

Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications: Wave 10

Report on behalf of Ofqual

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Executive summary

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the tenth wave of research Ipsos MORI has conducted on behalf of Ofqual to assess attitudes to A levels and GCSEs among teachers, the general public, students and parents. Each wave of the study has aimed to examine:

- Perceptions of A level and GCSE qualifications.
- Confidence in the examinations system, including implementation and regulation.
- The relevance of information received on the A level and GCSE examination systems.
- Awareness and perceptions of Ofqual.

Methodology

This wave, for the first time, questions were asked about perceptions of other academic qualifications (such as the International Baccalaureate and the Project) and vocational qualifications. Questions specifically about the Diploma were not asked this wave.

A telephone survey was carried out among 500 teachers of GCSEs and or A/A2 level qualifications in a representative sample of schools and colleges in England between 21st November and 16th December 2011. One teacher per school was interviewed. Data were weighted to the regional profile of schools and colleges in England that deliver GCSEs and A levels.

Interviews with the general public were conducted face-to-face in home using the Ipsos MORI 'capibus' omnibus survey between 18th November and 15th December 2011. Overall 2,098 interviews were conducted with respondents aged 15+. This included 253 students who had recently taken, were taking or were about to take A levels and GCSEs and 384 parents of students who had recently taken, were taking or were about to take A levels and GCSEs. As in the previous nine waves, additional interviews were conducted with students and parents. The aim of this was to provide a more robust sample of these groups for analysis.

This methodology is in keeping with previous waves except where noted.

Perceptions of A levels

Confidence in A levels amongst A level teachers remains stable (81% compared with 76% in 2010). However, there has been a fall in the proportion of teachers saying that they are more confident in the A level system than they were a year ago (from 10% in 2010 to 5% in 2011).

Whilst the proportion of parents reporting more confidence in the A level system than a few years ago is unchanged, there has been an increase among the general public overall (25% in 2011 compared with 20% in 2010) who say this.

Support for A levels amongst A level students is high. There has been an **increase in the proportion who think the A level is an important qualification to have** (94% of students in 2011 versus 78% in 2010), signalling a return to 2009 levels of support. The vast majority of A level students also agree that a higher educational qualification such as A level is more important now than ever (86%) and disagree that the A level should be abolished (82%). The majority of teachers also agree that it is more important now than ever that students have a higher level of education such as an A level (85%) and that overall, the A level is an important qualification to have (92%).

Amongst teachers, marking and grading is an important factor in their confidence in the A level system, highlighted by the fact that this is the most frequently mentioned concern about A levels amongst teachers of the qualification. Positively, **the majority of A level teachers are confident in the accuracy and quality of marking of A level papers** (73%) and only a minority (29%) feel that the quality of marking has decreased; these are in line with 2010 figures. Following a significant rise in wave 10 (to 87%), the proportion of A level teachers who feel that students get the grade their performance deserves has returned to 2009 levels; this is driven by a significant increase in the proportion who 'tend to agree' that this is the case (61% compared with 47% in 2010).

Three quarters (76%) of students agree that A level students get the grade their performance deserves, as do two-thirds (66%) of parents and 59% of the general public overall. This indicates a link between proximity to the system and perceptions of grading with perceptions of grading falling the further removed respondents are.

The proportion of A level teachers and A level students who hold negative opinions towards the media announcement of A level results remains consistent with the previous wave; 82% of teachers say they find the media's coverage unhelpful and 24% of students say they find this upsetting.

There has been a significant **increase in the proportion of parents who feel the A* grade will help universities to identify top students** (75% from 66% in 2010). The majority of teachers and students also agree this is the case.

Perceptions of GCSEs

GCSE teachers' confidence in the GCSE system has remained static, and is lower than A level teachers' confidence in the A level system (69% compared with 81%). This trend is a continuation from 2010 (76% of A level teachers were confident compared to 69% of GCSE teachers), though the gap has widened in 2011.

There has, however, been **an increase in confidence among students**, with over half (51%) saying they have more confidence in the system now than they did a few years ago compared to 38% who said this in 2010.

As well as teachers' overall confidence in GCSEs being lower than A levels, there is more concern and less confidence about certain aspects of the GCSE system than is the case for the A level system. For instance, whilst the majority of GCSE teachers remain confident in the accuracy and quality of GCSE marking (62%), this is lower than for A level marking amongst A level teachers. There has also been a **negative shift in opinion of teachers towards the reliability of GCSE grading**; the proportion saying *all/most students get the right grade* has fallen since 2010 (77% compared with 86%) whilst the proportion saying that *around a quarter get the wrong grade* has increased (20% versus 11% in 2010). The biggest contributing factor to students not getting the grades they deserve according to both teachers and the general public is students performing worse than expected in exam papers or controlled assessments (64% of teachers feel this contributes a lot/somewhat and 72% of the public feel this contributes at least a little) rather than factors relating to examination design or marking. However, the most commonly cited concern about the GCSE system amongst GCSE teachers relates to controlled assessment (18% mentioned this as a concern).

Outcomes of A levels and GCSEs

As is consistent with previous years, two in five teachers (42%) say they have to rely on enquiries about results services to get accurate results for their students.

Awareness of Ofqual

There has been a steady increase in teachers' awareness of Ofqual since 2008. **Familiarity (unprompted) with Ofqual has increased to 76%** from 64% in 2010 and **awareness of Ofqual's role has increased from 73% to 84%**.

In contrast, **amongst the general public unprompted familiarity with Ofqual as an organisation and awareness of Ofqual's role is low** (16% familiar and 14% aware of their role). Familiarity amongst parents is slightly higher at 21%.

In keeping with the increased awareness of Ofqual, **the proportion of teachers who consider Ofqual to be effective in its role has increased**; in 2011, 11% said Ofqual is very effective compared with 7% in 2010.

Information

In 2011, parents feel more informed about A levels and GCSEs than they did in 2010. There has been an **increase in the proportion of parents of A level students saying they have enough information on the way that A levels are marked and graded** (35% versus 26% in 2010). Whilst unchanged compared to 2010, A level students are still more likely to say they have enough information (69%).

Seven in ten (69%) GCSE students and 42% of parents of GCSE students agree that they have all the information they need on how GCSEs are marked and graded. The proportion of GCSE students saying this has increased to 2009 levels having fallen to 49% in 2010.

Parents and students are most likely to trust schools and teachers as a source of information about exams. Similarly, they also say that these would be the sources they would be most likely to contact in case of concern about grades or the examination system.

Other academic qualifications

In this wave of the research, respondents were asked questions about other academic qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate, iGCSEs or the Project. It is worth highlighting that the 'teacher' sample is composed specifically of GCSE/ A level teachers, and to be eligible for the student or parent sample for analysis, a respondent had to themselves be/ have a child who is about to start taking, already be taking or recently have taken GCSE or A levels and therefore did not focus specifically on teachers/ students of these other qualifications (therefore views cannot be considered representative of teachers/students/parents as a whole).

Most teachers (86%) feel they are aware of the differences between traditional academic qualifications such as A levels and GCSEs and other academic qualifications. Whilst teachers are often aware of these other academic qualifications, they are not always able to comment on how they work in practice due to lack of first-hand experience. For instance, whilst 59% say they are confident in the accuracy and quality of marking of newer academic qualifications, a further 18% report that these qualifications are not taught in their school or college.

Less than half of students or parents are aware of the difference between other academic qualifications and traditional qualifications such as A levels and GCSEs (46% and 42% respectively).

Vocational qualifications

Despite the students surveyed being GCSE/ A level students specifically, two in five (39%) have taken a vocational qualification in the last two years.

Amongst teachers, understanding of what is meant by 'level' of vocational qualification is higher than knowledge of 'credit' in relation to vocational qualifications; 85% of teachers say they understand the meaning of 'level' whereas 64% say they understand how credit works.

Half of the general public respondents feel they understand what is meant by 'level' of vocational qualifications, whereas 36% report knowing how 'credit' works.

Opinion towards the comparability of vocational qualifications to academic qualifications is mixed. **Teachers are more likely to disagree than agree (59% versus 25%) that vocational qualifications are of an equal status to traditional academic qualifications** such as A levels and GCSEs in terms of skill and level of difficulty required to achieve the qualification. Just over half (55%) of students and two in five (42%) parents agree vocational qualifications are of an equal status.

A similar proportion of teachers and students agree that there is enough opportunity to study vocational qualifications in schools and sixth form colleges (56% and 60% respectively).

Teachers also tend to agree that the way that vocational qualifications are taught in schools is suitable for the subject (57%) and school/college environment (59%).

Regulated versus unregulated qualifications

Understanding of the difference between regulated and unregulated qualifications is low; a minority of teachers (35%) and all general public respondents (21%) say they know a great deal/ fair amount about this distinction.

Introduction

Introduction

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by Ofqual to conduct a tenth wave of research to assess teachers', parents', students' and the general public's perceptions of A levels and GCSEs. This follows nine waves of surveys measuring perceptions of A levels between 2003 and 2010 (and, since 2004, perceptions of GCSEs).¹ This wave questions were also asked about other academic qualifications and vocational qualifications.

Objectives of the research

The overall objectives of the research are similar to the objectives in previous waves. This study aims to examine:

- Perceptions of A level and GCSE qualifications
- Confidence in the examination system – both in its implementation and regulation
- The relevance of the information received on the A level and GCSE examination system.
- Teachers' awareness of, and ratings of, Ofqual.

All ten waves of the research have aimed to gain greater insight into perceptions of the **A level examination system** among teachers, parents, students and the general public. In particular:

- perceptions of the A level qualification;
- confidence in the A level examinations system; and
- information received on the A level examinations.

Since wave four in 2005, this research has also looked at perceptions of the **GCSE examinations system** among teachers, parents, students and the general public. In particular:

- perceptions of the GCSE qualification; and
- confidence in the GCSE examinations system.

Since wave five in 2006, the scope of the research has been expanded to look at:

¹ Prior to 2008 the survey was commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

- how likely people are to contact various organisations about the fairness of the exam system and whether they feel they act in students' best interests;
- awareness of the Diploma;
- the effectiveness of the QCA ("Ofqual" since 2008) at regulating the examinations system;
- preferred channels for receipt of exam results;
- views on the accuracy and quality of the marking of GCSE and A level papers; and
- whether or not teachers have to rely on enquiries about results services to get accurate results for their students.

Furthermore, since wave seven in 2008 the research has also measured:

- familiarity with Ofqual , and perceptions of Ofqual's effectiveness as exams regulator; and
- perceptions of the reliability of grades at GCSE level, and factors contributing to students not getting the grades they deserve.

In addition, in waves eight and nine expanded to include:

- views on the effectiveness the new Diploma qualifications in delivering learning and progression outcomes for students; and
- perceptions of the status of the Diploma among university admissions offices, employers, schools and the general public.

For the first time in 2010, a new question was included to measure perceptions of the new A* grade at A level.

In 2011, questions on the Diploma were removed. Several new questions were added.

These focused on:

- Perceptions of alternative qualifications to GCSEs and A levels, such as the iGCSE and International Baccalaureate.
- Perceptions of, and opportunity to study, vocational qualifications.
- Understanding of regulated versus unregulated qualifications.

Context/background to wave 10 of the survey

When examining perceptions in a tracking survey it is important to consider the context within which the research was conducted. Around the fieldwork period, concerns were raised about the marking of examination papers and the government outlined a series of ambitious reforms to traditional and vocational qualifications. Preceding fieldwork in the summer of 2011, 12 errors were found in examination papers across the UK affecting a total of 140,000 papers which resulted in discussions to increase the regulatory powers of Ofqual². The examinations system was also subject to high-profile media coverage in December after The Telegraph³ published a video showing chief examiners seeming to reveal the topics on an upcoming GCSE History paper⁴.

The period surrounding the fieldwork was also one of significant reforms to the examination system. In summer 2010 the number of A level modules taken was reduced from six to four and the A* grade was introduced and subsequently awarded to 8% of exam papers. Following this, in 2011 the government issued the *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*⁵ in March which recommended a range of reforms to raise the status of vocational qualifications and ensure that they meet the needs of young people. In addition, in June 2011 large-scale GCSE reform was announced. Following the recommendations of Ofqual, from 2012 modular examinations will end and with assessment to be taken at the end of the course, and in essay subjects the importance of writing skills is to be emphasised by reintroducing marks specifically for spelling, punctuation and grammar.

It is against the backdrop of these priorities that the wave 10 survey was conducted.

Methodology

All ten waves of the research have been carried out using Ipsos MORI's general public face-to-face omnibus and a telephone survey of teachers. Details of the methodology used in each wave of the survey can be found in Appendix A. The methodology used for wave ten is summarised below.

²<http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00198969/ofqual-to-get-new-powers-to-fine-exam-boards-over-mistakes-in-papers>

³As this was published during the last week of fieldwork (the majority of fieldwork, including all fieldwork with the general public and parents, had already been conducted), the data was analysed to determine whether it had affected results. After comparing survey data before the Telegraph story and after, no significant change in findings as a result was apparent.

⁴<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/secondaryeducation/8940799/Exam-boards-Were-cheating-were-telling-you-the-question-cycle.html>

⁵ <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/The%20Wolf%20Report.pdf>

Survey of teachers

A telephone survey was conducted among teachers of GCSE and/or AS/A2 level qualifications, selected from a sample of 500 schools and colleges across England between 21 November and 16 December 2011. The same sampling approach as that used in previous waves was taken. Middle deemed secondary, secondary and 16+ phase of education establishments were selected from Edubase. Within each of these three education types, a systematic random sample of schools was drawn, allowing all schools an equal chance of selection, whilst ensuring that the profile of the sample *for each education type is representative within itself*. Whilst a representative number of maintained versus independent schools was drawn (based on the proportion of each of these types of establishment in England), a higher proportion of FE institutions (compared to their prevalence versus secondary schools) were drawn. This was done to enable adequate numbers of FE colleges for analysis; an approach that is in keeping with previous waves of the survey.

Interviews were carried out by Ipsos MORI's in-house telephone unit using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), and all data entry, editing, validation and analysis was carried out by Ipsos MORI's data processing unit.

Quotas were set on qualification taught (A levels and/or GCSEs) and, years of teaching experience. A quota was also set on the number of interviews to be achieved with independent schools and secondary maintained schools as well as FE institutions, with the quota on FE institutions ensuring that a sufficient number of teachers from this establishment type are interviewed to allow for analysis of FE responses.

Survey of the general public, parents and students

Fieldwork for the 'general public' research was conducted face-to-face, in-home, using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) on Ipsos MORI's weekly 'Capibus' omnibus survey.

Interviews were conducted between 18 November and 16 December 2011 with 2,098 members of the general public aged 15+ in England. This included,

- 253 students who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs;
- 384 parents of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs, and

- 1,461 members of the general public who did not fall into the categories of parent or student above.

As in the previous nine waves, the general public sample was boosted with additional interviews with parents and students. This was done by putting questions for parents on three waves of the Ipsos MORI Capibus and questions for students on four waves in order to allow more robust analysis of the views of these groups. When results are presented at an overall 'all general public respondents' level, this includes the booster interviews with students and parents. It should therefore be highlighted that more interviews were conducted with students and parents than would be found in a representative 'general public' sample.

This wave, *more* additional booster interviews were conducted with parents and students compared to previous waves and therefore the over-representation of parents and students in the survey is greater this wave. This allows for a larger number of students and parents for analysis of these two key sample groups in the report (and allows comparability of these across years of the survey as they were weighted in the same way each time within a representative general public wave of capibus). However, it does mean that the data at an 'all general public respondents' level is not comparable against previous waves, nor is it representative of the general public, due to the over-representation of students and parents in the data. For this reason, in the interests of statistical robustness and clarity, comparisons at an overall general public level against previous waves are not made in this report.

It should be noted, however, that not all questions included in the general public research were asked of all respondents. Indeed most of the questions were asked only of parents and/or students and much of the analysis in this report is at this level and so is comparable against previous waves.

Weighting data

Each wave of the capibus general public, parent and student data was weighted to the known general public population profile. It was weighted as part of *each capibus wave* during which it was collected (e.g. data collected in each of the four capibus waves were weighted separately taking into account the achieved interviews within that wave versus the known population). It was then combined into an overall dataset. The overall dataset (with these booster interviews) was not re-weighted to make it representative of the general public, as this would have meant down-weighting the student and parent data this year. Applying a different weighting scheme would have removed comparability with previous waves. This

however, does mean that students and parents continue to be over-represented (the implications of this are discussed in the preceding section).

The teacher data was also weighted; in keeping with previous years, this was weighted by Government Office Region at the analysis stage to match the known *regional profile* of schools and colleges in England that deliver GCSE and A level qualifications. The data has not been weighted to centre/ establishment type as has been the case in previous years.

Interpretation of the data

When interpreting the findings, it is important to remember that the results are based on a sample, rather than the entire total population, of teachers, parents and students in England. Consequently, results are subject to sampling tolerances and not all differences between sub-groups are statistically significant. Significant differences are shown in bold text in the tables and charts.

Weighting data, whilst important in ensuring that results are representative, can also introduce a 'design effect' and results in an 'effective base' that differs from the unweighted and weighted sample size. It is possible to recalculate the *effective* base by taking this distorting effect into account, and this is the figure which is used for statistical analysis.

Throughout this report, in keeping with previous waves, unweighted bases are shown in tables and charts. However, significance testing between wave 9 and wave 10 is based on the effective base. The effective bases in these waves and an approximate guide to the difference required between waves nine and ten of the research to show significant changes is provided in the table below.

Differences required for significance at the 95% confidence level at or near these percentages

Effective base		10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
<i>Wave 9 sample</i>	<i>Vs.</i>			
	<i>Wave 10 sample</i>			
All students (84)	All students (188)	8	12	13
GCSE students (42)	GCSE students (84)	11	17	19
A level students (52)	A level students (111)	10	15	17
All parents (267)	All parents (332)	5	7	8
GCSE parents (215)	GCSE parents (277)	5	8	9
A level parents (218)	A level parents (272)	5	8	9
All general public respondents (1,931)	All general public respondents (1,734)	2	3	4
All teachers (488)	All teachers (493)	4	6	6
GCSE teachers (404)	GCSE teachers (395)	4	6	7
A level teachers (295)	A level teachers (304)	5	7	8

Source: Ipsos MORI

Please note that caution should be exercised when comparing percentages derived from base sizes of 99 respondents or fewer, and particularly when comparing percentages derived from base sizes of 50 respondents or fewer. Therefore, the reporting of such sub-samples that follows should be regarded as indicative only.

Base definitions:

This report makes regular reference to the views of ‘students’ and ‘parents’. Unless otherwise indicated, these terms refer to students who at the time of interview in November and December 2011 are currently taking, have just taken or are about to take A levels and/or GCSEs, and parents of students in this position. Unless otherwise stated, when discussing ‘students’ or ‘parents’, the data includes responses from both the A level *and* GCSE cohorts. In some instances, the focus is just on those who /whose children are currently taking, have just taken or are about to take A levels or just on those who /whose children are currently taking, have just taken or are about to take GCSEs. The report highlights any analysis where this is the case.

