

# **Perceptions of A Levels, GCSEs and Other Qualifications in England – Wave 12**

Perceptions of Heads of Schools, Teachers, the  
General Public, Parents and Students



September 2014

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## Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the 12th wave of research of the Perceptions Survey. This longitudinal study aims to explore attitudes to general and vocational qualifications, as well as awareness and perceptions of Ofqual.

Since its inception in 2003, this project has been conducted using a face-to-face omnibus survey of students, parents and members of the public, as well as telephone interviews with teachers. In 2012, the scope of this study was extended to capture the views of headteachers, employers and representatives of higher education institutions.

This year a completely new approach to data collection and the scope of the project was introduced. To increase the robustness of the findings, the study was conducted using an online survey (self-completion questionnaires) instead of collecting responses via telephone and/or face-to-face interviews, which were the preferred methods used in past waves.

The objectives of the research were to investigate:

- overall perceptions of, and confidence in, the qualifications taken by young people – particularly A levels, GCSEs and other academic<sup>1</sup> and vocational qualifications;<sup>2</sup>
- confidence in qualification standards and the examination system – both in implementation and regulation;
- awareness and perceptions of Ofqual.

YouGov conducted the fieldwork for this project, which was undertaken between February and March 2014 in England. The groups of respondents were as follows:

- 230 headteachers;
- 698 teachers of A levels and/or GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications for 15 to 19 year olds;
- 365 students, defined as young people aged 15 to 19 years old, who are studying/will study A levels, GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications;

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<sup>1</sup> Ofqual defines academic qualifications as qualifications that are assessed by formal examinations and moderated coursework.

<sup>2</sup> Ofqual defines vocational qualifications as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job.

- 321 parents of students who are taking or who have just taken A levels, GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications;
- 1,818 members of the general public.

When interpreting the results of the study it is important to consider the changes in sampling and data collection methodology. These changes mean that **this year's results are not directly comparable with those of previous waves of research**. Any comparisons that report differences with past results should be mindful of these changes. To assist in understanding the implications of changing the mode of data collection a parallel wave was conducted. The main findings of this parallel wave were:

- Respondents were more likely to register a response in the online version of the questionnaire rather than answering “Don't know / No opinion” – which is a frequent response in offline public surveys.
- Teachers were more likely to provide a more positive response when asked a question by an interviewer than when they answered online in their own time and in private. This bias in responses is typical due to the ‘social distance’ introduced by removing a human interviewer from the collection process.

In addition to the above caveat, the following should also be considered:

- **Comparability between groups was not always possible.** Different questions were necessarily asked of members of the different respondent groups. Details of the questions are listed in appendix D.
- **Sampling and weighting.** The data were collected from samples of the population in England. Results are therefore subject to sample tolerances and not all the differences reported are statistically significant. Details about sample composition, weighting and statistical significance are included in appendix B.
- **Context in which the research took place.** At the time when this research took place, consultation was under way regarding important reforms to both A level and GCSE qualifications in England, in addition to smaller-scale, but significant, changes being made to the timing and structure of assessments. While the existence of this consultation should rightfully impact on the perceptions of the respondents, the concurrency of this consultation with the research may have had an impact (positive or negative) on this year's results.

## Key findings

### Perceptions of A levels and GCSEs

- **Confidence in the A level system was high among respondents. However, some respondent groups reported a moderate loss of confidence in A level qualifications.**

Confidence in A levels across all groups was high, with 68 per cent of all respondents reporting that they had confidence in the A level system. Headteachers reported the highest level of confidence (81 per cent), while members of the public had the lowest (59 per cent).<sup>3</sup>

When asked about their confidence in A levels relative to last year, the majority of respondents reported having the same amount of confidence (60 per cent). However, just over one-quarter of headteachers, teachers and students reported having less trust in A levels when compared to last year (28 per cent for headteachers and 27 per cent for teachers and students). Interestingly, A level teachers reported the highest levels of loss of trust in the A level system, with one-third (33 per cent) reporting having less confidence than in previous years, but they remained the teaching group with the highest confidence in the system (81 per cent). Only a small proportion of respondents had more confidence in the A level system compared to the previous year (seven per cent of students, four per cent of parents and headteachers and two per cent of teachers).

From this year's results, it is clear, as it was during wave 11 of the research, that those with direct experience of qualifications (namely teachers, headteachers and students) have more confidence in A level qualifications than other respondent groups. However, these respondents also reported the highest perceived loss of confidence in the qualifications.

- **The A level qualification was generally perceived as a “trusted qualification”.**

All groups reported similar opinions of the strengths of the A level qualification. Overall, the A level was perceived as a “trusted qualification” (as reported by 81 per cent of headteachers and teachers, 68 per cent of students, 62 per cent of parents and 59 per cent of members of the public). Other strengths highlighted by respondents included the perception that the A level is a well-established

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<sup>3</sup> Percentages of agreement with the statement “I have confidence in the A level system”: 81 per cent of headteachers, 74 per cent of teachers, 69 per cent of students, 62 per cent of parents, 59 per cent of members of the public.

system that is “well understood by people” and that it is “good preparation for further study”.

- **As reported in previous years, levels of confidence in the GCSE system remain low when compared to the A level system.**

The evidence shows that the respondent groups with the highest levels of confidence in GCSEs were students (61 per cent), headteachers (55 per cent) and teachers (54 per cent), closely followed by members of the public (50 per cent). Parents had the least confidence in the qualification (45 per cent).

As with previous waves of research, it is apparent that levels of confidence in A levels have remained consistently higher than those in GCSEs. It could be argued that, given the reliance on GCSE outcomes to inform secondary school league tables (or other accountability measures), GCSEs tend to attract more media attention and have greater consequences for schools, which may influence and/or exacerbate the perceptions of respondents. As with the A level findings, it is worth noting that this research occurred at the same time as the consultation regarding GCSE reform.

- **Perceived “constant change in the exam system” was the main source of concern among all respondent groups.**

“Constant change in the exam system”, either at GCSE or A level, was the most frequently chosen source of concern across all respondent groups (cited by 67 per cent of headteachers, 56 per cent of teachers, 48 per cent of students, 46 per cent of parents and 40 per cent of members of the public).

Similarly to last year’s results, “incorrect marking of exam papers” and “incorrect grading” were also frequently mentioned concerns reported by both headteachers and teachers, as was “removal of the January assessment opportunity / January exams”. Concerns around marking and grading were less strong for parents, members of the public and students. These groups are less likely to have an understanding of the operation of the system and therefore may be less able to accurately isolate any concerns they may have.

For a second consecutive year, students were concerned about “too much pressure / stress” placed on them by A levels and/or GCSEs and “heavy workload”. These issues were also a recurrent concern raised by parents and, to a lesser extent, members of the public. Teachers were also concerned about “too much pressure / stress on teachers”.

- **Teachers and headteachers reported differing views on confidence in the marking and grading of A levels and GCSEs, with teachers generally being more positive than headteachers. Further, students and teachers**

**reported the highest levels of confidence in the marking and grading of A levels and GCSEs across all respondent groups.**

Overall, results showed a degree of reservation among headteachers about the grading and marking of GCSEs and A levels. Headteachers reported the lowest levels of confidence in this area. About 45 per cent of headteachers reported having confidence in the accuracy of marking of A levels, compared to at least 51 per cent of all other groups. Thirty eight per cent of headteachers had confidence in the accuracy of marking of GCSEs, compared to at least 45 per cent of all other groups.

Similarly, almost half of headteachers (46 per cent) felt that the accuracy of marking has decreased over the past year (compared to just 28 per cent of teachers). Moreover, the research suggested that headteachers were the group with the largest proportion of respondents who believed that all A level and GCSE students did not get the right grade (67 per cent for A levels and 79 per cent for GCSEs). Supporting these findings, “inaccurate marking of exam papers” was reported by the majority of headteachers as the main reason why they believed all A levels and GCSE students did not get the right grade. Another reason was “grade boundaries not properly set”.

By contrast, students and teachers, and predominantly A level teachers, reported the highest levels of confidence in the marking and grading of A levels and GCSEs across all respondent groups (at least 60 per cent for A levels and at least 54 per cent for GCSEs, for teachers).

Differing opinions between teachers and headteachers regarding confidence in marking could be explained by the differences in roles and responsibilities of these groups. It could be argued that, given the accountability measures, headteachers could have a less positive view of marking and grading because of their impact and consequences for the school.

- **When thinking about grading of GCSEs and A levels, the subject areas that respondents tended to be more concerned about were English, maths and sciences.**

Overall, the main reason why respondents seemed to be concerned with the grading of English papers was the perceived high degree of subjectivity involved in marking A level and GCSE English papers, as well as concerns about inaccurate marking and grading as discussed previously. These perceptions could also be explained by the remnant trend of opinion initiated by the grading of GCSE English in 2012.



## Perceptions of other academic, vocational and applied qualifications

- **Headteachers and teachers reported the highest level of knowledge and understanding of vocational qualifications. Members of the public had the least.**

Seventy-six per cent of headteachers and 66 per cent of teachers reported knowing and understanding the difference between academic qualifications such as GCSEs, A levels, and vocational qualifications. This was followed by 44 per cent of students and parents. The general public was the least informed group and reported the least amount of knowledge (37 per cent).

Further, parents and students and members of the public showed a high degree of uncertainty about the difference between GCSEs/A levels and other qualifications (vocational, applied and other academic), with approximately as many agreeing as disagreeing that they knew the difference.

- **All respondent groups felt that ‘other qualifications’ including “other academic qualifications” and “vocational qualifications” were easier to achieve than A levels and GCSEs.**

Respondents were asked to evaluate how easy it is to obtain these qualifications “in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification” when compared to academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels. Responses were largely divided between alternative qualifications being “equally difficult to achieve” and “easier to achieve”. However, it is important to note that, in the case of students, parents and particularly members of the public, a large number of respondents (sometimes more than half) were not able to or chose not to make a comparison in difficulty between the two types.

## Awareness and perceptions of Ofqual

- **As expected, awareness of Ofqual was particularly high among headteachers and teachers, while members of the public were the least aware.**

Awareness of Ofqual as the regulator of exams and qualifications was very high for both headteachers (98 per cent) and teachers (92 per cent). On the other hand, knowledge of Ofqual was relatively low among parents (45 per cent), students (34 per cent) and members of the public (33 per cent).

- **Respondents who were aware of Ofqual positively rated its performance as the exams regulator, but by a small margin.**

Those respondents who were aware of Ofqual’s functions were asked to rate its effectiveness at regulating the exam system. A large proportion of headteachers

(55 per cent), teachers (53 per cent) and students (49 per cent) believed that Ofqual is effective at regulating the exam system. However, only a slightly smaller proportion of these groups (41 per cent for headteachers and 35 for both teachers and students) did not think that Ofqual is effective.

This was also the case when evaluating Ofqual's effectiveness at maintaining qualification standards, but with slightly less confidence being expressed by all groups. Across all groups, 44 per cent of respondents agreed that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications, whereas 40 per cent disagreed.

- **“Inconsistent marking” of exam papers and “inconsistent grading” were the main reasons why respondents believed Ofqual to be ineffective at maintaining standards.**

The findings suggest that those respondents who perceived Ofqual as ineffective at maintaining standards did so because “Inconsistent marking exists” (as mentioned by 82 per cent of headteachers, 75 per cent of parents and students, 68 per cent of teachers and 60 per cent of members of the public) and “inconsistent grading exists”. Further, “changes made to GCSEs in the last 12 months” was repeatedly quoted by all respondents except members of the public as the main reason behind their evaluation of Ofqual's performance as ineffective.

- **Trust in Ofqual as a source of information about exams was highest among headteachers and teachers.**

Respondents tended to trust teachers, teaching peers, awarding organisations and Ofqual for information about exams. Those respondents who did not trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams reported that their lack of confidence was rooted in “Ofqual's perceived lack of independence from the government. This was reported by all groups of respondents.

## Introduction

Ofqual regulates general and vocational qualifications in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The aim of Ofqual is to secure the standards of, and public confidence in, qualifications and to raise awareness of the range and benefits of regulated qualifications. Therefore, it is important for Ofqual to monitor attitudes and perceptions of qualifications.

The Perceptions Survey 2014 is the 12th wave of a longitudinal research study commissioned since 2008, and before that, by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority since 2003. This longitudinal survey is designed to capture the perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications in England from headteachers, teachers, parents, students and the general public.

In conducting the 12th wave of the Perceptions Survey, the methodological framework and methods were changed in order to improve the research design. Details of the changes to the methodology and the impact of this on the research can be found in the methodology section and more extensively in Appendices B and C.

### Objectives of the research

The objectives of the research were to explore:

- perceptions of, and confidence in, qualifications taken by young people – particularly A levels, GCSEs and other academic<sup>4</sup> and vocational qualifications;<sup>5</sup>
- confidence in qualification standards and the exam system – both in implementation and regulation;
- awareness and perceptions of Ofqual.

While these aims and objectives remain the same as those of previous waves of the research, additional questions have been included to reflect the reform agenda, while outmoded and/or redundant questions have been removed.

### Structure of the report

This report begins by providing a context for the current wave of the research and outlining the methodology used. Results of the survey of headteachers and teachers, parents and students, and the general public are then presented, followed by summaries of these findings from these respondent groups. Further methodological information is provided in Appendices B and C, and a comprehensive record of

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<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of the survey, other academic qualifications are defined as IGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths.

<sup>5</sup> Vocational qualifications are defined as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job.

responses from each group (beyond those discussed in the findings) is provided in appendix A.

## Background

This large-scale research survey is unique in providing a wide overview of perceptions of general and other qualifications from the users of these qualifications. This study follows 11 waves of surveys exploring perceptions of A levels from 2003 to 2012 and, since 2004, perceptions of GCSEs.<sup>6</sup> Since 2011, the research has included questions about other academic and vocational qualifications for 15 to 19 year olds. From 2008, the research has also explored the awareness, perceptions and effectiveness of Ofqual. This allows Ofqual to track perceptions of how well it is carrying out its regulatory duties.

Following years of debate surrounding grade inflation and the rigour of A level and GCSE qualifications, the government White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (2010)<sup>7</sup> proposed reforms to both A levels and GCSEs. These reforms included a departure from a modular approach to teaching and assessing GCSEs and A levels and removing the opportunity for students to re-sit units, as this was perceived as giving rise to grade inflation. A report from the House of Commons Education Committee published in June 2012 stated that confidence in GCSEs and A levels had been undermined by criticism from universities and employers, by errors on question papers in summer 2011 and by grade inflation.<sup>8</sup>

The GCSE qualification attracted further discussion on the release of results in August 2012, with concerns raised by teachers and teacher associations regarding grades in GCSE English. This culminated in a judicial review that completed in February 2013. Although the judicial review found in favour of Ofqual and the exam boards involved, this action is highly likely to have impacted on perceptions of, and confidence in, the system.

Proposals to develop and implement new qualifications called EBacc certificates that could see a single awarding organisation deliver qualifications in each EBacc subject were under consideration during wave 11 of this study. However, these proposals were abandoned in early February 2013.<sup>9</sup>

There has also been significant debate about the future of the A level qualification and the way that it is delivered. While universities still rely on A levels as the primary

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to 2008, the survey was commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

<sup>7</sup> *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010* (Department for Education) [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> *The Administration of Examinations for 15–19 Year Olds in England, First Report of Session 2012–13* (House of Commons Education Select Committee):

[www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/141/141.pdf](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/141/141.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21363396](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21363396)

form of assessment for entry, there have been widespread concerns about the effectiveness of the system as a means of aiding universities to select the right candidates. *The Importance of Teaching* (2010) stressed a commitment to include universities and learning organisations in the future development of A levels to ensure that the qualifications are fit for purpose in supporting progression to further education, higher education and employment.

In June 2012, in response to the White Paper and findings from its national and international research, Ofqual published, for consultation, a proposed regulatory approach to implementing A level reform in England.<sup>10</sup> The majority of stakeholders taking part in the consultation welcomed the increased role of universities and higher education institutions in the development of A levels, and strongly supported the general principles of the proposed regulatory approach.<sup>11</sup>

A level teachers, higher education institutions and employers recognised that perceptions of A levels were generally positive.<sup>12</sup> Higher education sector interviewees (wave 11) felt that A levels remained the “gold standard” for their subjects when compared with alternative Level 3 qualifications. Students also support this notion as identified in wave 10 of the current study.<sup>13</sup> The majority of students felt that it was more important than ever to get a higher-level qualification such as an A level.

The results in the 2012 report published by the Programme for International Student Assessment<sup>14</sup> regarding the relative performance of international jurisdictions may have impacted on perceptions reported in this study. It reported England (and the UK as a whole) as being behind other high-attaining jurisdictions and being ranked lower than previously in some areas, which led to negative media reports regarding the education system in the UK.

Since the last survey (wave 11), there have been multiple changes proposed for A level and GCSE qualifications. In fact, while this survey was being conducted, consultations were live regarding reforms to both A level and GCSE qualifications in England. While the existence of this consultation should rightfully impact on the perceptions of the respondents, the concurrency of this consultation with the research may have had an impact (positive or negative) on this year’s results.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/news/a-level-reform/](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/news/a-level-reform/)

<sup>11</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-11-07-Analysis-of-the-consultation-into-the-involvement-in-a-levels-and-amended-criteria.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-11-07-Analysis-of-the-consultation-into-the-involvement-in-a-levels-and-amended-criteria.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-04-03-fit-for-purpose-a-levels.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-04-03-fit-for-purpose-a-levels.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <http://ofqual.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2012-03-13-ofqual-perceptions-of-a-levels-gcses-wave-10.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Study sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

In summary, the exams system has been subject to a range of proposed changes and reforms over recent years in addition to high-profile challenges regarding its operation that are likely to have impacted on perceptions of the effectiveness and operation of the current systems.

## **Methodology**

### **Overview of approach**

This year, data from all respondent groups was collected using online questionnaires. These changes reflect improvements in both technology and practice, with online data collection not only being more efficient but also arguably more reliable than the existing collection approach. Previous waves of this survey have used telephone and face-to-face interviews to gather the perceptions of participants.

Improvements have also been made to the sampling to make sure that the samples drawn are unbiased and representative of the population of subjects. Due to changes to the question wording, sampling and weighting approaches and changes in the data collection method, there are limitations on the comparability of findings in the current wave to those conducted previously.

### **Sampling**

The sampling of participants was designed with a view to achieving respondent groups that were representative of the wider population. Details of this sampling procedure and its effectiveness are provided in appendix B.

Responses were collected from the following groups:

- 698 teachers of GCSE, A level and other academic and vocational qualifications offered to 15 to 19 year olds (referred to throughout this report as teachers);
- 230 headteachers;
- 365 students, which are defined as those aged 15 to 19 who are studying/have studied/will study A levels and/or GCSEs and/or an academic qualification defined as the Level 1/Level 2 certificates (commonly known as IGCSE and referred to as this throughout the report), the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths and other academic qualifications (including vocational and applied);
- 321 parents/carers of students who are taking or who have just taken A levels, GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications (including vocational and applied);
- 1,818 members of the public.

All respondent groups were asked a range of questions about their perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications and the systems that deliver them. These

included their confidence in the system, strengths of the system and their views on specific aspects of the system such as the accuracy of marking and grading. They were also asked a series of questions about their awareness and perceptions of Ofqual and their trust in different sources of information about exams.

While the sampling approach has aimed to identify groups of participants that are representative, given that a survey of this kind only captures the views of those involved, throughout this report responses attributed to groups (for example, teachers, parents etc.) reflect only those respondents included in the study.

### **Limitations and caveats**

As this wave has introduced several changes to sampling, question wording and data collection methods, comparisons between this year's results and previous waves are less meaningful than would usually be the case and are therefore subject to limitations. To assist in understanding the implications of changing the mode of data collection, a parallel wave was conducted. The impact of introducing online data collection methods is discussed in appendix C. However, it is important to note two main caveats when interpreting the results of this study likely arising from changes in methodology. First, the lower incidence of "Don't know / No opinion" responses observed when the questions are delivered online compared to those delivered by an interviewer. Second, the fact that teachers tended to provide more positive responses when asked a question by an interviewer compared to when individuals answer online in their own time and in private. Therefore, results obtained from teachers (and potentially other respondent groups) this year are likely to be less positive when compared to previous years due to the collection mode used. Detailed information about how the data were collected, sample composition and implications of these changes when interpreting this year's results can be found in appendix B.

While efforts have been made to sample the population in a manner that means the findings are representative, the data are, necessarily, only a sample. Therefore, results are subject to sample tolerances and not all the differences reported are statistically significant. A summary of the confidence intervals relevant to the different respondent groups is provided in appendix B.

As a final caveat, it is important to bear in mind that the context in which the research took place is an important factor when interpreting the results. At the time when this research took place, a consultation was under way to consider the introduction of important reforms to both A level and GCSE qualifications in England. While the existence of this consultation should rightfully impact on the perceptions of the respondents, the concurrency of this consultation with the research may have had an impact (positive or negative) on this year's results.

## **Reporting of figures**

Throughout this report, percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. This means that for questions where a single response was received from each respondent, percentages may not always add up to exactly 100 per cent. For other question types where respondents were able to select more than one response, percentages will add up to more than 100 per cent.

Below each figure an 'effective base' is quoted, which differs from the sample sizes given above. These numbers are a product of the data weighting procedure that is applied (see appendix B) and are used for statistical analysis. However, where a question is asked of a subgroup of the respondents based upon their answer to a previous question, they do provide an indication of the numbers who answered the question.



## Headteachers' and teachers' perceptions

The following sections detail the responses provided by the 230 headteachers and 530 teachers.

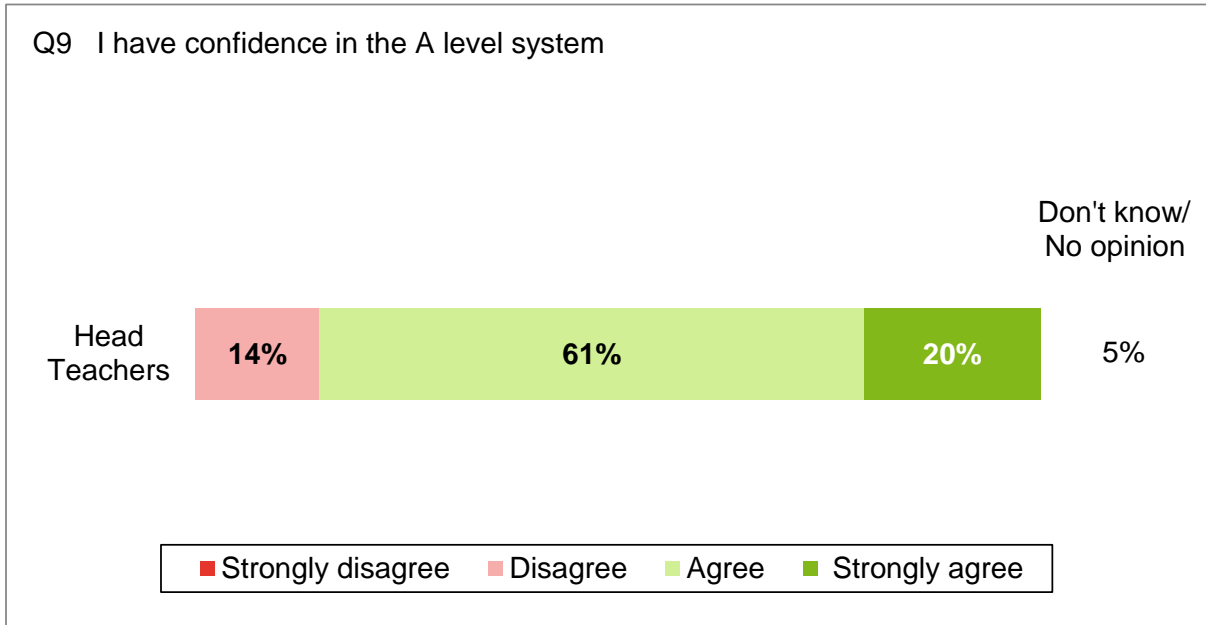
### Confidence in the A level system

The vast majority of headteachers (81 per cent) and the majority of teachers (74 per cent) reported having confidence in the current A level system (see figures 1 and 2). Approximately two-thirds of headteachers and teachers stated that their position on this had remained unchanged since the previous year (see figures 3 and 4). While for the most part these findings are positive, it is also worth noting that just over one-quarter of headteachers (28 per cent) and teachers (27 per cent) reported having less confidence in the A level system than they had the year before.

Exploring what respondents believed to be the strengths and limitations of the current A level system, headteachers and teachers expressed similar views overall. Both groups overwhelmingly viewed A levels as a trusted qualification (81 per cent of both headteachers and teachers) based on a well-established, well-understood system that provides a good foundation for further study. A small minority (2 per cent of both groups) were unable to identify any strengths in the current system. See figures 5 and 6 for the complete range of options and corresponding responses.

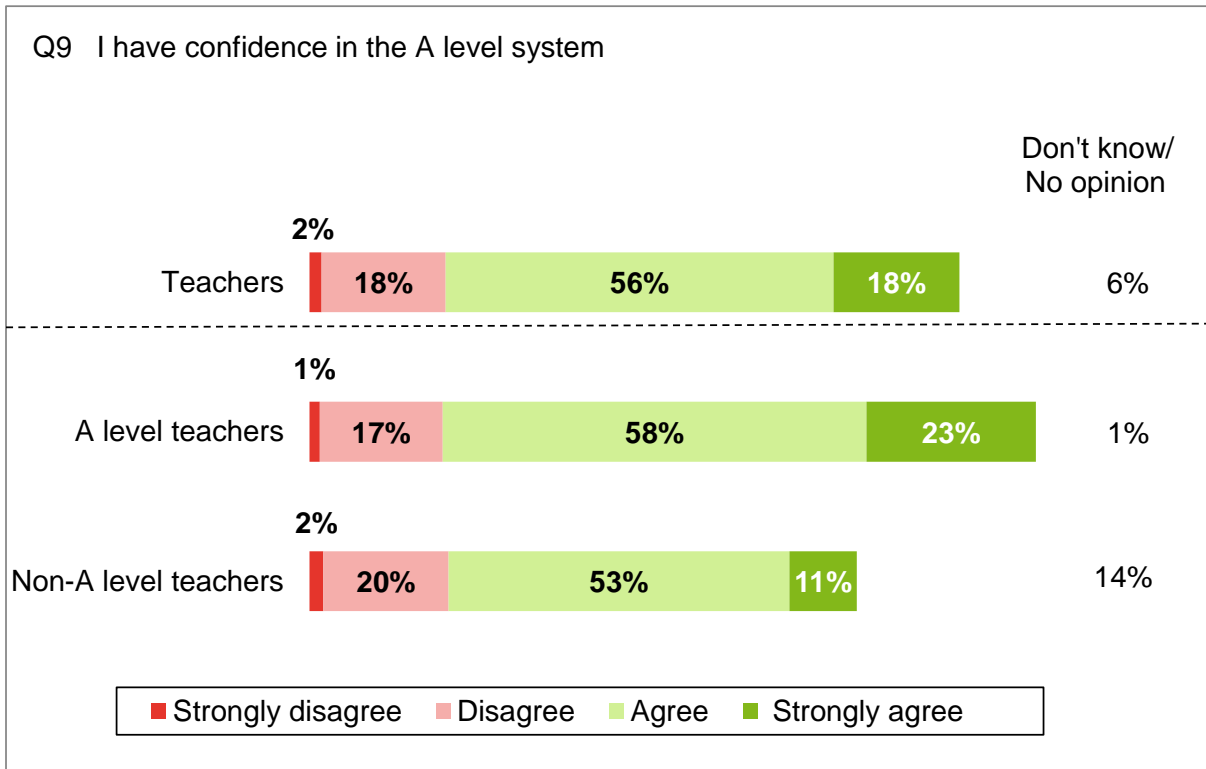
The main concern about A levels cited by headteachers (67 per cent) and teachers (56 per cent) is the perceived constant change in the exam system. The removal of the January assessment opportunity also ranked highly in the concerns of both respondent groups. Incorrect marking of exam papers ranked highly for headteachers, with just over half citing this as a concern. Just under one-third of teachers also cited this issue. See figures 7 and 8 for a breakdown of responses from headteachers and teachers.

**Figure 1: Confidence in the A level system – headteachers**



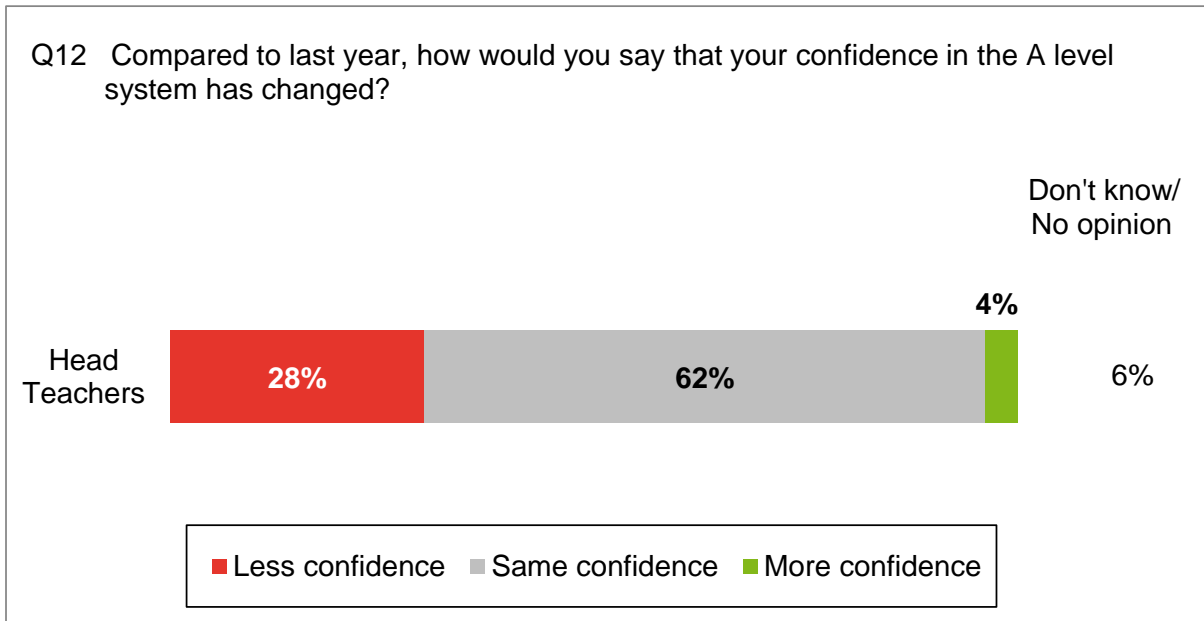
Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 2: Confidence in the A level system – teachers**



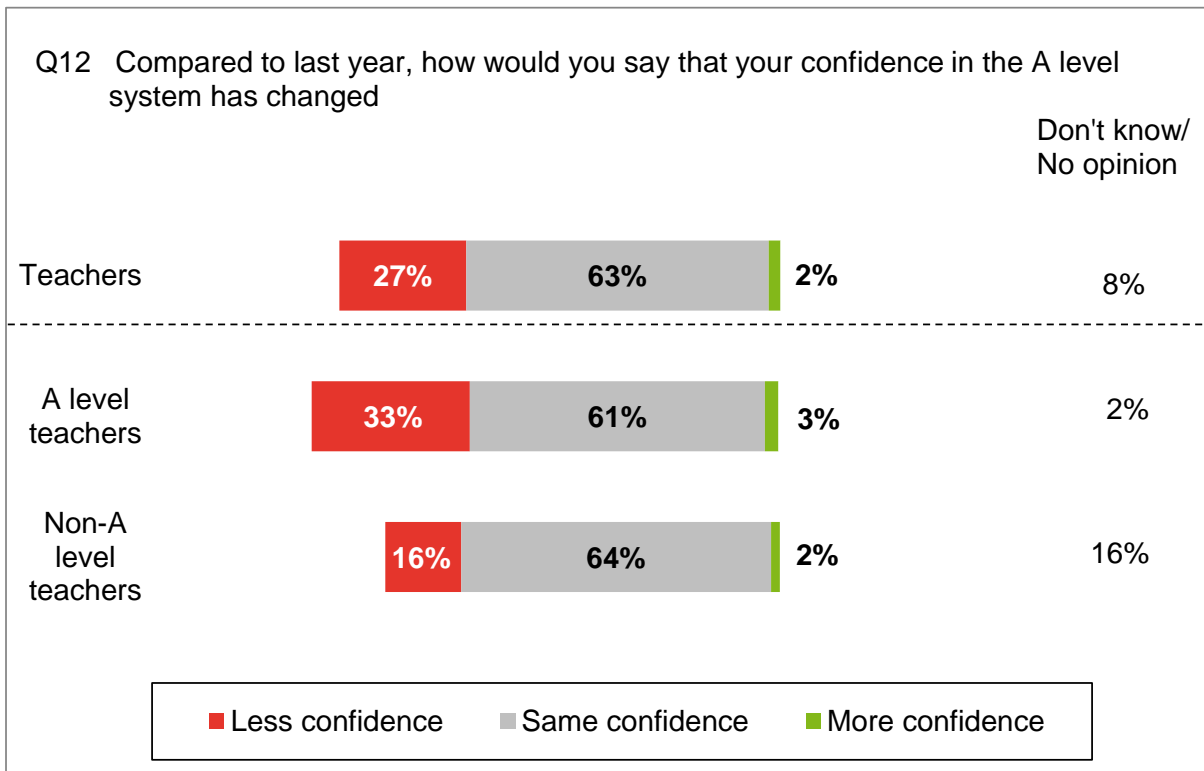
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 3:** Confidence in the A level system compared to last year – headteachers



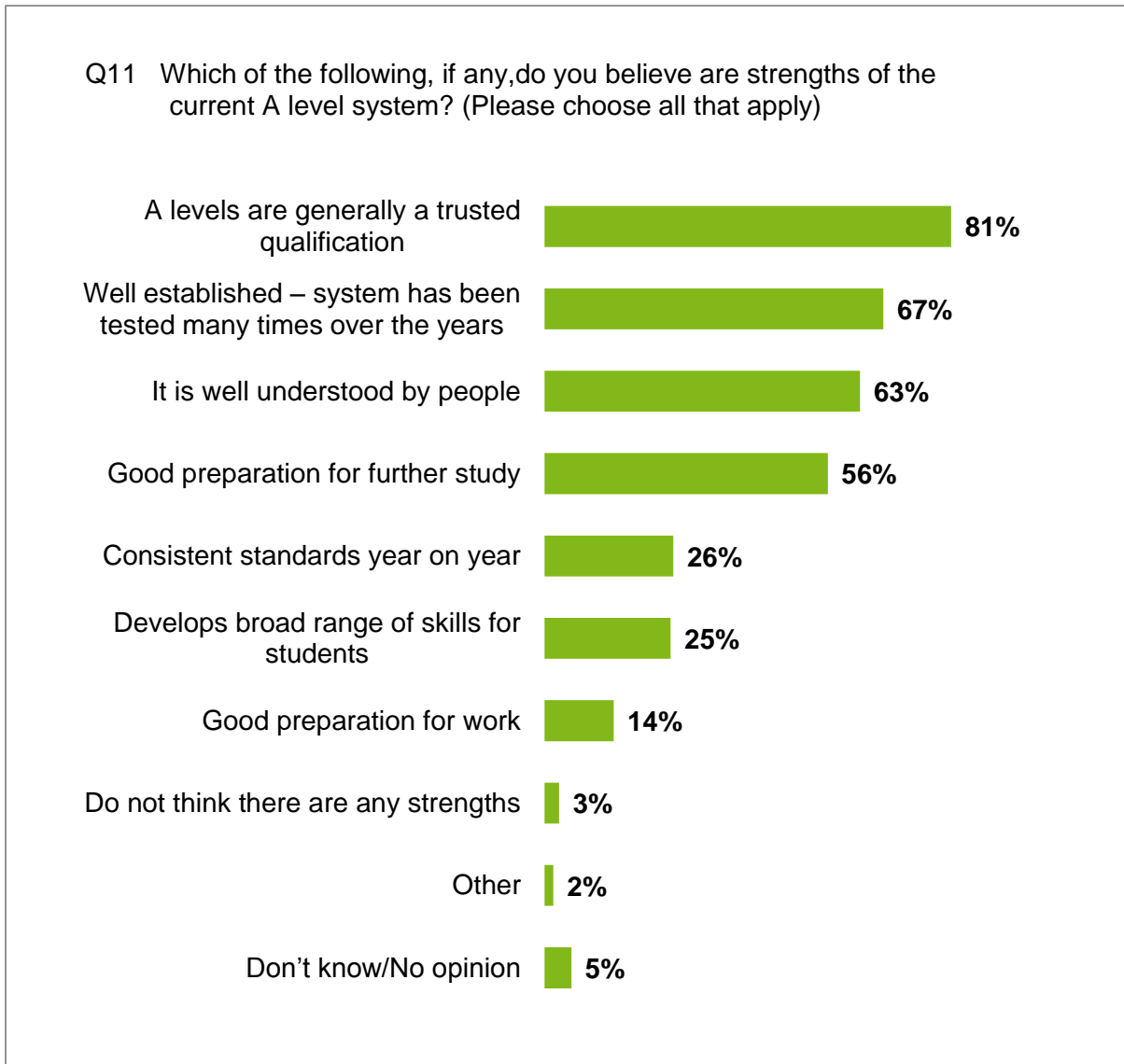
Effective base: 204 headteachers in England.

