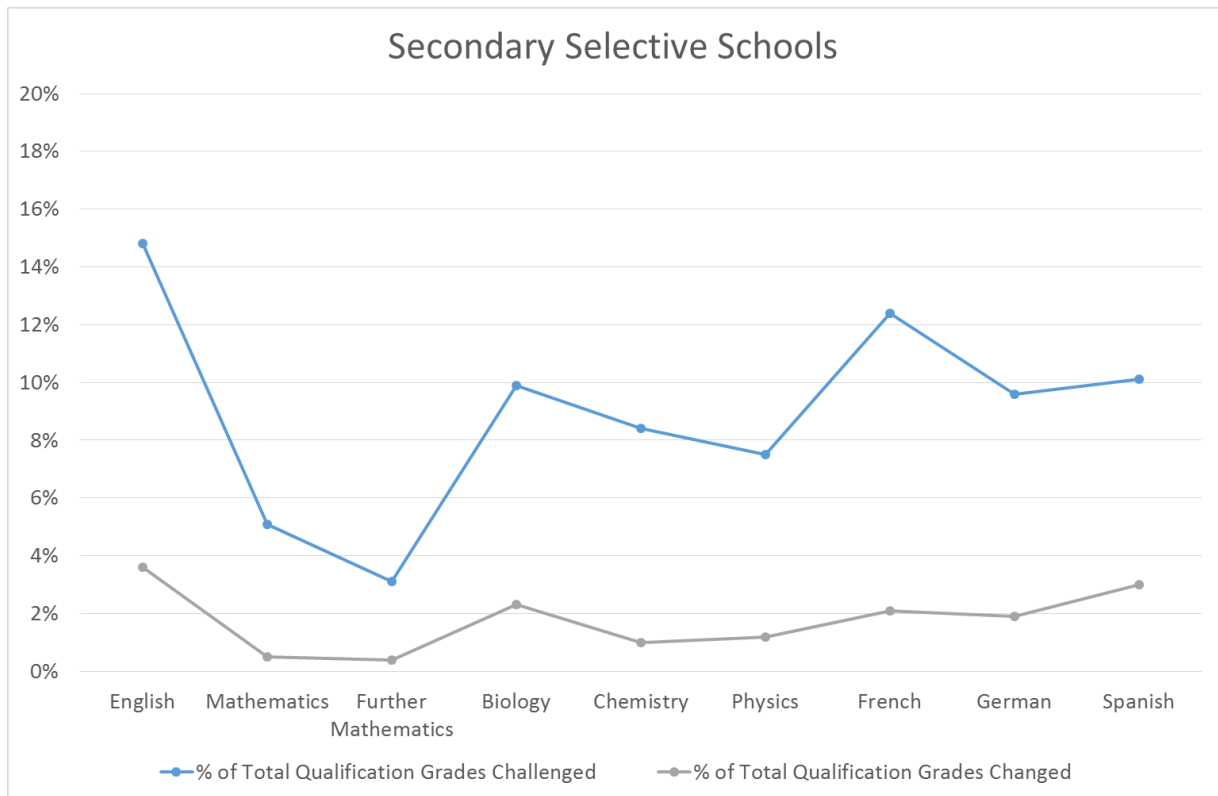
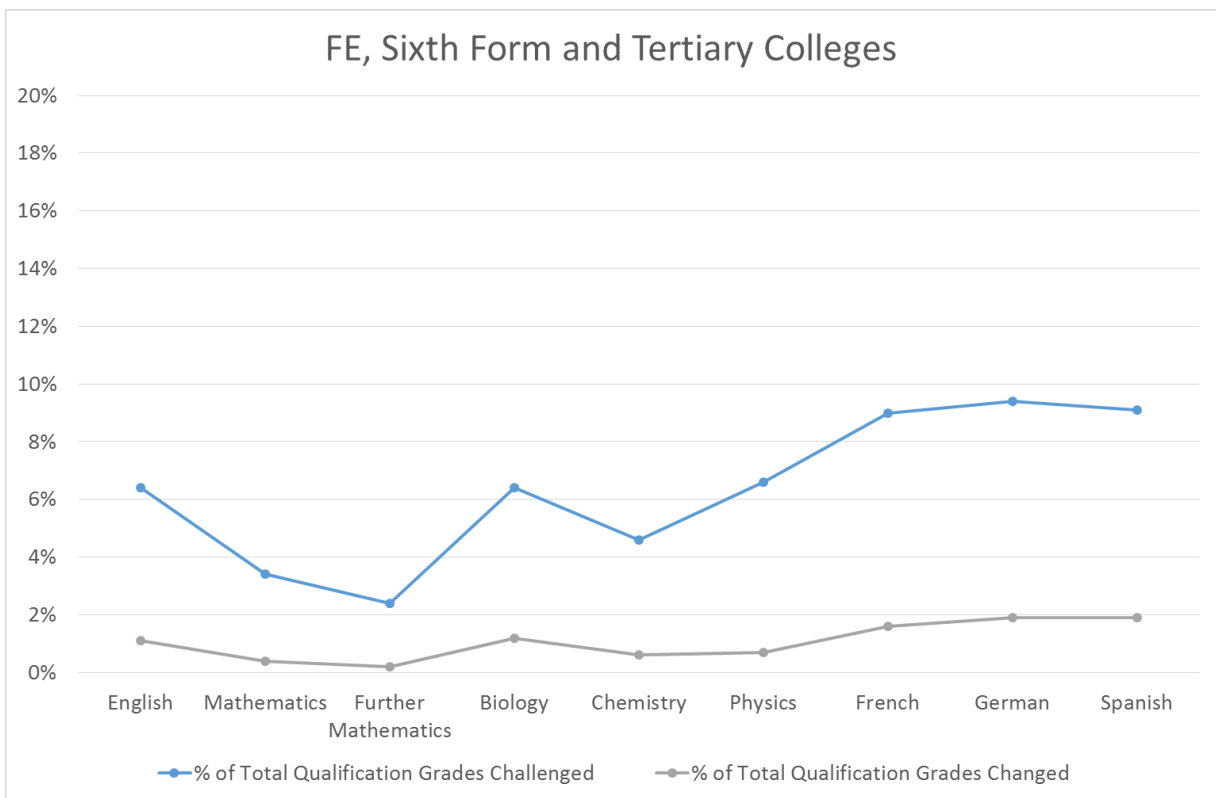