As has been the case in previous waves of the research, where ‘general public’ is referred to, this is **inclusive** of student and parent interviews (including the additional student and parent interviews). Therefore, for analysis purposes, ‘student’ and ‘parent’ interviews are not mutually exclusive of the general public interviews.

Where ‘teachers of A levels’ or ‘teachers of GCSEs’ are referred to, this includes teachers in mainstream and independent schools, and lecturers in college, who are currently teaching AS or A2 level qualifications or vocational A levels or GCSEs and vocational GCSEs. They may also teach other qualifications too (such as the IB or another vocational qualification) but they were only eligible for the survey if they said that they taught GCSEs and/or A levels. .

It is important to bear in mind that most of the general public who are not students or parents interviewed as part of this research have had no direct, *recent* experience of either the GCSE or A level exam. In addition, parents and students could only draw upon their own experience, which typically only related to one period in time. The majority of teachers, however, were able to reflect on their own experience of teaching for GCSE or A level exams over a period of some years; hence the following report focuses on these results as the most informative.

This wave, we have asked about vocational qualifications. Whilst the general public sample may include some people who are knowledgeable about this through direct experience (as a student of vocational qualifications, parent or employers who hires those with vocational qualifications), this may not be the case. Whether a respondent was counted as a ‘student’ or ‘parent’ was based on their/ their child’s experience of A levels or GCSEs and not vocational qualifications. The survey has not specifically sought the views of students (or their parents) who have taken vocational qualifications and so the results presented here are only a reflection of 15-19 GCSE/A level students (and their parents) not learners as a whole.

Where percentages do not sum to 100%, this is due to computer rounding the decimal points up or down, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple responses. An asterisk (*) denotes a value of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.

Perceptions of A levels

Confidence in the A level system

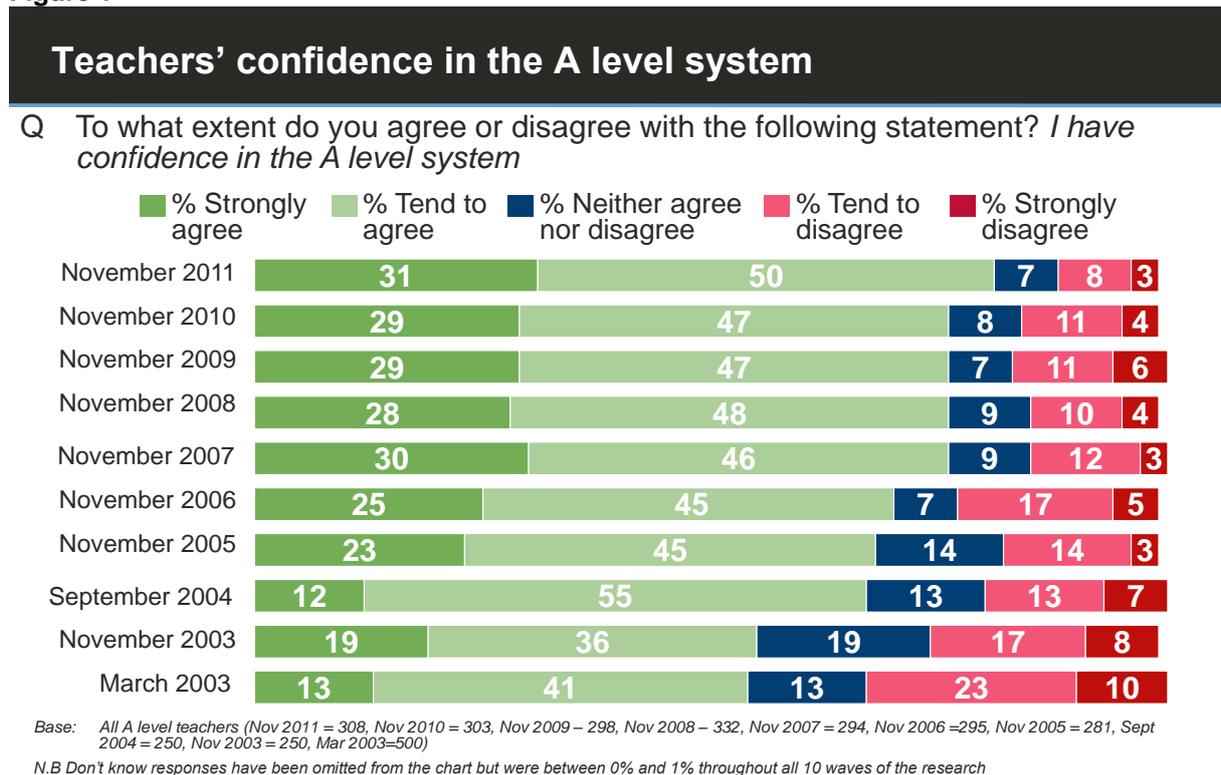
This section examines perceptions of the A level system amongst teachers, students, parents and all general public interviewed. It focuses on overall confidence in the A level system as well as certain factors relating to the system such as marking and grading.

Views of teachers

As shown in Figure 1, four in five A level teachers (81%) agree that they have confidence in the A level system, with just one in ten (11%) disagreeing. This is in keeping with 2010.

Teachers in maintained secondary schools are more likely than those in independent schools to say that they have confidence in the A level system (85% in maintained schools say they are confident compared to 71% in independent schools).

Figure 1⁶

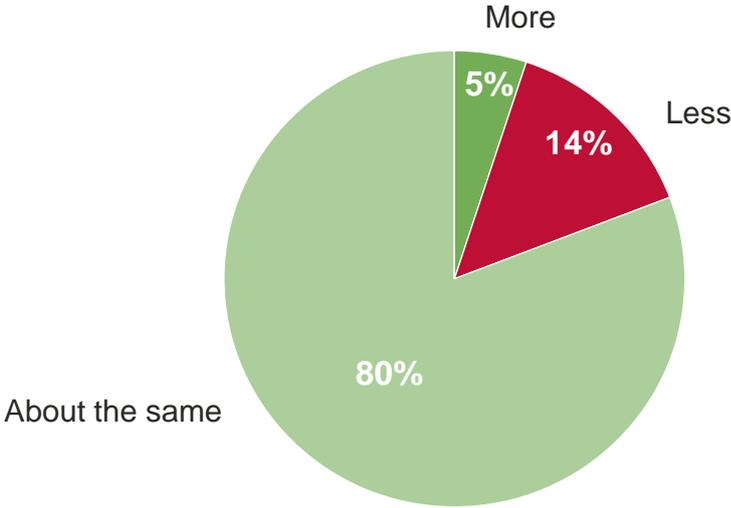


⁶ Don't know responses are not included in the chart but are 1% or less throughout all 10 waves of the research

A level teachers were asked if there had been any change in their confidence in the A levels system compared to the previous year. As shown in Figure 2, the majority of teachers (80%) say that their confidence in the A level system is unchanged; this is in keeping with 2010 when 74% said this. However, there has been a fall in the proportion of A level teachers saying that they are *more* confident in the A level system than they were a year ago (from 10% in 2010 to 5% in 2011). There has been no change in the proportion of teachers who say they have *less* confidence compared with a year ago (this remains consistent with 2010 at 14%).

Figure 2
Teachers' confidence in the A level system compared to last year

Q Compared to last year, would you say that currently you have more confidence in the A level system, less confidence in the A level system or about the same level of confidence?



Base: All A level teachers (308), November 2011

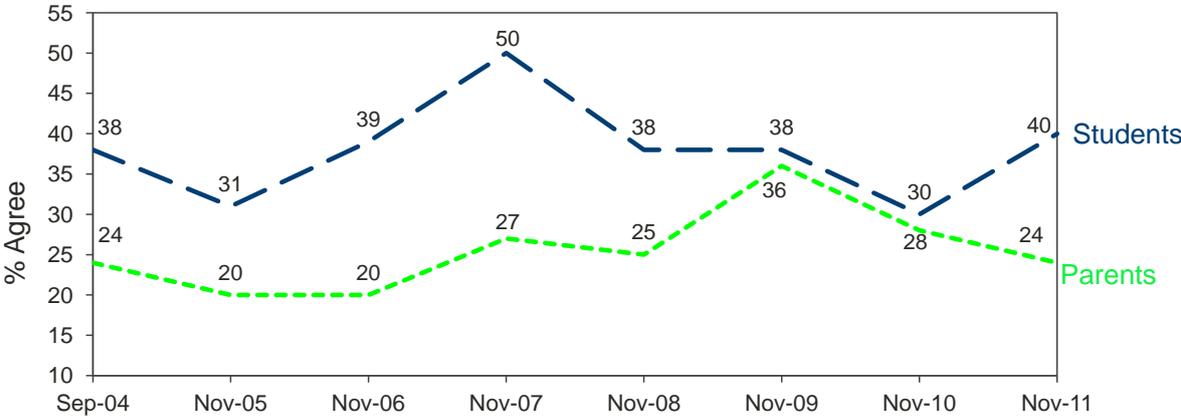
Views of the general public, students and parents

All general public respondents were asked about their confidence in the A level system. Overall, a quarter of all respondents (25%) report an increase in confidence in wave 10. Around a quarter (27%) of parents of A level or GCSE students say that they ‘have more confidence in the A level system now than a few years ago’; a comparable proportion to 2010 (28%).

Figure 3⁷

Confidence in the A level system

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *I have more confidence in the A level system now than I did have a few years ago*



Base: See footnote

Amongst A level students specifically, in 2011 35% agree that their confidence in A levels has increased. This is unchanged from the proportion of A level students in 2010 (31%) who said this. Similarly, the proportion of parents of A level students who report that they have increased confidence in A levels has remained the same (27% in 2011 and 28% in 2010).

⁷ **Bases:** **Wave 10**, All general public (2,098), parents (384) and students (253); **Wave 9**, All general public (1,931), parents (334) and students (120), November 2010; **Wave 8**, All general public (1,774), parents (290) and students (112), November 2009; **Wave 7**, All general public (1,857), parents (297) and students (152), November 2008; **Wave 6**, All general public (1,765), parents (292) and students (136), November 2007; **Wave 5**, All general public (1,964), parents (256), and students (84), November 2006; **Wave 4**, All general public (1,974), parents (273) and students (73), November 2005; **Wave 3**, All general public (1,720), parents (303) and students (80), September 2004.

Perceptions of the importance and value of the A level qualification

Views of teachers

Although recognition of the importance of the A level remains extremely high, as shown in table A, since 2010 the proportion of A level teachers who agree that the A level is an important qualification to obtain has decreased (from 96% to 92%). There has, however, been no change in the high proportion of A level teachers (85%) who believe that it is more important now than ever that students get a higher level education qualification such as an A level (although this is the highest proportion since the question was first asked in 2003).

Table A: Teachers' perceptions of the A level

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	Wave 10	Wave 9 vs. Wave 10
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Overall, the A level is an important qualification for people to obtain											
Agree	94	95	95	91	93	93	95	94	96	92	-4
Disagree	2	2	3	2	5	2	3	2	1	2	+1
It is more important now than ever that students get a higher level of educational qualification such as an A level											
Agree	80	76	78	77	76	83	81	82	79	85	+6
Disagree	12	16	12	10	15	11	9	9	11	8	-3
<i>Base: All A level teachers</i>	<i>(500)</i>	<i>(250)</i>	<i>(250)</i>	<i>(281)</i>	<i>(295)</i>	<i>(294)</i>	<i>(332)</i>	<i>(298)</i>	<i>(303)</i>	<i>(308)</i>	

N.B. Statistically significant changes between waves 9 and 10 are highlighted in bold.

Source: Ipsos MORI

Views of students

The findings highlight that almost all A level students agree that the A level is an important qualification to obtain, with the proportion of students who agree that the A level is an important qualification to obtain has rising to 94% in 2011. This is a return to the levels of support seen in 2009 (93%) following a significant drop in support in 2010 when 78% agreed the A level qualification was important.

More than four in five A level students (86%) also agree that it is more important now than ever that students get a higher educational qualification such as an A level, which is not significantly different from 2010. Support for abolishing A levels remains very low and is consistent with 2010 findings (6% in 2011, 8% in 2010); the vast majority of A level students (82%) disagree that the A level should be abolished.

Table B: Students' perceptions of the A level

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	Wave 10	Wave 9 vs Wave 10
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Overall, the A level is an important qualification for people to obtain											
Agree	85	82	88	90	90	87	90	93	78	94	+16
Disagree	8	4	5	8	2	7	1	3	5	3	-2
It is more important now than ever that students get a higher level of educational qualification such as an A level											
Agree	82	80	80	82	88	94	81	88	79	86	+7
Disagree	4	9	6	8	2	2	4	3	9	5	-4
A levels should be abolished											
Agree	4	11	14	3	2	8	6	11	8	6	-2
Disagree	76	74	75	85	92	80	80	78	79	82	+3
Base: All A level students	(80)	(73)	(80)	(73)	(84)	(69)	(88)	(66)	(73)	(157)	

N.B. Statistically significant changes between waves 9 and 10 are highlighted in bold.

Source: Ipsos MORI

A level grading and performance

Views of teachers

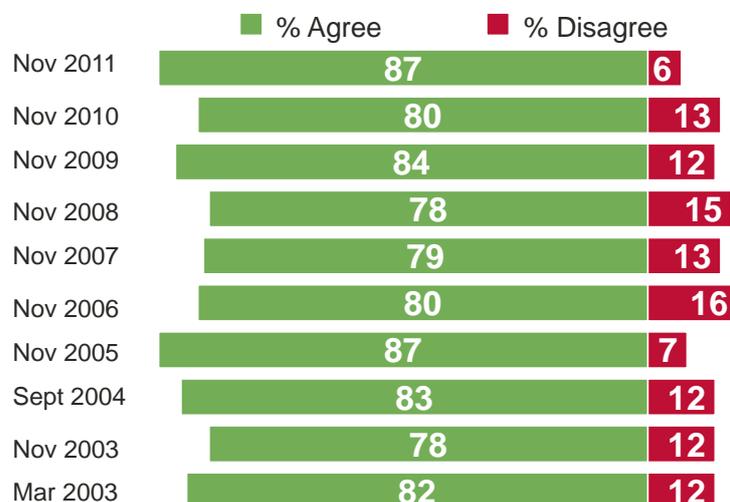
The vast majority of A level teachers (87%) agree that most students taking A levels get the grade their performance deserves. As Figure 4 shows, if looked at an *overall* level of agreement (*combining strongly agree and tend to agree*) this represents a significant rise in the proportion agreeing that most students get the grade their performance deserves compared to 2010 (80%). In fact, although comparable to 2009, the proportion agreeing with this in 2011 is the highest since 2005. However, it should be highlighted that this change is driven by an increase in the proportion who *tend* to agree that most students taking A levels get the grade their performance deserves (61% compared to 47% in 2010).

As might be expected, those who disagree that they have confidence in the A level system are less likely than average to agree that most students taking A levels get the grade their performance deserves (55% vs. 93%).

Figure 4

Teachers' perceptions of A level grading and performance

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *Most students taking A levels get the grade their performance deserves*



Base: All A level teachers (Nov 2011 = 308, Nov 2010 = 303, Nov 2009 = 298, Nov 2008 = 332, Nov 2007 = 294, Nov 2006 = 295, Nov 2005 = 281, Sept 2004 = 250, Nov 2003 = 250, Mar 2003 = 500)

NB: Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is because *don't know* and *neither agree nor disagree* responses have been omitted from the chart

Views of the general public, students and parents

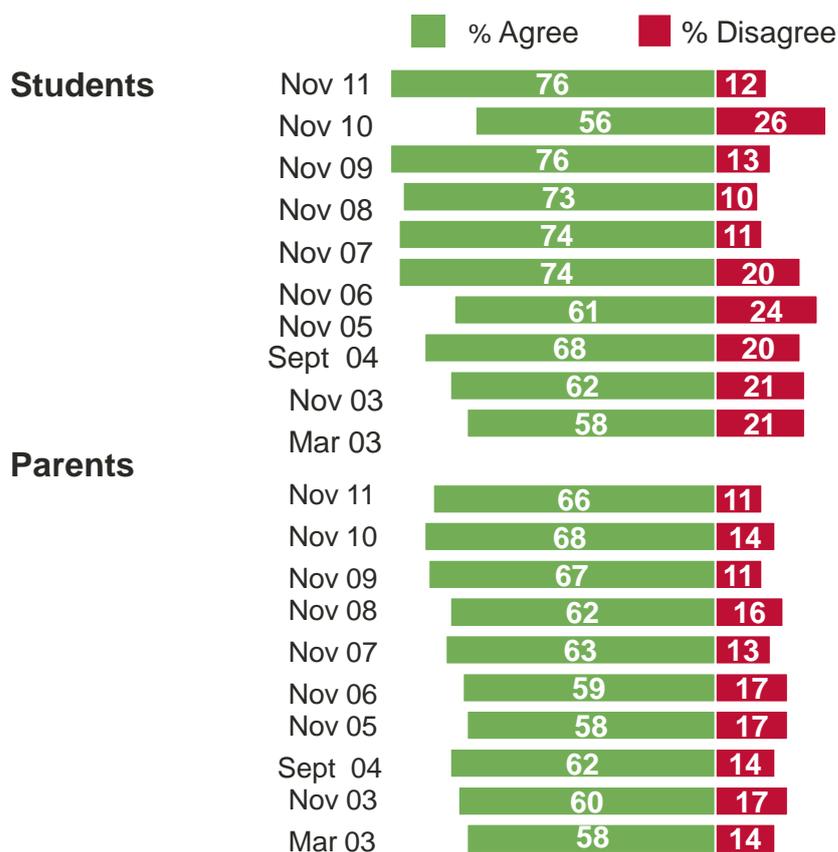
Three in five of all respondents in the general public survey agree that most students taking an A level get the grade their performance deserves (59%)⁸. As shown in Figure 5, more than three in four students (76%) and two in three parents (66%) agree that most students get the grade that their performance deserves. This represents an increase of 20% in the proportion of students who believe most A level students get the grade their performance deserves between waves (76% in 2011 and 56% in 2010). This however signals a return to the levels of confidence in grading reported between 2006 and 2009 (when 73%-76% agreed this was the case), following a significant drop in 2010.

⁸ This data can be found in the accompanying datafile.

Figure 5

A level grading and performance

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'Most students taking A levels get the grade their performance deserves'?