**Figure 4:** Confidence in the A level system compared to last year – teachers



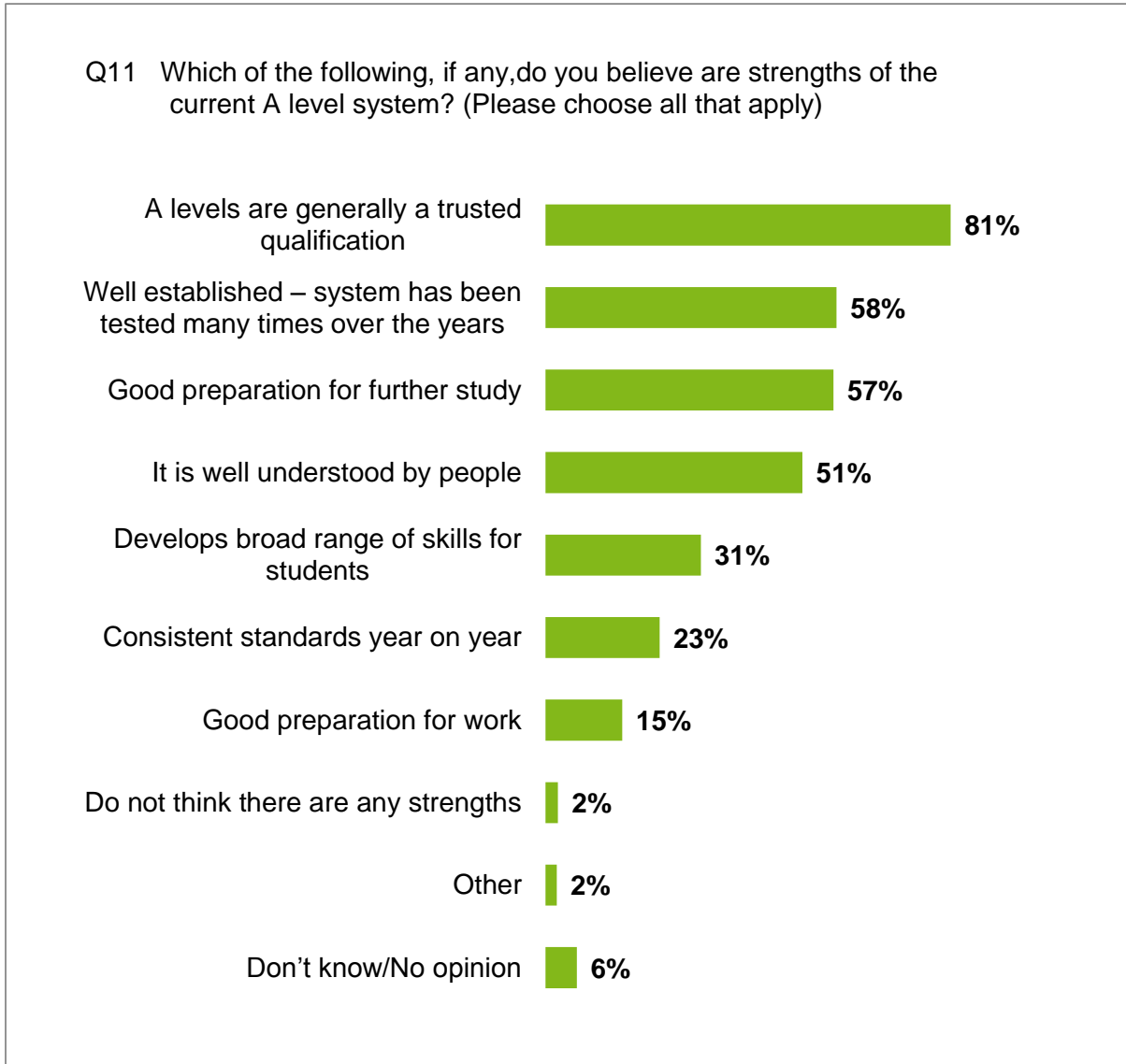
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 5: Strengths of the A level system – headteachers**



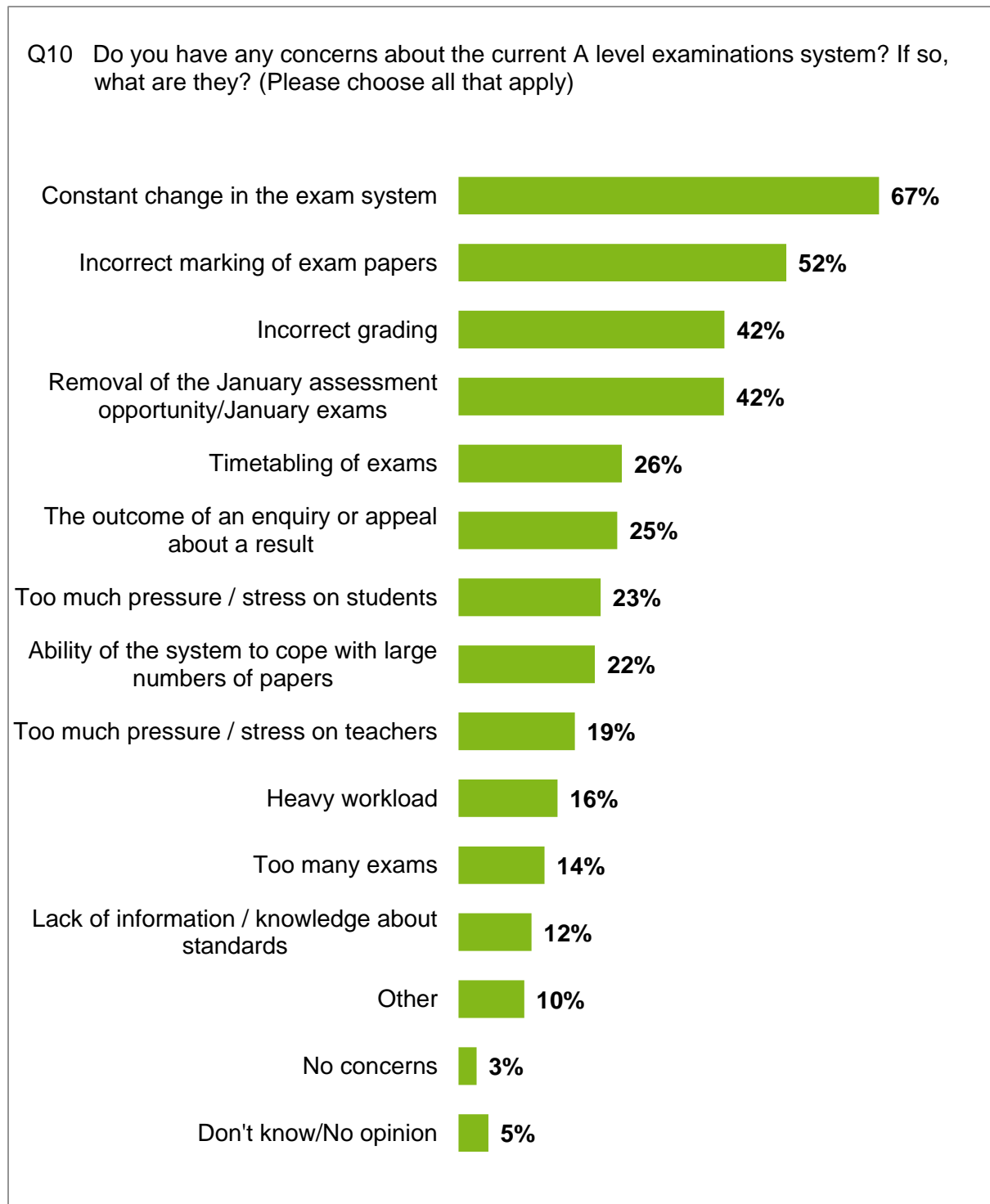
*Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.*

**Figure 6:** Strengths of the A level system – teachers



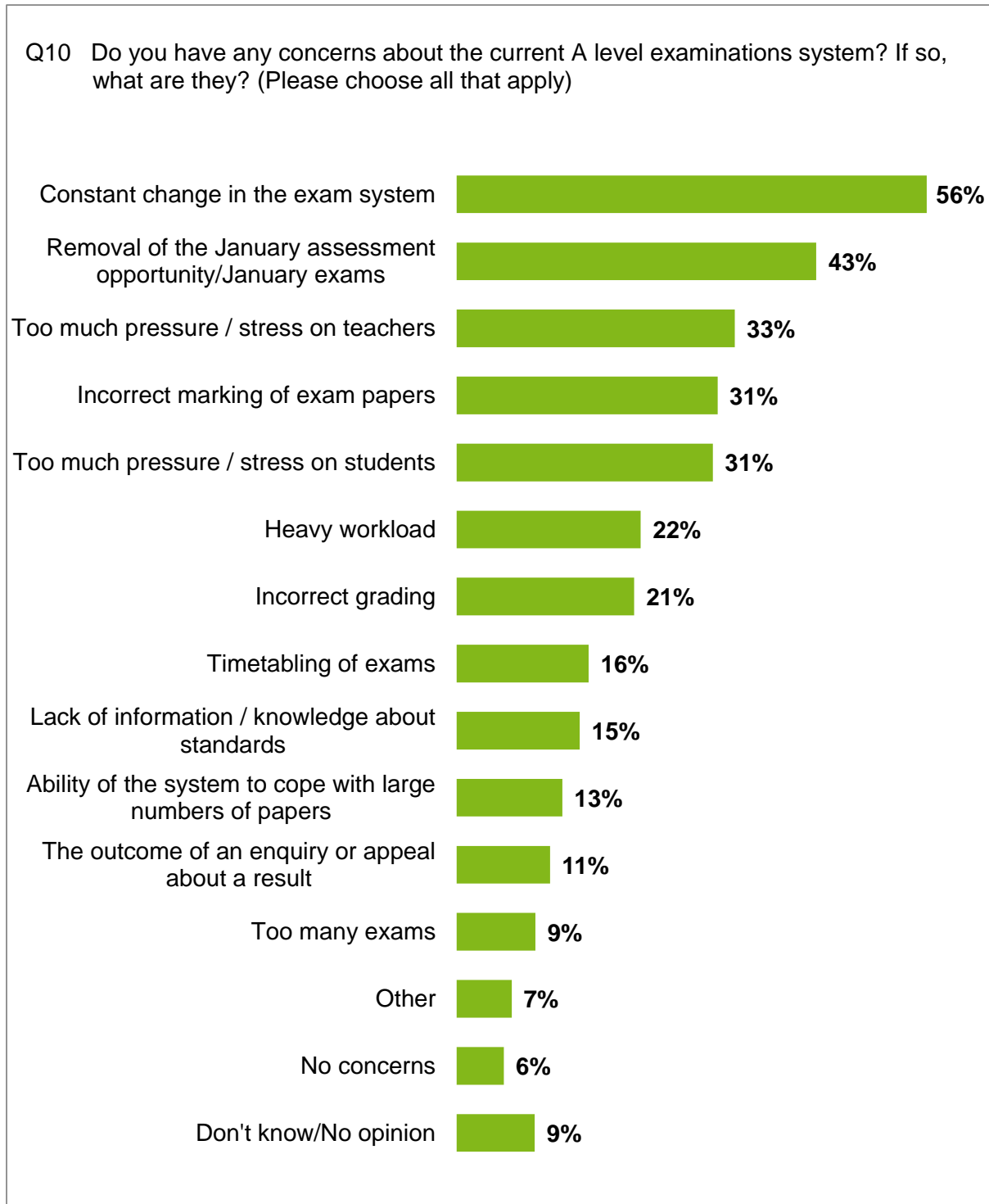
*Effective base: 530 teachers in England.*

**Figure 7: Concerns about the A level system – headteachers**



Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 8:** Concerns about the A level system – teachers



Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

## **Confidence in the GCSE system**

Respondents were asked about their confidence in the GCSE system. Just over half of headteachers (55 per cent) and teachers (54 per cent) expressed that they had confidence (see figures 9 and 10). Around half of headteachers (53 per cent) and teachers (47 per cent) reported that they felt less confidence in the GCSE system than they had the year before (see figures 11 and 12). A small percentage (4 per cent in both groups) reported greater confidence in the system compared to last year.

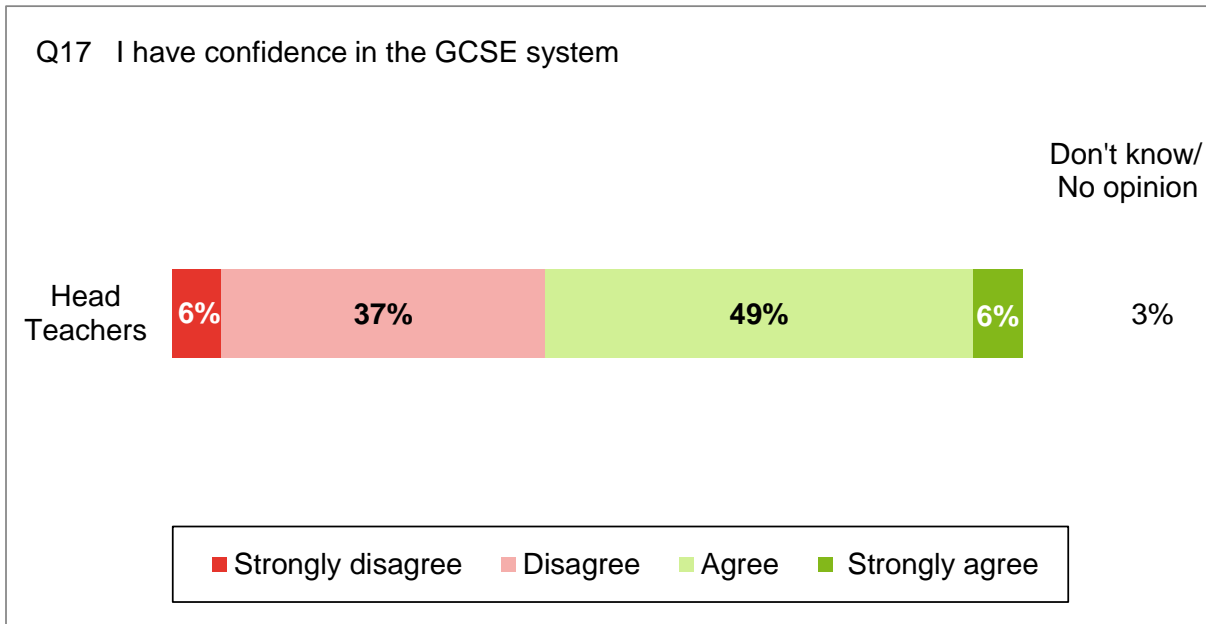
These findings are consistent with those found in previous Perception Surveys, which show a slight decrease in teachers' confidence in the GCSE system. However, methodological changes in this year's survey limit the validity of this comparison.

Responses from headteachers and teachers when asked about their views of the strengths of GCSEs are summarised in figures 13 and 14. Most respondents indicated that they felt GCSEs are well understood by people (63 per cent of headteachers and 54 per cent of teachers) and are seen as a trusted qualification (58 per cent of headteachers and 56 per cent of teachers). Across both groups, 10 per cent of respondents expressed that they did not feel GCSEs had any strengths.

Details of the responses when asked about concerns with the GCSE system are reported in figures 15 and 16. Overwhelmingly, concerns were raised regarding constant change in the exam system (79 per cent of headteachers and 60 per cent of teachers). It is important to note the concurrency of this research with the consultation window for the reform to current qualifications, which may have had an impact on views regarding change in the system. Other areas of concern highlighted by headteachers focused on the accuracy of outcomes for candidates. These were expressed as concerns about marking (57 per cent) and grading (48 per cent). Teachers highlighted more concerns regarding teachers and students than did headteachers, with the interacting issues of pressure and stress on teachers and students and the move to end-of-year exams being frequently selected.

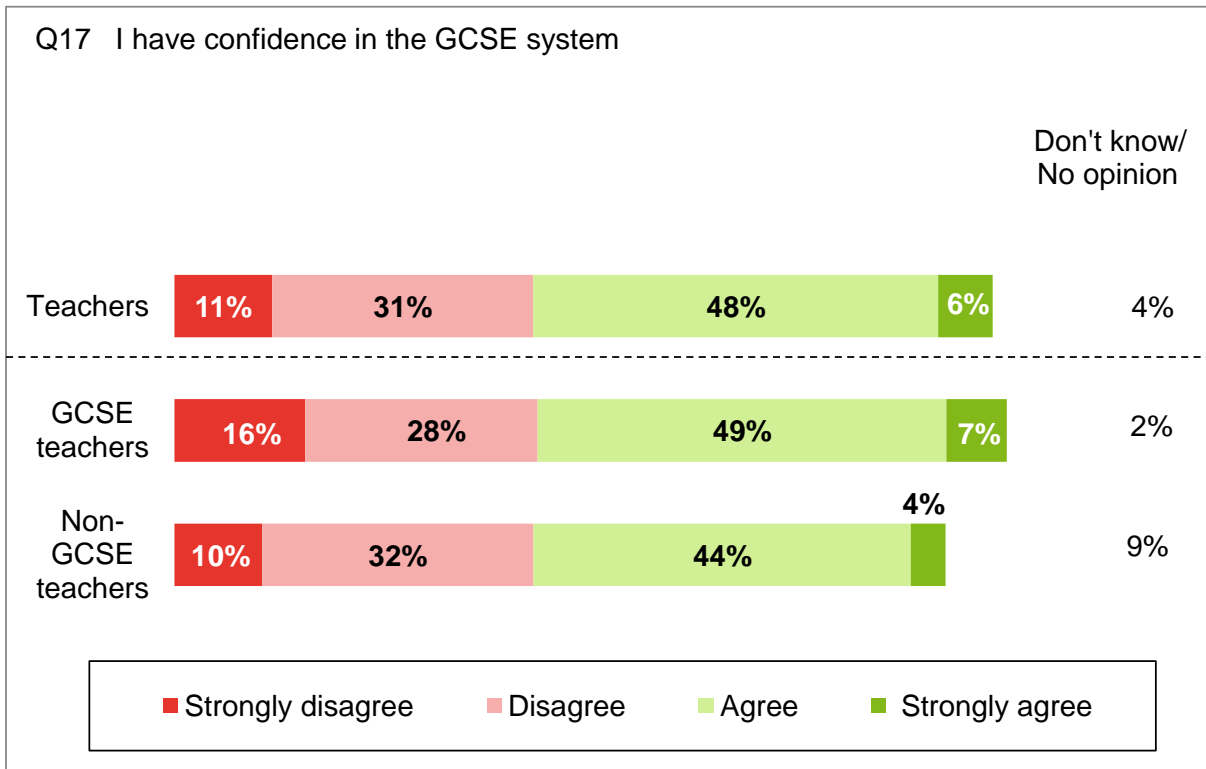


**Figure 9:** Confidence in the GCSE system – headteachers



Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 10:** Confidence in the GCSE system – teachers



Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 11:** Confidence in the GCSE system compared to last year – headteachers



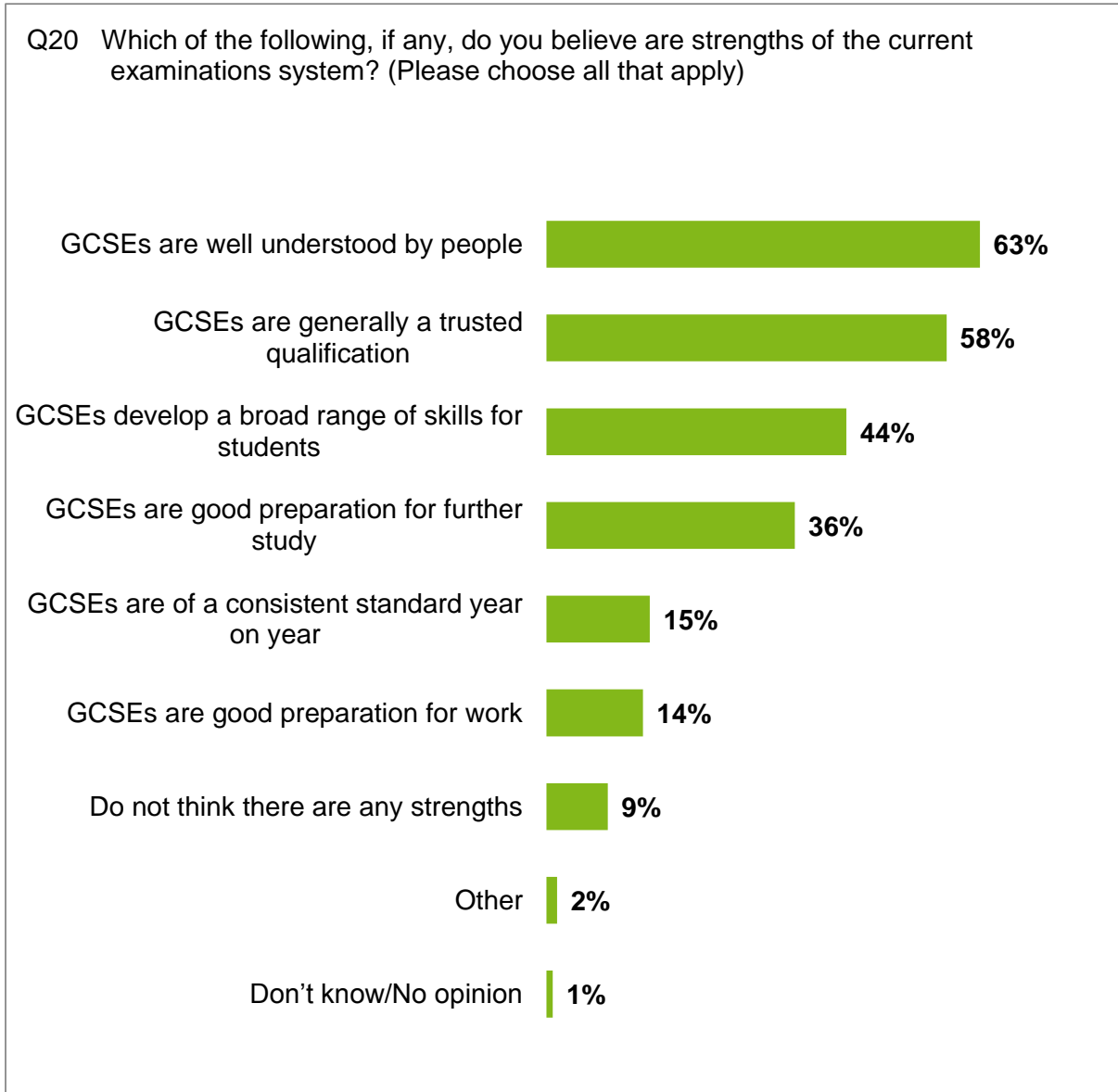
Effective base: 204 headteachers in England.

**Figure 12:** Confidence in the GCSE system compared to last year – teachers



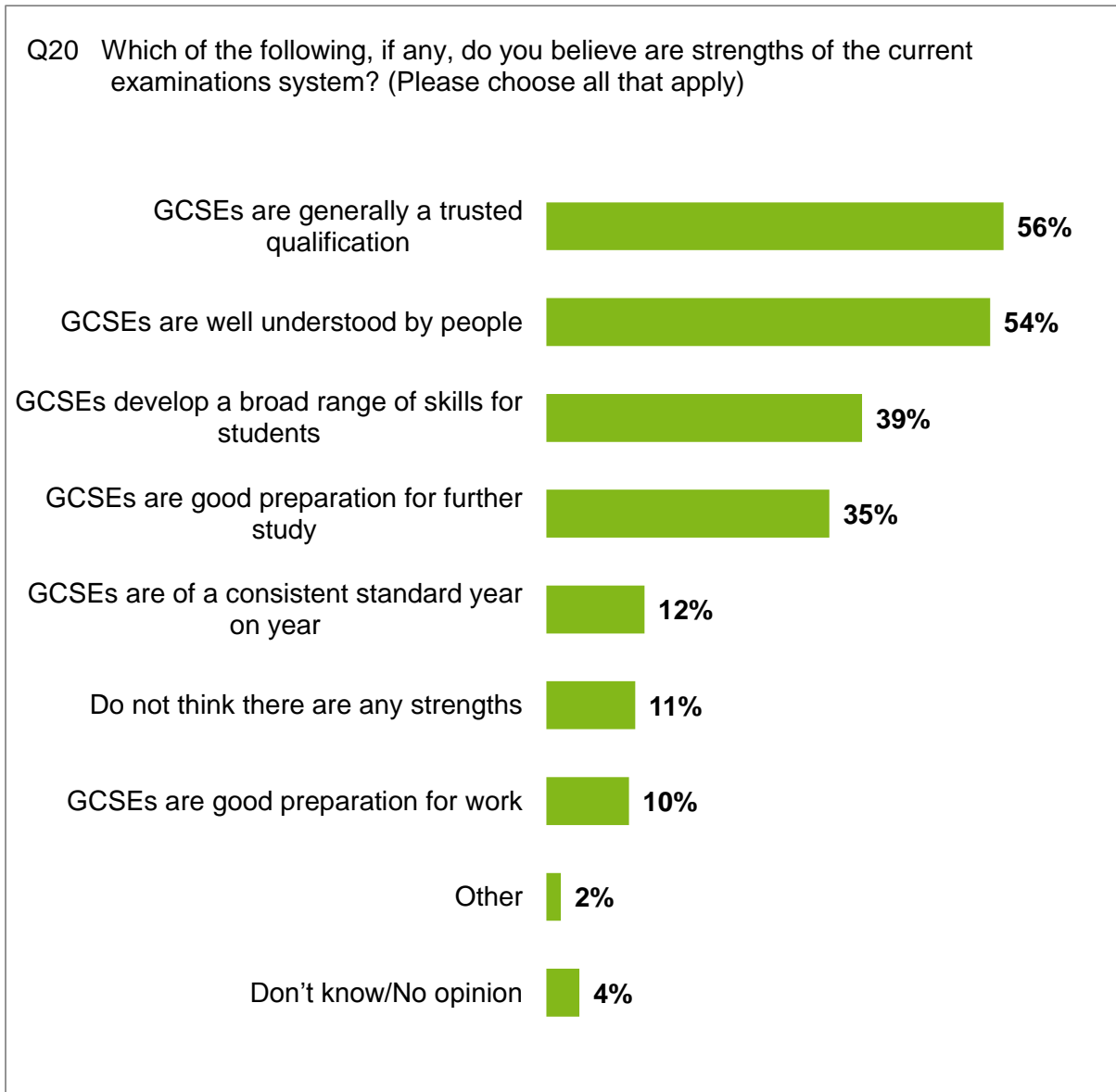
Effective base: 522 teachers in England.