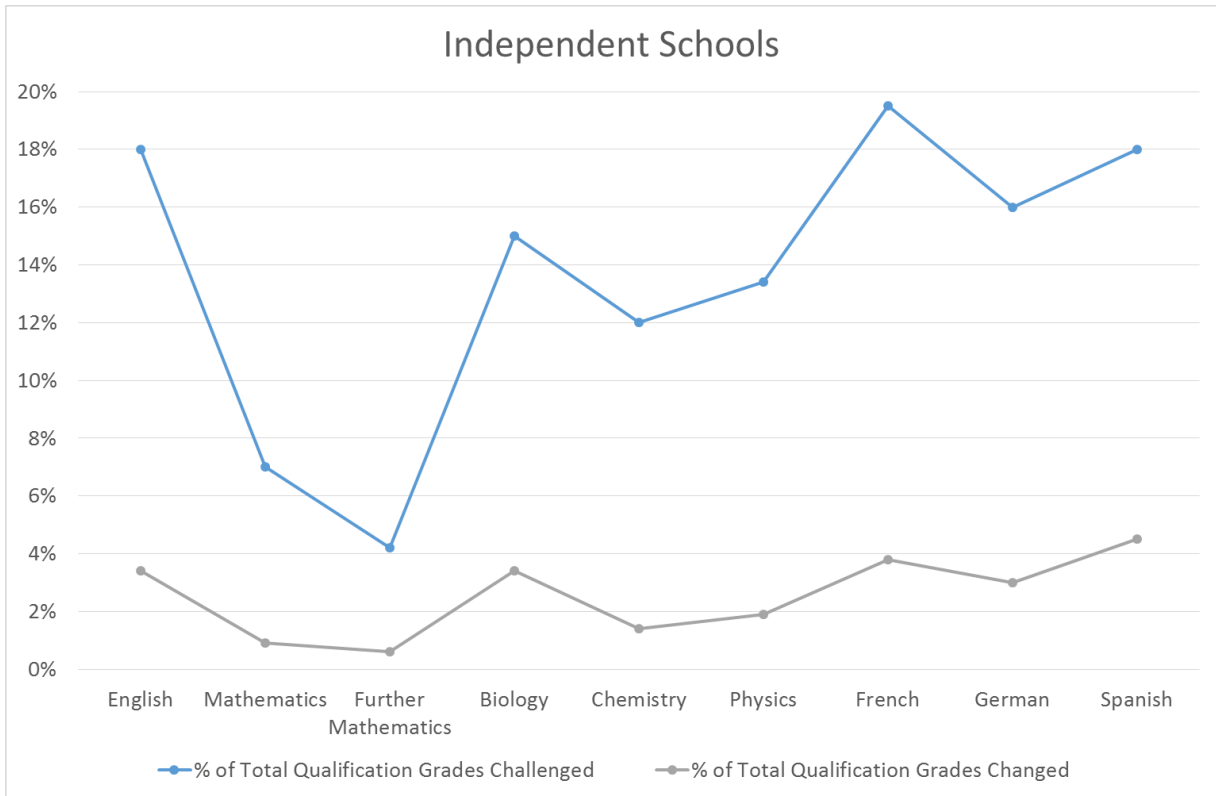