Bases:

Nov 2011 All students (253), and all parents (384)

Nov 2010 All students (120), and all parents (334)

Nov 2009 All students (112), and all parents (290)

Nov 2008 All students (152), and all parents (297)

Nov 2007 All students (136), and all parents (292)

Nov 2006 All students (138) and all parents (324)

Nov 2005 All students (137) and all parents (346)

Sep 2004 All students (80) and all parents (303)

Nov 2003 All students (119) and all parents (315)

Mar 2003 All students (92) and all parents (293)

Teachers' concerns about the A level system

A level teachers were asked if they had any concerns about the current A level system. As shown in Table C, between wave 3 when the question was first asked and wave 7, there had been a gradual rise in the proportion of teachers who did not have any concerns about the A level system.. This year the proportion of teachers citing no concerns (33%) is similar to 2010 (37%). As shown in table C, incorrect grading and marking of exam papers remains the most commonly cited concern among teachers. The table shows the top five mentions; however other factors that were more frequently mentioned issues in 2010 were only highlighted by a small proportion in 2011. These were that teachers are now less likely to be concerned that some courses are harder or more complicated than others (1% vs. 8% in 2010) and the number or frequency of changes to the curriculum (3% vs. 8% in 2010).

Table C: Teachers' concerns about the A level system – Top five mentions

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	Wave 10	Wave 9 vs Wave 10
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Incorrect grading and marking of exam papers	n/a	n/a	21	11	16	20	17	25	15	21	+6
Examinations/ curriculum is too easy/too many re-takes	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	0	13	6	12	9	-3
Timetabling of exams	n/a	n/a	13	7	7	4	3	4	3	6	+3
Heavy workload	n/a	n/a	15	12	10	6	5	3	6	5	-1
Individual subject issues (e.g. too many sciences/content of courses etc)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	2	2	5	+3
No concerns	n/a	n/a	21	25	26	35	38	28	37	33	-4
Don't know	n/a	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	*	0	*	0
<i>Base: All A level teachers</i>	(500)	(250)	(250)	(281)	(295)	(294)	(332)	(298)	(303)	(308)	

Source: Ipsos MORI

Confidence in the accuracy and quality of the marking of A level papers

Views of teachers

In 2011, as in 2010, just under three quarters of A level teachers (73%) have confidence in the accuracy and quality of marking A level papers,

As seen in Figure 6, in 2011, the proportion of teachers who agree that the accuracy and quality has decreased has remained in line with 2010 findings at just under one in three teachers (29%).

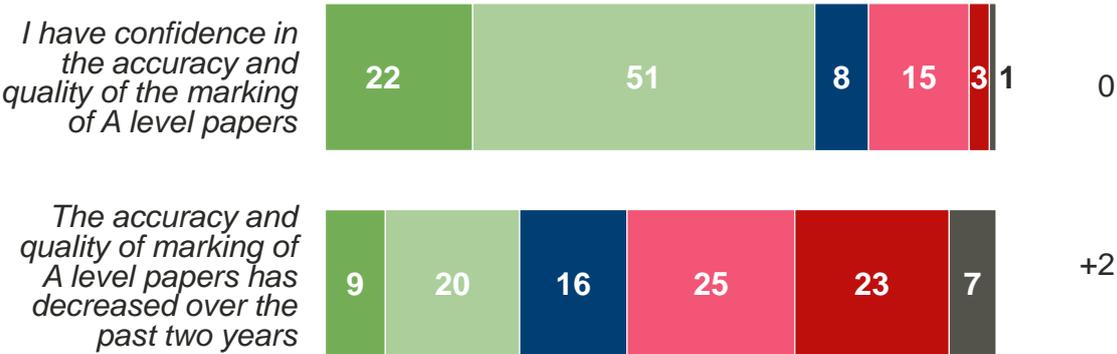
Confidence in the accuracy and quality of A level marking is highest amongst those who have been teaching for up to 5 years (86% of these teachers are confident versus 73% of the teacher sample overall).

Figure 6

Teachers' confidence in the quality of A level marking

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...

■ % Strongly agree
 ■ % Tend to agree
 ■ % Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ % Tend to disagree
 ■ % Strongly disagree
 ■ % No opinion
 % Change in agreement since 2010



Base: All A level teachers (308) Nov 2011; (303) Nov 2010

The most frequently mentioned reason for A level teachers believing that the accuracy and quality of A level marking has decreased over the past two years is the lack of high quality or experienced markers (20%). This is a change compared to 2009 and 2010 where 'many grades changing after re-marking' was the most cited reason. However mentions of this issue have fallen in 2011 to 19% from 30% in 2010.

Other issues cited by teachers include inconsistency in marking (16%) and the number of appeals that succeed (10%). Since 2010, concern has fallen regarding the high number of papers that are sent to be remarked (9% compared to 22% in 2010), the numerous requests for remarks which has shown up errors (7% compared to 19% in 2010) and that the results don't always match student ability (5% down from 17% in 2010).

Views of students and parents

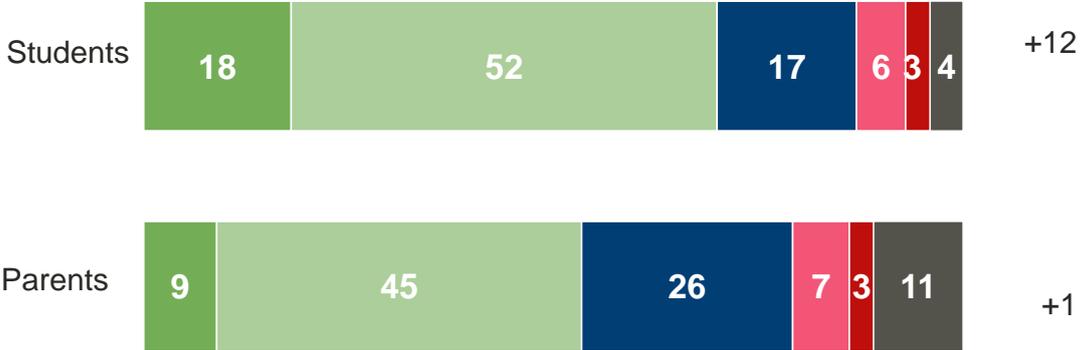
Students have more confidence than parents in the quality of A level marking, as shown in Figure 7. Whilst 70% of students agree that they have confidence, this falls to 55% among parents. .

Figure 7

Parents' and students' confidence in the quality of A level marking

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *I have confidence in the accuracy and quality of the marking of A Level papers*

■ % Strongly agree
 ■ % Tend to agree
 ■ % Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ % Tend to disagree
 ■ % Strongly disagree
 ■ % Don't know
 % Change in agreement since 2010



Base: All students (253), parents (384), Nov 2011

The media's reporting of A level results

Views of teachers

A level teachers remain highly critical of media coverage of the announcement of A level results. As Table D shows, in this wave of research four in five (82%) say they find the coverage unhelpful, which is in line with 81% of teachers in 2010.

Table D: Teachers' perceptions of media coverage

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	Wave 10	Wave 9 vs. Wave 10
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
<i>I find the media's coverage of the announcement of the A level results each year unhelpful</i>											
Strongly agree	58	65	70	70	60	61	51	58	57	57	0
Tend to agree	26	23	19	16	20	24	27	23	24	25	+1
Neither agree nor disagree	6	5	4	5	8	5	7	7	10	10	0
Tend to disagree	8	3	4	5	8	7	10	11	7	4	-3
Strongly disagree	2	2	2	3	4	2	5	1	2	3	+1
Don't know	1	*	*	*	*	1	*	1	*	1	+1
Agree	84	88	89	86	80	85	78	80	81	82	+1
Disagree	10	5	6	8	12	9	15	12	9	7	-2
<i>Base: All A level teachers</i>	<i>(500)</i>	<i>(250)</i>	<i>(250)</i>	<i>(281)</i>	<i>(295)</i>	<i>(294)</i>	<i>(332)</i>	<i>(298)</i>	<i>(303)</i>	<i>(308)</i>	

Source: Ipsos MORI

Views of students

As shown in table E, around one in four A level students (24%) say they find the media coverage of the announced A level results upsetting, which is consistent with 2010 findings. This maintains the increased levels of concern about the media coverage in the years since 2007 when just eight per cent said they found the coverage of A levels upsetting.

Table E: Students' perceptions of media coverage

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	Wave 10	Wave 9 vs. Wave 10
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
<i>I find the media's coverage of the announcement of the A level results each year upsetting</i>											
Strongly agree	-	3	5	-	2	3	1	6	6	3	-3
Tend to agree	4	8	9	3	-	5	15	23	15	21	+6
Neither agree nor disagree	16	12	9	12	5	12	28	21	29	32	+3
Tend to disagree	36	29	28	42	33	45	32	33	34	31	-3
Strongly disagree	40	45	48	42	58	34	18	13	10	9	-1
Don't know	3	3	3	-	1	1	6	4	5	3	-2
<i>Agree</i>	4	11	14	3	2	8	16	29	22	24	+2
<i>Disagree</i>	76	74	75	85	92	79	49	46	44	41	-3
Base: All A level students	(80)	(73)	(80)	(73)	(84)	(69)	(88)	(66)	(73)	(157)	

Source: Ipsos MORI

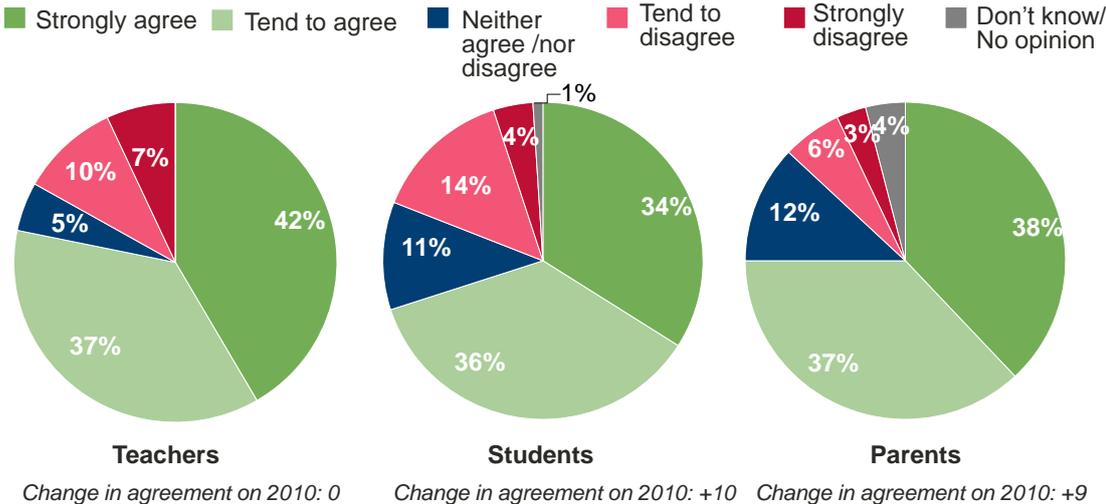
Perceptions of the A* grade

The A* grade for A levels introduced in 2010 was designed to stretch and challenge the most able students and help universities differentiate between applicants. Accordingly, students, their parents and A level teachers were asked if they believed the A* grade should help universities identify top students. As shown in Figure 8, the majority (79%) of A level teachers agree with this. The majority of parents and students also feel this way (75% and 70% respectively). The proportion of teachers and students who agree has remained unchanged since 2010 (79% and 60% respectively). However, the proportion of parents who believe that the A* grade should help universities identify top students has increased from two in three (66%) in 2010.

Figure 8

Perceptions of the A* grade at A level

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *The A* grade at A level should help universities identify top students*



Base: All teachers (500), students (253), parents (384), Nov 2011

Looking specifically at A level students, two thirds (66%) agree that the A* should help universities identify top students, consistent with the results from last year (65%). A quarter of parents of A level students (74%) agree that this is the case in 2011.

Perceptions of GCSEs

Perceptions of GCSEs

Confidence in the GCSE system

Views of teachers

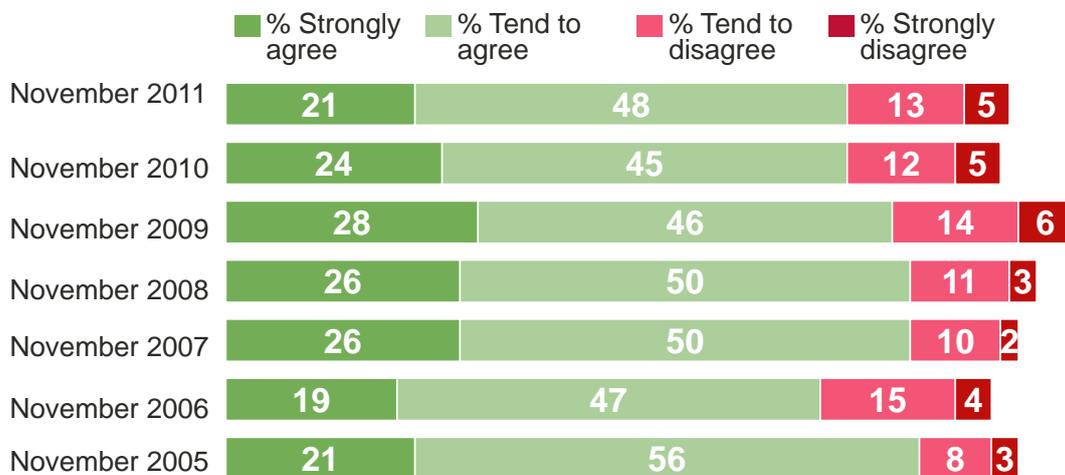
Seven in ten GCSE teachers (69%) say they have confidence in the GCSE system (see Figure 9). This is lower than the proportion of A level teachers who have confidence in the A level system (81%) and whereas confidence towards A levels has risen, confidence towards GCSEs is unchanged.

In 2011, as in 2010, GCSE teachers from maintained secondary schools are the most confident in the system (75% say they are confident compared to just 52% of independent schools).⁹

Figure 9

Teachers' confidence in the GCSE system

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *I have confidence in the GCSE system*



Base: All GCSE teachers (Nov 2011 = 401, Nov 2010 = 414, Nov 2009 = 401, Nov 2008 = 388, Nov 2007 = 397, Nov 2006 = 420, Nov 2005 = 414)
 NB: Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is because *don't know* and *neither agree nor disagree* responses have been omitted from the chart

⁹ Analysis of findings at this level of detail has only been reported where significant. The published dataset only provides data for all teachers or at a qualification level (all GCSE or A level teachers). Findings by centre type are not shown in the published dataset

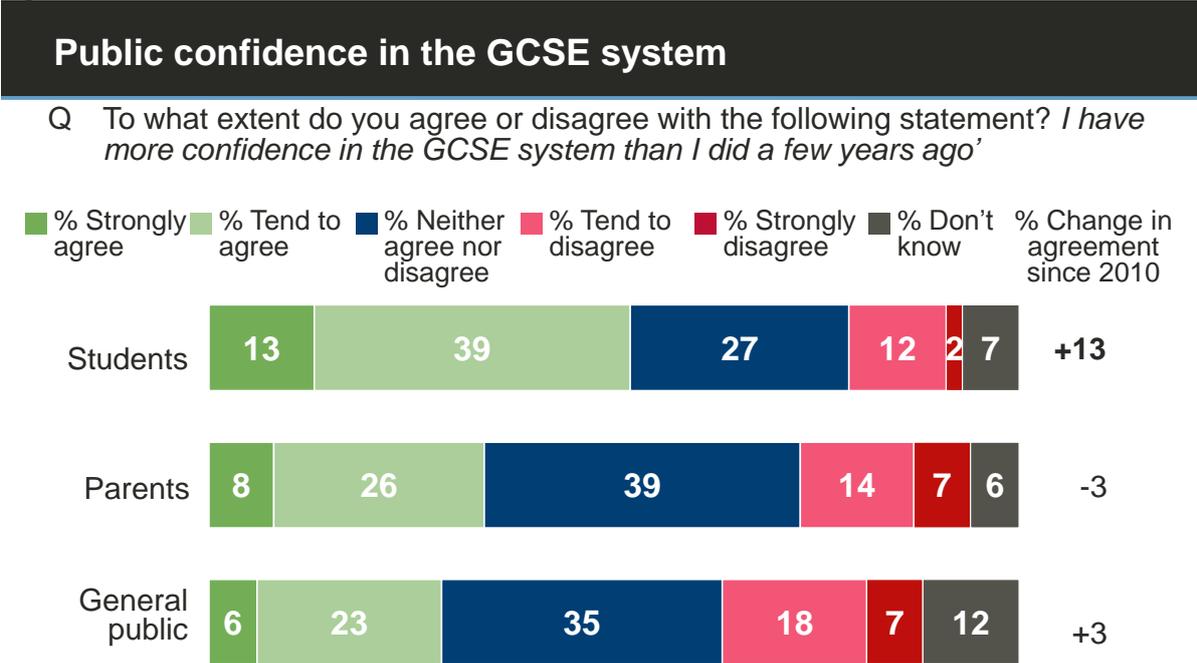
Views of the general public, students and parents

Overall, more than one in four of the general public (28%) agree that they have more confidence in the GCSE system now than they did a few years ago. Those that have more confidence in the A level system than they did a few years ago are most likely to feel the same way about the GCSE system (63% compared to 13% who have less confidence in the A level system).

At 38%, 2010 saw the lowest level of agreement among students since this question was first asked in 2005; in 2011 the proportion of students who are confident has returned to the levels seen in 2009 (when 51% said they had more confidence). The proportion of parents that agree has remained stable since 2010 (when 37% said they were more confident).

The results for GCSE students specifically, show that 53% say they have more confidence in the GCSE system than a few years ago, consistent with the results from last year (48% in 2010). There has also been no significant change in the views of parents of GCSE students (35% in 2011 agree compared to 38% in 2010).