**Figure 13:** Strengths of the GCSE system – headteachers



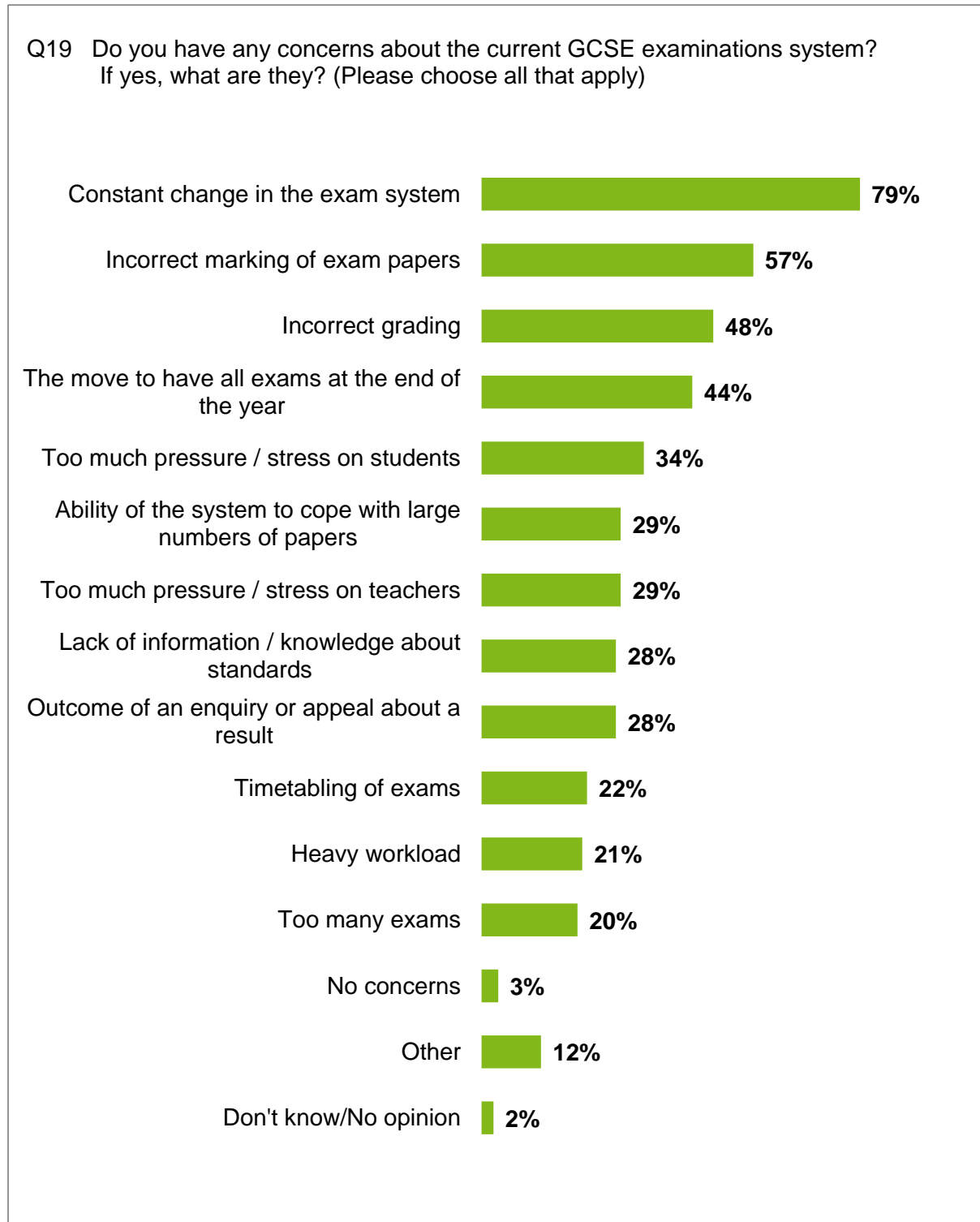
*Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.*

**Figure 14:** Strengths of the GCSE system – teachers



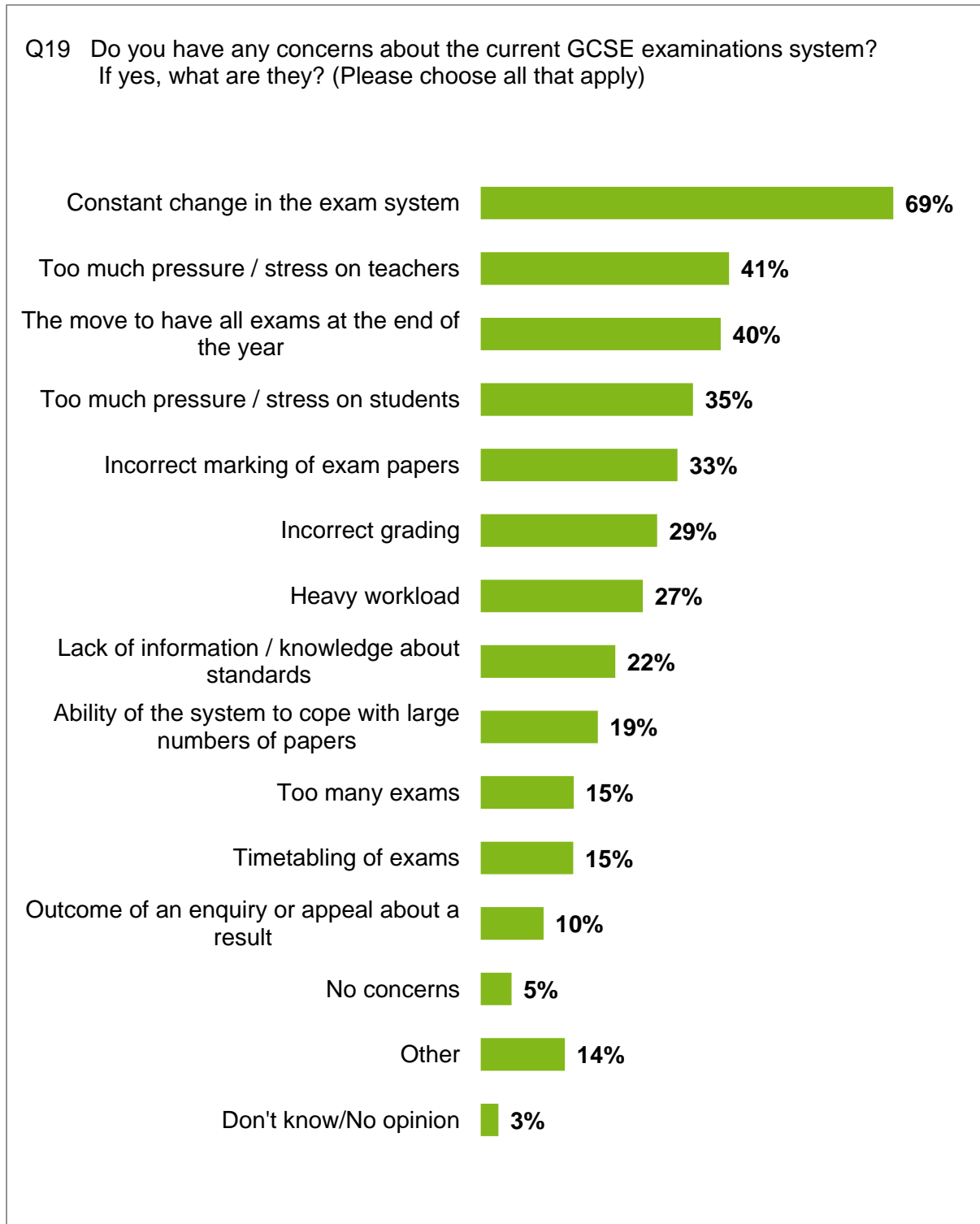
*Effective base: 530 teachers in England.*

**Figure 15: Concerns about the GCSE system – headteachers**



*Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.*

**Figure 16:** Concerns about the GCSE system – teachers



Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

## **Perceptions of marking and grading**

### **Marking**

Respondents were questioned about their perceptions of marking and grading at both GCSE and A level. Forty-nine per cent of headteachers and 46 per cent of teachers reported a lack of confidence in A level marking (see figures 17 and 18), with similar proportions perceiving there to be a reduction in marking accuracy over the past two years (see figures 19 and 20).

Headteachers expressed similar low levels of confidence in marking of GCSEs and A levels, with 57 per cent registering a lack of confidence in GCSEs and 49 per cent in A levels. This trend was not mirrored in the teacher group, with only 39 per cent lacking confidence (see figures 21 and 22). Just over half of the headteachers (53 per cent) believed that the accuracy of GCSE marking has decreased over the past two years and only 34 per cent believed that accuracy has remained constant (see figure 23). Forty-one per cent of the teachers surveyed stated that in their view the accuracy of marking has not decreased over the past two years. However, a high proportion (25 per cent) did not express an opinion or stated that they did not know (see figure 24).

### **Grading**

Sixty-seven per cent of headteachers and 47 per cent of teachers responded that they did not think all A level students get the right grade. The figures were higher for GCSE grades (79 per cent of headteachers and 64 per cent of teachers).

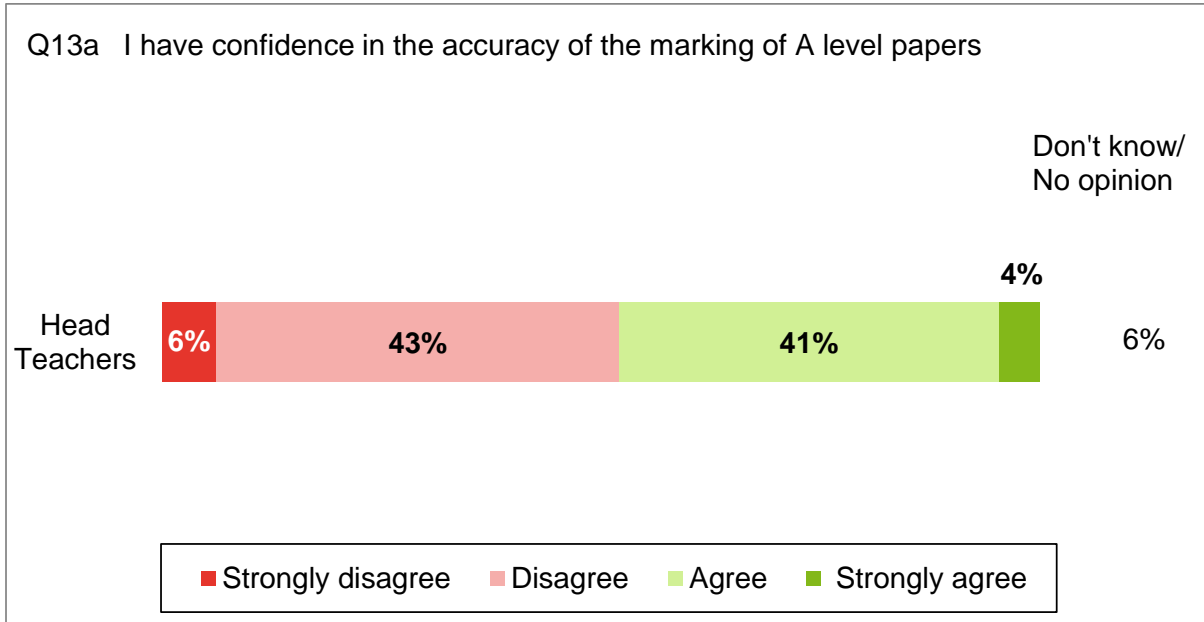
Figures 25 and 26 show the percentages of students who receive the right grades for A levels and GCSEs, as perceived by headteachers. Of the headteachers who believed that not all students get the right grade, 78 per cent perceived that more than 70 per cent of students get the right grade at A level and 64 per cent believed the same at GCSE. Similar response profiles were reported by the teacher respondents.

The most cited reasons for students not getting the right grade were similar between the headteacher and teacher respondent groups and across GCSE and A level (see figures 27 and 28 for headteachers and appendix A for teachers). The most prominent responses across both groups and levels were the inaccurate marking of exam papers and grade boundaries not being properly set. Few felt that preparation of students was a factor, although students' variable performance in the exam (better or worse) was recognised by many.

Headteachers were invited to submit supplemental information about the grading of GCSEs, identifying the subjects about which they had most concerns. In total, 167 headteachers submitted information and 95 of these expressed concern about the grading of GCSE English. Maths was the second most frequently mentioned subject

(39 respondents) and sciences the third (15 respondents). This response pattern is unsurprising given the recent judicial review, the high number of students sitting these qualifications and the importance of the outcomes for both schools and students.

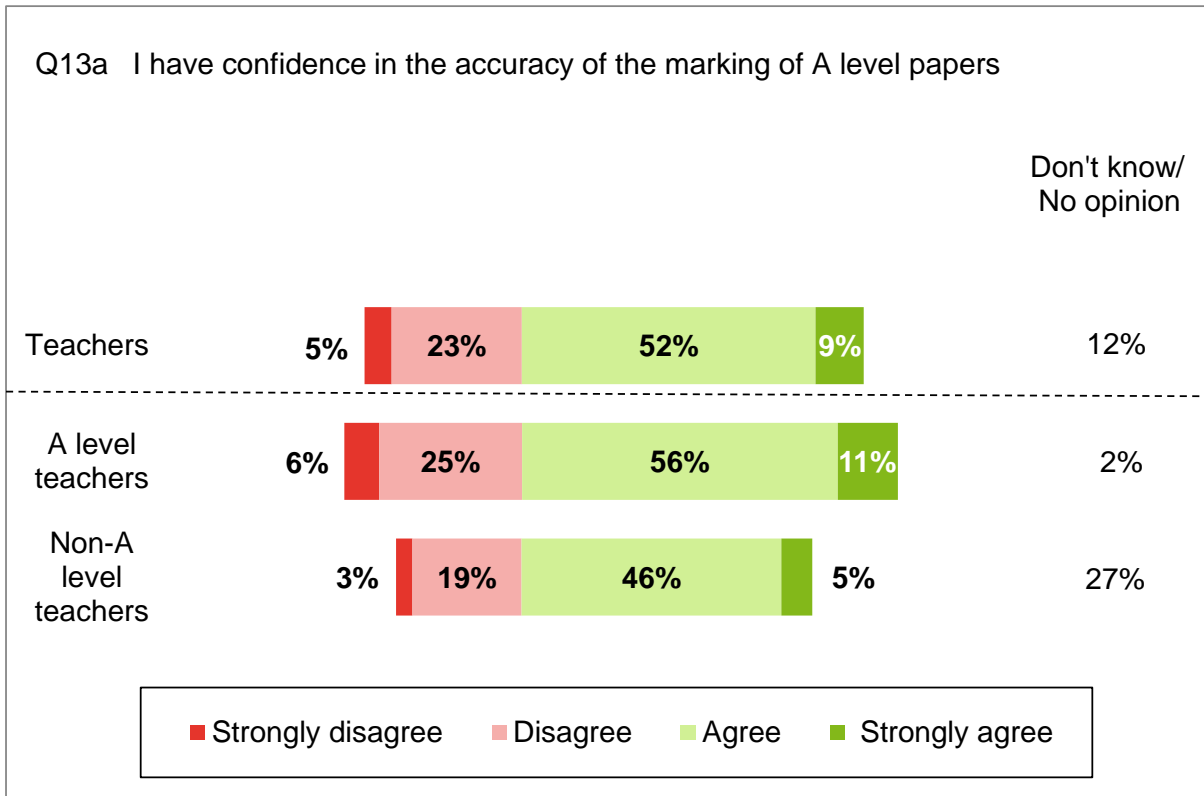
**Figure 17:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A levels – headteachers



*Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.*

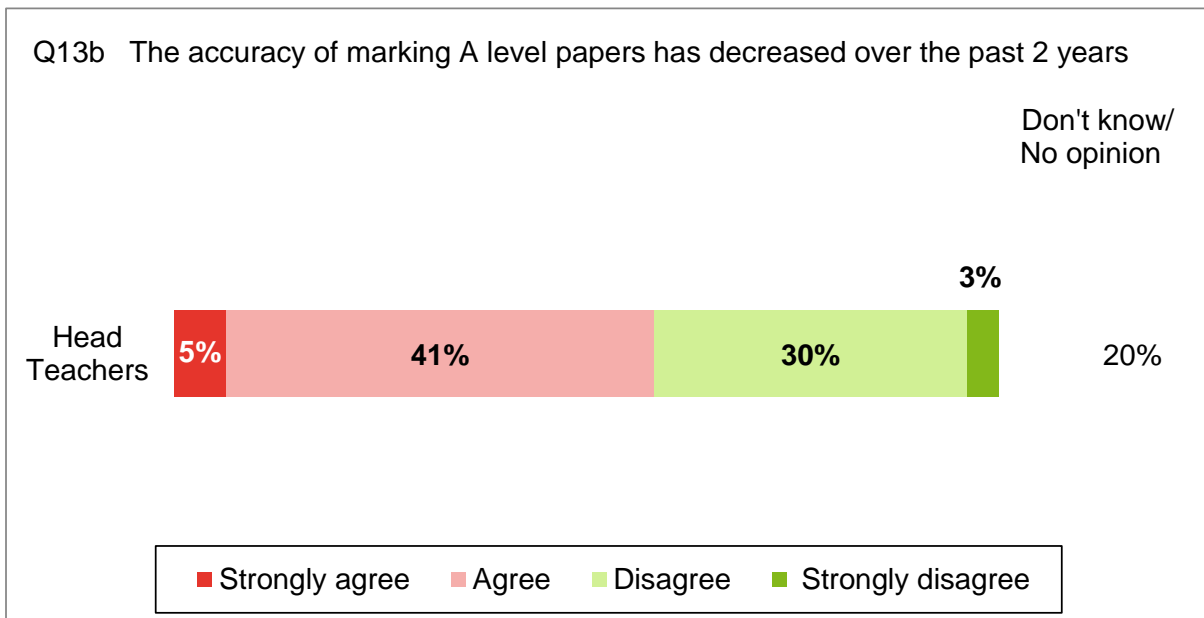


**Figure 18:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A levels – teachers



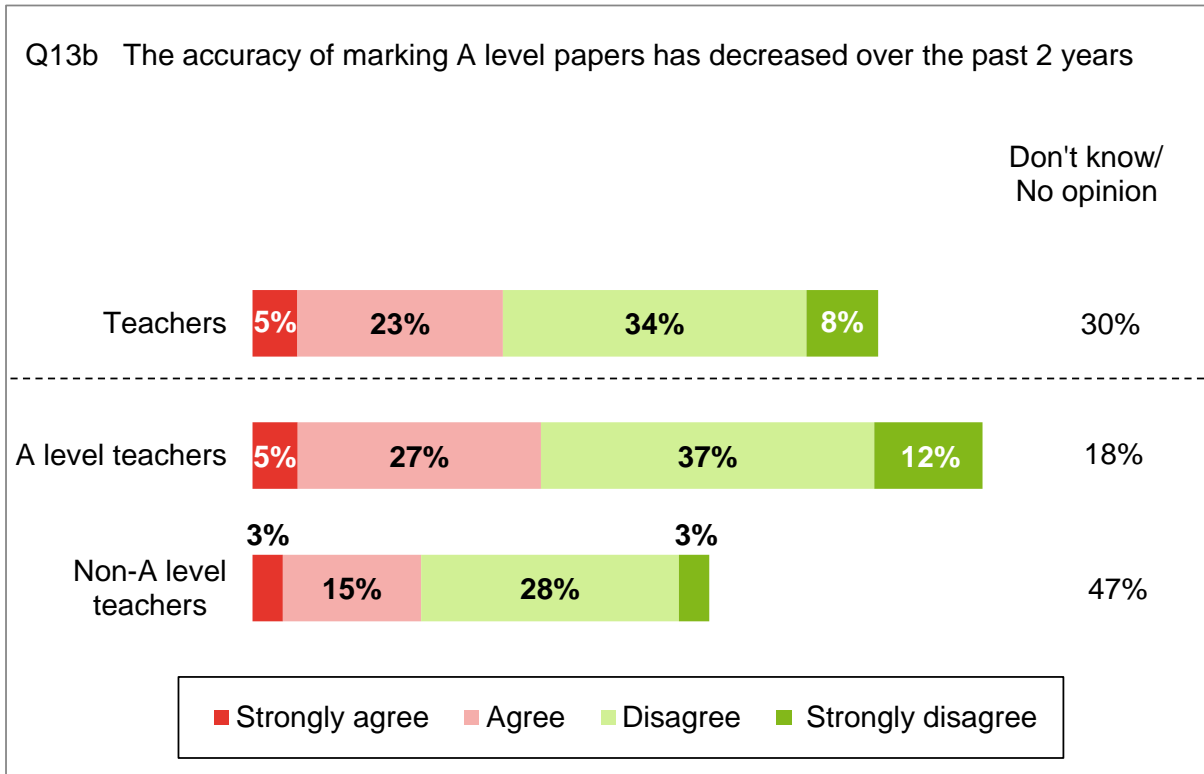
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 19:** Perceptions about changes in the accuracy of the marking of A levels over the past two years – headteachers



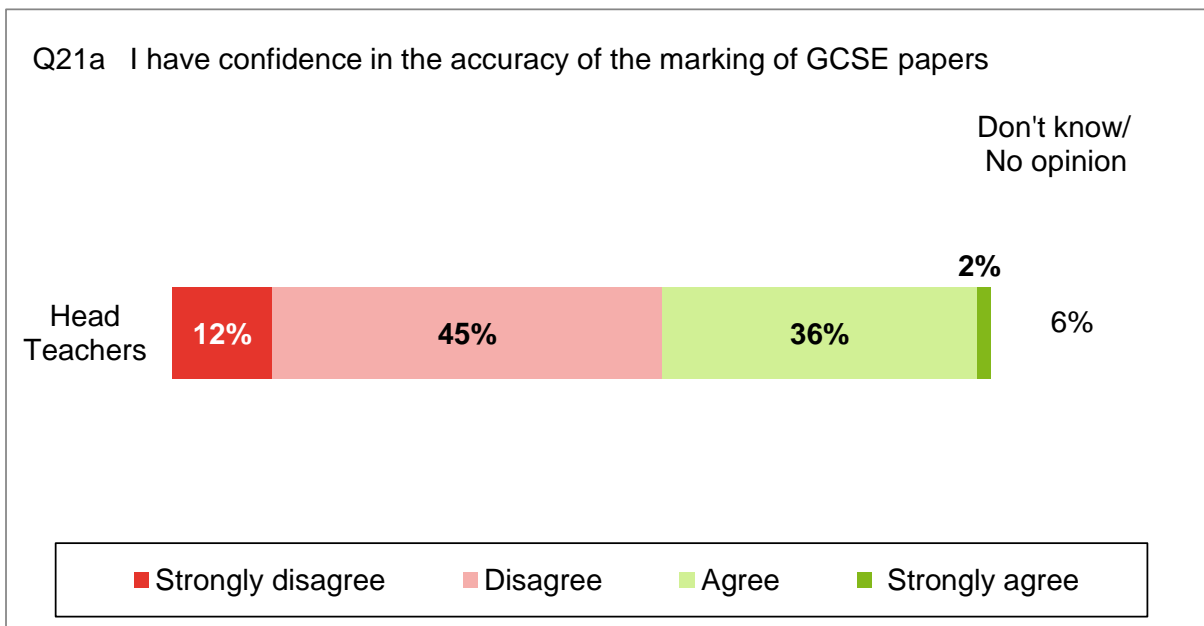
Effective base: 204 headteachers in England.

**Figure 20:** Perceptions about changes in the accuracy of the marking of A levels over the past two years – teachers



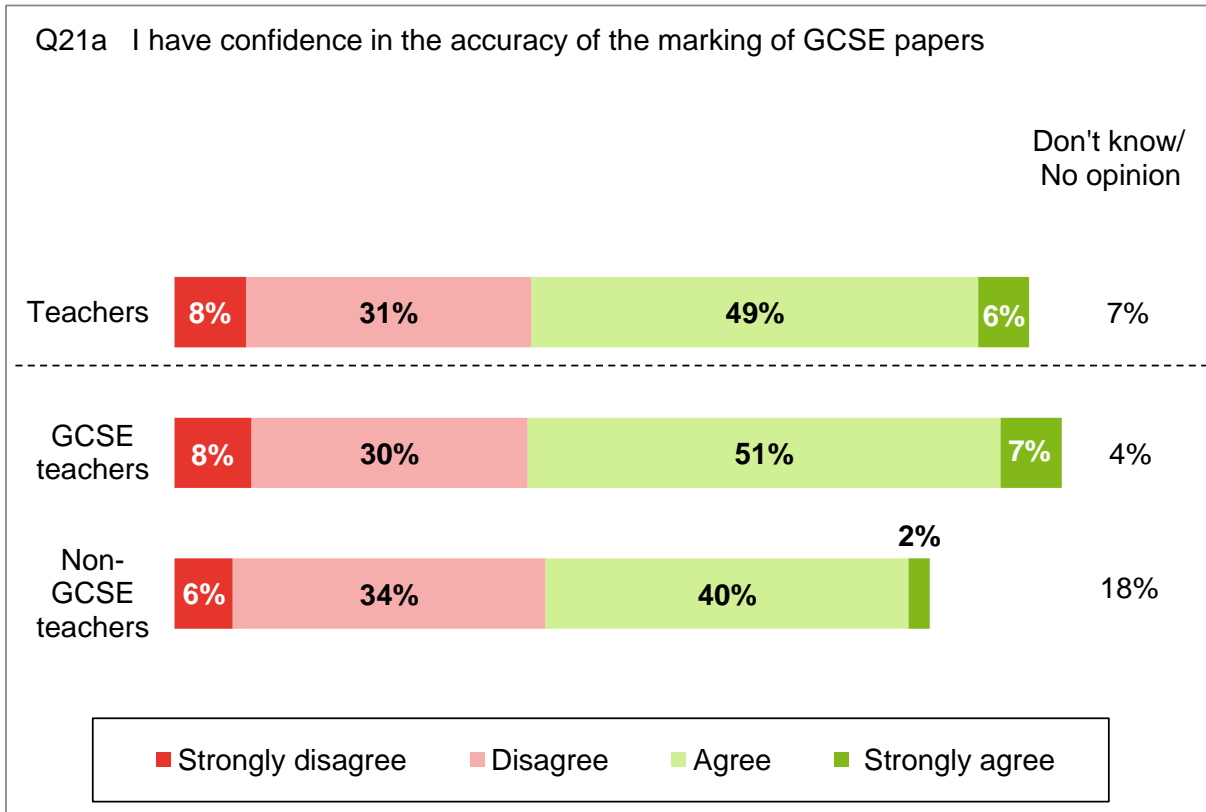
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 21:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs – headteachers



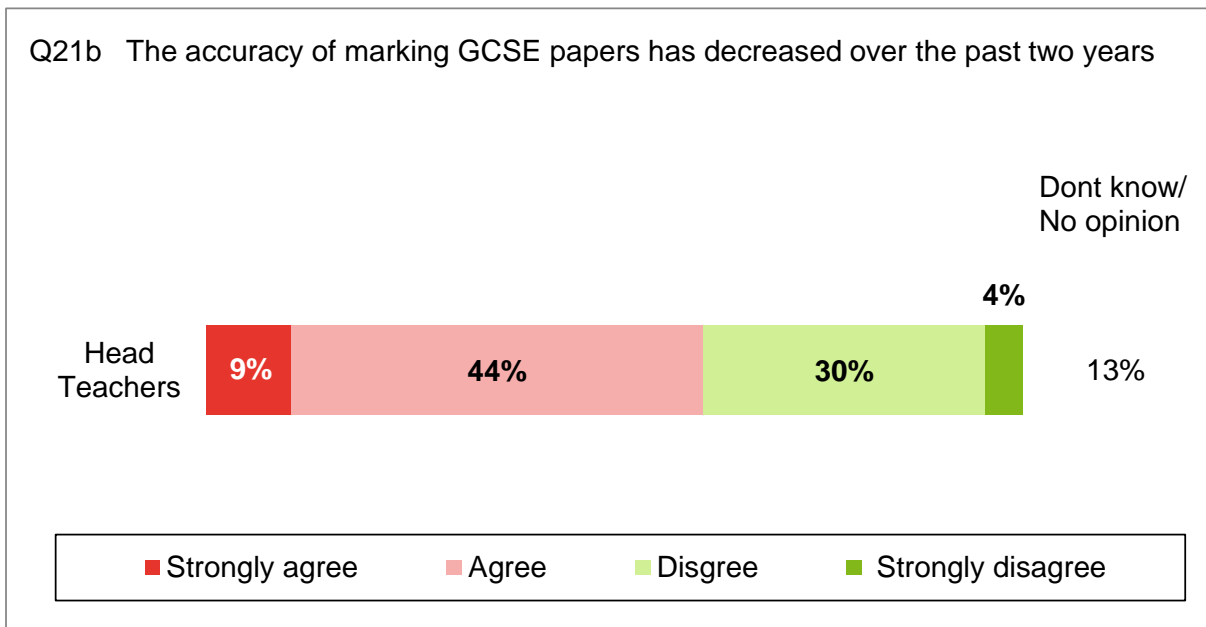
Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 22:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs – teachers



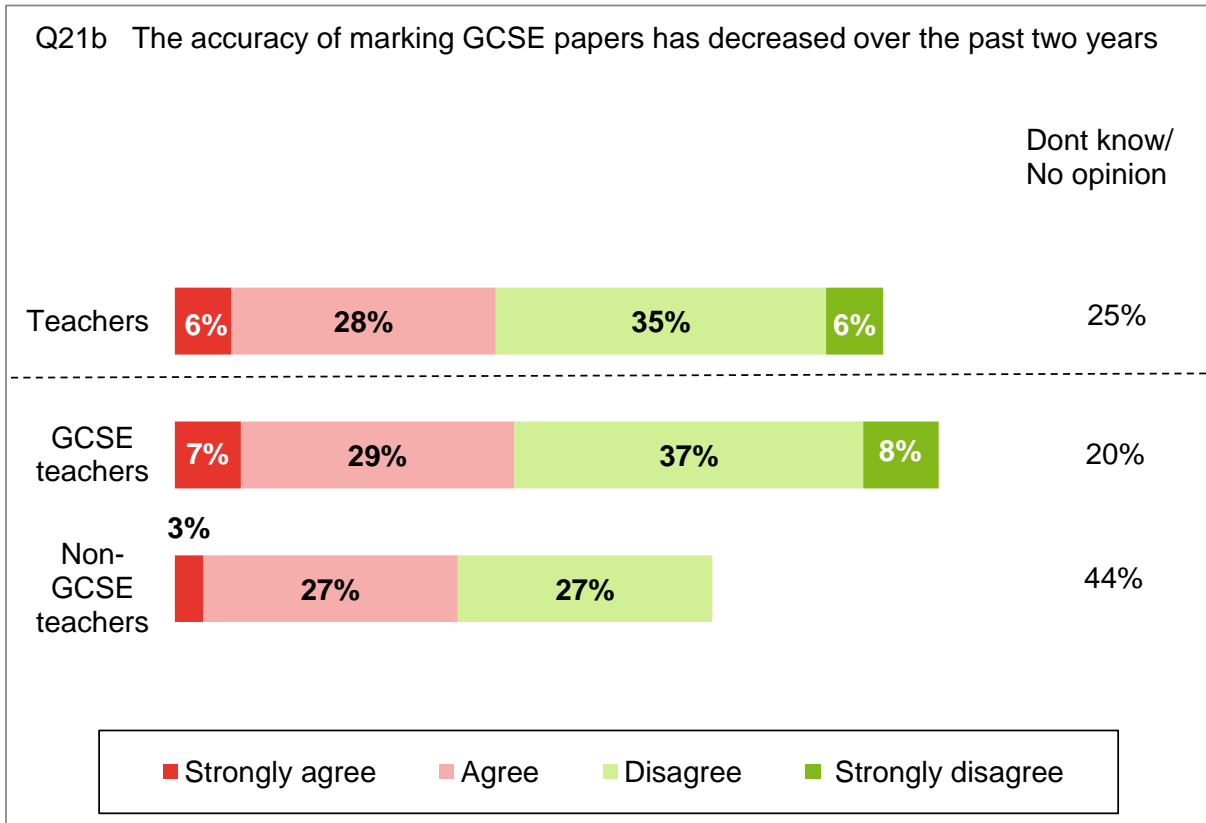
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 23:** Perceptions about changes in the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs over the past two years – headteachers



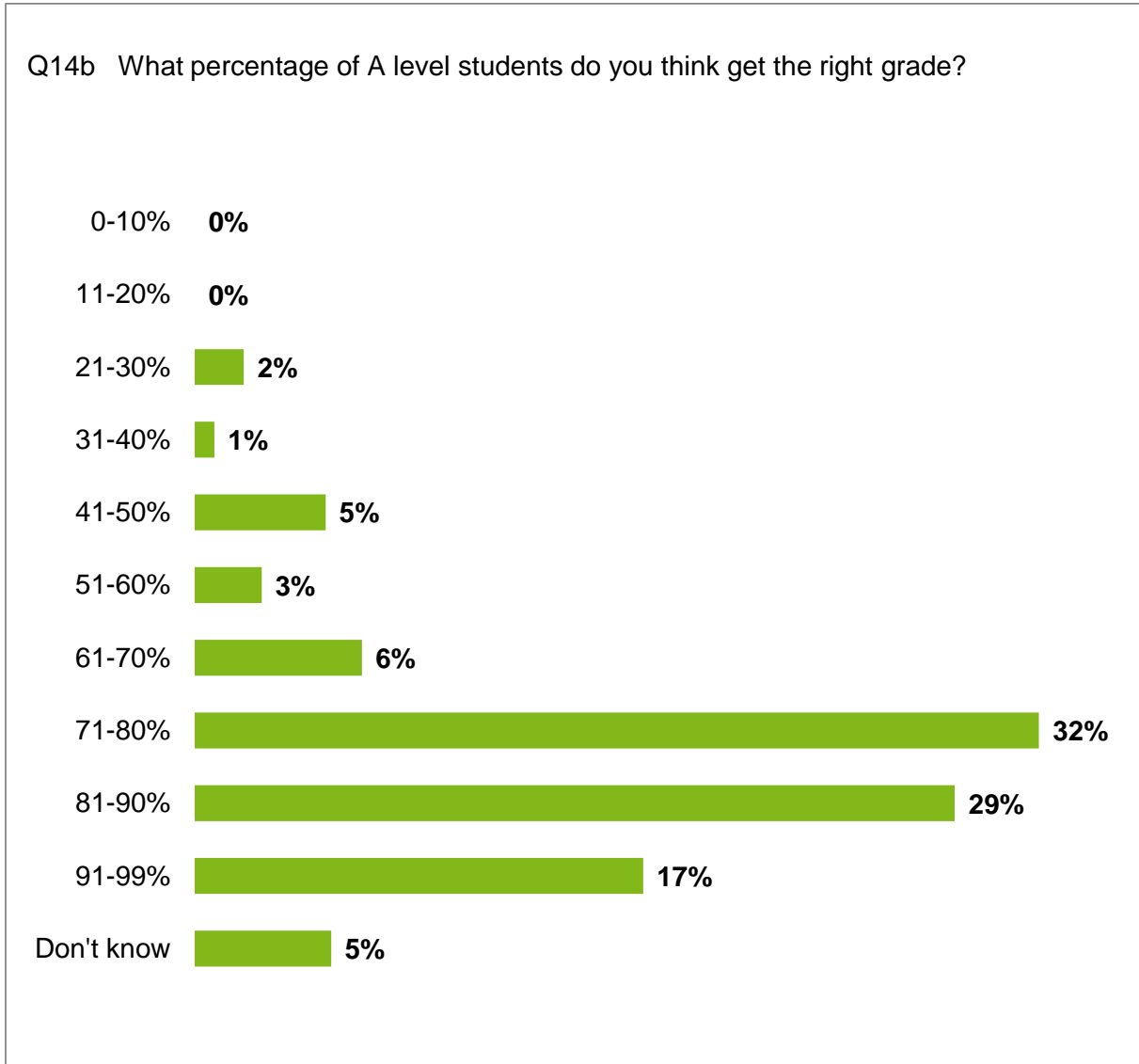
Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 24:** Perceptions about changes in the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs over the past two years – teachers