Figure 13. Percentage of A level grades challenged and changed for each subject by school type.







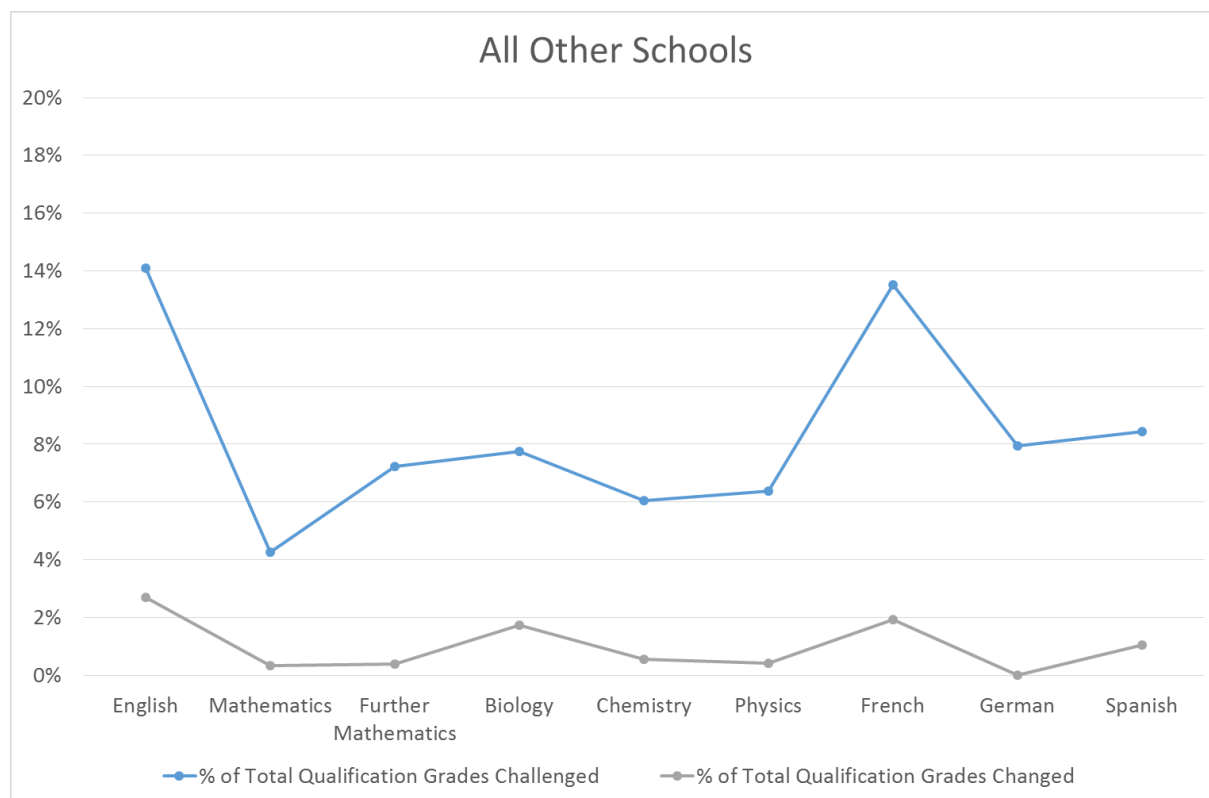


Table 7. Percentage of GCSE grades challenged that were changed by school type.