Figure 10



N.B. Statistically significant changes between waves 9 and 10 are highlighted in bold.
 Base: All students (253), parents (384) and general public (2098), Nov 2010; All students (120), parents (334) and general public (1,931), Nov 09

Confidence in the accuracy and quality of marking of GCSE papers

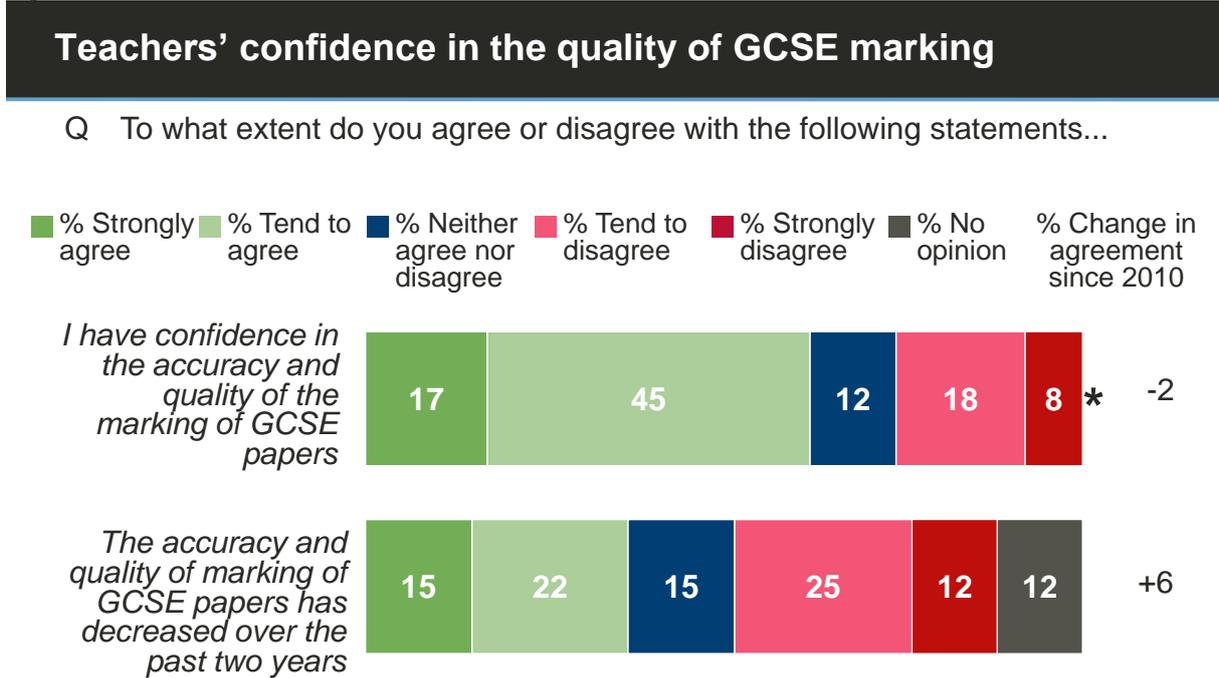
Views of teachers

As shown in Figure 11, just under two in three GCSE teachers (62%) have confidence in the accuracy and quality of the marking of GCSE papers; this is unchanged since 2010 (64%). In comparison confidence in the accuracy and quality of marking of A level papers continues to be higher¹⁰ (73%) than GCSEs.

Confidence in the accuracy and quality of the marking of GCSE papers is highest among those who have been teaching for 5 years or less; over three in four (76%) feel confident¹¹.

The proportion of GCSE teachers who agree (strongly agree and agree combined) that the accuracy and quality of marking GCSE papers has decreased over the past two years has not changed significantly from 2010 (37% in 2011 vs. 31% in 2010). However, there has been an increase in the proportion who *strongly* agree that this is the case (from 10% in 2010 to 15% in 2011).

Figure 11¹²



Base: All GCSE teachers (401) Nov 2011; (414) Nov 2010

¹⁰ Amongst A level teachers than confidence in GCSEs is amongst GCSE teachers.

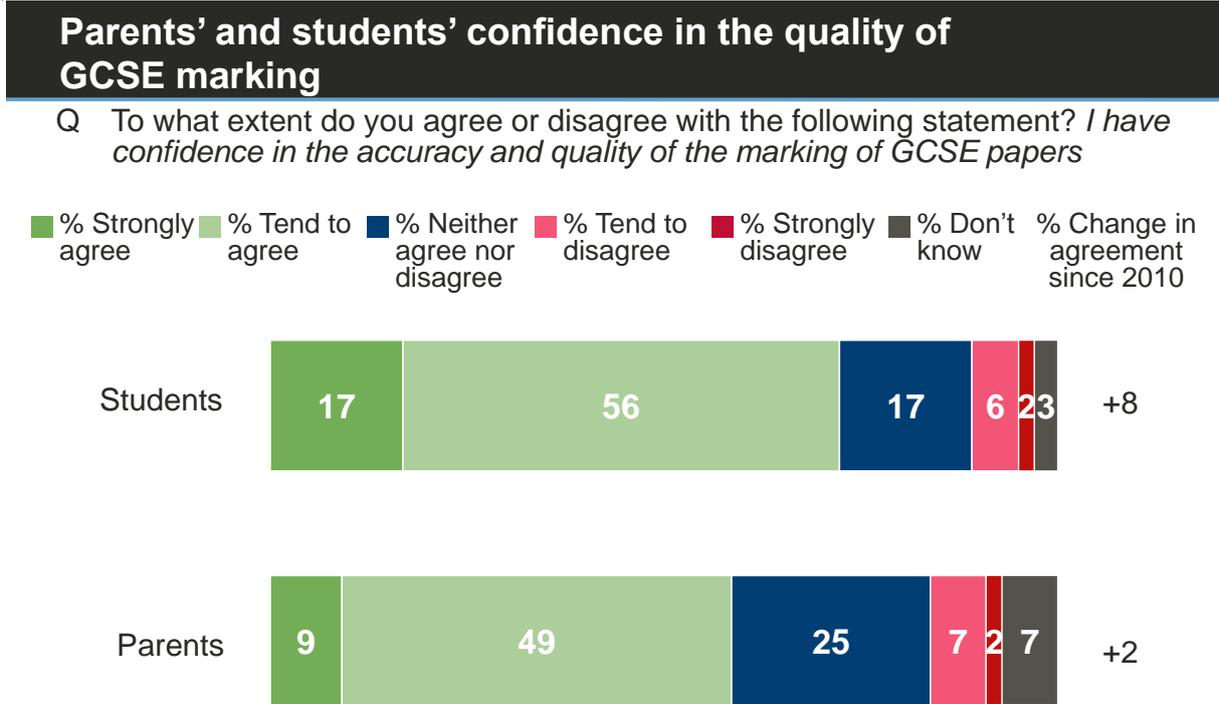
¹¹ Analysis at this level of detail has only been provided where differences between sub-groups are significant. The published dataset provides data for teachers at an overall level; it does not show data by length of time teaching.

¹² The * on the chart denotes a figure greater than 0 but less than 0.5

Views of students and parents

Figure 12 shows that just under three quarters of students (72%) are confident in the accuracy and quality of GCSE marking. This is significantly higher than the proportion of parents (59%) who agree that they have confidence.

Figure 12

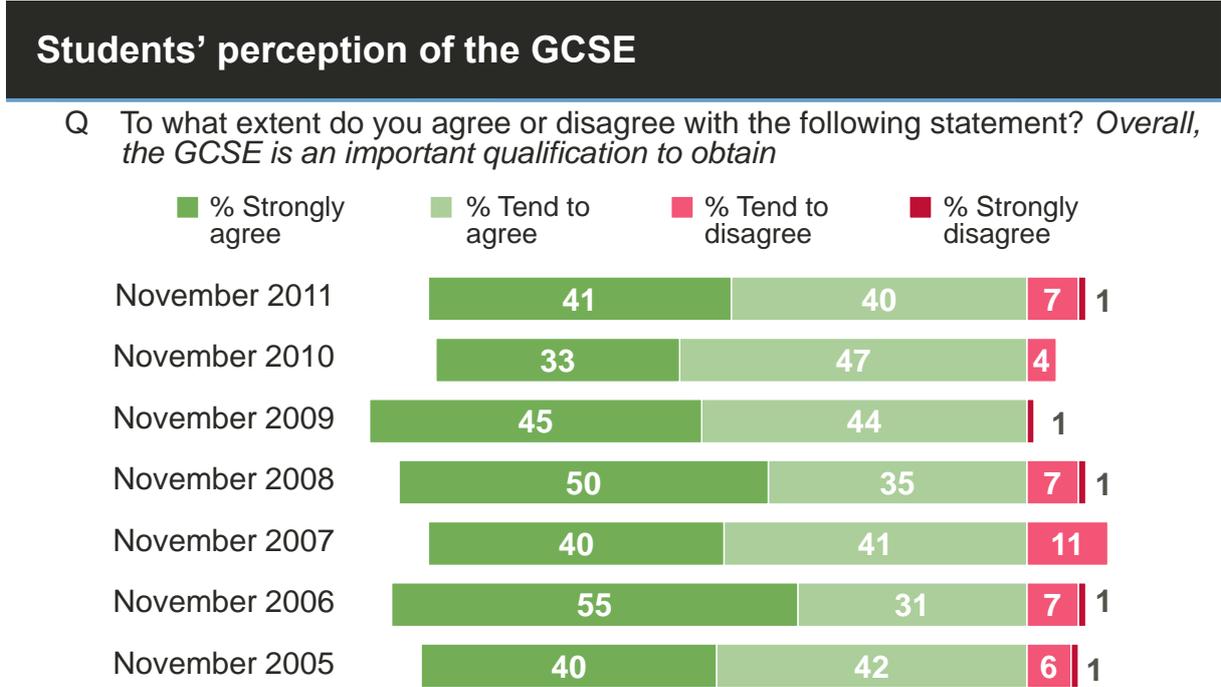


Base: All students (253), parents (384); Nov 2011 all students (120), parents (334)

Perceptions of the importance and value of GCSEs among GCSE students

In line with findings from previous waves, GCSEs are perceived as important among GCSE students, with four in five (81%) agreeing it is an important qualification to obtain (see Figure 13).

Figure 13



Base: All GCSE students (Nov 2011 = 107, Nov 2010 = 59, Nov 2009 = 58, Nov 2008 = 75, Nov 2007 = 74, Nov 2006 = 74, Nov 2005 = 84)
 NB: Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is because *don't know* and *neither agree nor disagree* responses have been omitted from the chart

Teachers' concerns about the GCSE examinations system

GCSE teachers were asked what, if any, concerns they have about the GCSE system. One in four GCSE teachers (24%) did not cite any concerns about the GCSE examinations system at all, which is consistent with 2010 findings (28%). This is, however, lower than the proportion of A level teachers who cite no concerns with the A level examinations system (33%).

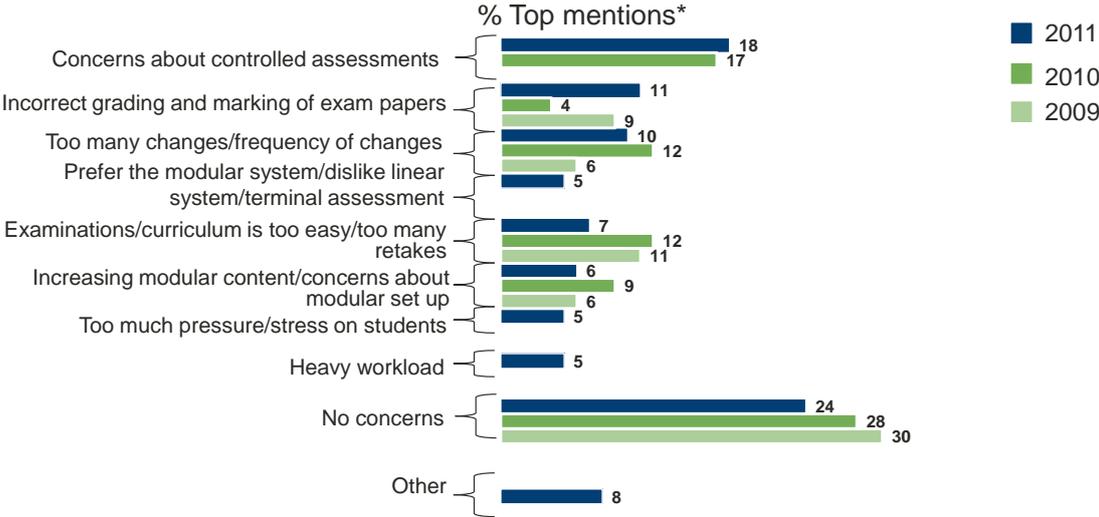
As shown in Figure 14, the most commonly cited concern about the GCSE system relates to concerns about controlled assessments (18%), a concern which has remained constant since 2010 when it was first mentioned (17%). The next most commonly cited concerns are incorrect marking and grading of exam papers (11%) and the frequency of changes (10%).

Concern that exams and the curriculum are too easy and that there are too many retakes has fallen since 2010 (from 12% to 7%).

Figure 14

Teachers' concerns about the GCSE system

Q Do you have any concerns about the current GCSE examinations system?



Base: All GCSE teachers (401) November 2011; (414) November 2010; (401) November 2009

* Only answers provided by over 5% of teachers are shown

Reliability of GCSE grades

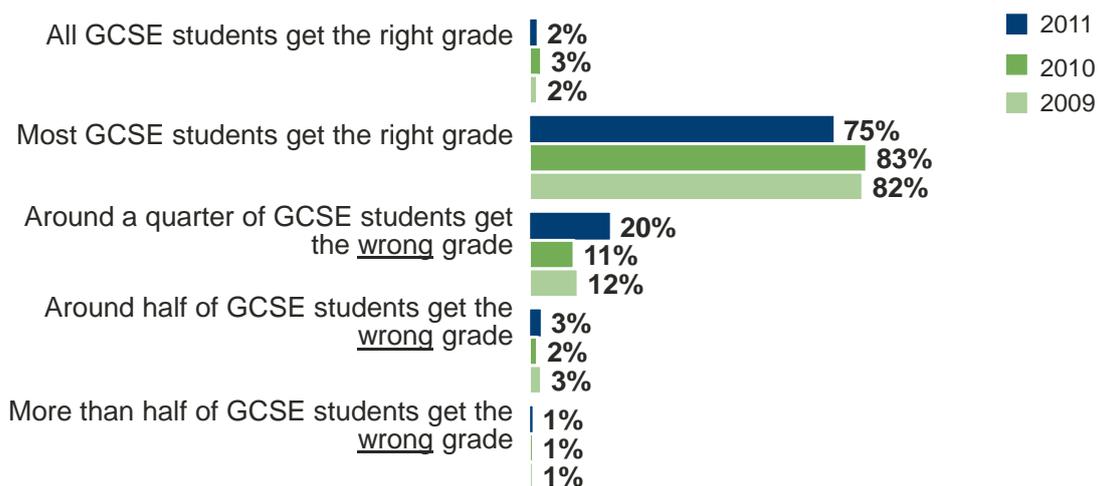
Views of teachers

Overall, three in four teachers (77%) believe that *all/most* GCSE students get the right grade, (75% say *most* get the right grade whilst just two per cent say that *all* students get the right grade - see Figure 15). One in five (20%) believe that around a *quarter* of GCSE students get the *wrong* grade. Whilst these results are still broadly positive, they represent a negative shift in opinion since 2010 when 86% believed that *most* students got the right grade and only one in ten (11%) believed that around a *quarter* of GCSE students got the wrong grade.

Figure 15

Reliability of GCSE grades - teachers

Q I would like you to think about the reliability of GCSE grades. Which of the following statements is closest to your view ?



Base: All teachers (500) November 2011; (500), November 2010; (500) November 2009

Views of the general public, students and parents

As shown in Figure 16, just over two thirds (67%) of all general public respondents¹³ say that *most* GCSE students get the right grade whereas 18% think *around a quarter* of GCSE students get the *wrong* grade. It is a minority who feel that the level of error is any higher than this; just five per cent think that *around half* of students get the wrong grade, while two per cent say that it is more than half.

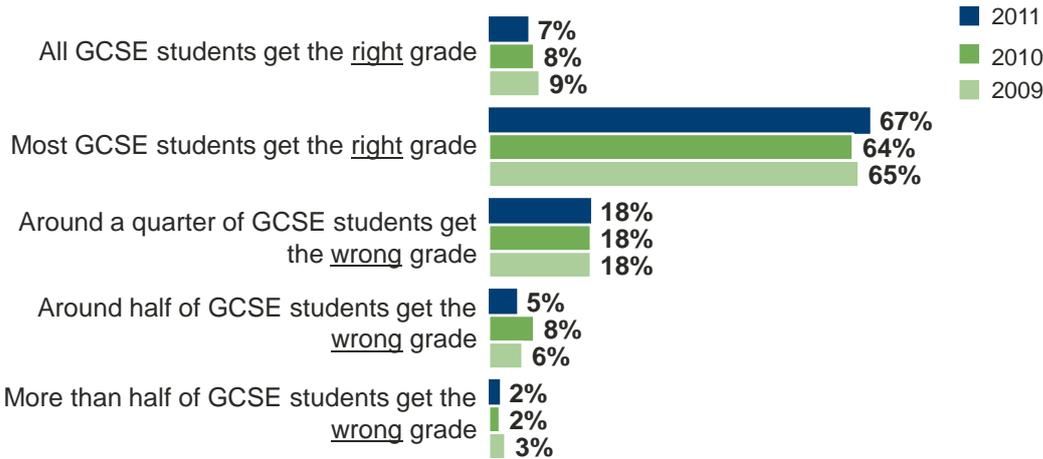
¹³ This includes the student and parent data

The same proportion of parents and students feel that *all* GCSE students get the right grade (7%). A further 77% of parents and 71% of students say that most GCSE students get the right grade.

Figure 16

Reliability of GCSE grades – general public

Q I would like you to think about the reliability of GCSE grades. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view ?



Base: All general public (2,098), November 2010; (1,931), November 2010; (1,774), November 2009

Factors contributing to students not getting the grades they deserve

Views of teachers

Teachers were asked what factors they feel contribute to GCSE students not getting the grades they deserve. In this wave of the survey, statements referred to ‘controlled assessment’ rather than ‘coursework’ as in all previous waves, reflecting the new requirements on GCSEs. The change to question wording did not make a significant difference to teachers’ views.

As shown in Figure 17, teachers believe that better or worse performance than expected in examination papers or controlled assessment is the biggest contributor to students not getting the grades they deserve – nine in ten (91%) feel that this contributes at least a little.

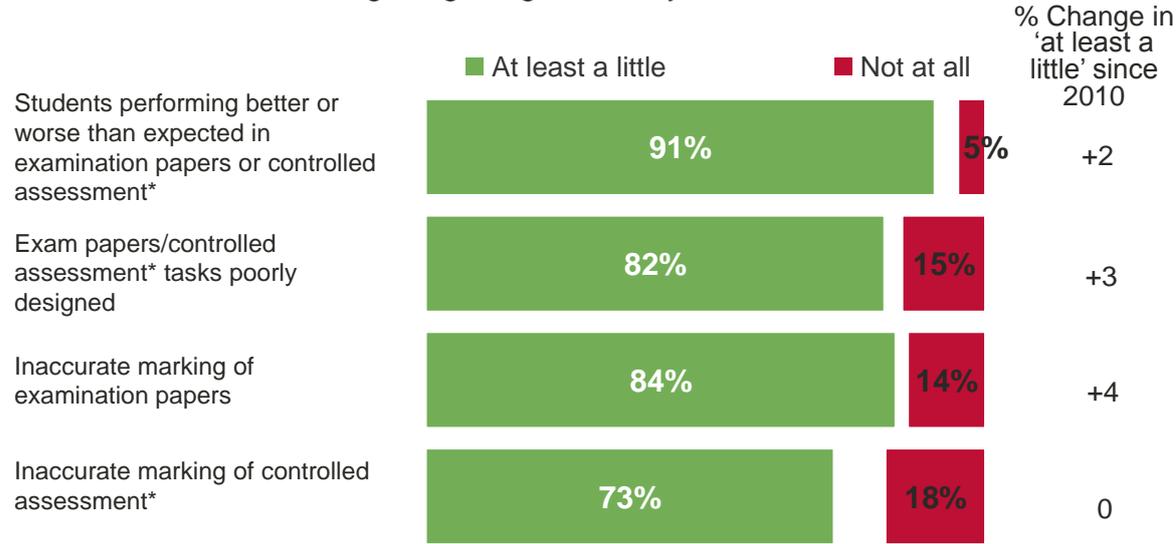
Four in five teachers (84%) feel that inaccurate marking of examination papers contributes at least a little to students not getting the grade they deserve and a similar proportion (82%) say the same about examination papers and controlled assessment tasks being poorly designed.