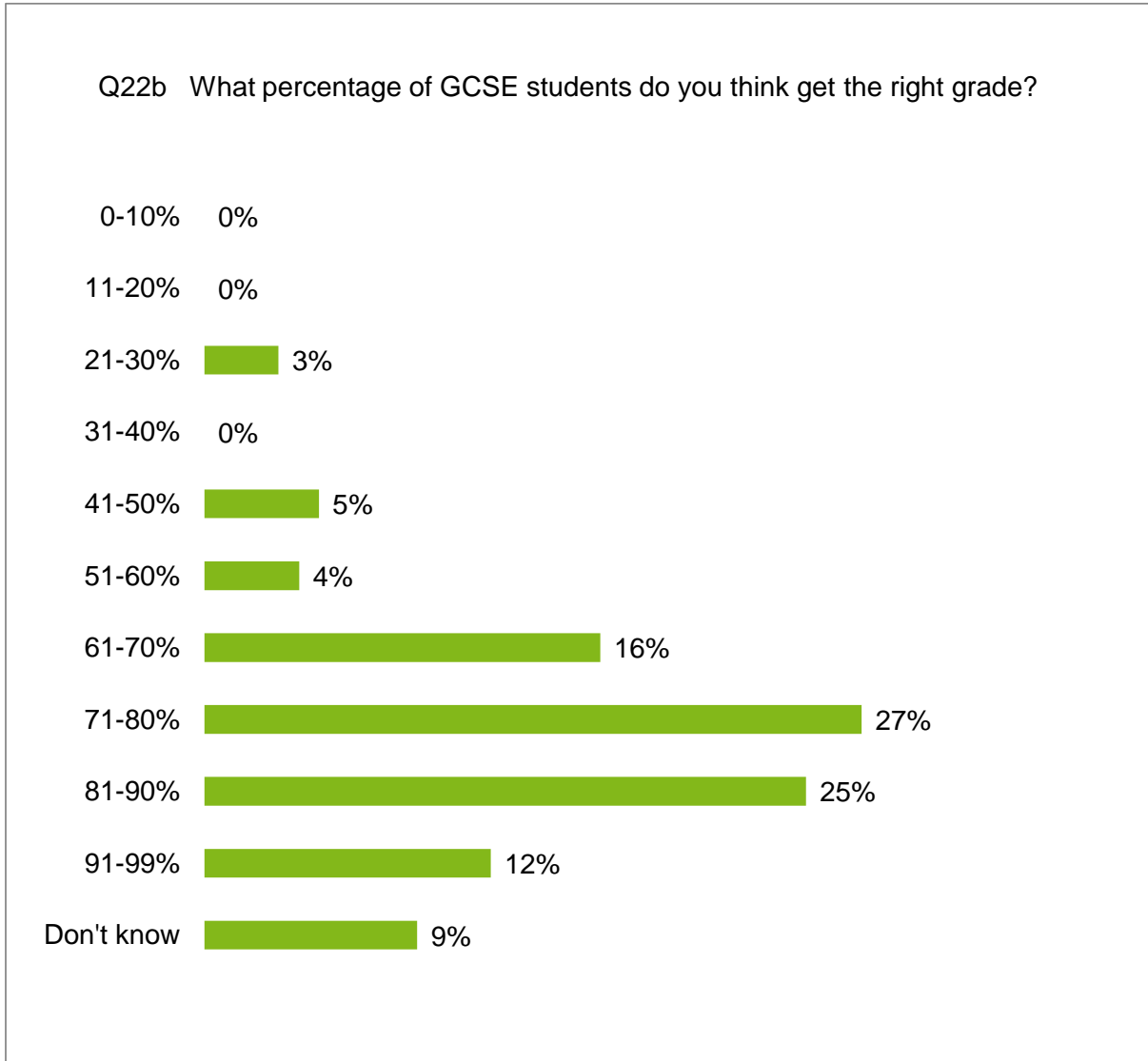
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 25:** Perceptions of the percentage of A level students getting the right grade – headteachers



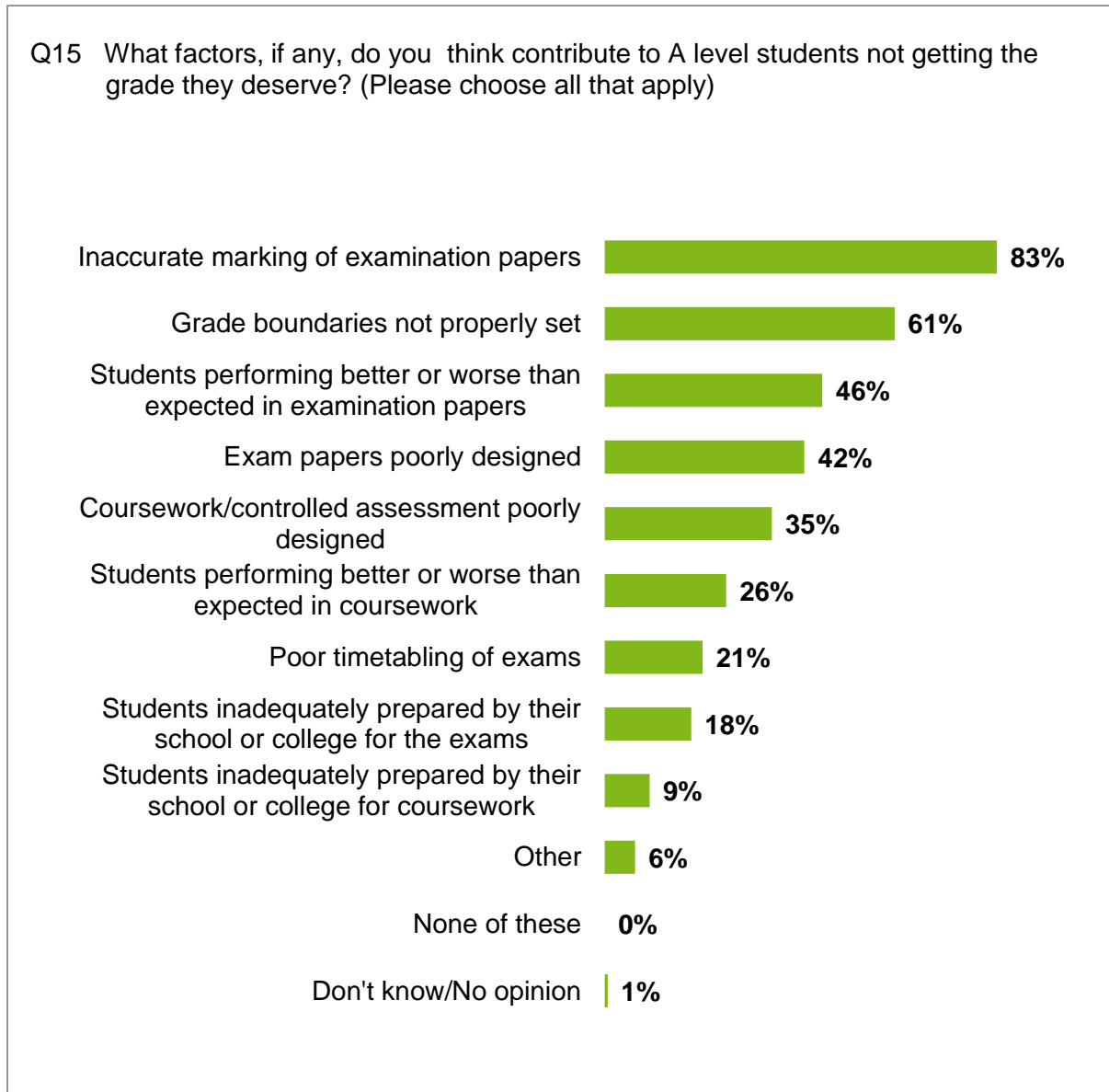
*Effective base: 134 headteachers in England.*

**Figure 26:** Perceptions of the percentage of GCSE students getting the right grade – headteachers



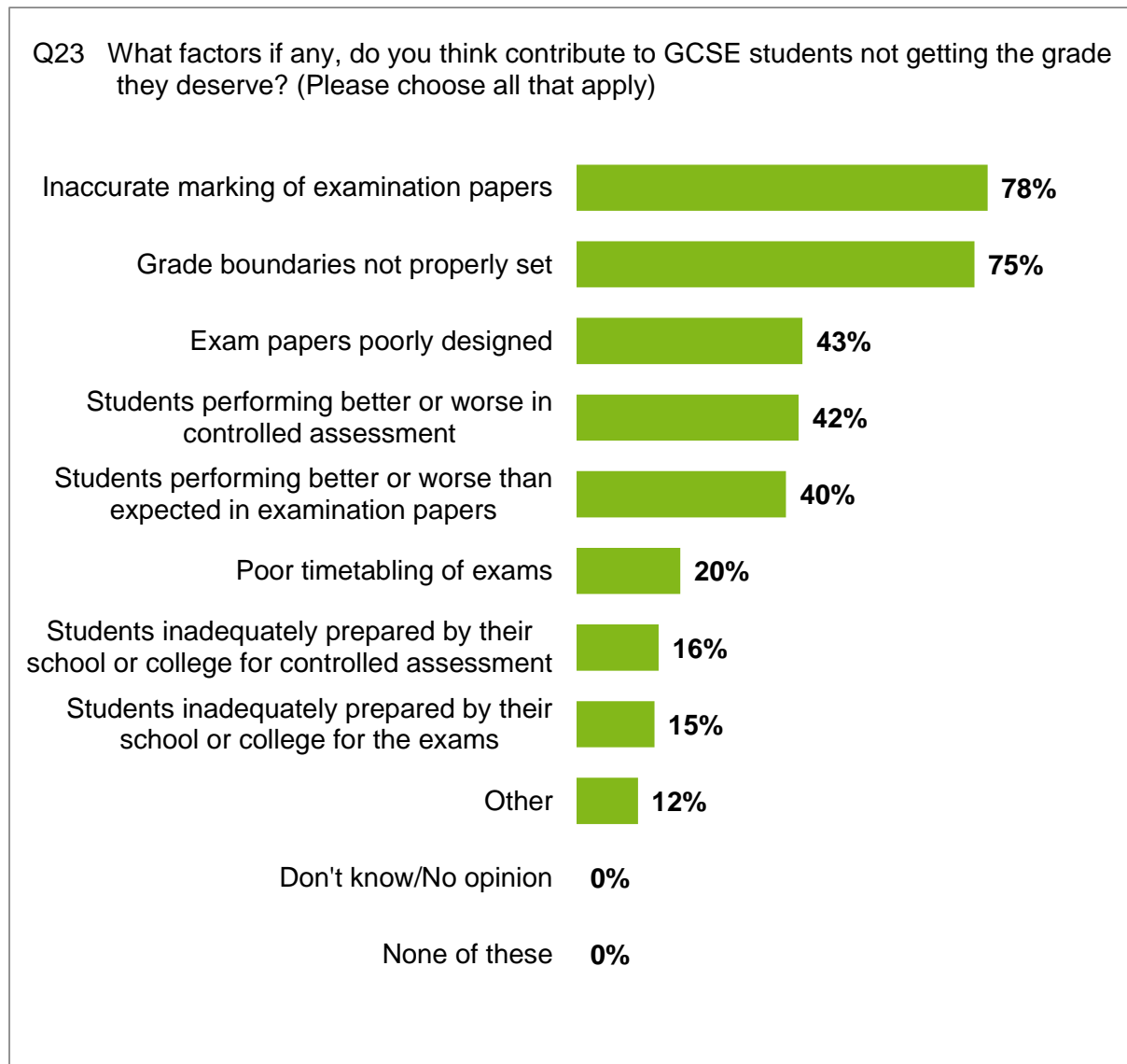
*Effective base: 159 headteachers in England.*

**Figure 27:** Factors contributing to incorrect grading at A level – headteachers



*Effective base: 134 headteachers in England.*

**Figure 28:** Factors contributing to incorrect grading at GCSE – headteachers



*Effective base: 159 headteachers in England.*



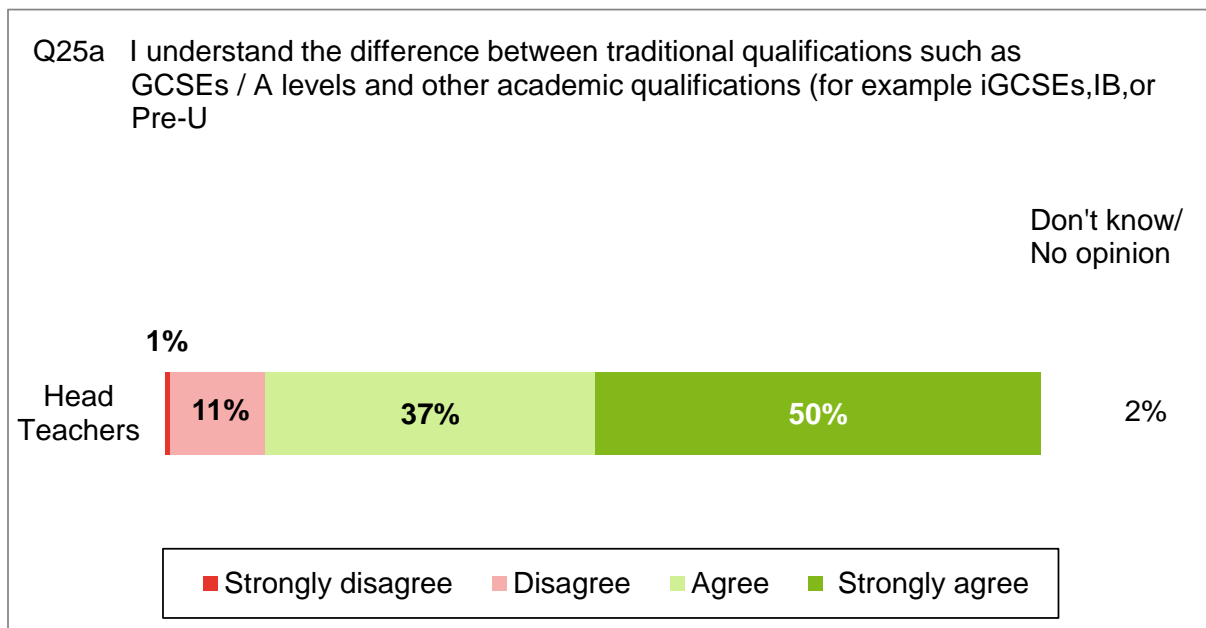
## Perceptions of other qualifications

### Other academic qualifications

The vast majority of headteachers (87 per cent) and the majority of teachers (63 per cent) reported having an understanding of the differences between traditional qualifications, such as GCSE and A levels, and other academic qualifications, such as IGCSEs, International Baccalaureate or Pre-U (see figures 29 and 30).

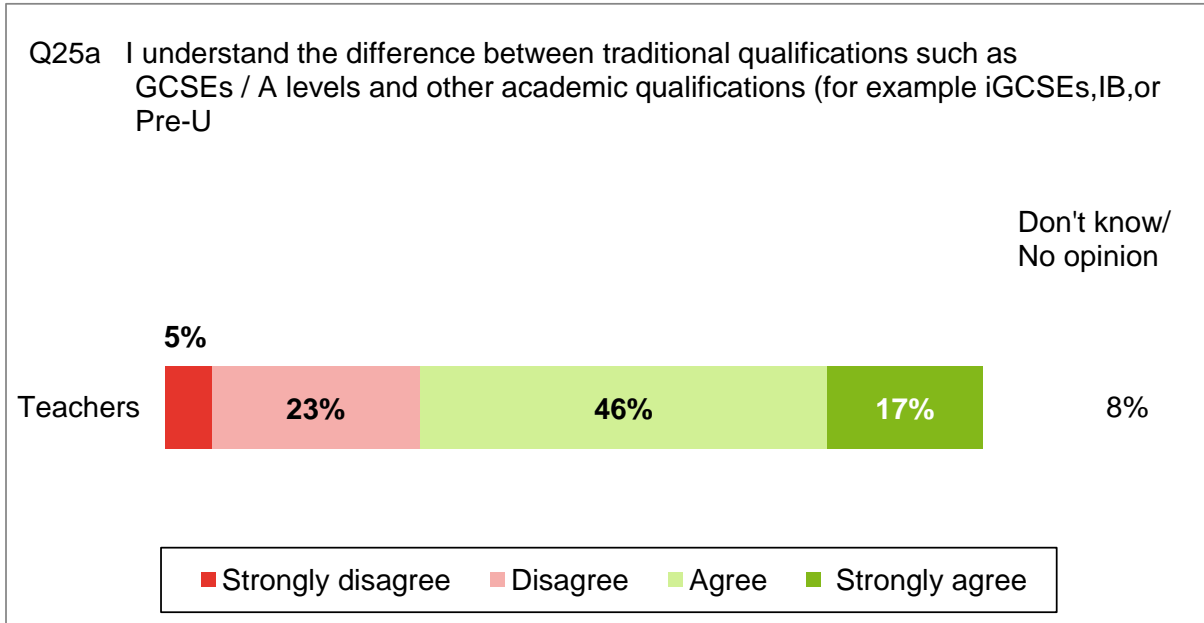
When asked to compare these other academic qualifications with traditional academic qualifications in terms of their difficulty to achieve, there was no consensus among the headteacher respondents (see figure 31). Forty-one per cent reported that other academic qualifications are as equally hard to achieve as traditional qualifications, 33 per cent reported that they are easier to achieve and 12 per cent believed that they are harder to achieve. A similar balance of opinion was expressed by the teacher respondent group (see figure 32), with few feeling that other academic qualifications are harder to achieve.

**Figure 29:** Understanding of the difference between traditional and other academic qualifications – headteachers



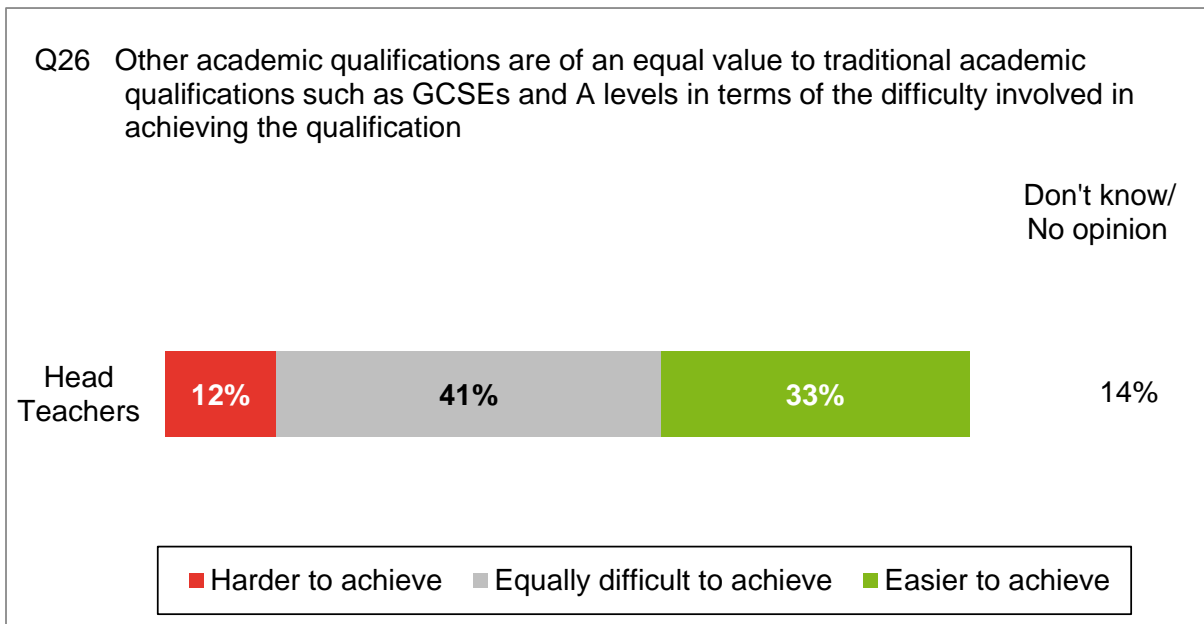
Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 30:** Understanding of differences between traditional qualifications and other academic qualifications – teachers

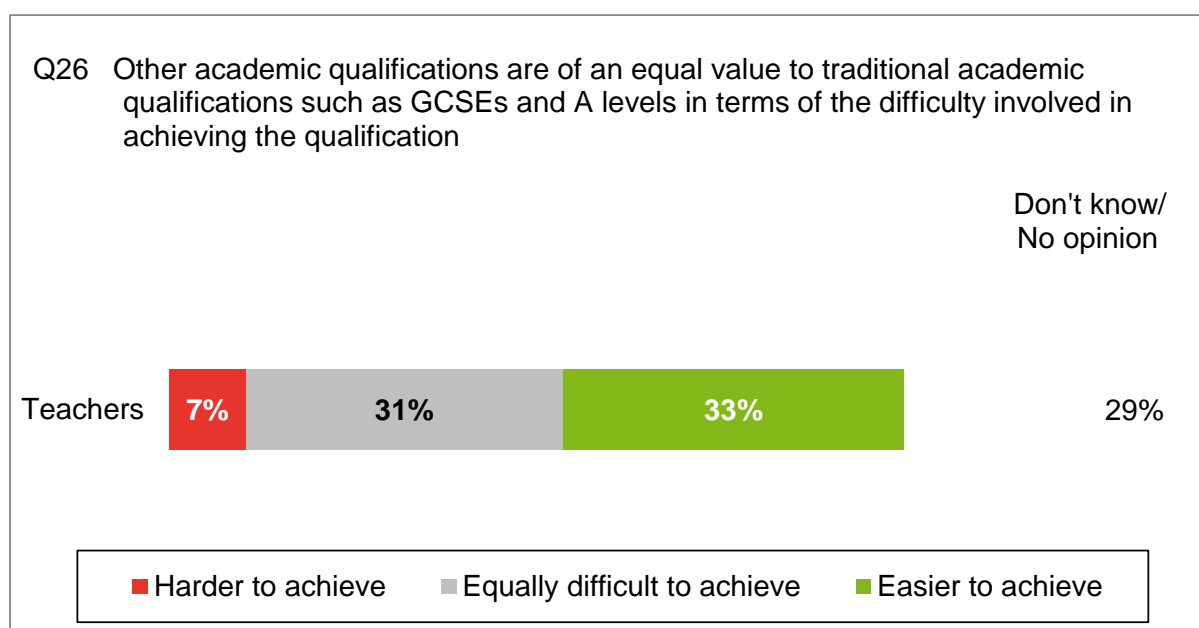


Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 31:** Perceived value of other academic qualifications – headteachers



Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 32:** Perceived value of other academic qualifications – teachers

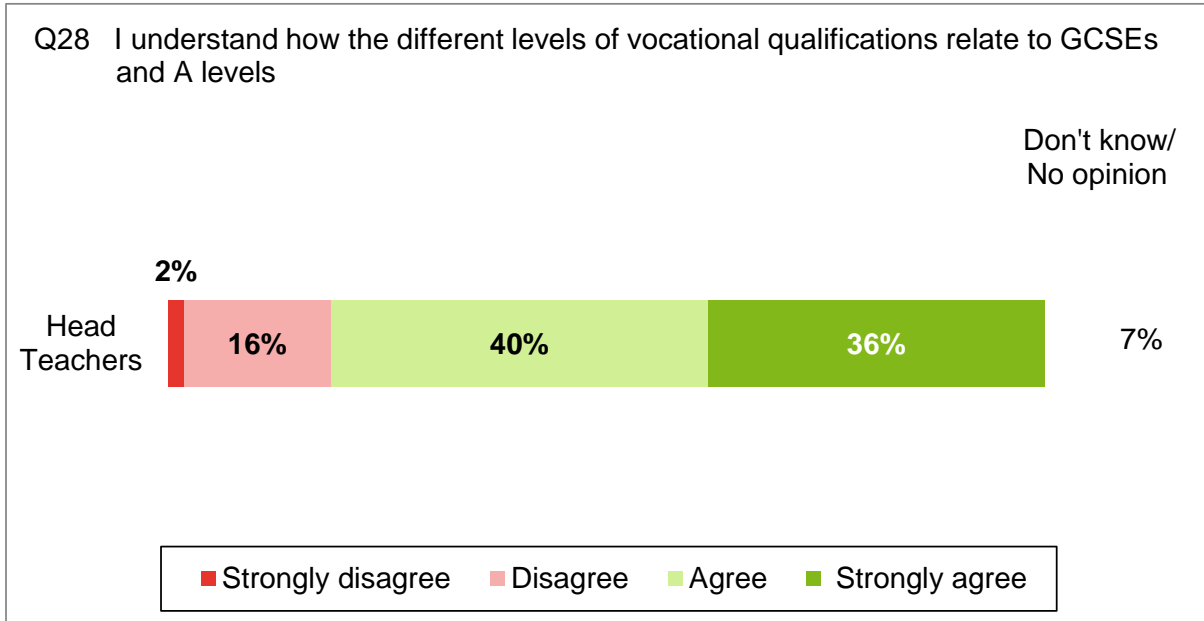
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

### Vocational and applied qualifications

The majority of headteachers (76 per cent) and teachers (66 per cent) reported having a good understanding of the different levels of vocational qualifications relative to GCSEs and A levels (see figures 33 and 34). Fifty-nine per cent of headteachers and 63 per cent of teachers felt that vocational qualifications are easier to achieve than traditional qualifications, with the vast majority of other respondents feeling that they were equally difficult to achieve (see figures 35 and 36).

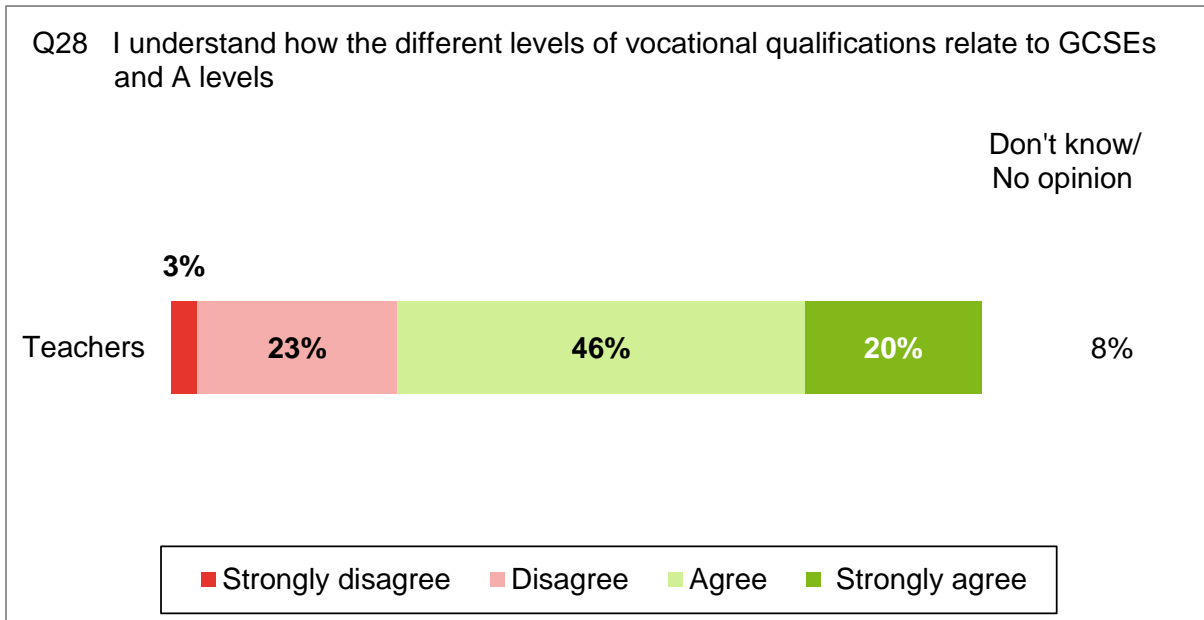
Again, from those who had a definitive response, most of the headteachers and teachers; reported understanding how different levels of applied qualifications relate to A levels and GCSEs (79 and 66 per cent) (see figures 37 and 38). However, a considerable proportion of headteachers (23 per cent) and teachers (30 per cent) did not know or did not respond when asked about the relative difficulty of applied qualifications compared to traditional academic qualifications. Of those who did provide a definite response, most headteachers (56 per cent) and teachers (66 per cent) perceived applied qualifications to be easier to achieve than traditional qualifications, while 43 per cent of headteachers and 30 per cent of teachers perceived them to be equally as difficult to achieve (see figures 39 and 40).