	Secondary comp/middle	Secondary selective	Secondary modern	City academies	Independent	FE, sixth form & tertiary	Other
English	19.0%	24.6%	20.9%	21.9%	25.1%	19.1%	20.8%
English literature	21.1%	39.0%	12.8%	26.1%	31.9%	25.0%	27.2%
Mathematics	15.0%	15.4%	12.9%	15.1%	16.1%	13.8%	15.6%
Biology	21.5%	23.4%	10.9%	20.9%	19.3%	11.3%	22.5%
Chemistry	18.6%	18.9%	16.4%	18.1%	25.1%	9.7%	37.1%
Physics	19.7%	14.7%	14.4%	18.8%	17.2%	20.6%	13.2%
Science	16.8%	18.5%	17.2%	14.4%	20.3%	7.8%	15.1%
Additional science	16.9%	15.2%	17.1%	16.4%	15.4%	0.0%	16.8%
Geography	19.3%	26.1%	20.2%	19.8%	24.8%	5.6%	8.5%
History	20.7%	28.6%	25.9%	19.3%	23.7%	0.0%	24.0%
French	17.4%	21.3%	21.4%	15.9%	20.1%	25.0%	7.2%
German	9.6%	10.8%	3.1%	12.3%	15.2%	0.0%	20.0%
Spanish	18.0%	18.9%	29.5%	21.0%	19.8%	0.0%	27.8%
Total	18.1%	25.0%	17.1%	18.7%	23.1%	17.0%	18.7%

Table 8. *Percentage of A level grades challenged that were changed by school type.*

	Secondary comp/ middle	Secondary selective	City academies	Independent	FE, sixth form & tertiary	Other
English	14.9%	24.3%	16.2%	18.8%	16.6%	17.1%
Mathematics	14.6%	9.5%	13.1%	12.2%	12.9%	12.6%
Further mathematics	26.7%	14.3%	17.4%	13.4%	8.5%	15.6%
Biology	21.6%	23.3%	22.3%	22.8%	18.6%	21.8%
Chemistry	11.1%	11.6%	12.1%	11.7%	12.4%	11.8%
Physics	14.9%	16.1%	12.7%	14.1%	10.7%	13.3%
French	17.3%	17.2%	20.7%	19.7%	17.2%	18.9%
German	9.4%	20.0%	10.1%	18.7%	20.3%	15.0%
Spanish	24.0%	29.6%	28.7%	24.7%	20.5%	24.8%
Total	16.1%	18.1%	16.3%	16.6%	15.1%	16.2%

Summary

This report supplements our official statistical release on enquiries about results for the summer 2015 GCSE and A level exam series by providing a breakdown of enquiry behaviour across subjects and school types. Acquisition of unit/subcomponent level enquiries about results data for the first time has allowed us to explore whether there are more enquiries about results made in certain subjects than others and more enquiries made by certain school types than others.

Results showed that there was large variation in the percentage of qualification grades awarded that were challenged across subjects but less variation in the percentage of qualification grades awarded that were changed. There was a general trend across all qualification levels such that the percentage of grades challenged and changed was slightly higher in subjects where the assessment is more subjective in nature (English, humanities, classics, and MFLs), than in subjects where the assessment is more objective (mathematics and the sciences).

At GCSE, schools tended to submit more enquiries for students whose original grade was D than for any other grade. At AS and A level, enquiries tended to be associated with an original qualification grade B. There were some exceptions. For GCSE English literature, biology, chemistry, and physics, enquiries tended to be associated with an original qualification grade B and for A level further mathematics with an original grade A. This is likely to reflect the higher ability profile of the students taking these subjects.