Just under three quarters (73%) say that inaccurate marking of controlled assessment contributes at least a little to students not getting the grade they deserve.

Figure 17

Contributing factors to GCSE students not getting the grades they deserve - teachers

Q To what extent, if at all, do you think that each of the following factors contributes to GCSE students not getting the grades they deserve ?



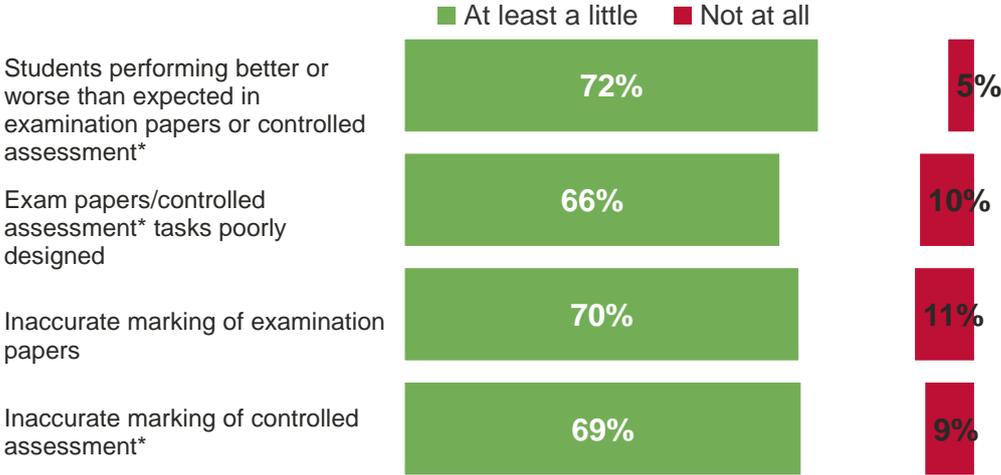
Base: All teachers (500) November 2011, (500) November 2010
 * Prior to 2011 the question referred to coursework rather than controlled assessment

Views of the general public, students and parents

As shown in the chart below¹⁴, like teachers, the general public overall¹⁵ also feel that better or worse performance than expected in examination papers or controlled assessment is the biggest contributing factor for students not getting the grades they deserve: 72% feel this contributes at least a little. Around seven in ten feel that inaccurately marked controlled assessment and exam papers contribute at least a little to incorrect grading (69% and 70% respectively) while just under two thirds (66%) feel that poorly designed exam papers and controlled assessment tasks are a contributing factor.

Figure 18
Contributing factors to GCSE students not getting the grades they deserve – general public respondents

Q To what extent, if at all, do you think that each of the following factors contributes to GCSE students not getting the grades they deserve ?



Base: All general public (2,098), November 2011

¹⁴ Please note the answer categories are presented in the same order as the chart above ‘Contributing factors to inaccurate grades – teachers’.

¹⁵ This includes the student and parent respondents

Table F shows that more than four in five parents (82%), and seven in eight (88%) students, think that inaccurately marked controlled assessment contributes at least a little bit. More than four in five parents (84%) and students (82%), think that inaccurately marked exam papers contributes to inaccurate grades.

Table F: Factors students and parents believe contribute *at least a little* to GCSE students not getting the grades they deserve

	Wave 9		Wave 10		Wave 9 vs. Wave 10	
	Students	Parents	Students	Parents	Students	Parents
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers or controlled assessment*	91	87	91	85	0	-2
Exam papers/controlled assessment* tasks poorly designed	89	79	86	79	-3	0
Inaccurate marking of examination papers	86	85	82	84	-4	-1
Inaccurate marking of controlled assessment*	89	84	88	82	-1	-2
<i>Base: All students/ All parents</i>	<i>(120)</i>	<i>(334)</i>	<i>(253)</i>	<i>(384)</i>		

* In Wave 9 the question referred to coursework rather than controlled assessment

Source: Ipsos MORI

Outcome of A levels and GCSEs

Outcome of A levels and GCSEs

Enquiries about results services

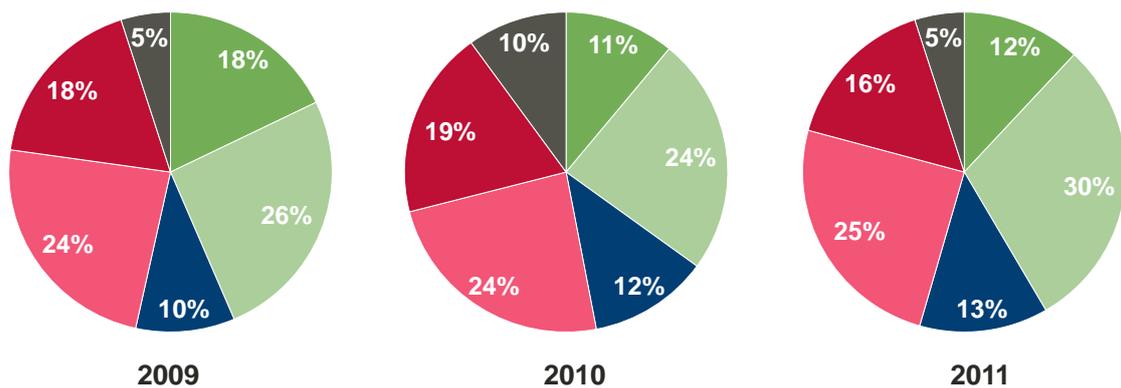
Over two fifths of teachers (42%) say that they have to rely on enquiries about results services to get accurate results for their students. This is consistent with 2010 and 2009 data (36% and 44% of teachers respectively agreed).

Figure 19

Enquiries about results services

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *I have to rely on the enquiries about results services to get accurate results for my students*

■ Strongly agree
 ■ Tend to agree
 ■ Neither/nor
 ■ Tend to disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree
 ■ No opinion



Base: All teachers (500) November 2011, (500) November 2010; (500) November 2009

Awareness of Ofqual

Ofqual is a relatively new organisation. First launched in 2008, it became the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and tests in England in 2010. As might be expected, there has been a steady increase in teachers' awareness of the regulator during the last three waves of the survey, which have covered the period of transition.

Unprompted awareness of Ofqual

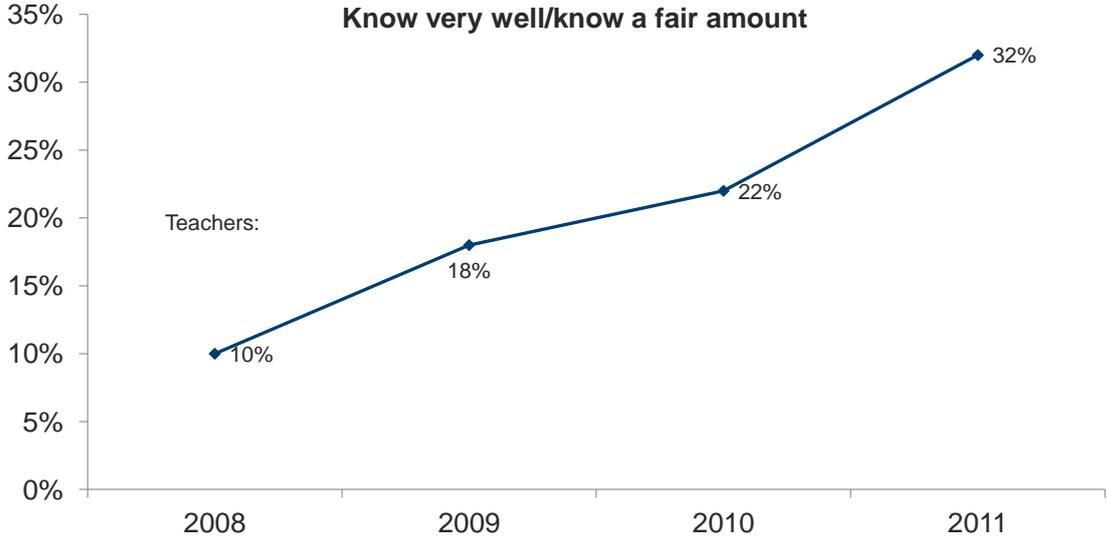
Views of teachers

When asked how well they know Ofqual without further details of its role, three quarters of teachers' state they are familiar¹⁶ with the organisation (76%) with one third stating they know Ofqual very well or by a fair amount (32%). This represents a considerable increase from 2010 when 22% of teachers responded in this way. Correspondingly, as Ofqual becomes more established, the proportion of teachers who have never heard of the regulator has decreased from 11% in 2010 to 5% in 2011.

Figure 20

Familiarity with Ofqual- teachers

Q How well do you know Ofqual?



Base: All teachers (500), November 2008-2011

¹⁶ Familiarity is defined in this report as knowing at least a little about an organisation.

Levels of familiarity with Ofqual vary among teachers. GCSE teachers are the most likely to be unaware of the regulator with roughly a quarter (26%) stating that they are unfamiliar¹⁷, compared to 21% of A level teachers. There is a relationship between both length of time teaching and the position teachers hold and their familiarity with Ofqual. Teachers who have been teaching for 16-25 years or over 25 years are more likely to say that they are familiar with Ofqual (84% and 89% respectively) than those who have been teaching for less than 5 years (58%). Senior management team teachers are more likely to be familiar (85%) than classroom teachers (57%).

¹⁷ Unfamiliarity is defined as hearing of but knowing nothing about, or having never heard of an organisation.

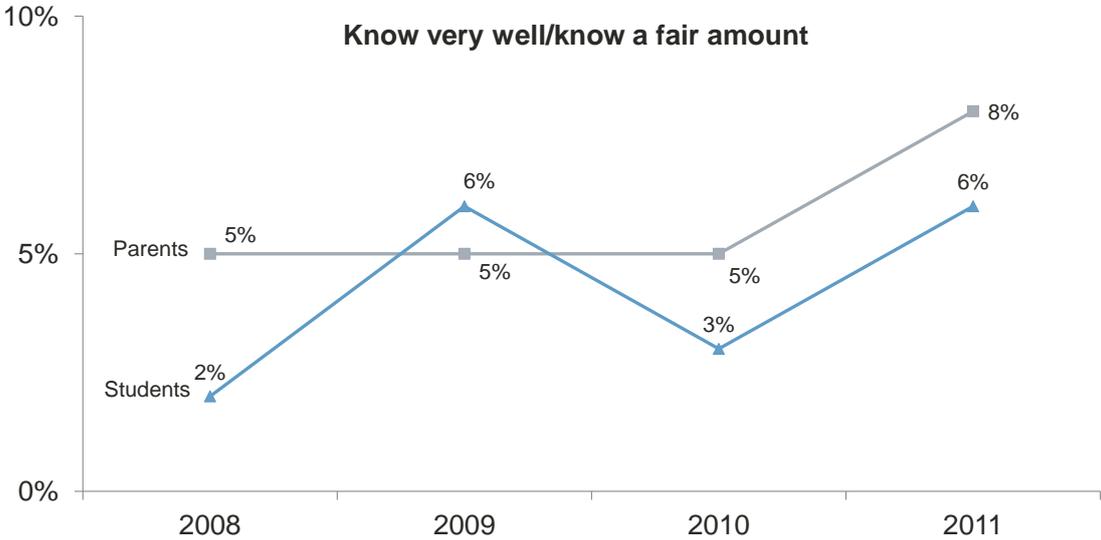
Views of the general public, students and parents

Familiarity with Ofqual among the general public overall¹⁸ is low. In the latest wave of research 16% state that they know at least a little about the regulator, out of which 6% know them very well or by a fair amount.

Six percent of students and eight percent of parents report that they know Ofqual very well or know a fair amount. However, the proportion of students who state that they know at least a little about the regulator has more than doubled, from seven percent in 2010 to 16% in 2011.

Figure 21

How well do you know Ofqual? – Parents and students



*Bases: All general public (2,098) November 2011; (1,931) November 2010; (1,774), November 2009, (1,857) November 2008
 All parents: (384) November 2011; (334) November 2010; (290), November 2009, (297) November 2008
 All students: (253) November 2011; (120) November 2010; (112), November 2009, (152) November 2008*

¹⁸ This includes student and parent responses

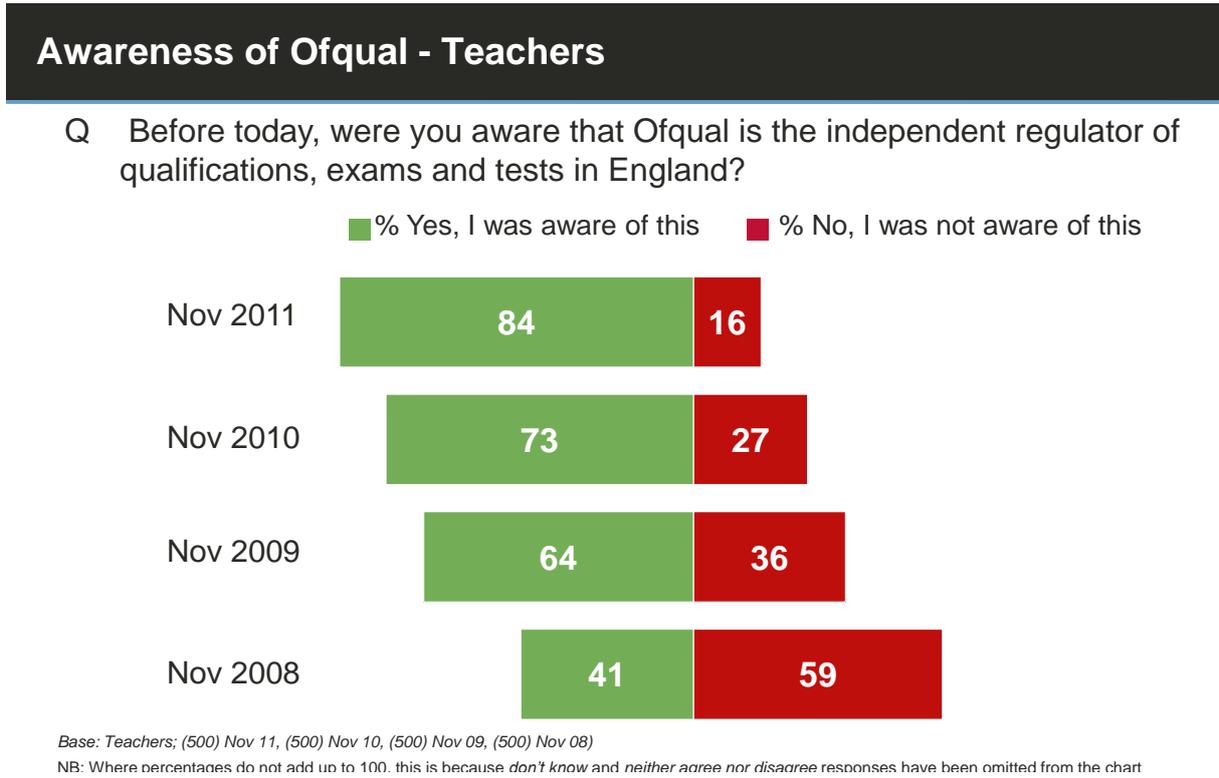
Prompted awareness of Ofqual

Views of teachers

When given a description of Ofqual’s role, the majority of teachers (84%) are aware that it is the independent regulator of qualifications and examinations in England. This is the highest level of awareness over the four waves of the survey in which the question was asked and a significant increase from the 2010 level (73%), in keeping with the increase in awareness of Ofqual each year since the organisation’s inception.

The findings highlight differences in prompted awareness levels amongst teachers similar to those found for unprompted awareness: A level teachers are more likely than GCSE teachers to be aware of Ofqual when prompted (87% vs. 81%). Teachers with more experience are more likely to be aware of Ofqual’s role (for instance 92% with over 25 years teaching experience were aware of this compared to 76% with under 5 years experience). Similarly, those in more senior roles showed higher levels of awareness (88% senior management team compared with 73% of subject teachers)¹⁹.

Figure 22



¹⁹ Analysis at this level of detail has only been provided where differences between sub-groups are significant. The published dataset provides data for teachers at an overall level; it does not show data by length of time teaching or types of role.

Views of the general public, students and parents

Again, amongst general public respondents²⁰, prompted awareness of Ofqual is low and unchanged from 2010. Fourteen percent are aware of Ofqual’s role, whilst the majority (83%) remain unaware. Awareness of Ofqual’s role is particularly low amongst GCSE students, with just 2% saying that they knew Ofqual was the independent regulator of qualifications and exams in England.

Figure 23

Awareness of Ofqual – General public

Q Before today, were you aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, exams and tests in England?

■ % Yes, I was aware of this ■ % No, I was not aware of this



Base: General public; (2,098) Nov 11, (1,931) Nov 10, (1,774) Nov 09, (1857) Nov 08
 NB: Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is because *don't know* and *neither agree nor disagree* responses have been omitted from the chart

Effectiveness of Ofqual

Views of teachers

Almost six in ten (58%) teachers now perceive Ofqual to be effective at regulating the examinations system. The proportion of those stating the regulator is *very effective* in its role has increased by 4 percentage points since 2010 (11% vs. 7%).

The type of qualification taught appears to have an impact on perceived effectiveness, with those who teach other vocational qualifications in addition to A levels and GCSEs more likely

²⁰ This includes the student and parent interviews.

than teachers of just A levels and GCSEs to believe that Ofqual is *not at all effective* (7% vs. 3% of A level teachers and 2% of GCSE teachers).

In addition teachers in independent schools are more likely to believe that Ofqual is *not very effective* in regulating the examinations system than secondary maintained schools (22% vs. 12%).