**Figure 33:** Understanding of the different levels of vocational qualifications – headteachers



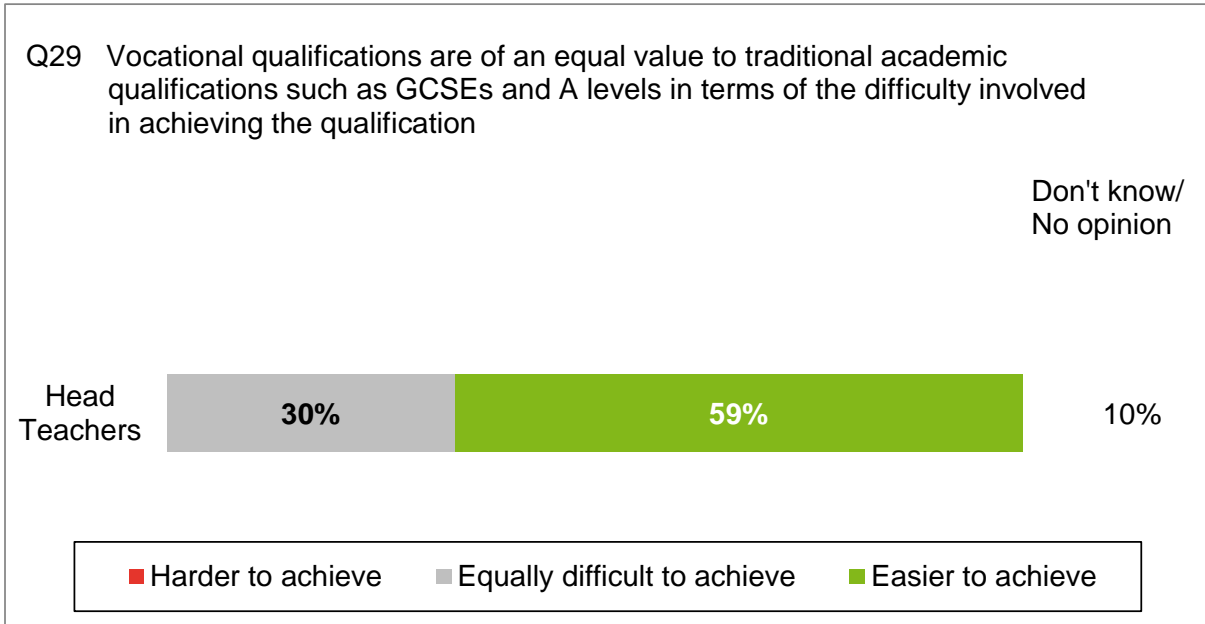
Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 34:** Understanding of the different levels of vocational qualifications – teachers



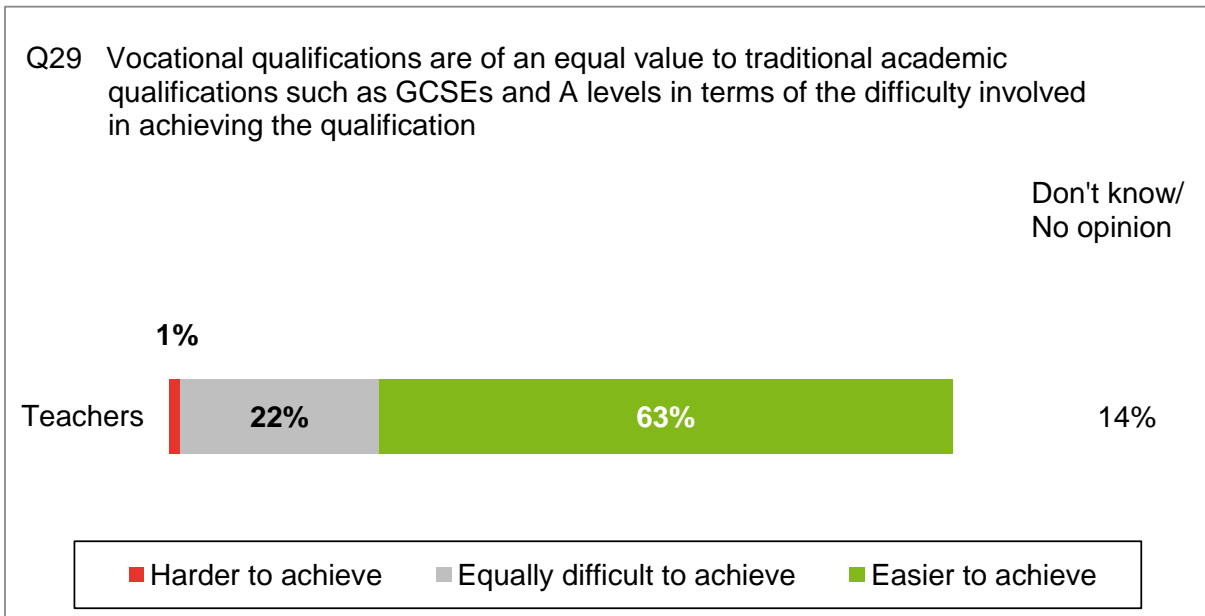
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 35:** Perceived value of vocational qualifications – headteachers



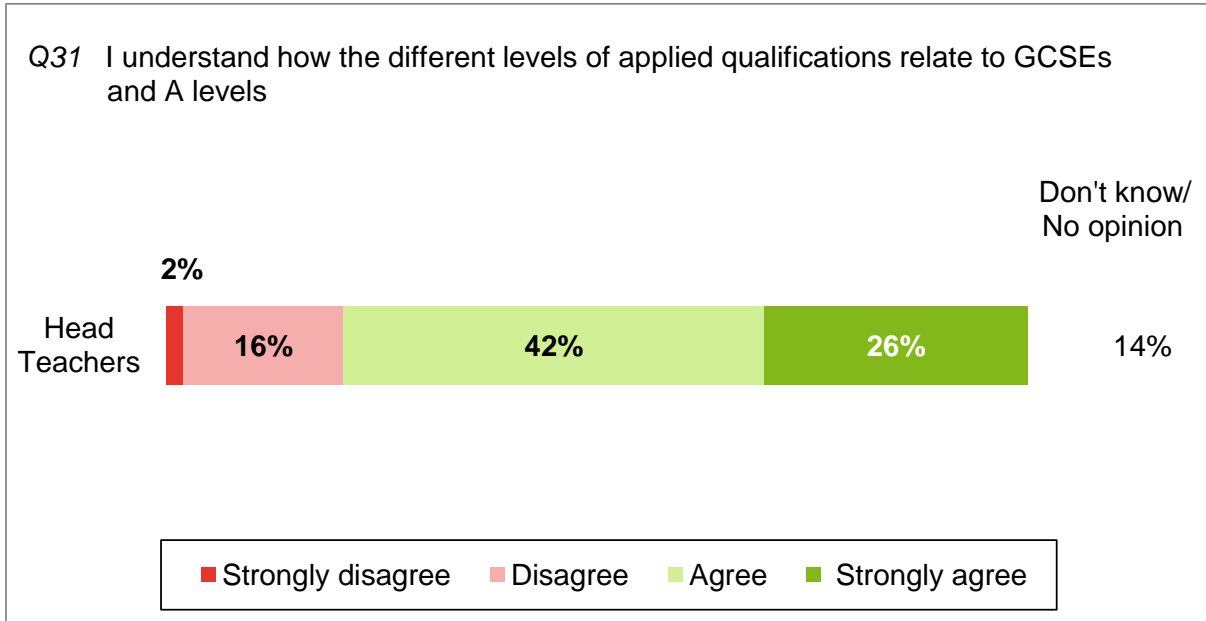
Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 36:** Perceived value of vocational qualifications – teachers



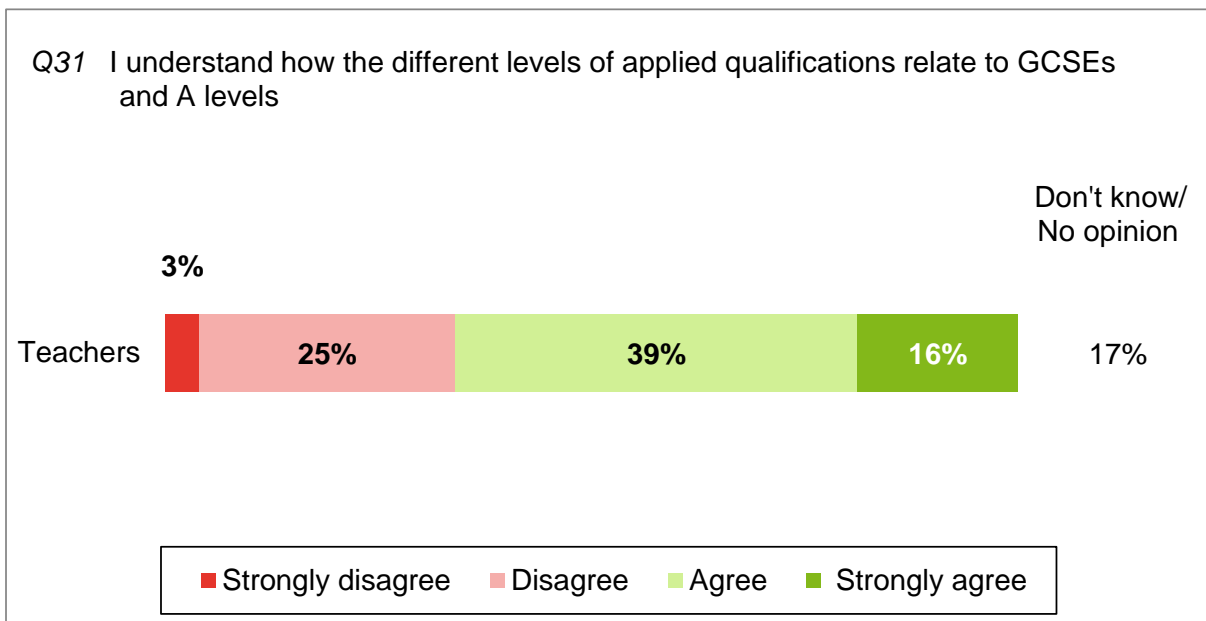
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 37:** Understanding of the different levels of applied qualifications – headteachers



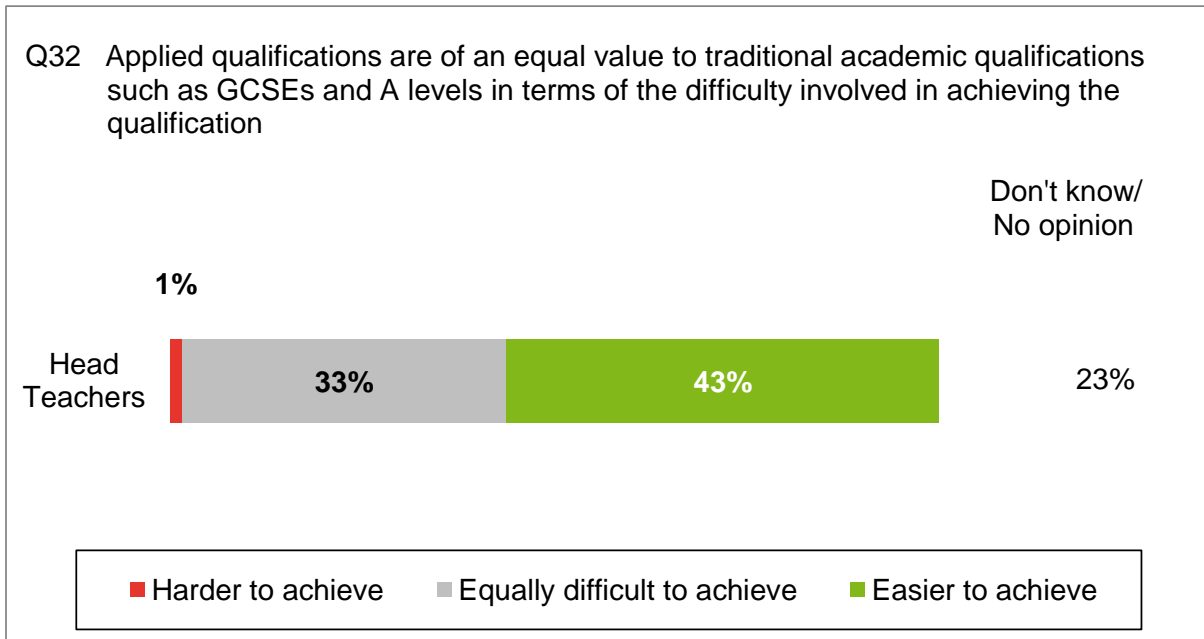
Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 38:** Understanding of the different levels of applied qualifications – teachers



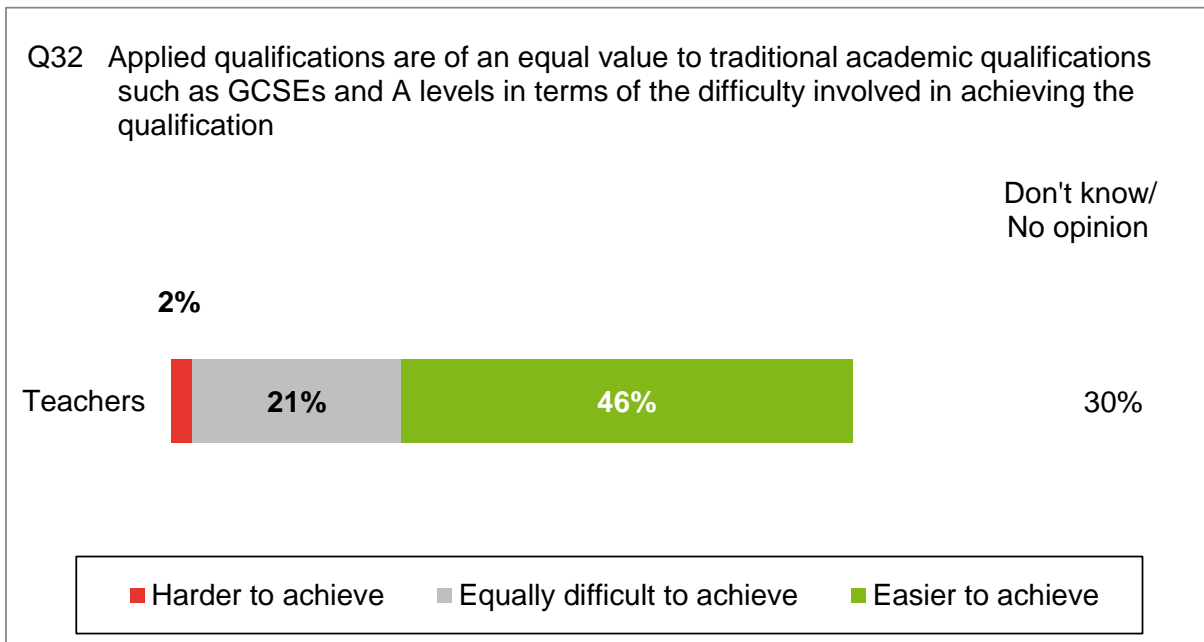
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 39:** Perceived value of applied qualifications – headteachers



Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 40:** Perceived value of applied qualifications – teachers



Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

## Awareness and perceptions of Ofqual

### Awareness

Respondents were asked about their knowledge of Ofqual using two different approaches. First, they were asked an unprompted question about their knowledge of Ofqual to determine baseline knowledge. This was followed up by the following explanatory statement:

Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The aim of Ofqual is to make sure that learners get the results they deserve, and that the qualifications they receive count, both now and in the future.

After being presented with this statement, respondents were asked whether they had been aware of Ofqual before taking part in the survey.

Unprompted awareness of Ofqual among headteachers was very high. Almost all headteachers knew a “fair amount” (61 per cent), “just a little” (22 per cent) or “a lot” (17 per cent) about Ofqual at the time of the survey (see figure 41). Teacher respondents also reported a high level of awareness of Ofqual, with 86 per cent reporting at least some knowledge of what Ofqual do (see figure 42).

Having been presented with the prompt, 98 per cent of headteachers and 92 per cent of teachers stated that they were aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England.

### Effectiveness

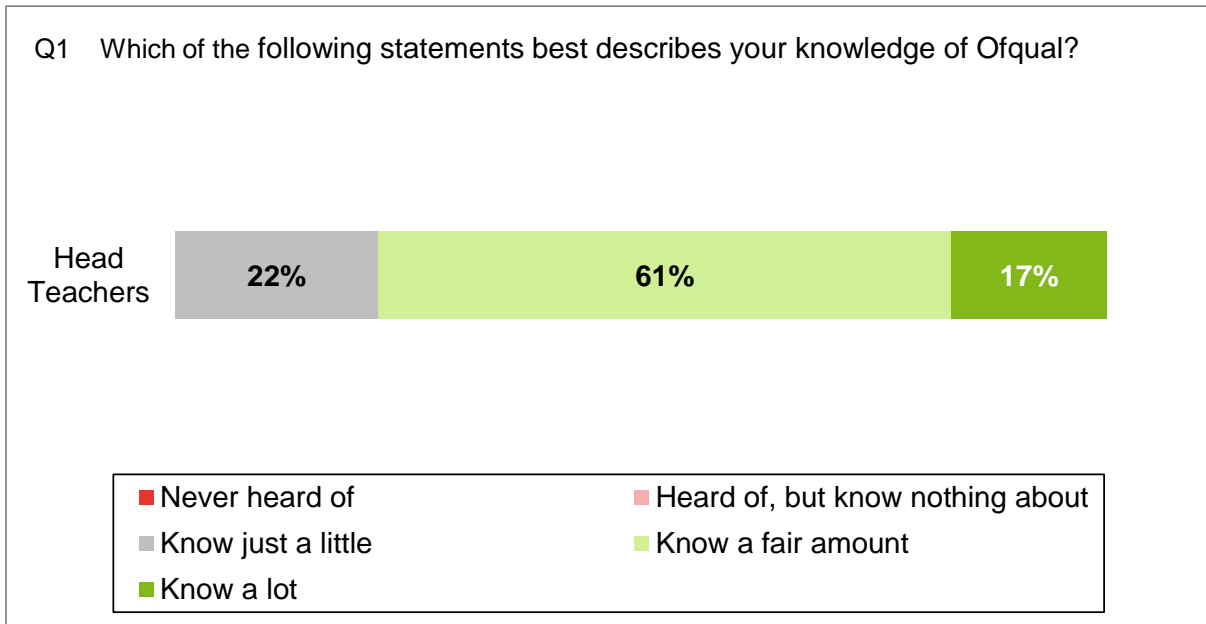
Respondents who indicated an awareness of Ofqual’s role were also asked separate questions regarding Ofqual's effectiveness in regulating the examination system and our effectiveness in maintaining the standards of qualifications.

Just over half of headteachers (55 per cent) and teachers (53 per cent) believed that Ofqual is an effective regulator of the exam system, whereas 37 per cent across both groups did not (see figures 43 and 44). When questioned about Ofqual's effectiveness in maintaining the standards of qualifications, the perceptions of respondents were slightly more negative. Forty-four per cent of both headteachers and teachers agreed that Ofqual is effective in maintaining standards, whereas 51 per cent of headteachers and 44 per cent of teachers did not (see figures 45 and 46).

The two most frequently cited reasons from headteachers for the perceived failure to maintain standards were inconsistent marking (82 per cent) and inconsistent grading (80 per cent) (see figure 47). Similar views were expressed by teachers (see appendix A). The next most cited reason for both groups was changes made to GCSEs in the last 12 months.

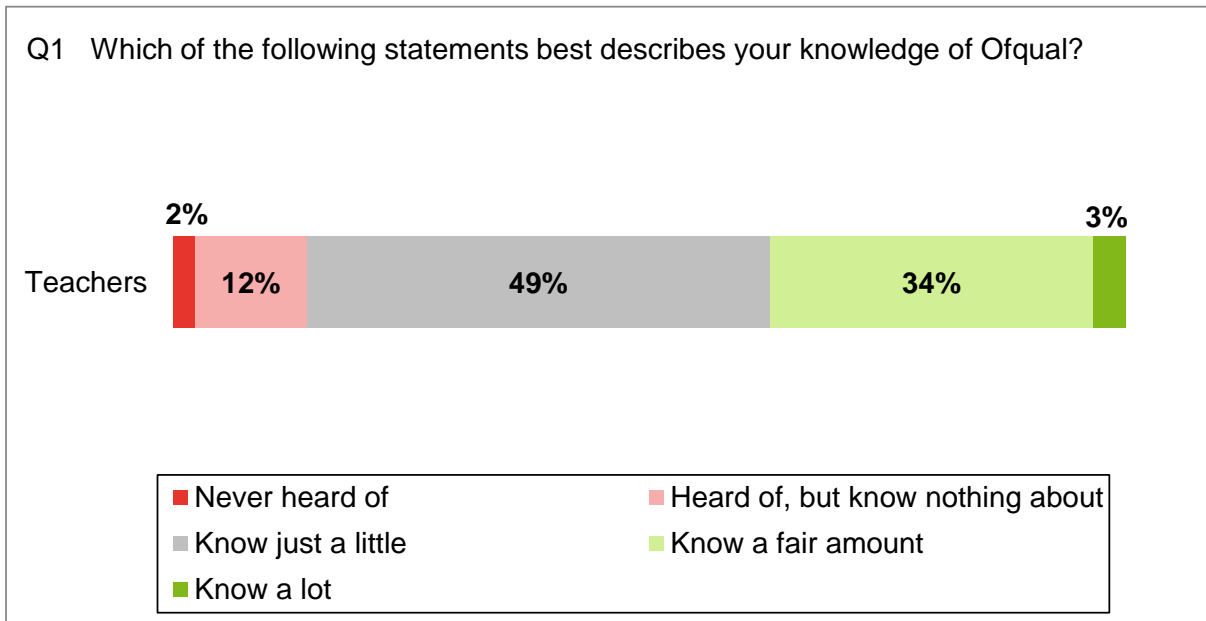


**Figure 41:** Unprompted awareness of Ofqual – headteachers



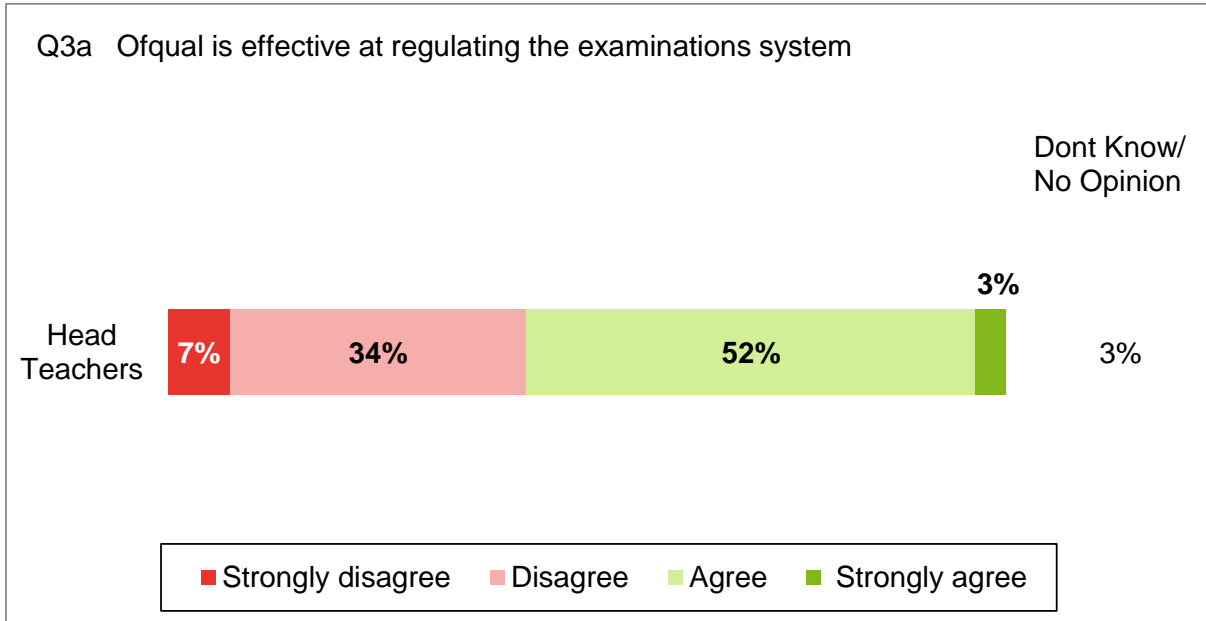
Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 42:** Unprompted awareness of Ofqual – teachers



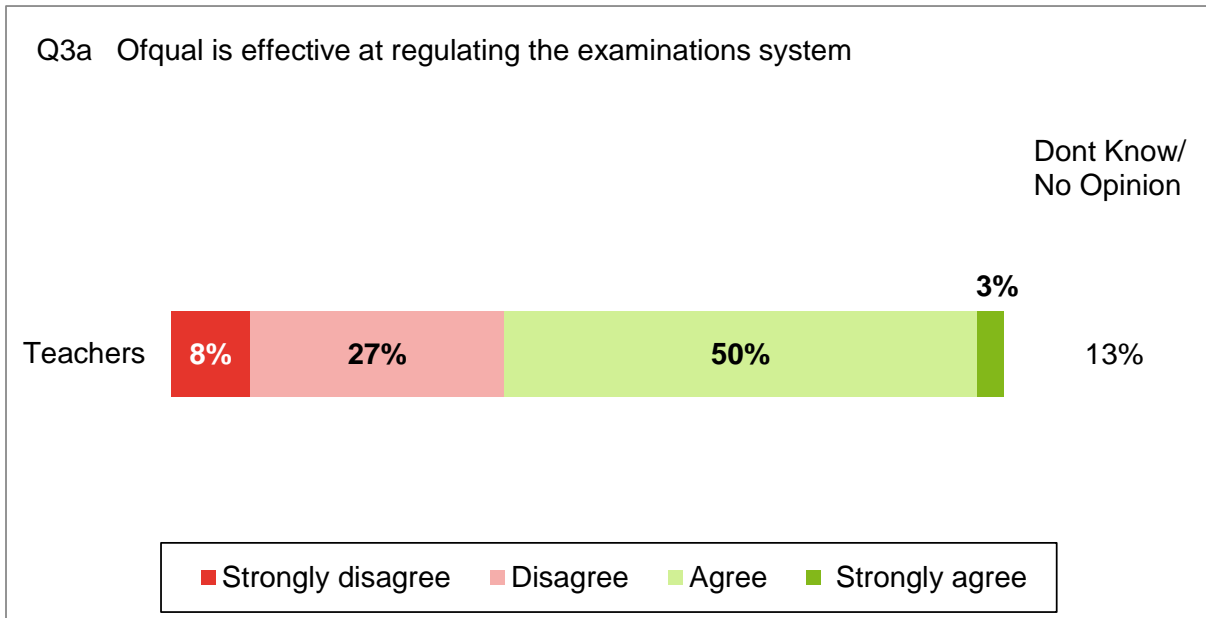
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure 43:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at regulating the exam system – headteachers



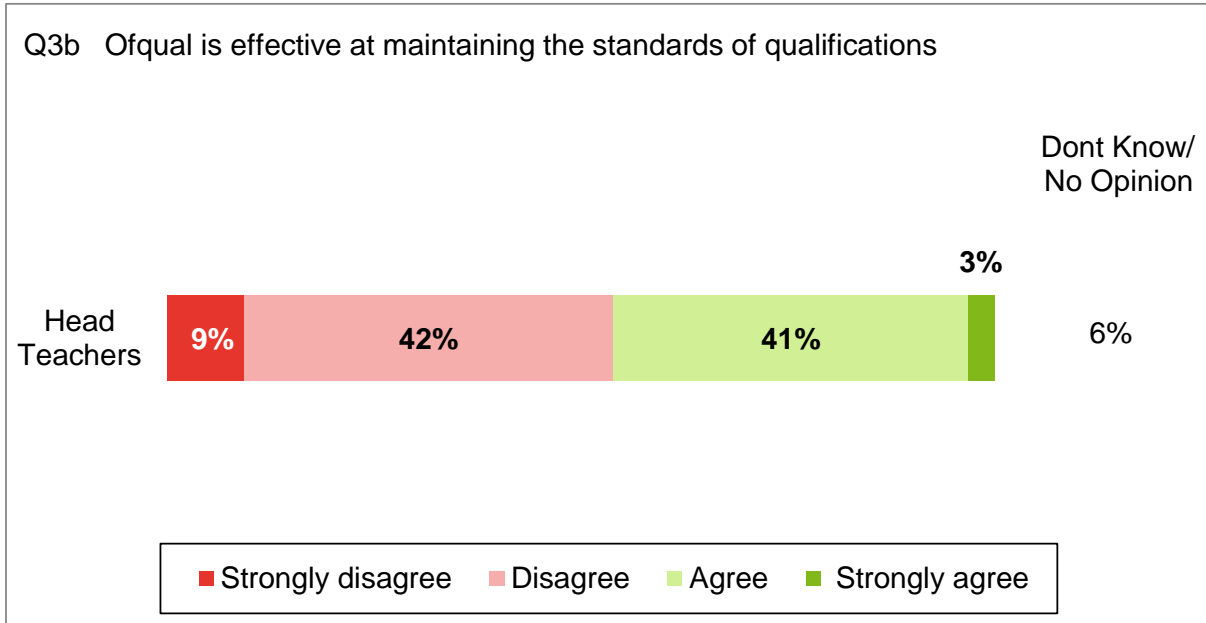
Effective base: 201 headteachers in England.

**Figure 44:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at regulating the exam system – teachers



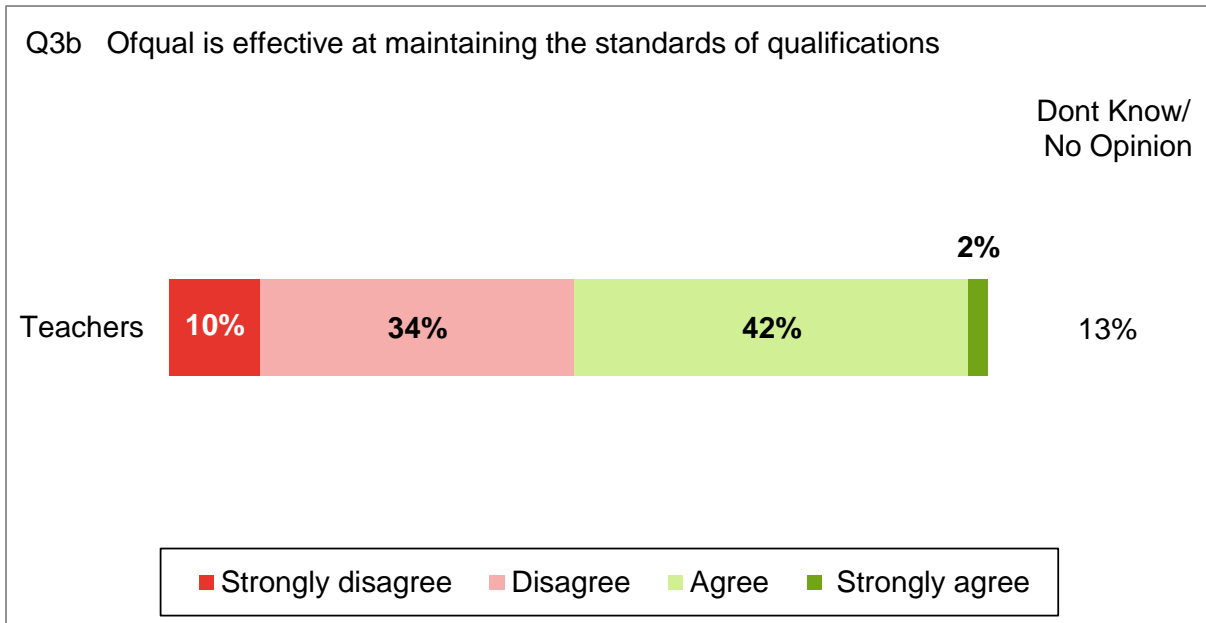
Effective base: 488 teachers in England.

**Figure 45:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – headteachers



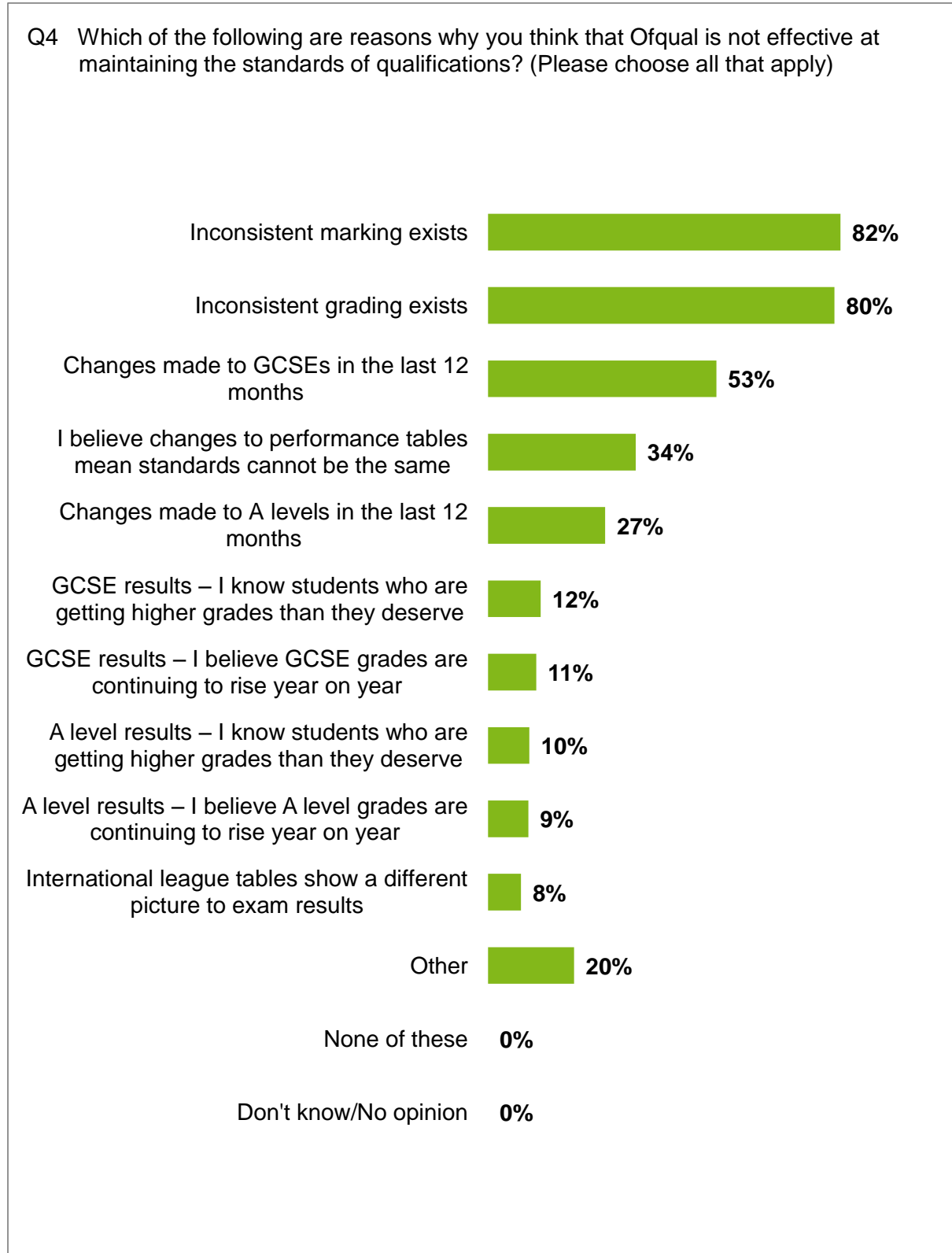
Effective base: 201 headteachers in England.

**Figure 46:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – teachers



Effective base: 488 teachers in England.