Analysis of unit/subcomponent raw mark changes following the enquiry process showed that there was no mark change in over half of cases. Three quarters of all enquiries resulted in a mark change of one mark or less and less than 5% of enquiries resulted in a mark of change of five marks or more. The average absolute mark change was never greater than two marks across all subjects and qualification levels. As with the grade changes, there was a general trend across all qualification levels such that the average absolute mark change was slightly higher in subjects with more subjective assessment than in those with more objective assessment.

Overall, independent schools tend to submit a greater percentage of their qualification entries for an enquiry relative to other school types, at both GCSE and A level. This trend largely holds when looking at individual subjects, particularly at A level. At both GCSE and A level, secondary selective schools have the highest percentage of grade changes relative to grades challenged and FE, sixth form and tertiary colleges have the lowest.

No conclusions can be drawn as to whether the trends reported here are typical or not as this is the first time this data has been collected. Over the coming years we will be able to explore trends when we have more unit/subcomponent level data following future exam series.

Background Notes

Data exclusions

The figures presented in this report relate to enquiries made for students certificating in GCSE full course, AS and A level qualifications only. Enquiries made for non-certificating students or those certificating in GCSE short courses, Level 1/2 certificates or advanced extension awards were not included in the analyses.

Enquiries were also excluded for certain analyses where they were missing data – for example, final qualification grades were still to be determined for 1,685 qualifications and so these qualifications were not included in any grade change analyses.

Similarly, enquiries missing original and/or post raw mark values (2,342 enquiries) were removed when conducting the analyses investigating changes in raw marks following enquiries. Enquiries relating to some CCEA units also had to be removed from this analysis (5,401 enquiries) due to CCEA supplying original raw marks prior to factorisation¹⁸. This meant that any mark changes calculated may not have been accurate.

The figures presented in this report are likely to be different from those published in our latest official statistical release because of these exclusions and a number of other reasons. First, the data used for the two reports were received on different dates, and second, the summary data provided for the official statistical release records service 3 enquiries (re-moderation) at a school level rather than the student level, which is how they are presented here.

Subject classification

Qualifications have been categorised into subject groups using the Joint Council for Qualification's (JCQ) classification system. In most cases, the subject group reflects a single subject, for example, the GCSE history group includes all GCSE history qualifications offered by exam boards. However, there are some cases where multiple qualifications are grouped together and these are as follows:

- Classical subjects includes ancient history, classical civilisation, classical Greek, Latin, and Biblical Hebrew.
- GCSE English includes both English and English language qualifications.
- AS and A level English includes English language, English literature and English language and literature qualifications.
- GCSE mathematics includes mathematics, methods in mathematics, and applications of mathematics qualifications.
- AS and A level mathematics includes mathematics, pure mathematics, and statistics.
- GCSE performing/expressive arts includes performing arts, expressive arts, and dance.

¹⁸ Factorisation is the adjustment of marks when a marker is found to be consistently lenient or severe.
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- AS and A level performing and expressive arts include performing arts and dance.
- Social science subjects (GCSE only) includes law, psychology, and sociology.
- Other modern languages includes Dutch, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Japanese, Modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Polish, Russian, Turkish, Urdu, and Persian.
- GCSE other sciences includes human health and physiology, agriculture and land use, astronomy, electronics, environmental science, and geology.
- AS and A level other sciences includes electronics, environmental technology, geology, and science in society.
- Other technology (GCSE only) includes motor vehicle studies.
- GCSE all other subjects includes catering, general studies and journalism.
- AS and A level all other subjects includes home economics, environmental studies, world development, humanities, anthropology, archaeology, philosophy, citizenship studies, and accounting.

This report focuses on EBacc¹⁹ subjects for GCSE and those subjects referred to by the Russell Group of Universities as ‘facilitating subjects’²⁰ for AS and A level

GCSE EBacc subjects are as follows:

- English/English language
- English literature
- Mathematics
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- Science
- Additional science
- Geography
- History
- French
- German
- Spanish

AS and A level ‘facilitating subjects’ are as follows:

- English literature (here we include all qualifications in the JCQ ‘English’ category)
- Mathematics
- Further mathematics

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc>

²⁰ <https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/for-students/school-and-college-in-the-uk/subject-choices-at-school-and-college/>

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- Geography
- History
- Classical languages (here we include all qualifications in the JCQ 'classical subjects' category)
- French
- German
- Spanish

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