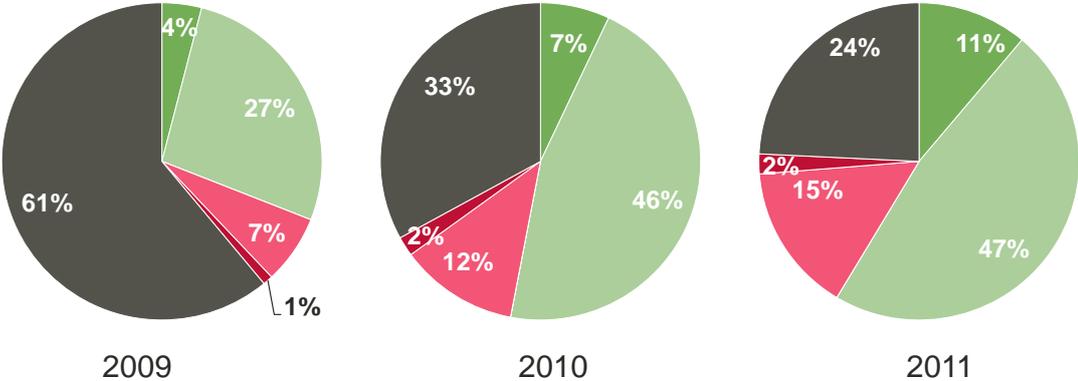
The findings highlight a link between perceptions of Ofqual and confidence in the examinations system; 63% of teachers who are confident in the GCSE system say they consider Ofqual to be effective compared with 44% of those who do not have confidence in the GCSE system. Findings are similar for A levels; 64% who are confident in the A level system consider Ofqual to be effective compared with 32% who are not.

Figure 24

Effectiveness of Ofqual at regulating the exam system

Q In your opinion, how effective, if at all, is Ofqual at regulating the examinations system?

Very effective Fairly effective Not very effective Not at all effective No opinion



Base: All teachers (500), November 2011; (500), November 2010; (500) November 2009

Information

Information

Information on A level exams for parents and students

Views of students and parents

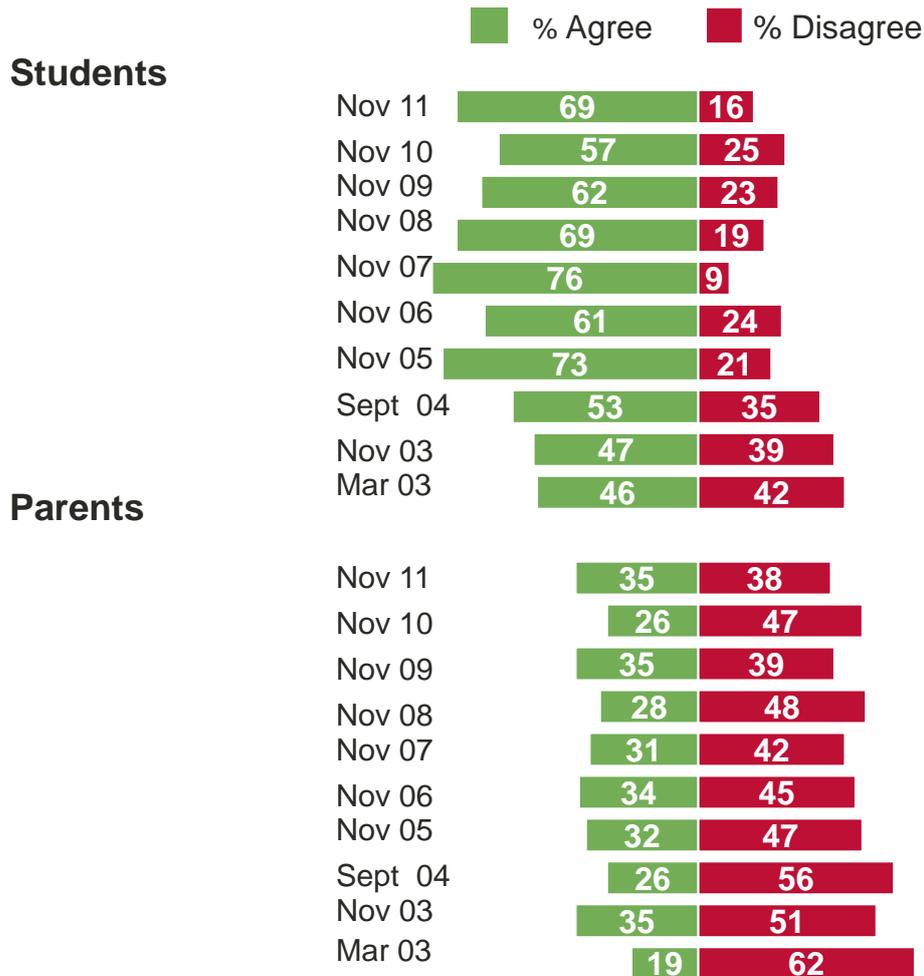
Consistent with previous years, around seven in ten students (69%) feel that they have adequate information about how A levels are marked and graded, with one in five strongly agreeing (22%).

There has been an increase in the proportion of parents who feel they have enough information (35% in 2011 compared with 26% in 2010) though more than half state that they would like more. This lower proportion of parents than students who have enough information is likely to be because they are not directly involved in the examinations system.

Figure 25

Information on A level exams

Q To what extent do you agree with the following statement? 'I have the information I need about how A level exams are marked and graded'?



Bases:

Nov 2011 A level students (157) and A level parents (316)

Nov 2010 A level students (73) and A level parents (242)

Nov 2009 A level students (66) and A level parents (242)

Nov 2008 A level students (88) and A level parents (243)

Nov 2007 A level students (69) and A level parents (237)

Nov 2006 A level students (84) and A level parents (256)

Nov 2005 A level students (73) and A level parents (273)

Sep 2004 A level students (80) and A level parents (303)

Nov 2003 A level students (119) and A level parents (315)

Mar 2003 A level students (92) and A level parents (293)

Information on GCSE exams for parents and students

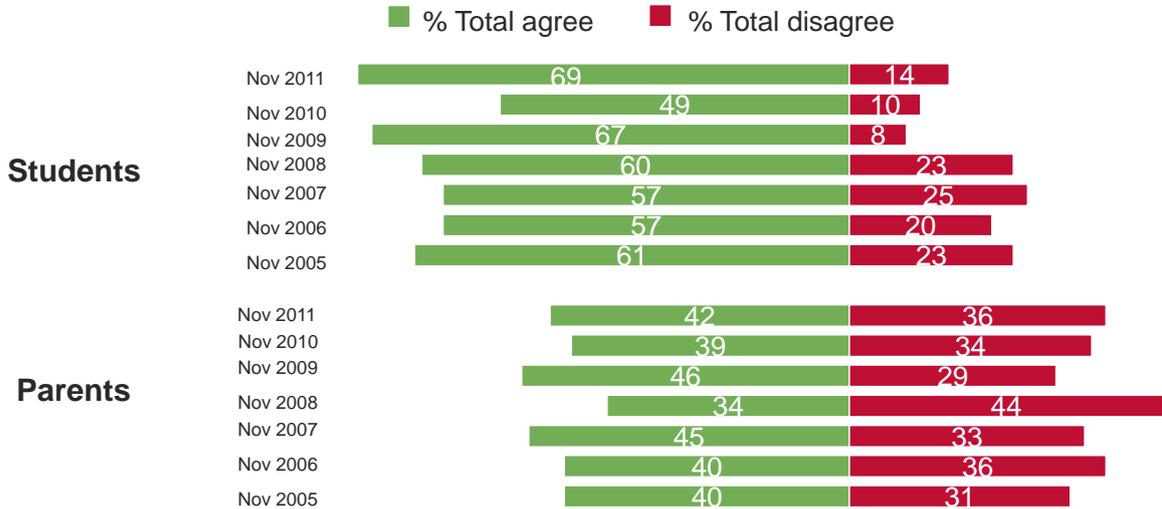
Seven in ten (69%) GCSE students agree that they have the information they need about how exams are marked and graded representing a significant increase from 2010 (69% in 2011 vs. 49% in 2010).

A smaller proportion of parents of GCSE students believe they have the information they need about how GCSE exams are marked and graded (42%).

Figure 26

Information on GCSE exams

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? ‘I have the information I need about how GCSE exams are marked and graded.’



Base: All GCSE students (Nov 2011 = 107, Nov 2010 = 61, Nov 2009 = 58, Nov 2008 = 75, Nov 2007 = 74, Nov 2006=74, Nov 2005=84) and GCSE parents (Nov 2011 = 319, Nov 2010 = 273, Nov 2009 = 239, Nov 2008 = 241, Nov 2007 = 235, Nov 2006=242, Nov 2005=262)
 NB: Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is because don't know and neither agree nor disagree responses have been omitted from the chart

Trusted sources of information

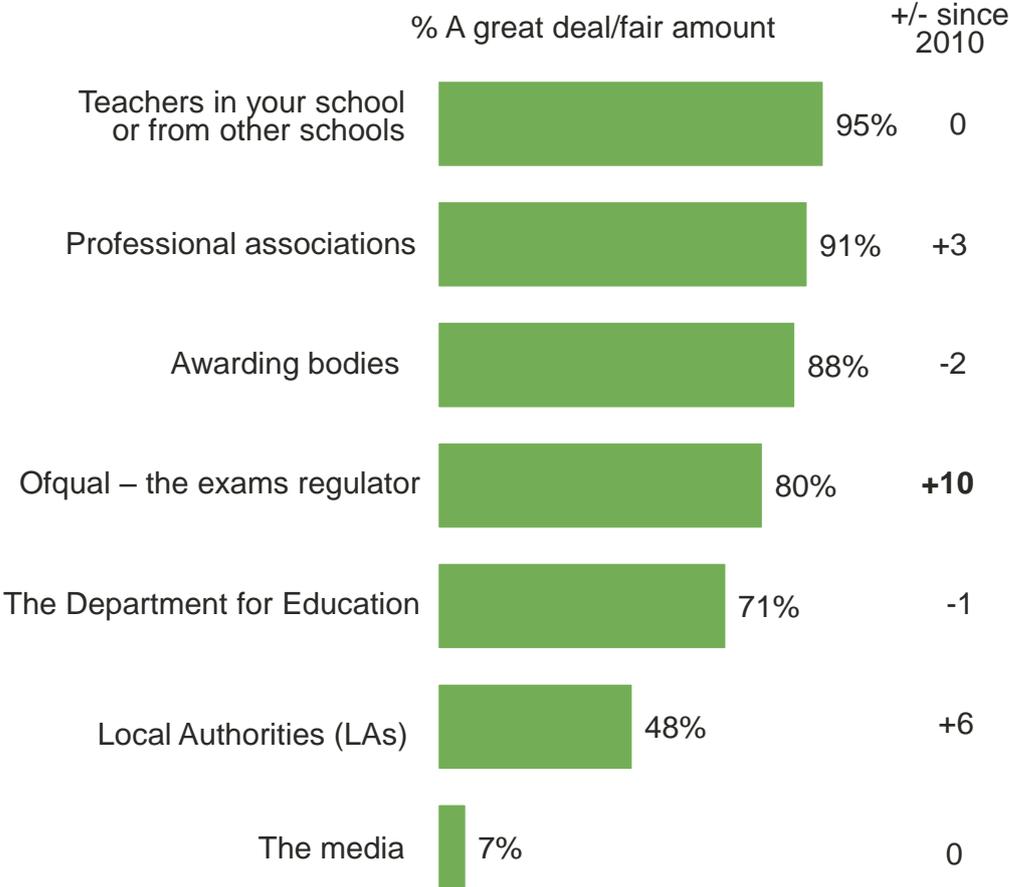
Views of teachers

The most trusted source of information about exams for teachers in 2011 continues to be other teachers (95%), with professional associations (91%) and awarding bodies (88%) also receiving high levels of trust. Trust in the media remains the lowest at just 7%.

Figure 27

Trusted sources of information – teachers

Q How much, if at all, do you trust each of the following as a source of information about exams?



N.B. Statistically significant changes between waves 9 and 10 are highlighted in bold.

Base: All teachers (Nov 2011 = 500; Nov 2010 = 500)

In line with the increased awareness and perceived effectiveness of Ofqual, teachers also have greater levels of trust in the regulator as a source of information (80% in 2011 vs. 70% in 2010). This represents the largest increase in trust of all the organisations between 2010 and 2011.

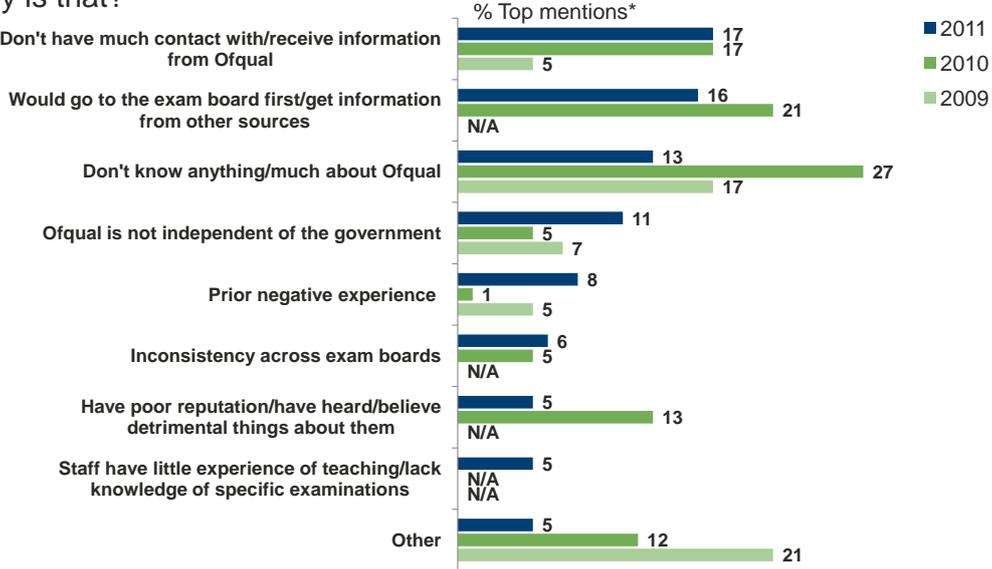
Teachers who stated they did not trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams were asked for the reasons why. As shown in Figure 28, they are most likely to say this is because they do not have much contact with the organisation (17%) or because they would go to alternative sources of information, such as exam boards, first (16%). Compared to previous years teachers are significantly less likely to say that they do not know anything about Ofqual (13% in 2011 vs. 27% in 2010)²¹.

A new reason for a lack of trust in Ofqual raised in 2011 is that 5% of teachers believe staff lack knowledge of specific examinations or have little experience of teaching.

Figure 28

Teachers' reasons for not trusting Ofqual

Q You said that you don't trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams, why is that?



Base: All teachers who do not trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams (63), November 2011; (63), November 2010; (60), November 2009
 * Only reasons that were mentioned by more than 5% of teachers are presented

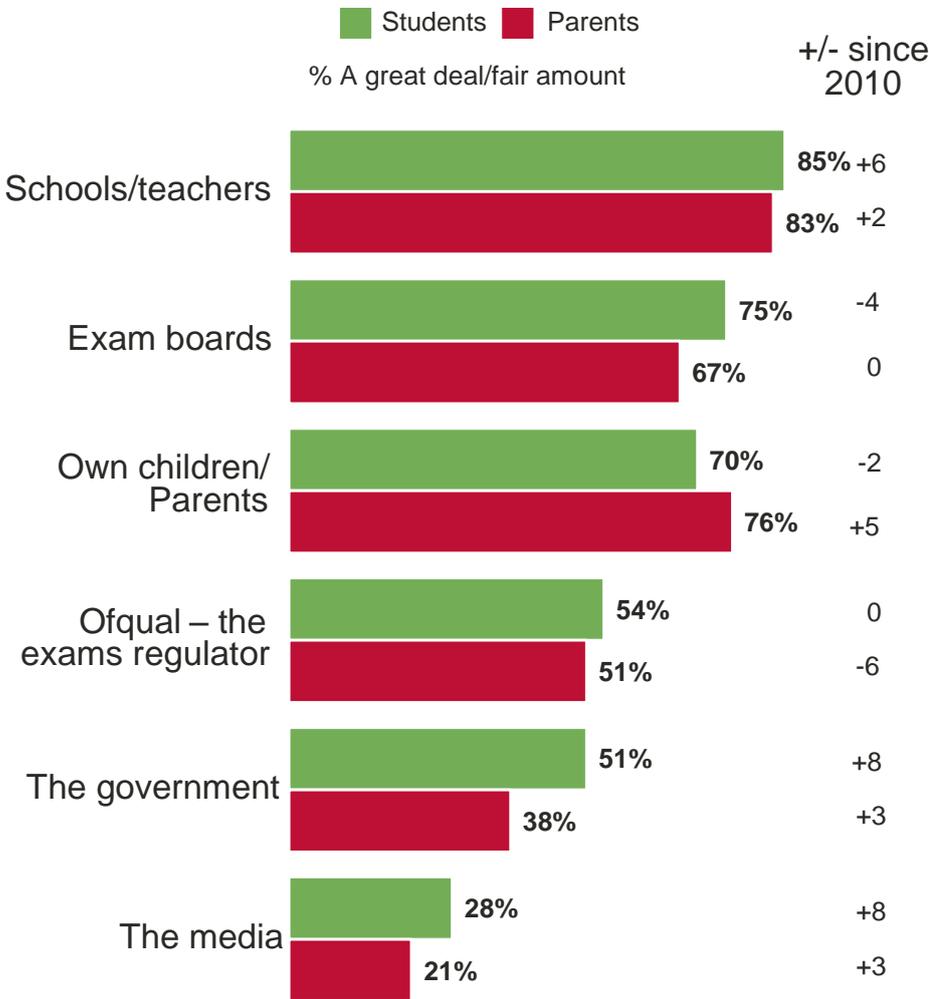
Views of students and parents

Amongst parents and students, schools and teachers remain the most trusted source of information about exams (85% and 83% respectively). Exam boards are also highly trusted (75% for students and 67% for parents), and over half of each group trusts Ofqual (54% of students and 51% of parents).

Figure 29

Trusted sources of information – students and parents

Q How much, if at all, do you trust each of the following as a source of information about exams?



Base: Nov 2011: All students (253) and all parents (384); Nov 2010: All students (120) and all parents (334)

There are some differences in the views of parents and students. Consistent with last year, students are significantly more likely to say they trust exam boards than parents (75% vs. 67% respectively) and in 2011 this is also true for the government (51% vs. 38% respectively). GCSE students are less likely to say that they would trust Ofqual (perhaps a reflection of the lower awareness levels of Ofqual amongst these students as discussed previously in this report); looking at 'net'²² trust figures 33% of A level students say that they trust Ofqual compared to 14% of GCSE students.

²² To calculate net trust the figures for the proportion who distrust Ofqual are subtracted from the figures for the proportion who trust Ofqual.

Organisations most likely to be contacted in instances where there are concerns about the fairness of the examination system

Views of students and parents

Students and parents were asked what organisations they would be most likely to contact should they have concerns about the examination grades their children receive, or about the fairness of the examination system.