**Figure 47:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s ineffectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – headteachers



*Effective base: 97 headteachers in England.*

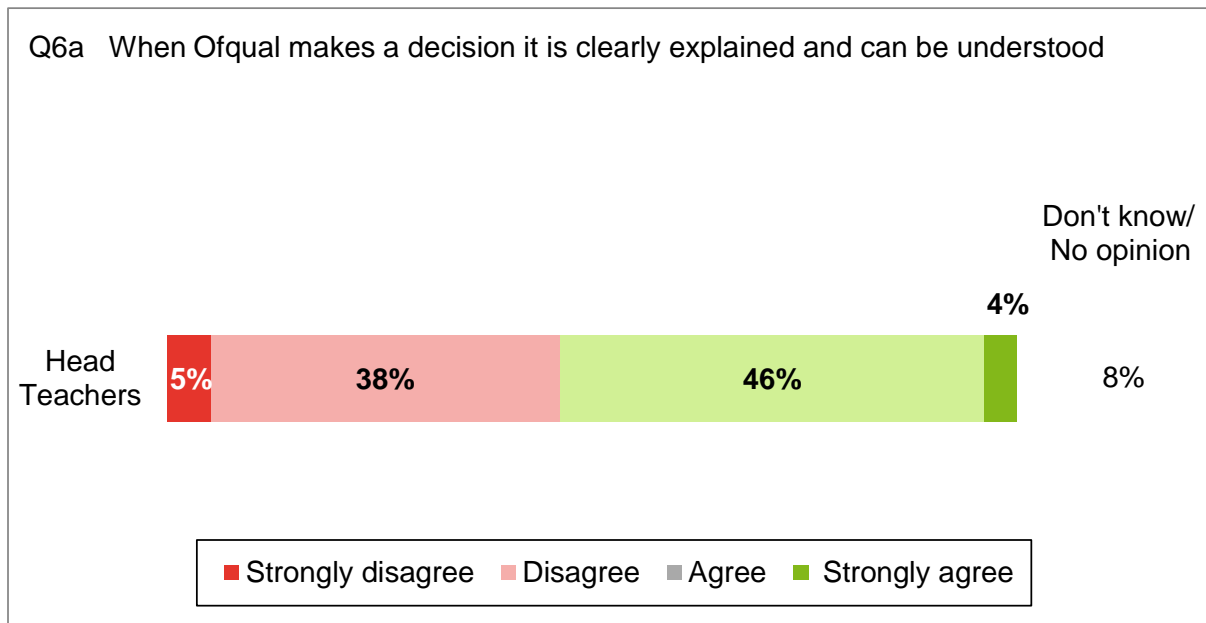
## **Perceptions of Ofqual's communications with stakeholders**

Given that extensive education reform proposals were under consideration and Ofqual consultation exercises were taking place around the time of the current wave of data collection supplementary questions were incorporated to address stakeholders' perceptions of how effective and transparent they believed Ofqual communications to be. Responses of headteachers and teachers to these questions are presented in figures 48 to 53.

The responses were evenly split between positive and negative responses for both headteachers and teachers. Of those who offered a definitive opinion, 54 per cent of headteachers and 53 per cent of teachers indicated that Ofqual decisions are clearly explained and can be understood. Forty-six per cent of headteachers and 47 per cent of teachers disagreed. Eight per cent of Headteachers and 24 per cent of teachers did not respond or did not express an opinion. It is worth noting that strong opinion did not exist on this point, with only 9 per cent of respondents feeling strongly (positively or negatively).

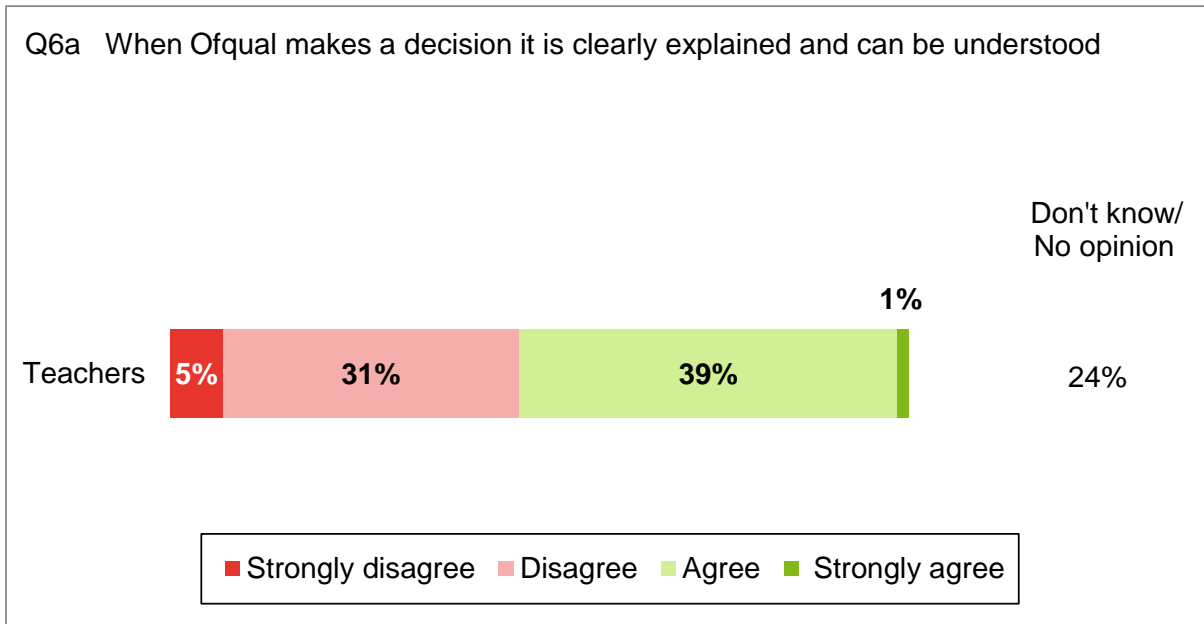
Similar response patterns were observed across questions regarding Ofqual's perceived ability to provide sufficient detail to allow people to understand how decisions made work in practice and Ofqual's effectiveness at communicating to all stakeholders. The relatively high proportion of teacher participants (over 20 per cent) not registering a response or not expressing an opinion on these questions compared with other questions is noteworthy in itself, potentially indicating a lower level of engagement with these issues.

**Figure 48:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s clarity of decision-making – headteachers



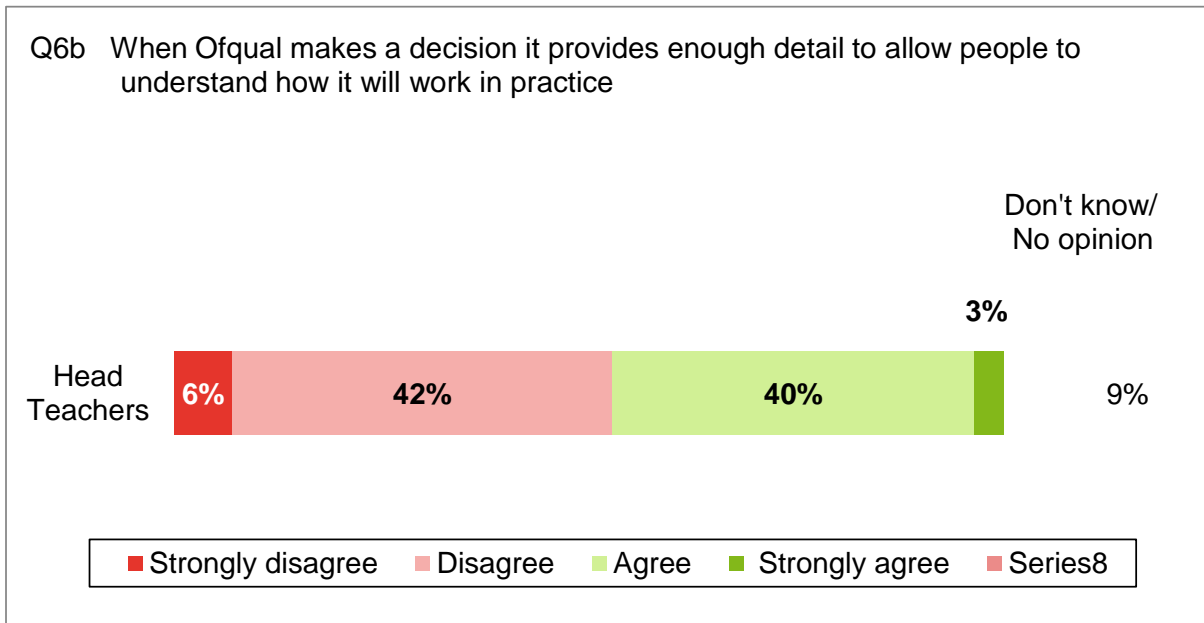
*Effective base: 201 headteachers in England.*

**Figure 49:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s clarity of decision-making – teachers



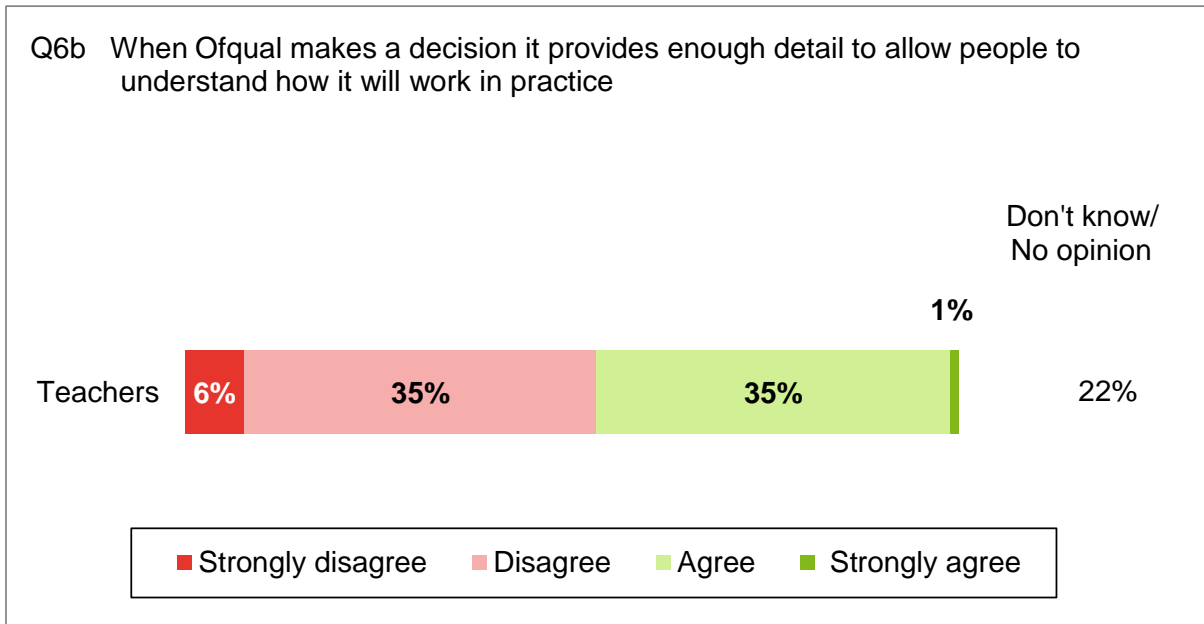
Effective base: 488 teachers in England.

**Figure 50:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s clarity about decision-making – headteachers



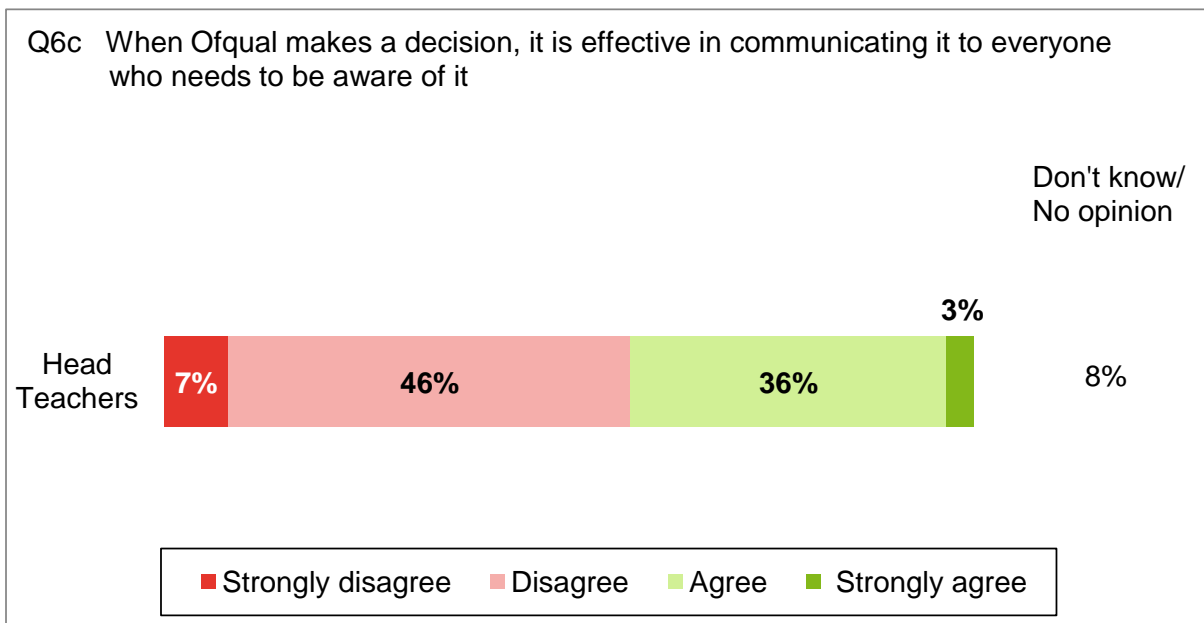
Effective base: 201 headteachers in England.

**Figure 51:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s clarity about decision-making – teachers



Effective base: 488 teachers in England.

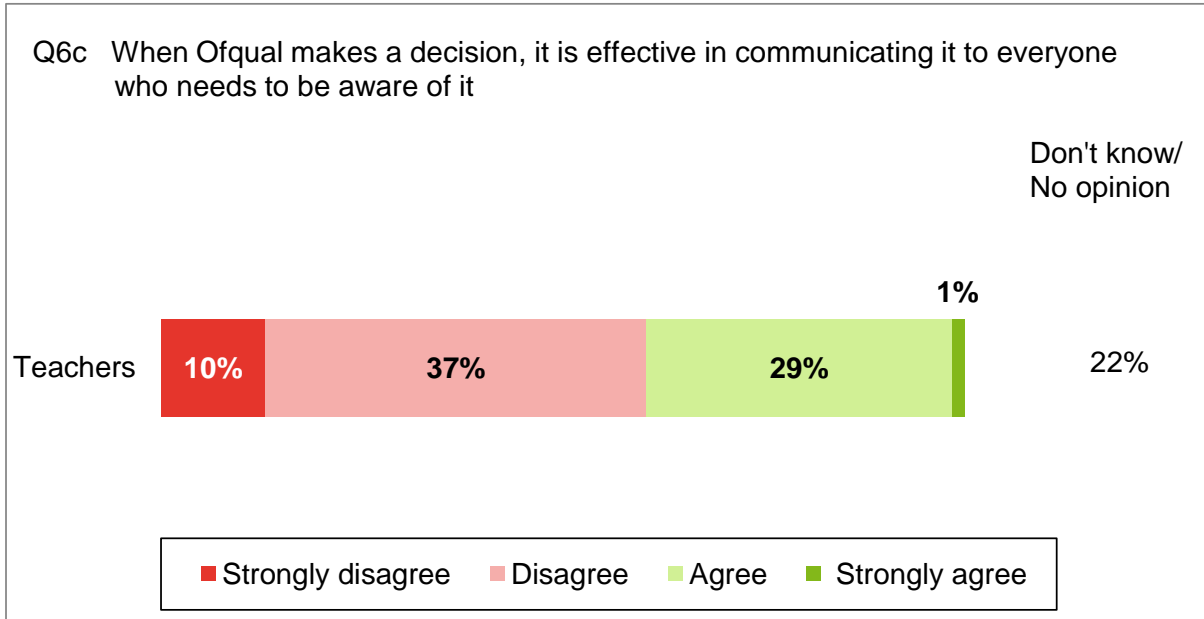
**Figure 52:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness in communicating with stakeholders – headteachers



Effective base: 201 headteachers in England.



**Figure 53:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at communicating with stakeholders – teachers



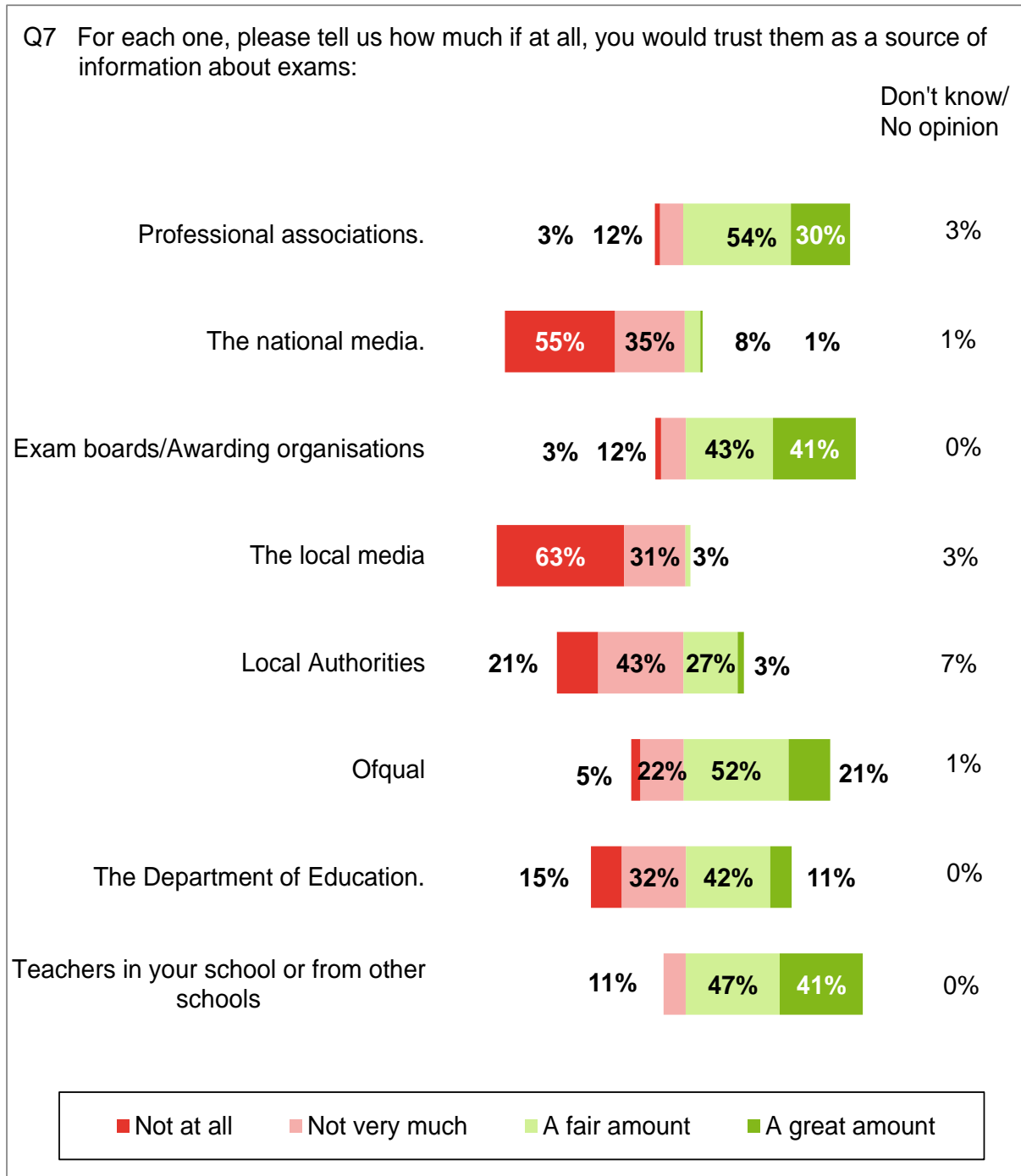
Effective base: 488 teachers in England.

### Trusted sources of information

Participants were presented with a list of different information sources and were questioned about the extent to which they trusted the source/s to provide information on exams. The findings for headteachers and teachers are shown in figures 54 and 55.

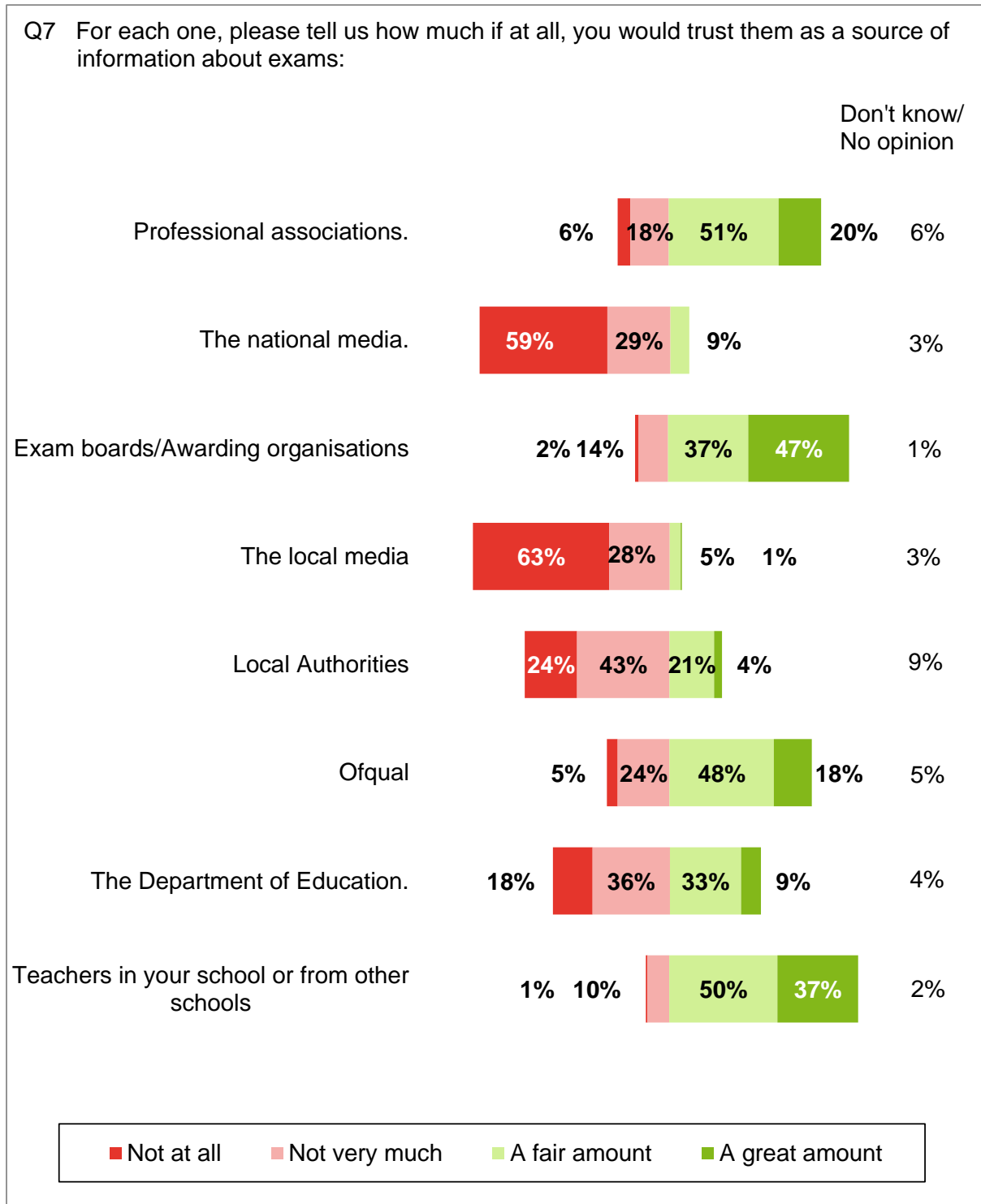
The two most trusted sources of information for both headteachers and teachers were teachers from their own or other schools and exam boards/awarding organisations. Almost three-quarters of headteachers and two-thirds of teachers trusted Ofqual as a source of information. Of the 27 per cent of headteachers who said that they did not trust Ofqual as an information source, the most frequently cited reason for this was Ofqual's perceived lack of independence from the government (60 per cent of responses given) (see appendix A). Teachers who did not trust Ofqual as a source of information most frequently cited their reasons as being exam boards were the first point of call for information (53 per cent), Ofqual's perceived lack of independence from the government (52 per cent) and not having much contact with Ofqual (49 per cent) (see appendix A).

**Figure 54:** Trusted sources of information about exams – headteachers



Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

**Figure 55:** Trusted sources of information about exams – teachers



Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

## Students' and parents' perceptions

### Confidence in the A level system

When asked about their confidence in the A level system, more than four times as many students reported having confidence (68 per cent) than not (15 per cent). Sixteen per cent of the students surveyed chose the “Don't know / No opinion” option (see figure 59). A very similar response pattern, showing reasonable levels of confidence, was received from parents (see figure 60).

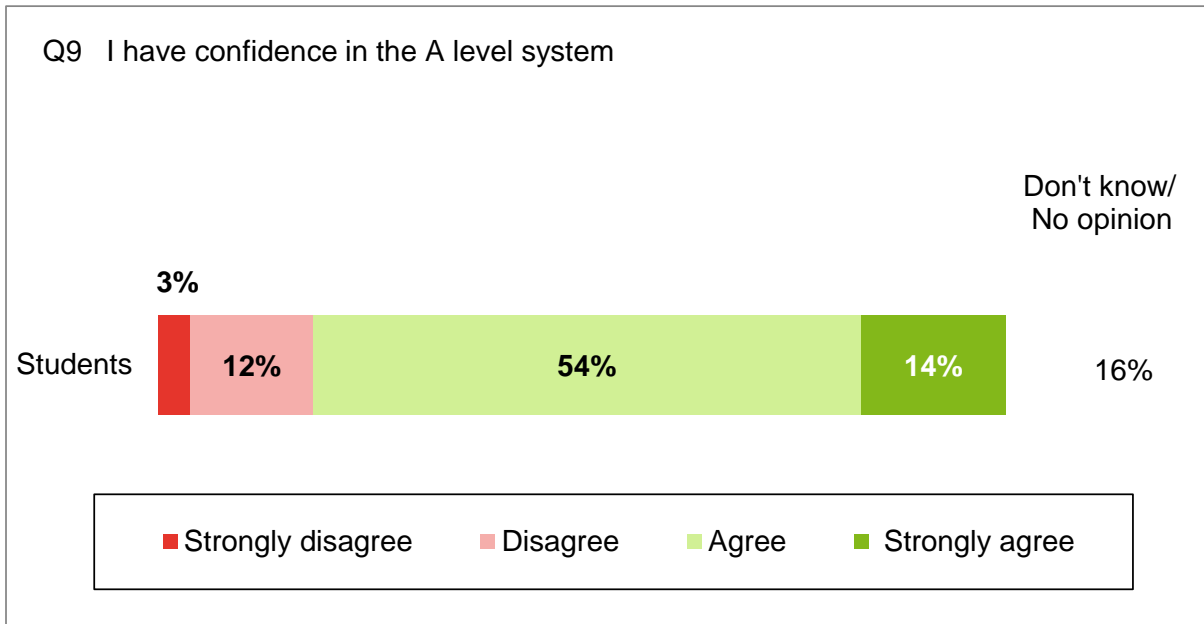
Forty-eight per cent of student respondents (58 per cent of those who registered an opinion) and 66 per cent of parent respondents (77 per cent of those who registered an opinion) reported that their confidence in the A level system had stayed the same compared to last year (see figures 61 and 62). Where confidence was reported as changing, 7 per cent of students and 4 per cent of parents had more confidence. However, 27 per cent of students and 17 per cent of parents had less confidence than last year.

Both groups were asked what they thought were the strengths of the current A level examination system (see figures 63 and 64). The responses across both groups were broadly similar, with the most common responses from both being that A levels are a general trusted qualification (65 per cent of respondents across both groups) and represent good preparation for further study (47 per cent across both).

Regarding concerns about the current A level system, the students sampled expressed concerns over the pressure/stress placed on them (53 per cent), constant change in the system (48 per cent), heavy workload (41 per cent) and the removal of the January assessment opportunity (40 per cent) (see figure 65). These factors clearly interact.

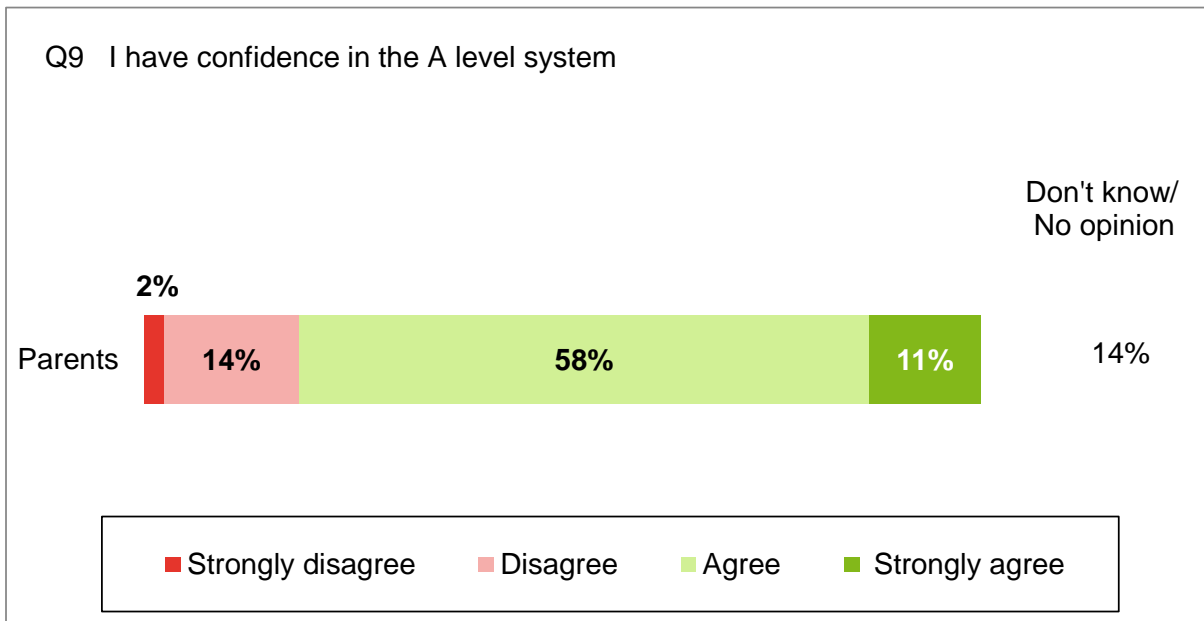
The most frequently selected concern of parents regarding the A level system was the perceived constant change in the system (46 per cent). Other concerns included too much pressure/stress on students (33 per cent) and concerns around incorrect marking (31 per cent) and incorrect grading (28 per cent) of exam papers. See figure 66 for the full range of options and their rankings.

**Figure 59:** Confidence in the A level system – students



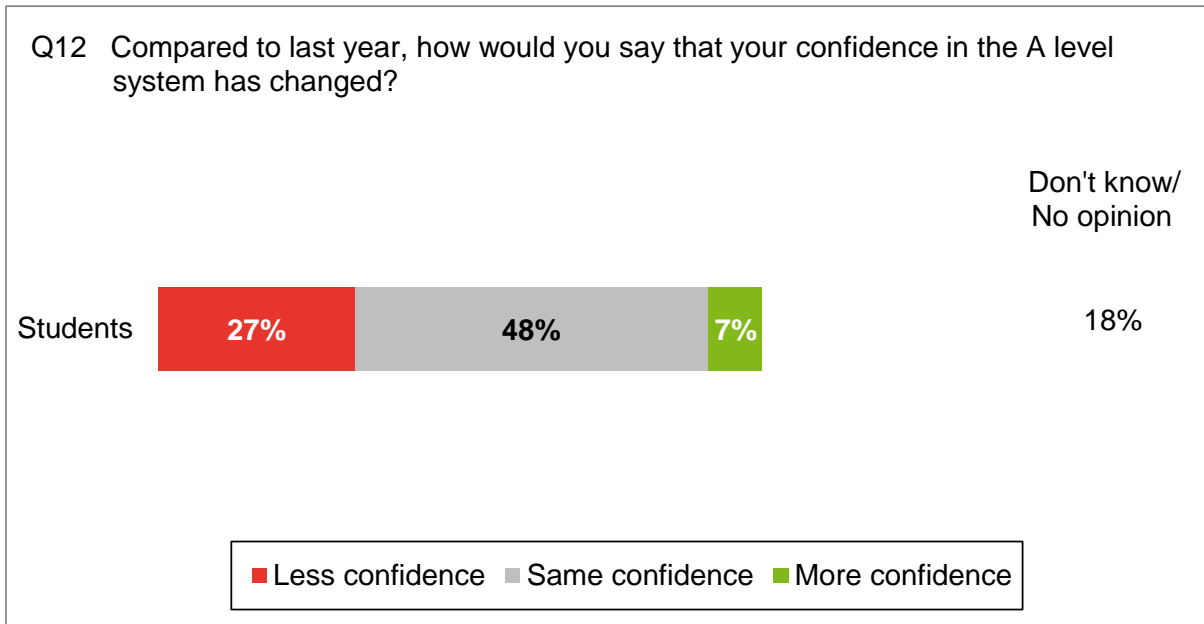
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 60:** Confidence in the A level system – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 61:** Confidence in the A level system compared to last year – students



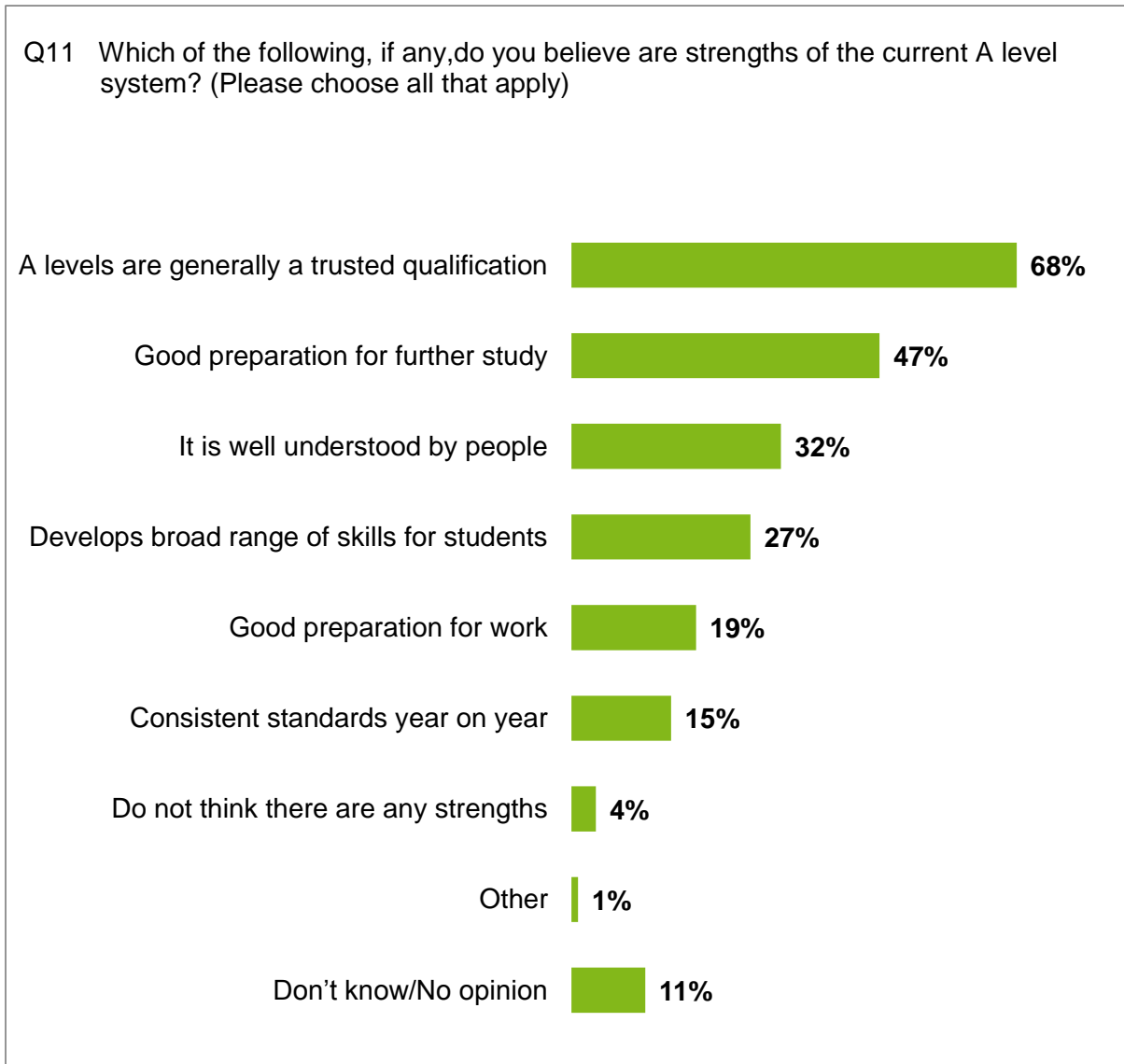
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 62:** Confidence in the A level system compared to last year – parents



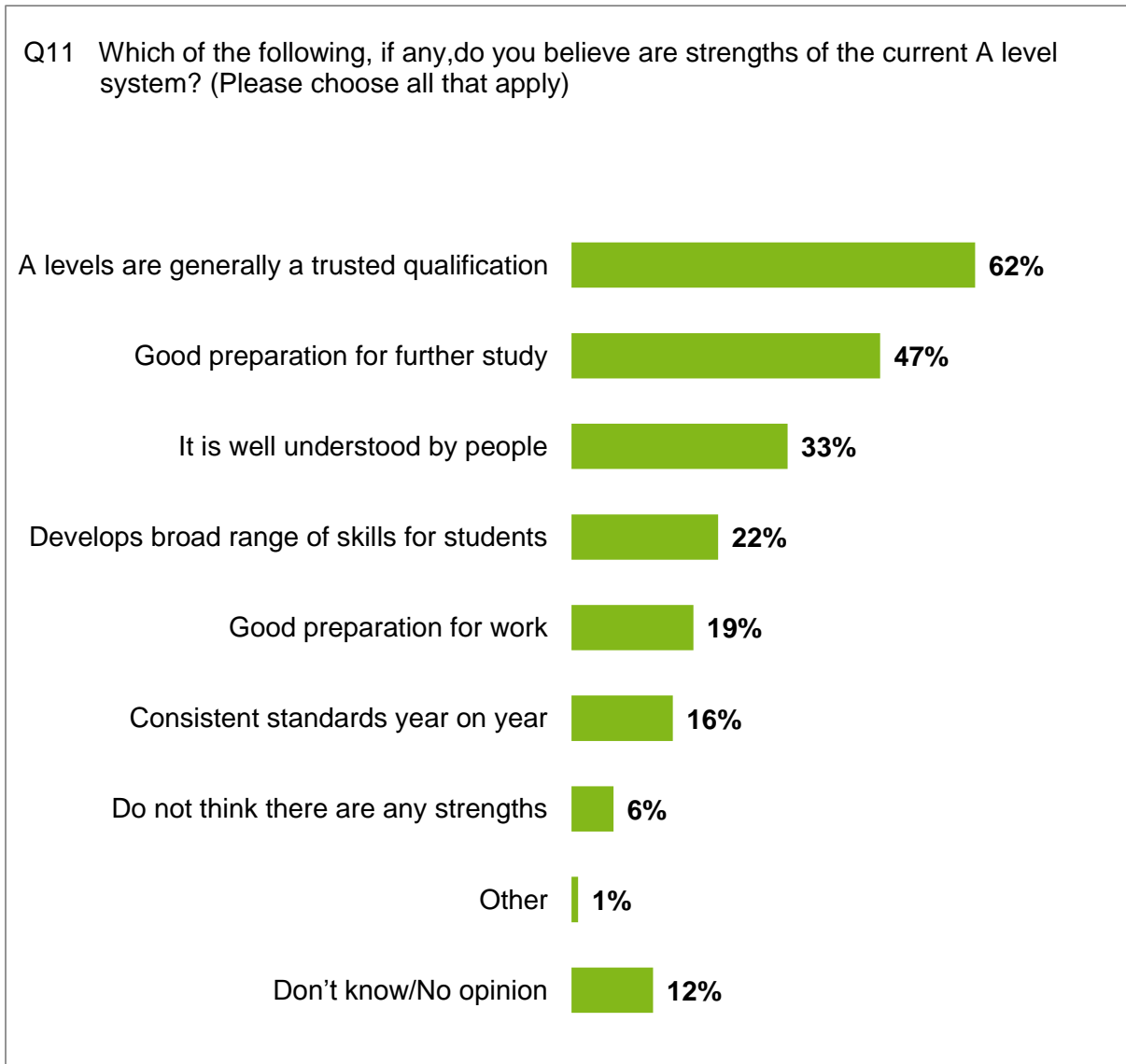
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 63:** Strengths of the A level system – students



*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

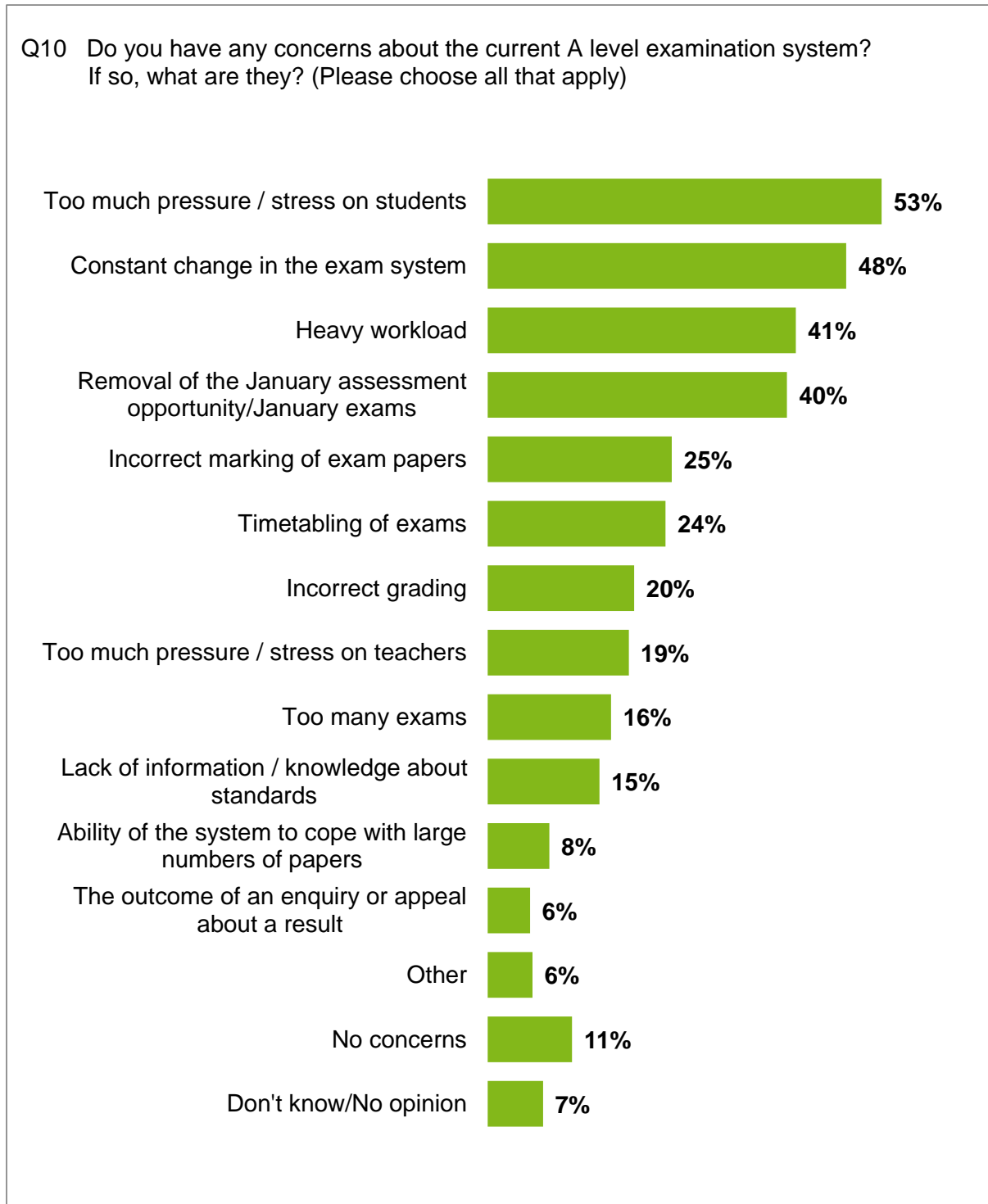
**Figure 64:** Strengths of the A level system – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

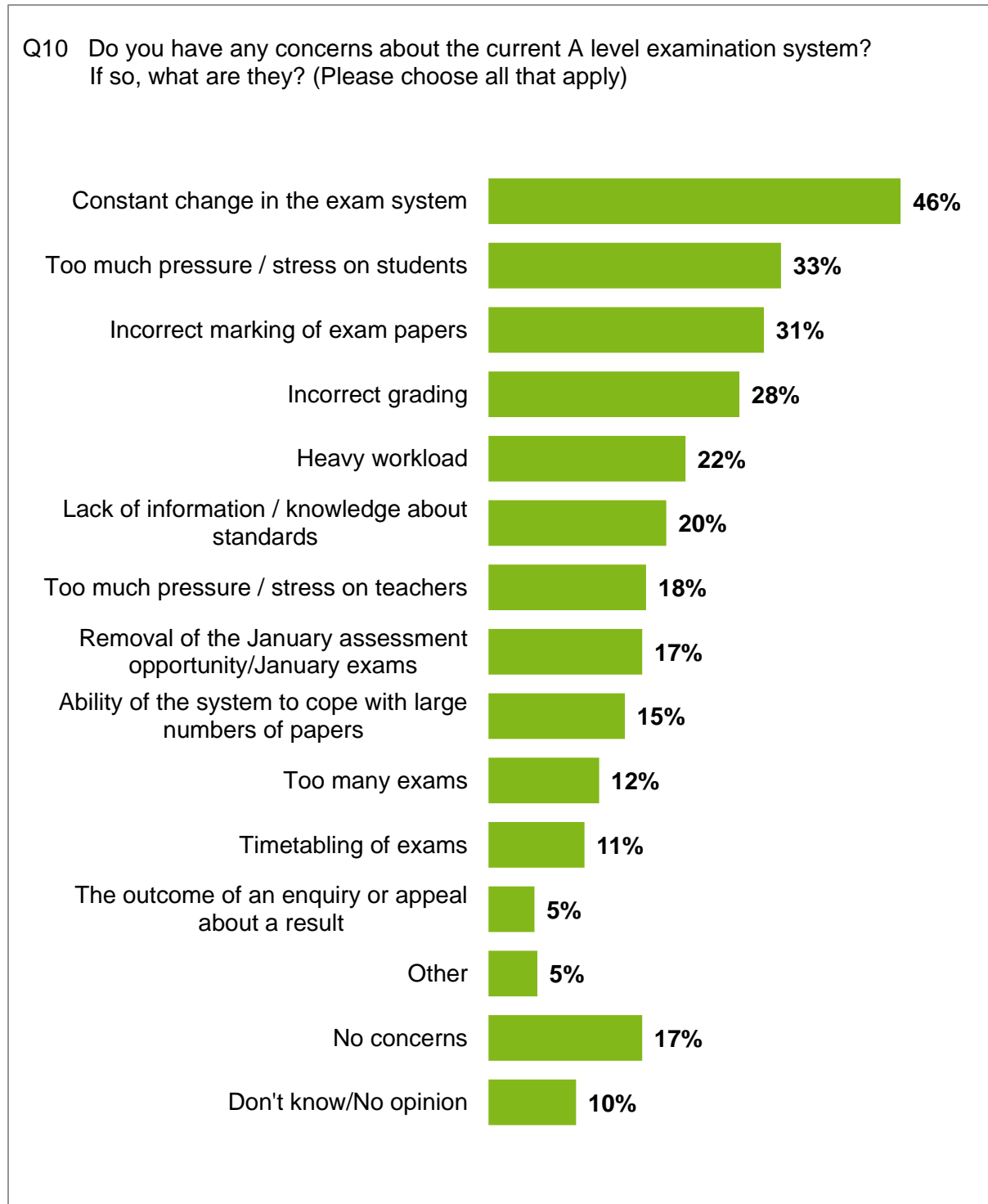


**Figure 65:** Concerns about the A level system – students



*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 66:** Concerns about the A level system – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

## **Confidence in the GCSE system**

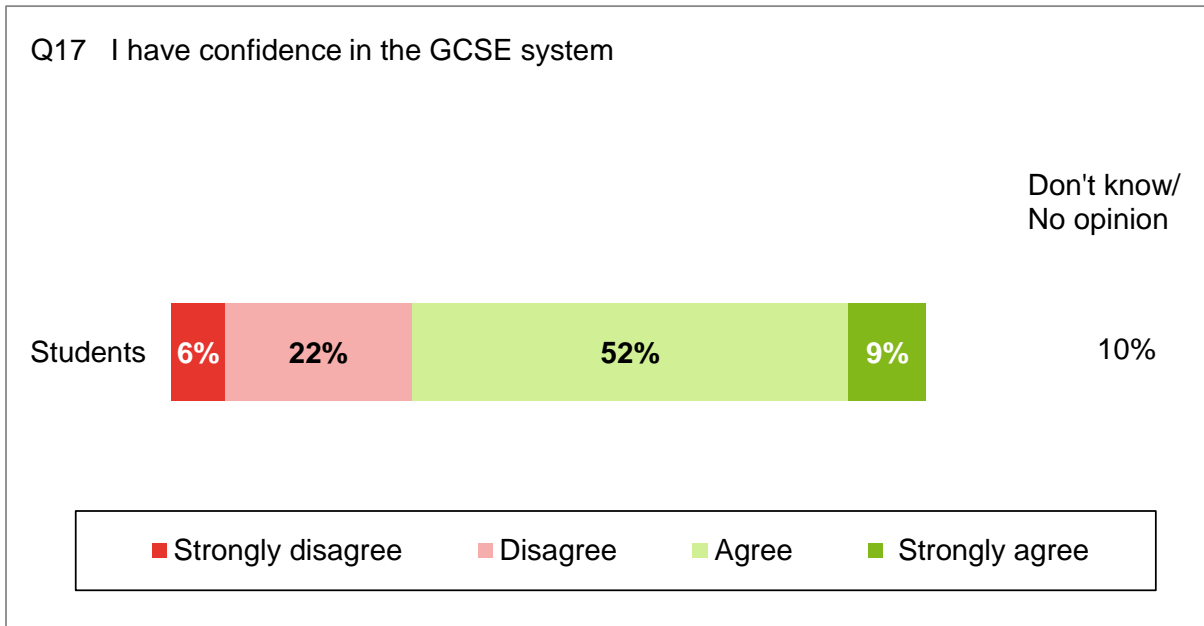
The majority of students (61 per cent) and parents (55 per cent) expressed confidence in the GCSE system, while 28 per cent of students and 34 per cent of parents expressed a lack of confidence (see figures 67 and 68). This suggests a slightly lower level of confidence compared with the A level system.

Figures 69 and 70 show that respondents reported some change in confidence in the GCSE system relative to last year. While 43 per cent of students and 57 per cent of parents had the same confidence as last year, 35 per cent of students and 27 per cent of parents reported less confidence. A small percentage (6 per cent across both groups) reported greater confidence in the system relative to last year.

Students were asked what, if any, they perceived to be the strengths of the current GCSE system. The most frequently identified strengths were that GCSEs are a generally trusted qualification (52 per cent) and that they are good preparation for further study (42 per cent). Parents also deemed GCSEs as being good preparation for further study (44 per cent) and a trusted qualification (42 per cent). See figures 71 and 72 for details of all responses.

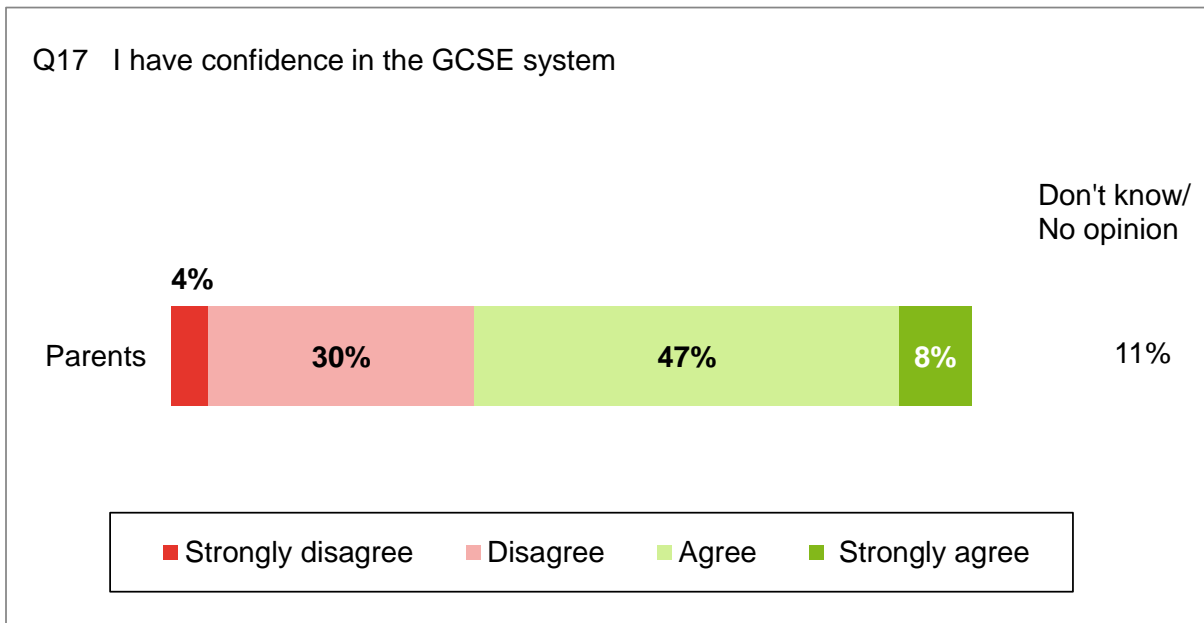
When asked what concerns they had about the GCSE system, 48 per cent of students viewed constant change in the system as a bigger concern than pressure/stress on students, which was the main concern reported at A level. This difference could be a reflection of the recent changes in the GCSE system (see figure 73). Pressure/stress on students, the move to exams at the end of the year and too many exams all ranked highly, with around one-third of respondents raising these issues as concerns. Parents also cited constant change in the system most frequently as a concern (53 per cent). Full details of parent responses are presented in figure 74.

**Figure 67:** Confidence in the GCSE system – students



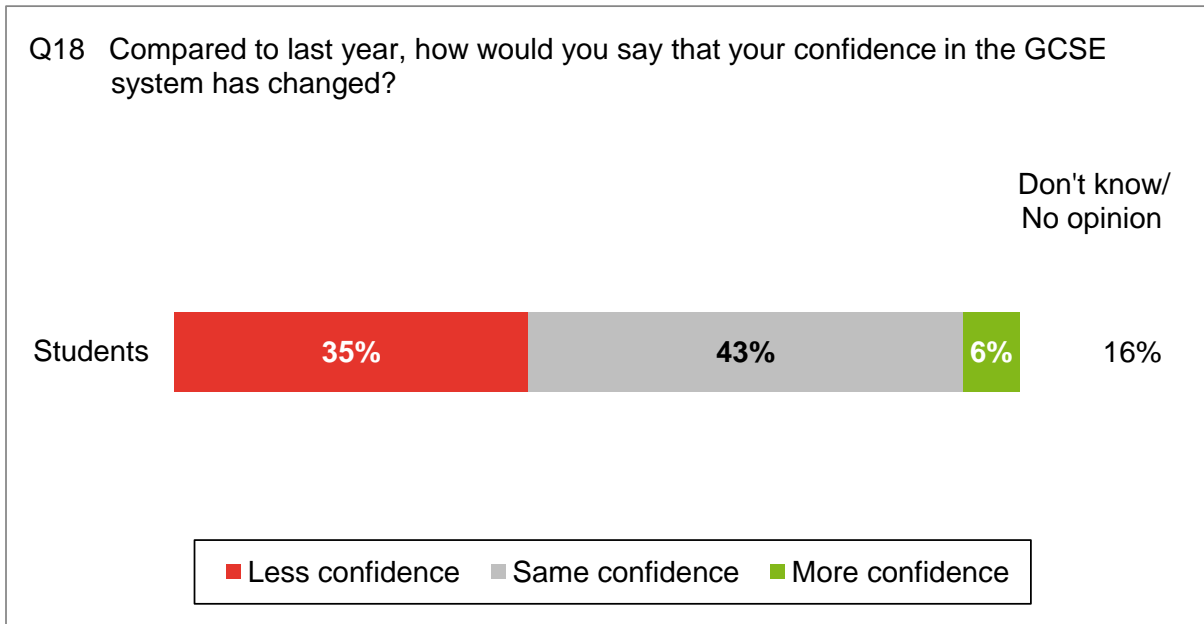
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 68:** Confidence in the GCSE system – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 69:** Confidence in the GCSE system compared to last year – students



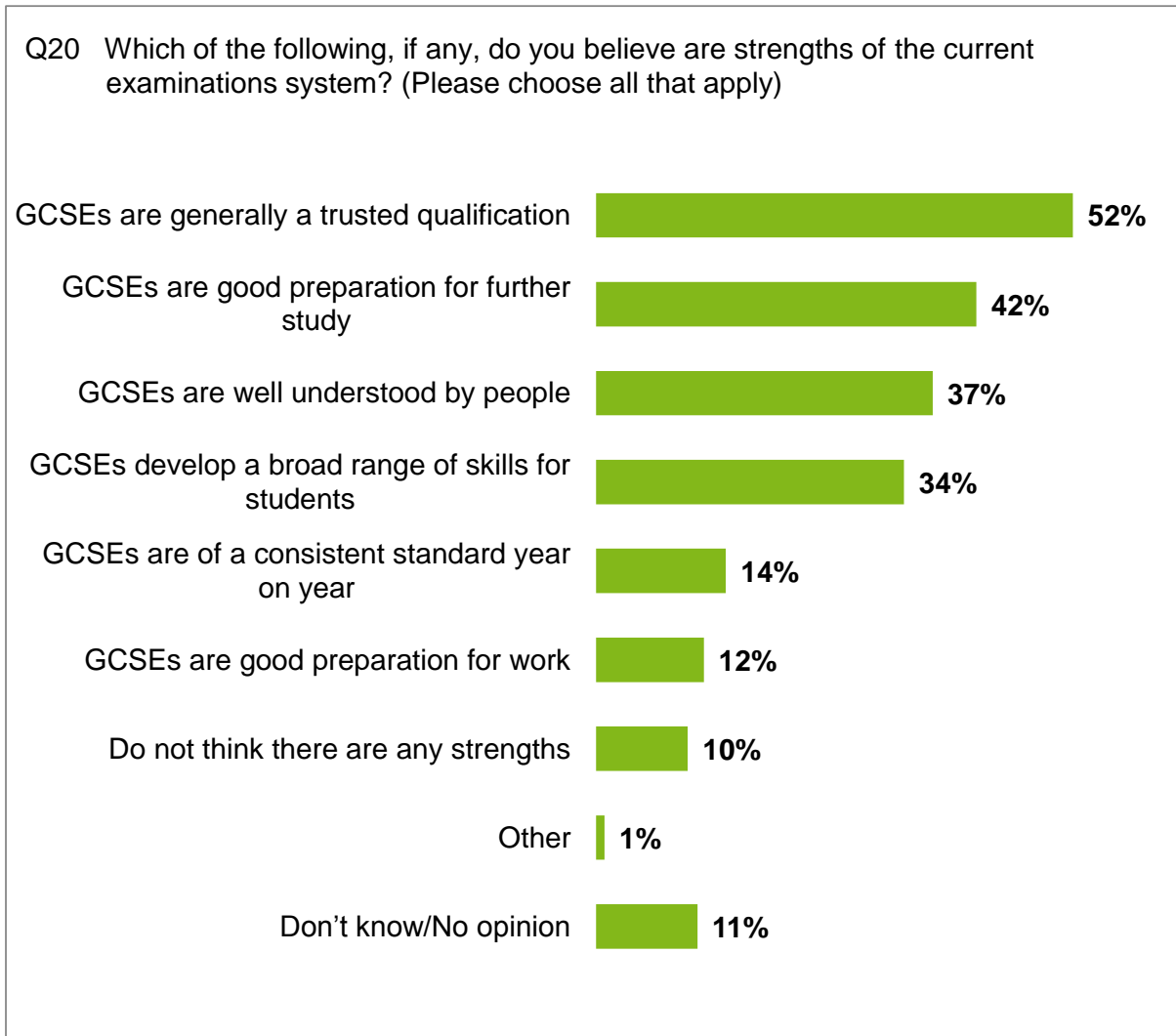
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 70:** Confidence in the GCSE system compared to last year – parents



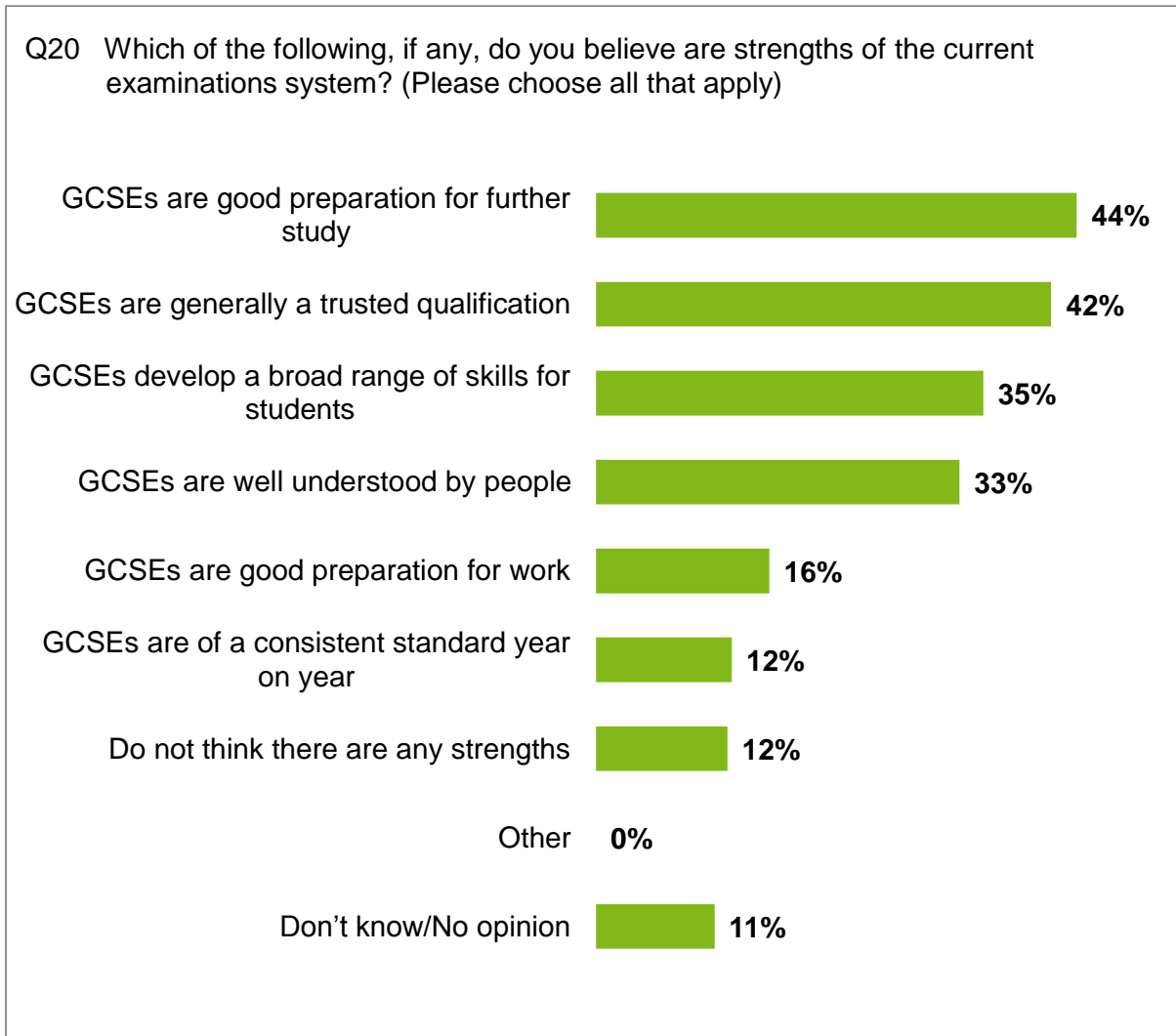
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 71: Strengths of the GCSE system – students**