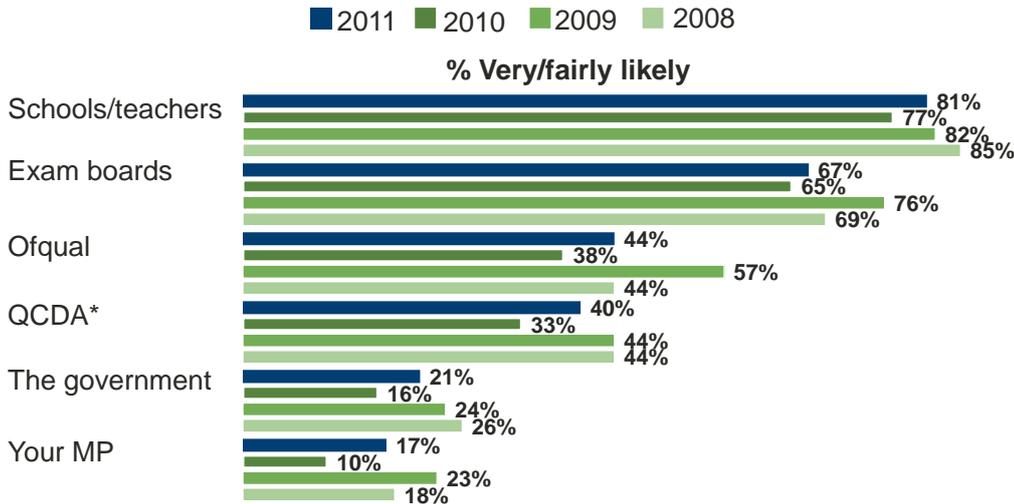
Schools and teachers and exam boards remain the most likely organisations for students to contact (81% and 67%) in 2011. The proportion who would contact QCDA and Ofqual has not experienced a significant change since 2010 (QCDA: 40% in 2011 vs. 33% in 2010, Ofqual: 44% in 2011 and 38% in 2010). Continuing mention of QCDA, an organisation that no longer operates, indicates that there is some confusion amongst students about who to contact.

The government and MPs continue to be the least likely to be contacted of all the given organisations at 21% and 17% respectively.

Figure 30

Students - Organisations to contact if concerns about the exam system

Q If you had a concern about the examination grades you had received or the fairness of the examination system, how likely or unlikely would you be to contact each of the following?



Base: All students (253 in Nov 2011, 120 in Nov 2010, 112 in Nov 2009, 152 in Nov 2008)
 * This question was asked about QCA prior to Nov 2009

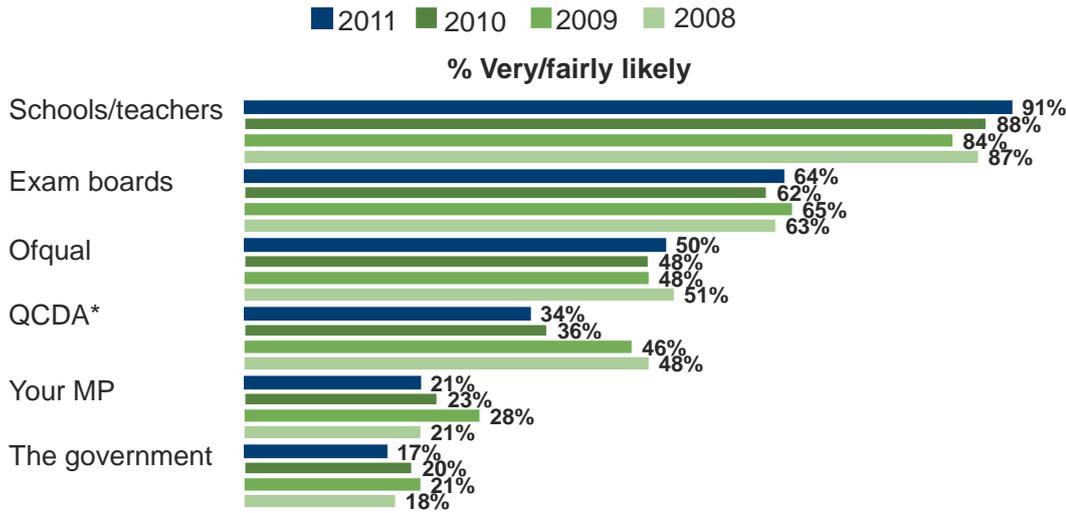
Like students, parents are also likely to contact schools and teachers and exam boards (91% and 64% respectively).

Half of parents would contact Ofqual (50%) and just over a third (34%) would contact QCDA. As with students, this shows uncertainty over which organisation to contact.

Figure 31

Parents - Organisations to contact if concerns about the exam system

Q If you had a concern about the examination grades you had received or the fairness of the examination system, how likely or unlikely would you be to contact each of the following?



Base: All parents (384 in Nov 2011, 334 in Nov 2010, 290 in Nov 2009, 297 in Nov 2008)
 * This question was asked about QCA prior to Nov 2009

Other academic qualifications

Other academic qualifications

For the first time in wave 10, teachers and the general public, including students and parents, were asked about their knowledge and perceptions of other academic qualifications such as iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate or the Project. When interpreting these findings, it is important to highlight that views are not representative of all teachers in England; instead the sample is made up of teachers who say that they teach A levels and/or GCSEs specifically. However, 28% of teachers participating in the survey reported also teaching other academic qualifications in addition to A levels or GCSEs.

Understanding of the difference between traditional and non-traditional academic qualifications

Views of teachers

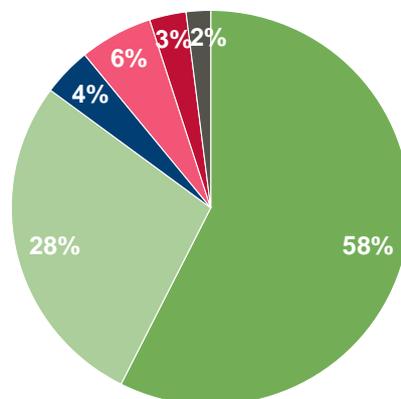
Teachers of A levels and GCSEs were asked to what extent they understand the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels and other academic qualifications. The majority of teachers (86%) agree that they are aware of the difference between A levels and GCSEs and ‘newer’ academic qualifications, with over half (58%) strongly agreeing.

Figure 32

Knowledge of non-traditional qualifications - teachers

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
I understand the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels and other academic qualifications such as iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate or the Project

Strongly agree Tend to agree Neither/nor Tend to disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

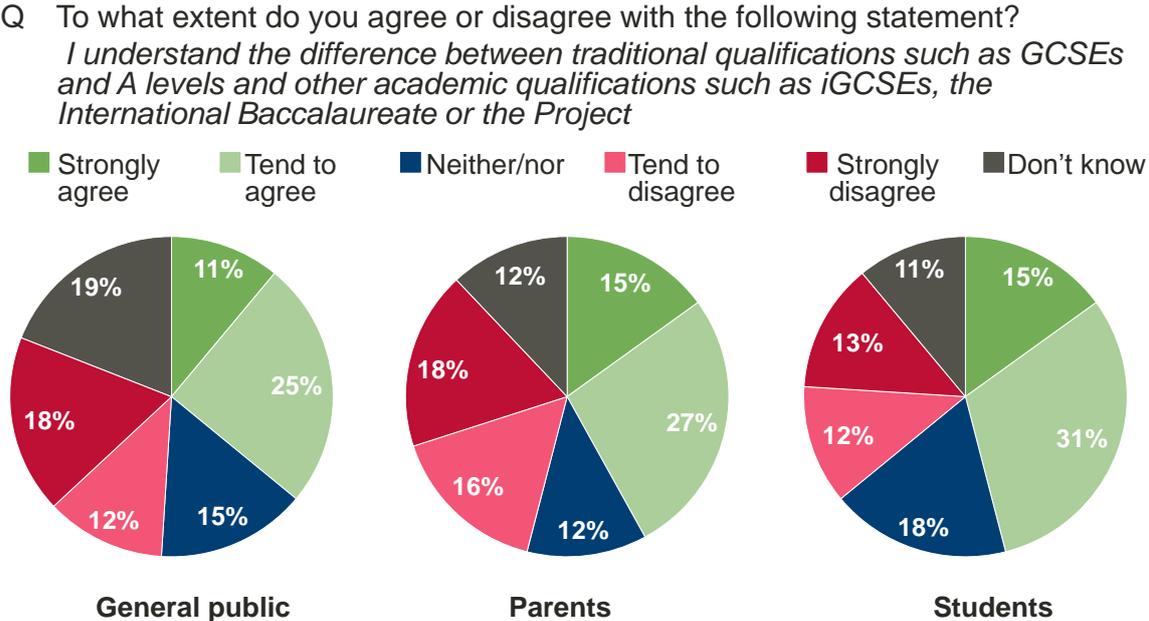


Teachers who report knowing more about Ofqual are more likely to feel they are aware of the differences between A levels, GCSEs and other academic qualifications; 89% who are familiar with Ofqual were aware of the differences between qualifications versus 75% who said they are not familiar with Ofqual. Teachers working in FE/Sixth Form are less likely than those in secondary schools to feel that they understand the difference between GCSEs and A levels and other academic qualifications (76% compared with 88%).

Views of the general public, students and parents

Overall, just over three in ten (36%) of the general public said that they understood the differences between traditional qualifications and other academic qualifications. A similar proportion of students and parents agree that they understand this distinction (46% vs. 42% respectively).

Figure 33
Knowledge of non-traditional qualifications – general public, parents and students



Base: General public (2,098), all students (253), all parents (384); Nov 2011

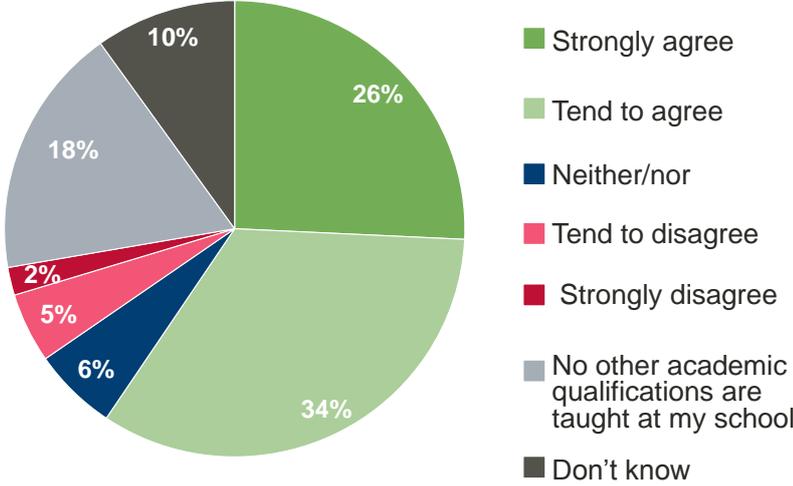
Teachers' confidence in accuracy and marking of other academic qualifications

Over half (59%) of teachers are confident in the accuracy and quality of marking of other academic qualifications taught in their school, whereas a minority (7%) do not feel confident in the marking of these qualifications. Almost two in five (18%) are unable to comment as no other academic qualifications are taught at their school.

Figure 34

Teachers' confidence in marking of non-traditional qualifications

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
I have confidence in the accuracy and quality of marking of the other academic qualifications taught in my school



Base: All teachers (500), November 2011

Perceptions of vocational qualifications

Perceptions of vocational qualifications

As was highlighted when discussing other academic qualifications, it is important to note that views are not representative of all teachers in England; as the sample is made up of teachers who say that they teach A levels and/or GCSEs specifically and therefore knowledge of, and attitudes towards, vocational qualifications may be influenced by this. However, 16% of teachers reported also teaching vocational qualifications in addition to A levels or GCSEs.

The same applies to parents and students, in that the focus of the survey is students/ parents of students who are about to take, taking or have taken A levels and GCSEs rather than all students or all parents. However, as the findings below highlight, there is some take-up of vocational qualifications amongst GCSE/ A level students.

Take-up of vocational qualifications amongst students

In wave ten of the research students were asked whether they were currently studying, or had recently studied a vocational qualification in the last two years. Though the students surveyed were GCSE or A level students specifically, which therefore is not a representative sample of students overall, take-up of vocational qualifications is relatively high at 39%. GCSE students are more likely to report studying a vocational qualification than A level students (51% compared with 30% of A level students).

Understanding of vocational qualifications

Views of teachers

Teachers were asked about the extent to which they understood two features of vocational qualifications; what is meant by 'level' and how 'credit' works in vocational qualifications. The majority of teachers (85%) understand what is meant by 'level' in vocational qualifications. The proportion of teachers who understand how 'credit' works is lower, with almost two thirds (64%) saying they understand this aspect of vocational qualifications. As would be expected, those who teach vocational qualifications in addition to A levels or GCSEs and teachers working in FE/sixth form colleges are more likely than other teachers to say they understand what is meant by 'level'.

Almost all (96%) teachers who teach vocational qualifications say that they understand what is meant by 'level' for these qualifications and 86% of this group of teachers say that they understand how credit works. Similarly, the majority of teachers who work in FE colleges (97%) report understanding what is meant by level, with 74% reporting they understand how credit works.

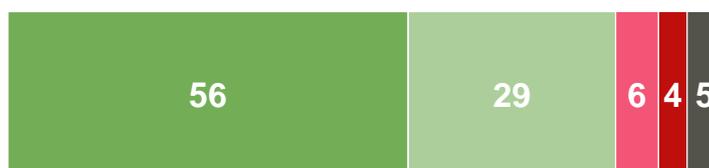
Figure 35

Knowledge of vocational qualifications - teachers

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

■ % Strongly agree
 ■ % Tend to agree
 ■ % Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ % Tend to disagree
 ■ % Strongly disagree
 ■ % Don't know

I understand what is meant by the 'level' of a qualification



I understand how 'credit' works with vocational qualifications



Base: All teachers (500), Nov 2011

Views of the general public

Due to the composition of the sample being A level and GCSE students, the questions around understanding aspects of vocational qualifications were only asked of a representative sample of the general public²³ rather than also being asked as part of the student and parent boost interviews.

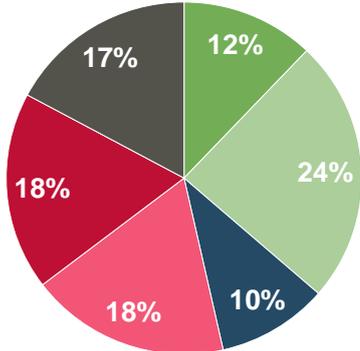
Exactly half of the general public understand what is meant by the ‘level’ of vocational qualification (50%) and a lower proportion understand how ‘credit’ works (36%). As might be expected, both results are significantly lower than those for teachers.

Figure 36
Understanding of vocational qualifications – general public

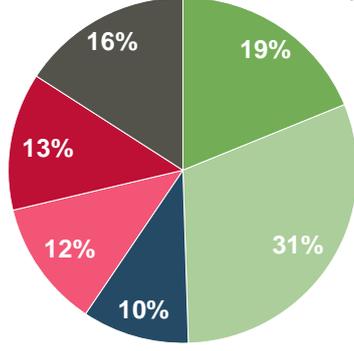
Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

■ Strongly agree
 ■ Tend to agree
 ■ Neither/nor
 ■ Tend to disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree
 ■ Don't know/No opinion

I understand how ‘credit’ works with vocational qualifications



I understand what is meant by the ‘level’ of vocational qualification



Base: General public (1,657)

²³ As this was a representative sample of the general public in England aged 15+, some students and parents were still included. The questions were asked on the first wave of Capibus to 1,657 respondents but were not asked in later waves that focused solely on students and parents.

Attitudes towards vocational qualifications

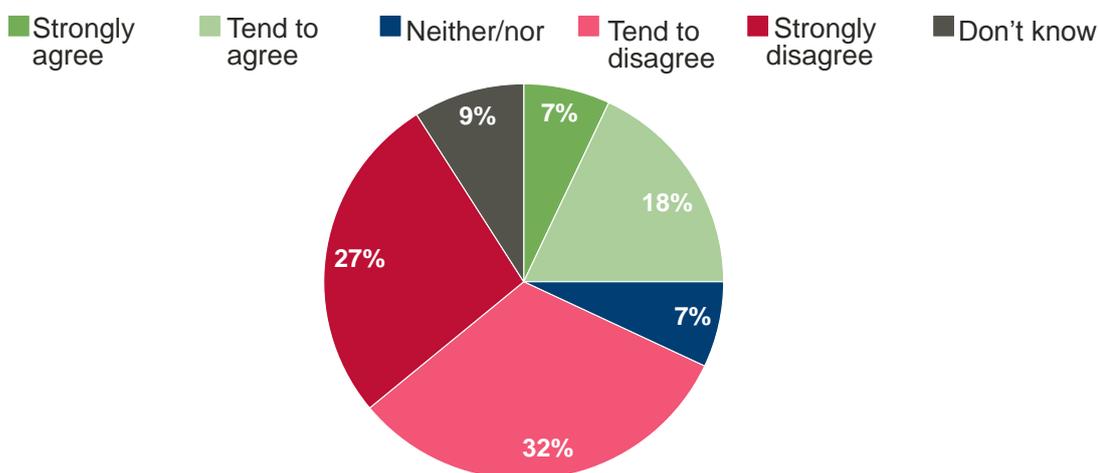
Views of teachers

The majority of A level and GCSE teachers do not consider vocational qualifications to be of an equal status to traditional academic qualifications (in terms of difficulty and level of skill required to achieve the qualification). Almost three in five (59%) do not consider them to be equal, with a quarter (25%) agreeing that they are²⁴.

Figure 37

Teachers' perceptions of vocational qualifications

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Vocational qualifications are of an equal status to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A Levels in terms of difficulty and level of skill required to achieve the qualification



Base: All teachers (500), November 2011

Views of students and parents

Over half of students believe that vocational qualifications are of an equal status to traditional academic qualifications (55%); this is significantly higher than the results for parents (42%) and the views of teachers reported in the previous section. Nearly one third of parents disagree that vocational qualifications and traditional academic qualifications share the same status (31%).

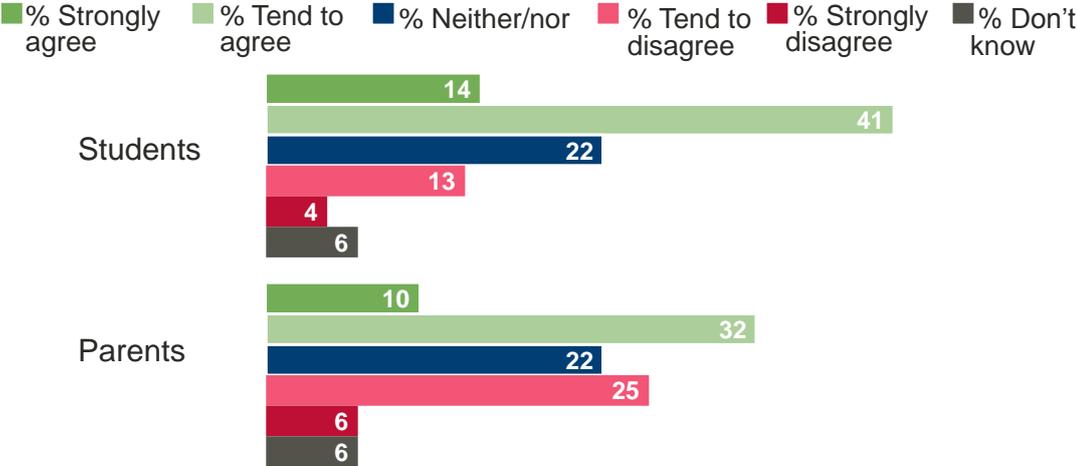
²⁴ This question was included following the concern highlighted in the Wolf Report that vocational qualifications are less well regarded than more traditional academic qualifications such as A levels and GCSEs. A number of recommendations are made in the report to ensure the status of vocational qualifications is raised, through ensuring courses lead to further education or employment, and restricting which qualifications are counted in school league tables to ensure teachers are incentivised to teach those of the highest quality.

For both students and parents, a relatively high proportion (22%) responded with neither agree nor disagree suggesting that they were unsure about comparing the two types of qualification.

Figure 38

Perceptions of vocational qualifications

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Vocational qualifications are of an equal status to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A Levels in terms of difficulty and level of skill required to achieve the qualification



Base: All students (253), all parents (384)

Availability of vocational qualifications

Views of teachers

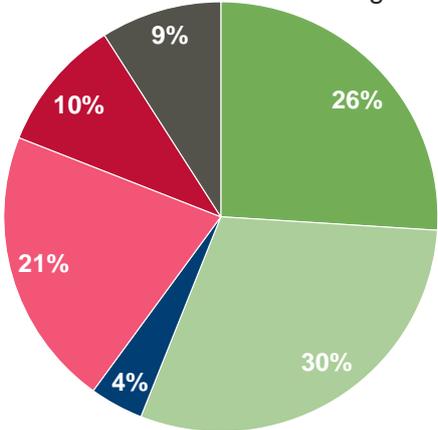
Teachers are more likely to agree than disagree that there is enough opportunity to study vocational qualifications in schools and sixth form colleges;²⁵ 56% agree whilst 31% disagree.

Figure 39

Prevalence of opportunity to study vocational qualifications - teachers

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *There is enough opportunity to study vocational qualifications in schools and sixth form colleges*

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Tend to agree ■ % Neither/nor ■ % Tend to disagree ■ % Strongly disagree ■ % Don't know



Base: All teachers (500), November 2011

²⁵ It should be noted that this survey only focused on school-based provision, rather than vocational qualifications in work place environments

Views of students

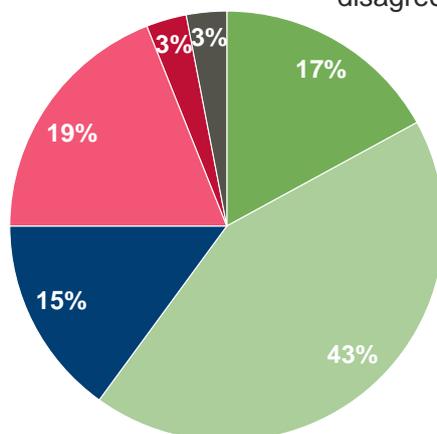
The majority of students agree that there is enough opportunity to study vocational qualifications in schools and colleges (60%). They are also significantly less likely than teachers to disagree (22% vs. 31%).

Figure 40

Prevalence of opportunity to study vocational qualifications - students

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *There is enough opportunity to study vocational qualifications in schools and sixth form colleges*

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Tend to agree ■ % Neither/nor ■ % Tend to disagree ■ % Strongly disagree ■ % Don't know



Base: All students (253), November 2011

Assessment of vocational qualifications

Views of teachers

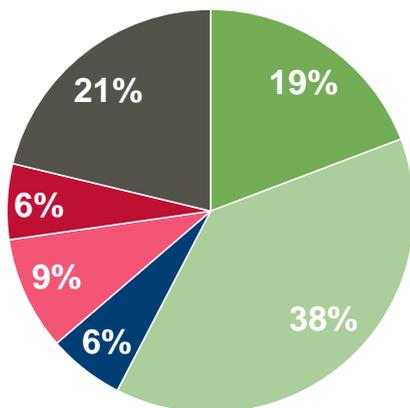
Teachers were asked whether they considered assessment of vocational qualifications to be suitable for the subject and school or sixth form college environment. Over half of teachers (57%) agree that the way in which vocational qualifications are assessed in schools and colleges is appropriate *for the subject*. Fifteen percent disagree that this is the case. One in five (21%) do not know, perhaps reflecting the fact that the sample is based on A level and GCSE teachers. The proportion of teachers agreeing that the assessment of vocational qualifications is suitable *for the school or sixth form college environment* is similar. Three in five (59%) agree that this is the case, whilst 15% disagree.

Figure 41

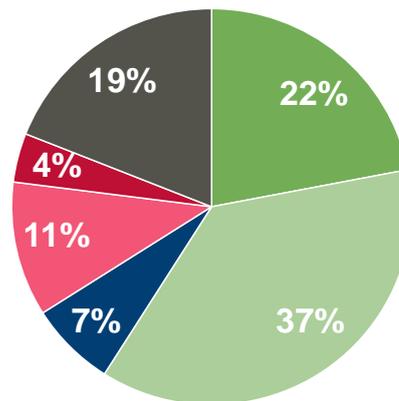
Suitability of vocational assessment- teachers

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

■ % Strongly agree
 ■ % Tend to agree
 ■ % Neither/nor
 ■ % Tend to disagree
 ■ % Strongly disagree
 ■ % Don't know



The way in which vocational qualifications are assessed in schools and sixth form colleges is appropriate for the subject



The way in which vocational qualifications are assessed is suitable for the school or sixth form college environment

Base: All teachers (500) November 2011

Regulated qualifications

Regulated qualifications

Teachers' understanding

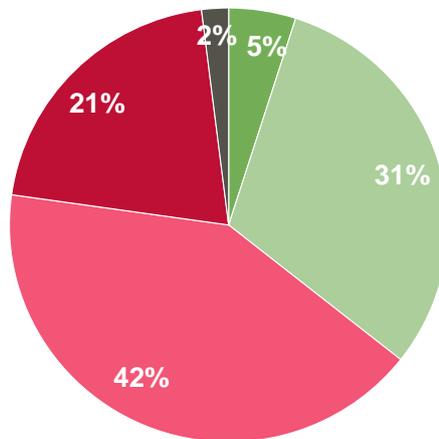
A minority of teachers feel they know the difference between a 'regulated' and 'unregulated' qualification. Around a third (35%²⁶) know a great deal/ fair amount about the difference between these qualifications whilst 62% feel that they know not very much/ nothing at all. Teachers who also teach vocational qualifications are more likely than other teachers to say they know about the difference between regulated and unregulated qualifications (50% vs. 35% of teachers overall). The findings indicate a link between familiarity with Ofqual and knowledge of regulation of qualifications, with those who are familiar with Ofqual more likely to say that they are aware of the difference between regulated and unregulated qualifications (40% compared with 21% who say they are not aware of Ofqual).

Figure 42

'Regulated' and 'unregulated' qualifications – teachers

Q How much would you say you know the difference between a 'regulated' qualification and an 'unregulated' qualification?

■ A great deal ■ A fair amount ■ Not very much ■ Nothing at all ■ Don't know/ No opinion



Base: All teachers (500), November 2011

²⁶ Please note, due to rounding the total figure for know a great deal/a fair amount is 35% whereas the figures for "know a great deal" and "know a fair amount" are 5% and 31% respectively.

General public understanding

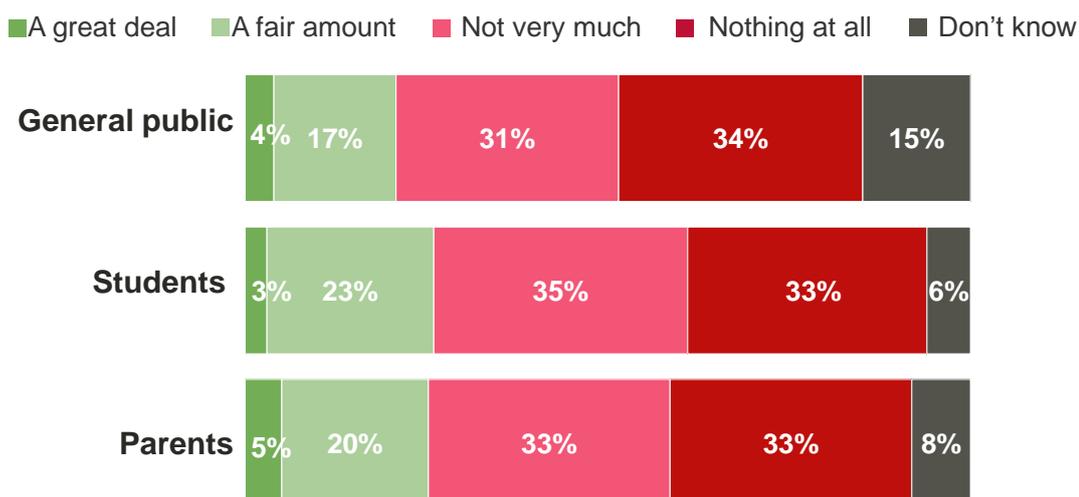
One in five (21%) general public respondents²⁷ say they understand the difference between a regulated and unregulated qualification.

Knowledge regarding the difference between a regulated and unregulated qualification is broadly similar for students and parents, with 25% of both groups stating they understand a great deal or a fair amount. One third of students and parents know nothing about the distinction between the two types of qualification (34% general public, 33% parents and students).

Figure 43

'Regulated' and 'unregulated' qualifications – general public

Q How much would you say you know the difference between a 'regulated' qualification and an 'unregulated' qualification?



Base: General public (2,098), all parents (384), all students (253)

²⁷ This includes all student and parent interviews

Appendices

Appendix A

Methodology – previous waves

All ten waves of the research were carried out using Ipsos MORI's general public omnibus and a telephone survey amongst teachers. Details of the methodology in each wave are as follows. In each wave, the student and parent interviews were included in the general public data for analysis.

Wave 1

Representative samples of the following groups were interviewed between 20th February and 14th March 2003, specifically:

- 500 **teachers** of AS level, A level or Vocational A level in England; and
- 1,714 **members of the general public aged 15+** in England.

As there was a need within the scope of the general public research to examine the views of those directly involved in the A level system, the general public sample was boosted with extra interviews among:

- 92 **students** in England who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels; and
- 293 **parents** of children in England who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels.

Wave 2

A representative sample of teachers, the general public, parents and students were interviewed between 23rd October and 14th November 2003, specifically:

- 250 **teachers** of AS level, A level or Vocational A level in England;
- 1,766 **members of the general public aged 15+** in England – this included;
- 119 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels; and
- 315 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels.

Wave 3

A representative sample of teachers, the general public parents and students were interviewed between 13th September and 12th October 2004, specifically:

- 250 **teachers** of AS level, A level or Vocational A level in England;
- 1,720 **members of the general public aged 15+** in England;
- 80 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels; and
- 303 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels.

Wave 4

A representative sample of teachers, the general public, parents and students were interviewed between 3rd and 25th November 2005, specifically:

- 504 **teachers** of AS level, A level or Vocational A level, GCSEs or Vocational GCSEs in England;
- 1,974 **members of the general public aged 15+** in England;
- 137 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs; and
- 346 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs.

Wave 5

A representative sample of teachers and the general public, parents and students were interviewed between 6th and 24th November 2006, specifically:

- 506 **teachers** of AS level, A level or Vocational A level, GCSEs or Vocational GCSEs in England;
- 1,964 **members of the general public aged 15+** in England;
- 138 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs; and

- 324 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs.

Wave 6

A representative sample of teachers and the general public, parents and students were interviewed between 12th and 30th November 2007, specifically:

- 500 **teachers** of AS level, A level or GCSEs in England;
- 1,765 **members of the general public aged 15+** in England;
- 136 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs; and

292 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs.

Wave 7

A representative sample of teachers and the general public, parents and students were interviewed between 6th November and 3rd December 2008, specifically:

- 500 **teachers** of AS level, A level or GCSEs in England;
- 1,857 **members of the general public aged 15+** in England;
- 152 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs; and

297 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs.

Wave 8

A representative sample of teachers and the general public, parents and students were interviewed between 9th November and 13th December 2009 with:

- 500 **teachers** of AS level, A level or GCSEs in England;
- 1,774 **members** of the general public aged 15+ in England;
- 112 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs; and

- 290 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs.

Wave 9

A representative sample of teachers and the general public, parents and students were interviewed between 12th November and 17th December 2010 with:

- 500 **teachers** of AS level, A level or GCSEs in England;
- 1,931 **members** of the general public aged 15+ in England;
- 120 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs; and
- 334 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs.

Wave 10

A representative sample of teachers and the general public, parents and students were interviewed between 18th November and 16th December 2011 with:

- 500 **teachers** of AS level, A level or GCSEs in England;
- 2,098 **members** of the general public aged 15+ in England; this includes interviews with:
- 253 **students** who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs; and
- 384 **parents** of children who are just about to take, are currently taking, or have recently taken, A levels and/or GCSEs.

Appendix B

Wave 10 sample profile²⁸

Sample profile – Omnibus General Public	Unweighted		Proportion after weighting %
	N	%	
Total	2,098	100	100
Gender			
Male	1,058	50	49
Female	1,040	50	51
Age			
15-24	454	22	24
25-34	282	13	13
35-44	361	17	18
45-54	360	17	19
55-64	291	14	12
65+	350	17	15
Social class			
AB	417	20	27
C1	710	34	29
C2	485	23	21
DE	486	23	23
Work status			
Working (full or part-time)	1,024	49	54
Not working	1,074	51	46
Region			
North East	138	7	6
North West	255	12	12
Yorks & Humber	228	11	9
East Midlands	138	7	7
West Midlands	287	14	14
South West	177	8	10
Eastern	228	11	12
London	314	15	14
South East	333	16	17

²⁸ This is the sample profile for wave 10. A detailed profile of respondents who participated in previous waves can be found in the previous reports, provided in separate volumes.

Sample profile – Omnibus Parents	Unweighted Only	
	N	%
Total	384	100
Parental status		
Parent with child in yrs 10-11 and intends to take A level exams	245	64
Parent with child in their 1 st /2 nd year of A levels	100	26
Parent with child who has taken A levels in the last 2 years	63	16
Parent with child in yrs 10-11 and due to take GCSE exams	245	64
Parent with child who has taken GCSEs in the last 2 years	158	41

Sample profile – Omnibus 15-19 year olds	Unweighted Only	
	N	%
Total	253	100
Student status		
Currently in KS4 and intends to take A level exams	13	5
Currently studying for A levels	80	32
Completed A levels in the last 2 years	65	26
Currently in KS4 and will be taking GCSE exams	13	5
Completed GCSEs in the last 2 years	94	37

Sample profile - Teachers	Unweighted		Proportion after weighting
	N	%	%
Total	500	100	100
A level/GCSE teacher			
Teaches A level	308	62	61
Teaches GCSEs	401	80	80
Level of responsibility			
Classroom/ subject teacher/ lecturer	124	25	25
Member of SMT/ leadership team	185	37	37
Course leader	40	8	8
Head of year	44	9	9
Subject manager	34	7	7
Curriculum co-ordinator	38	8	8
Programme Manager	12	2	2
Head of Faculty/ department/ house/ key stage	12	2	2
Exams officer	3	1	1
Director of Studies	3	1	1
Other	5	1	1
Years in teaching			
NQT/1 st year in teaching	15	3	3
1-5 years	106	21	21
6-10 years	62	12	12
11-15 years	39	8	8
16-25 years	111	22	23
Over 25 years	167	33	33
School/ College status			
Secondary maintained	300	60	59
Independent school	100	20	20
FE/ Sixth Form College	100	20	20

Appendix C

Statistical reliability

Because a sample, rather than the entire population, was interviewed the percentage results are subject to sampling tolerances – which vary with the size of the sample and the percentage figure concerned. For example, for a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 2,098 (where results are then weighted) respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary more than two percentage points, plus or minus, from the result that would have been obtained from a census of the entire population (using the same procedures). However, these assume that a perfect random sample has been achieved, (although an analysis of design factors between quota and random samples reveals that quota samples offer a good design). The tolerances that may apply in this report are given in the table below.

Weighting data, whilst important in ensuring that results are representative, can also introduce a ‘design effect’ and results in an ‘effective sample size’ that differs from the unweighted and weighted sample size. It is possible to recalculate the *effective* sample size by taking this distorting effect into account, and this is the figure which is used for statistical analysis. The tolerances presented below are based on the effective sample size.

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels (at the 95% confidence level)			
Size of sample or sub-group on which survey result is based	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
188 (i.e. all students)	4	7	7
332 (i.e. all parents)	3	5	5
493 (i.e. all teachers)	3	4	4
1734 (i.e. respondents in England)	1	2	2

Source: Ipsos MORI

Tolerances are also involved in the comparison of results between different elements of the sample. A difference must be of at least a certain size to be statistically significant. The following table is a guide to the sampling tolerances applicable to comparisons between sub-groups.

Significance testing between wave 9 and wave 10 is based on the effective base. The effective bases in these waves and an approximate guide to the difference required between waves nine and ten of the research to show significant changes is provided in the table below.

Differences required for significance at the 95% confidence level at or near these percentages					
Effective sample size			10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Wave 9 sample	Vs.	Wave 10 sample			
All students (84)		All students (188)	8	12	13
GCSE students (42)		GCSE students (84)	11	17	19
A level students (52)		A level students (111)	10	15	17
All parents (267)		All parents (332)	5	7	8
GCSE parents (215)		GCSE parents (277)	5	8	9
A level parents (218)		A level parents (272)	5	8	9
All general public respondents (1,931)		All general public respondents (1,734)	2	3	4
All teachers (488)		All teachers (493)	4	6	6
GCSE teachers (404)		GCSE teachers (395)	4	6	7
A level teachers (295)		A level teachers (304)	5	7	8

Source: Ipsos MORI

Appendix D

Definition of social grades

The grades detailed below are the social class definitions as used by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, and are standard on all surveys carried out by Ipsos MORI.

Social Grades			
	Social Class	Occupation of Chief Income Earner	Percentage of Population
A	Upper Middle Class	Higher managerial, administrative or professional	2.9
B	Middle Class	Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional	18.9
C1	Lower Middle Class	Supervisor or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional	27.0
C2	Skilled Working Class	Skilled manual workers	22.6
D	Working Class	Semi and unskilled manual workers	16.9
E	Those at the lowest levels of subsistence	State pensioners, etc, with no other earnings	11.7

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