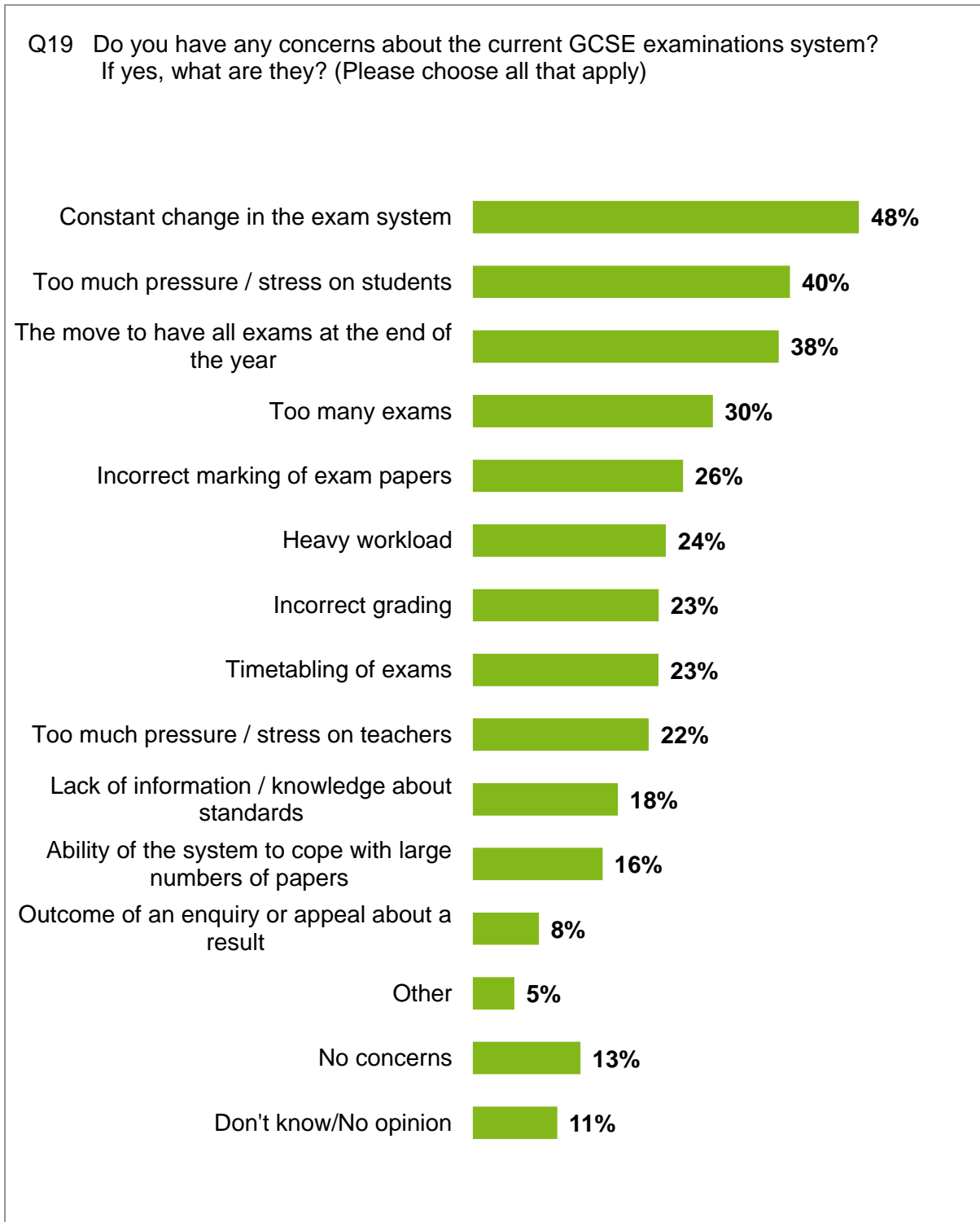
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 72:** Strengths of the GCSE system – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

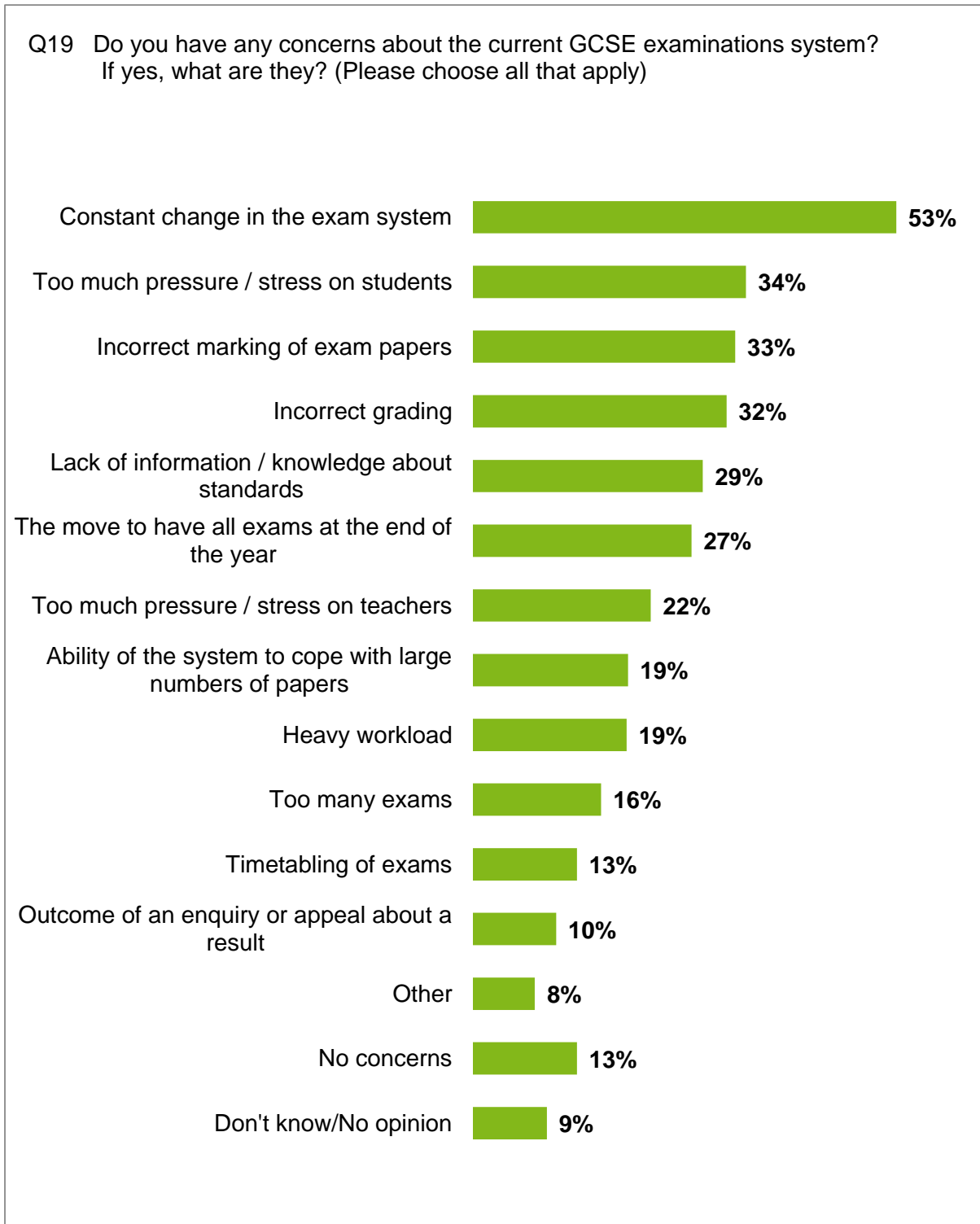
**Figure 73:** Concerns about the GCSE system – students



*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*



**Figure 74:** Concerns about the GCSE system – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

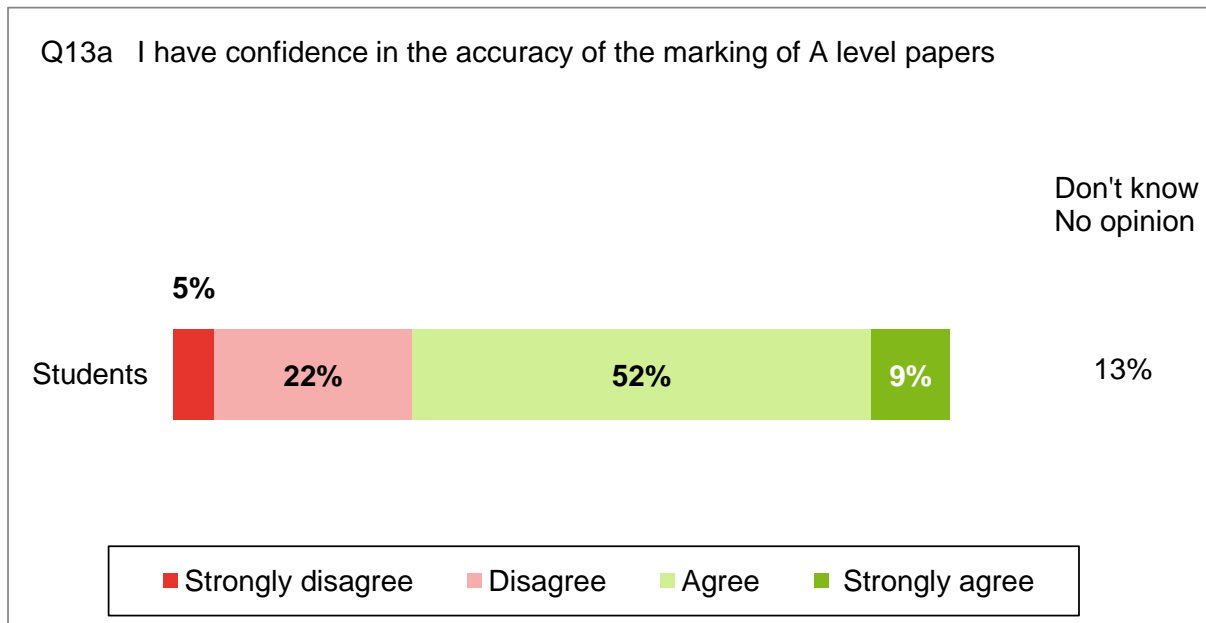
## Perceptions of marking

Respondents were questioned about their perceptions of marking and grading at both GCSE and A level.

A higher percentage of students and parents reported confidence in the marking of A level exams compared with headteachers and teachers. Over half of students (61 per cent) and parents (55 per cent) expressed confidence in A level marking, while 27 per cent of both students and parents reported a lack of confidence (see figures 75 and 76). Around one-third of students and parents reported that the accuracy of marking has decreased over the past two years. However, a high proportion (45 per cent across both groups) did not have or did not register an opinion (see figures 77 and 78).

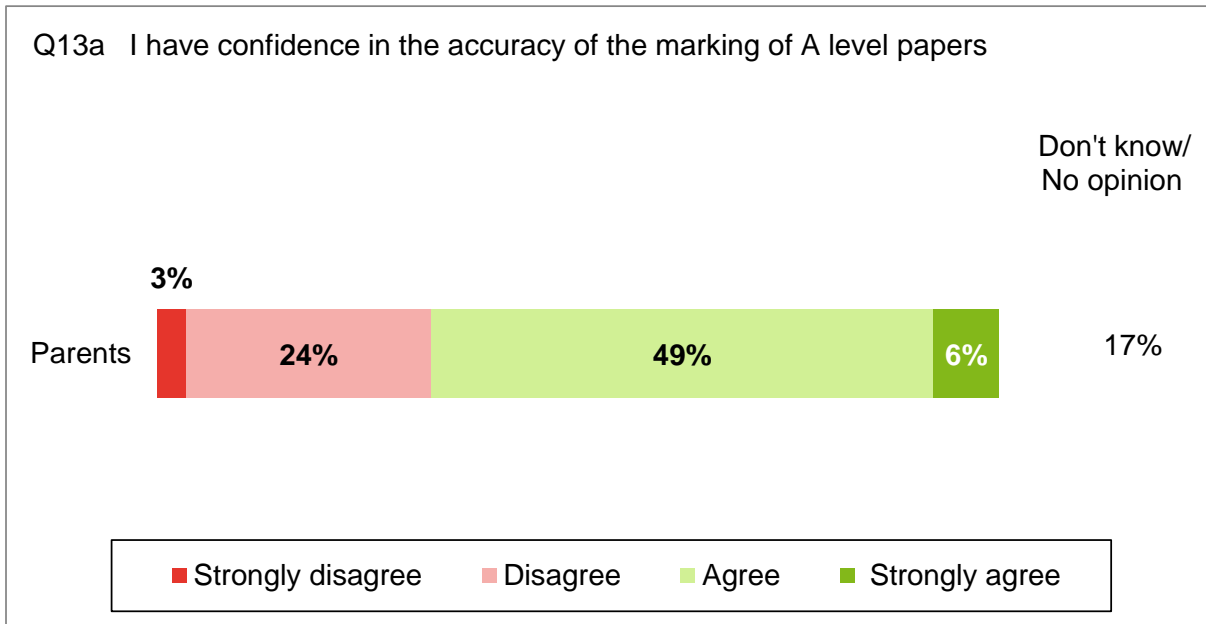
Perceptions of the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs were similar to those expressed for A level, with 58 per cent of students and 45 per cent of parents having confidence (see figures 79 and 80). Again, a high percentage of students and parents (42 per cent) did not express an opinion regarding whether or not the accuracy of marking had decreased over the past two years (see figures 81 and 82). This is not unsurprising given the relatively short exposure that these students and parents are likely to have had to these processes.

**Figure 75:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A levels – students



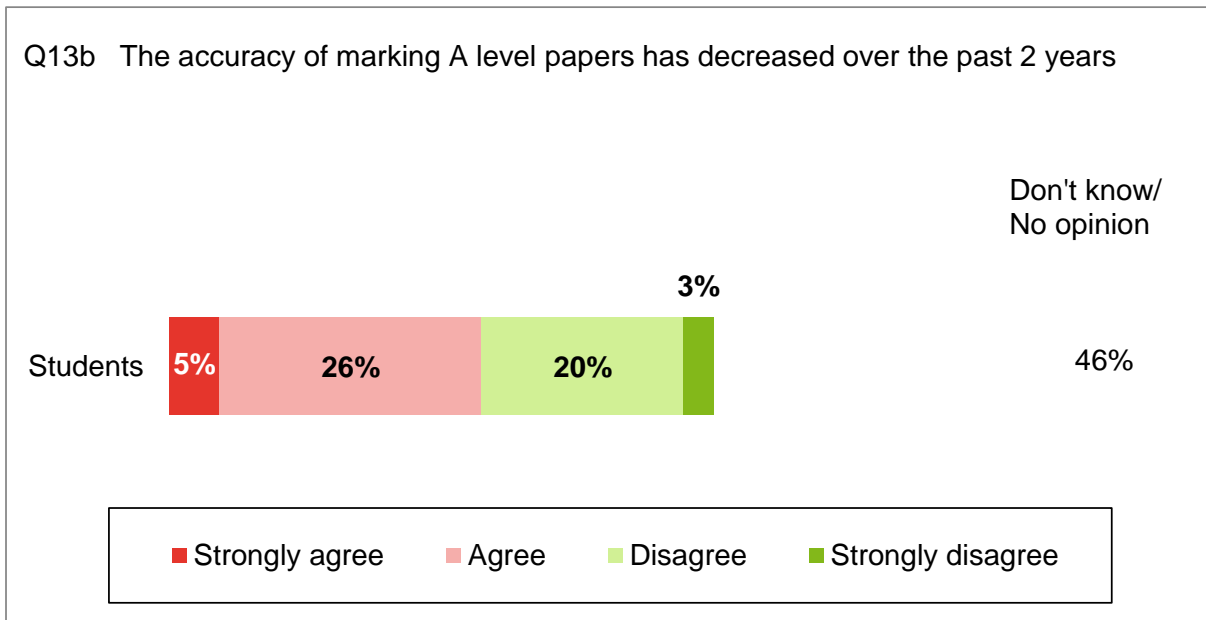
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 76:** Confidence in the marking of A levels – parents



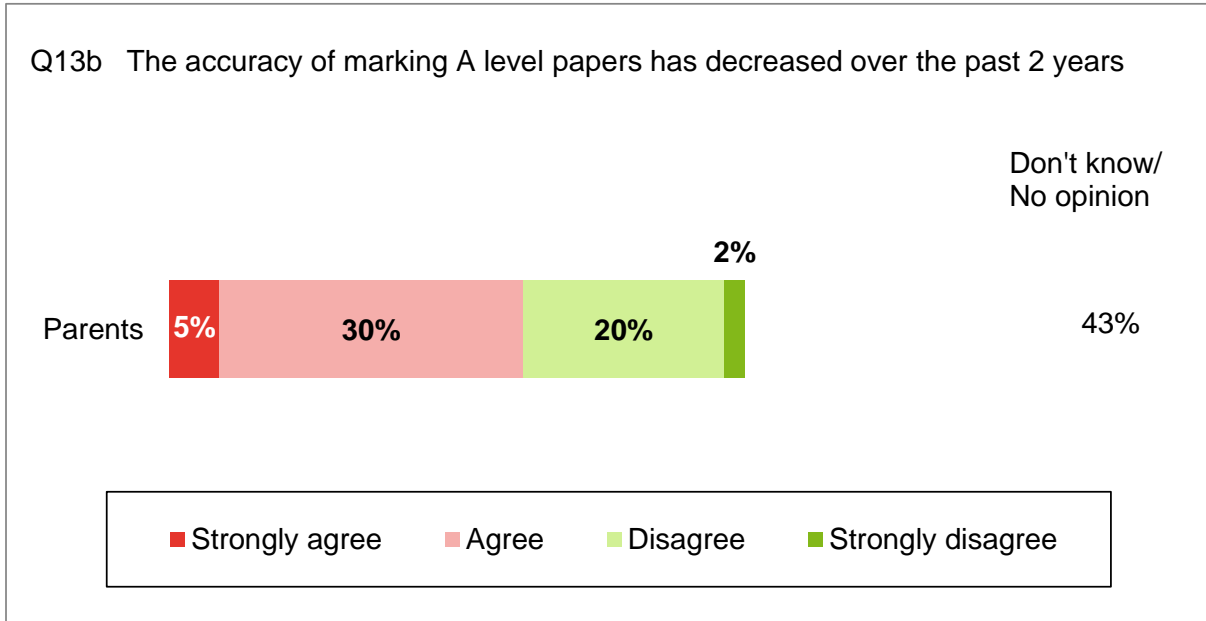
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 77:** Perceptions about change in the accuracy of the marking of A levels – students



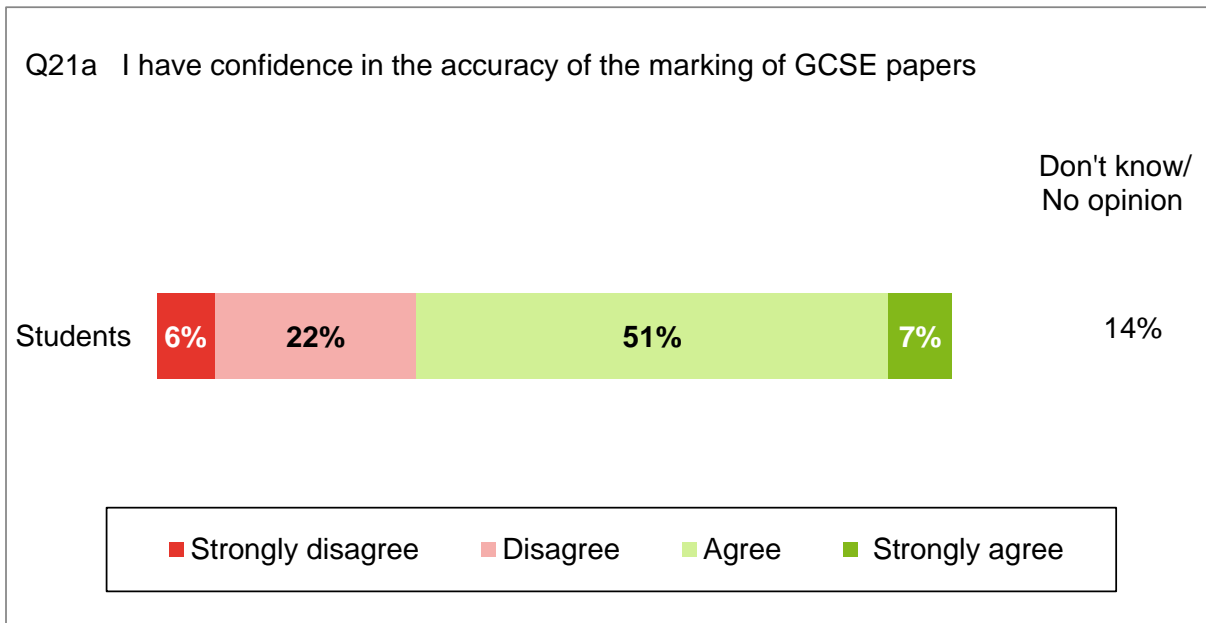
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 78:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A levels compared to last year – parents



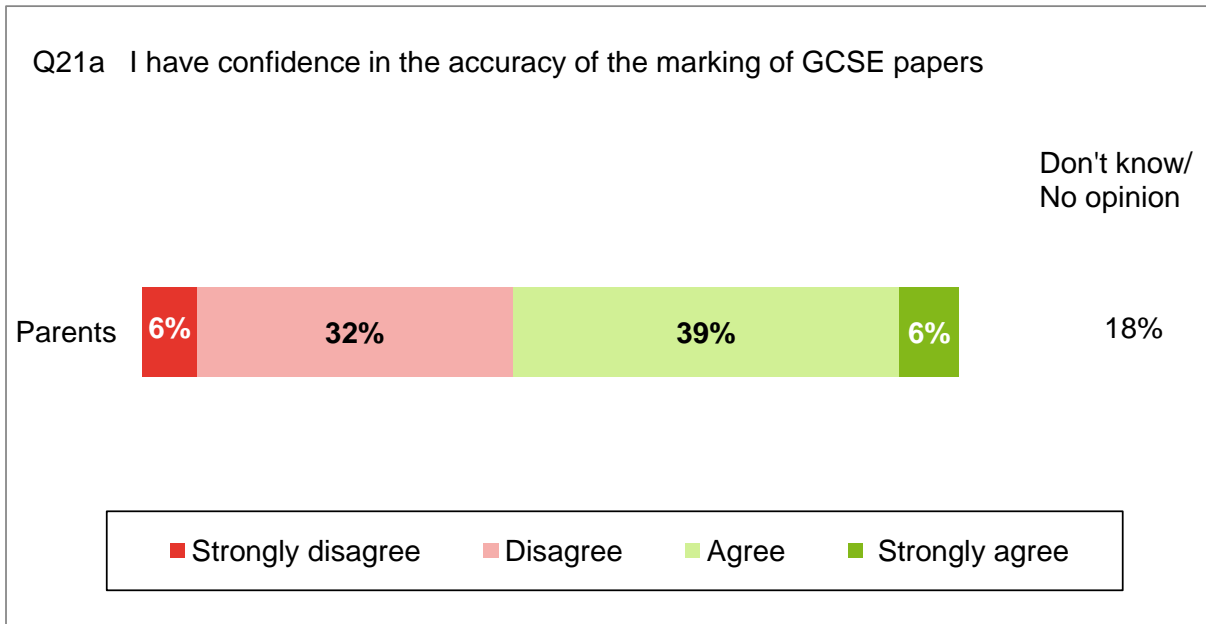
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 79:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs – students



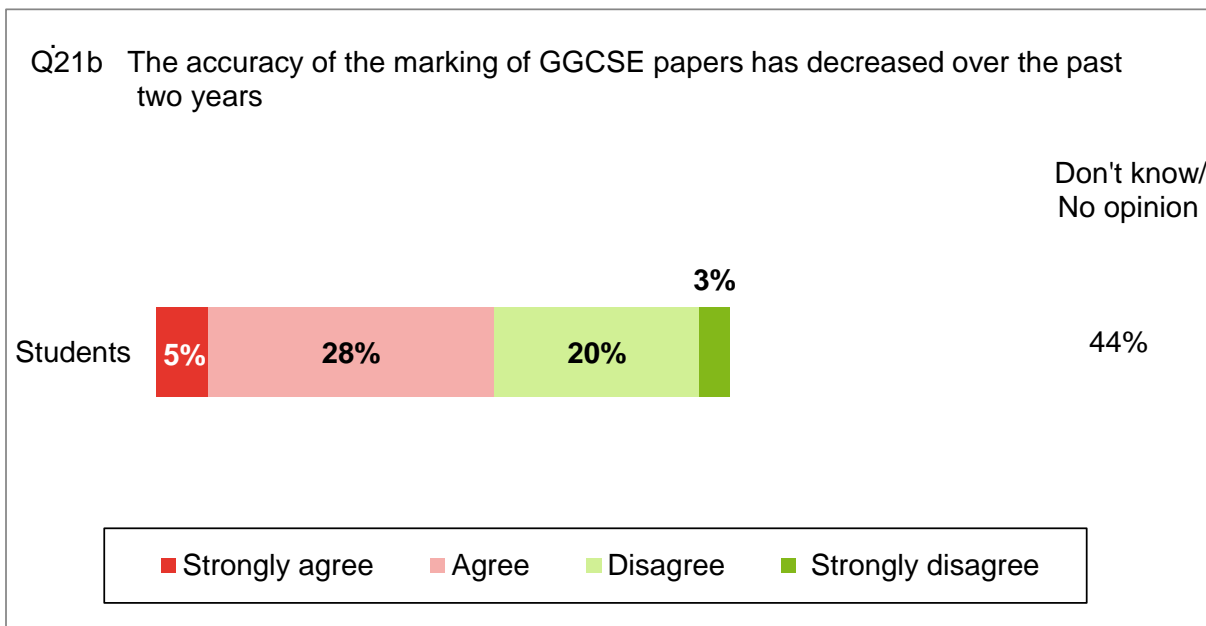
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 80:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs – parents



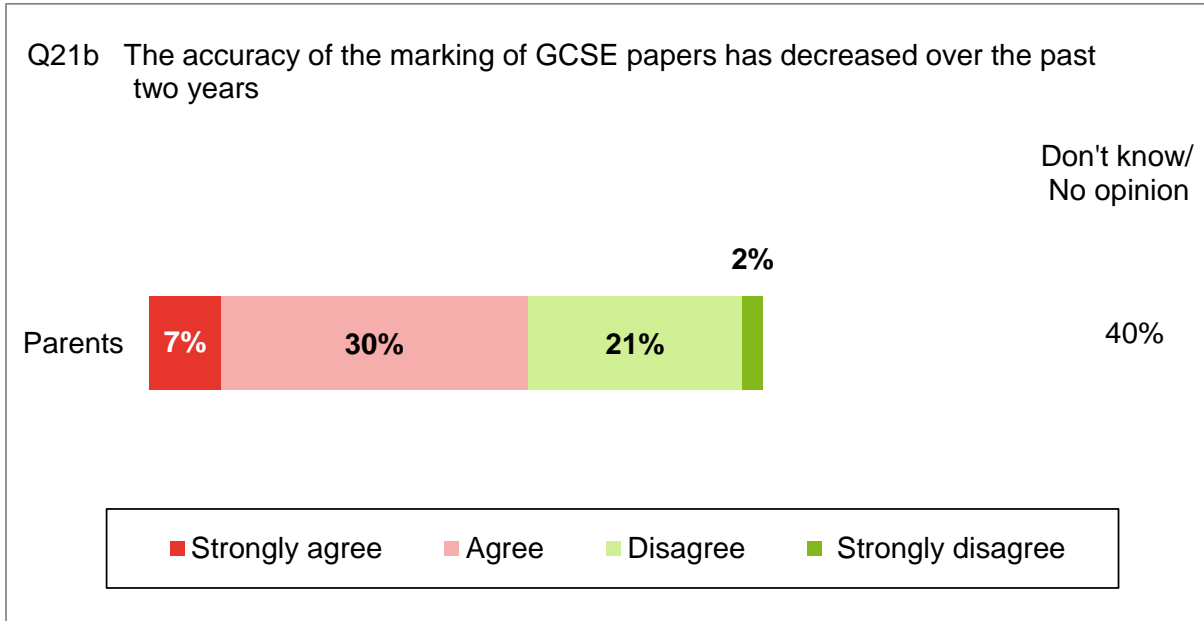
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 81:** Confidence in the GCSE system compared to last year – students



*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 82:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs compared to last year – parents



Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.

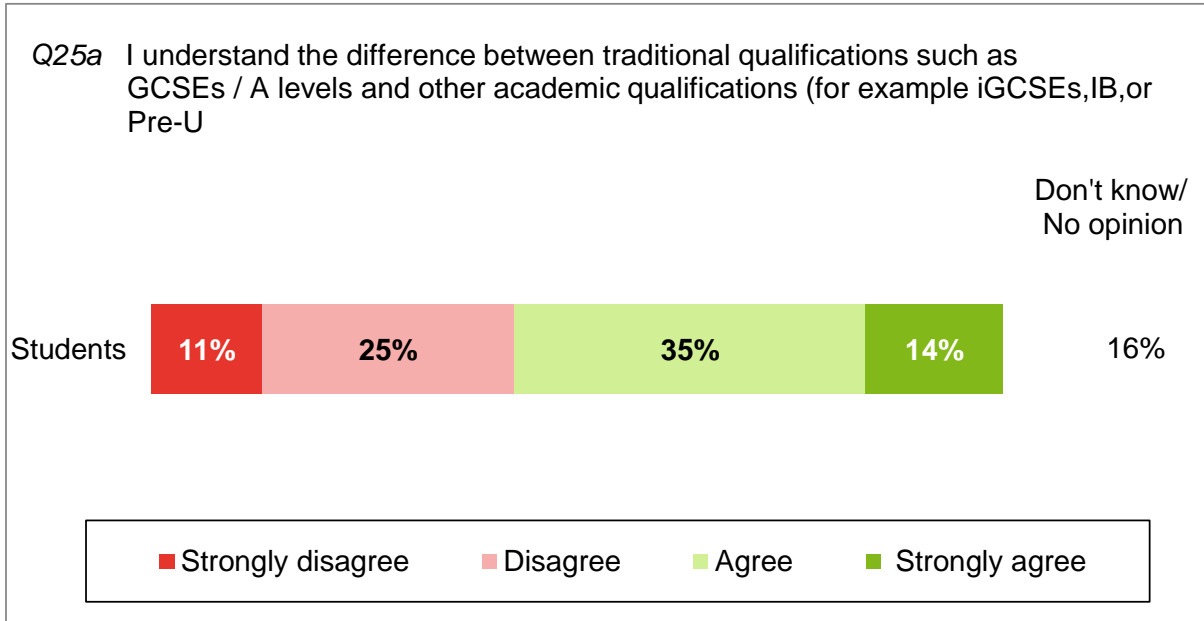
## Perceptions of other qualifications

### Other academic qualifications

When asked whether they knew the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs/A levels and other academic qualifications such as IGCSEs, International Baccalaureate or Pre-U, more students reported knowing the difference (49 per cent) than did not (36 per cent). Parents reported a lower level of understanding, with 48 per cent of respondents not knowing the difference between traditional and other academic qualifications (see figures 83 and 84).

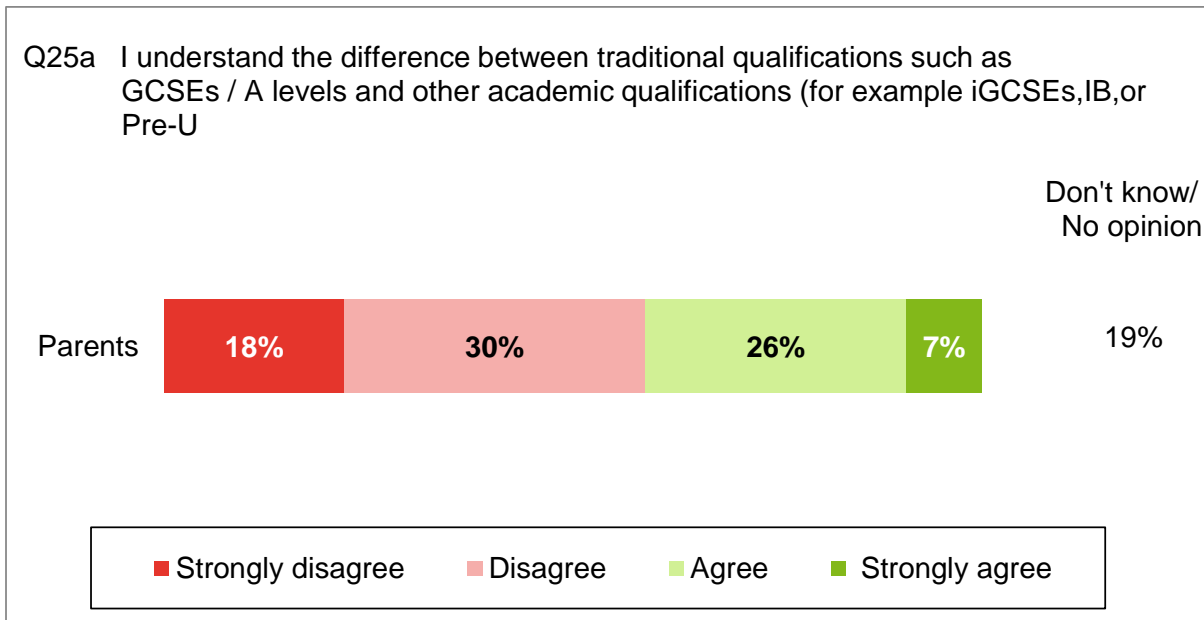
When students were asked whether they perceived other academic qualifications to be of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification, the most common response was that they thought they were easier to achieve (27 per cent). However, a substantial number (40 per cent) were unsure or did not express an opinion. When asked the same question, a large number of parents did not know or did not express a view (47 per cent). Of those who did register a view, parents mainly felt these qualifications to be as difficult or easier than traditional academic qualifications (55 per cent) (see figures 85 and 86).

**Figure 83:** Understanding of the difference between traditional qualifications and other academic qualifications – students



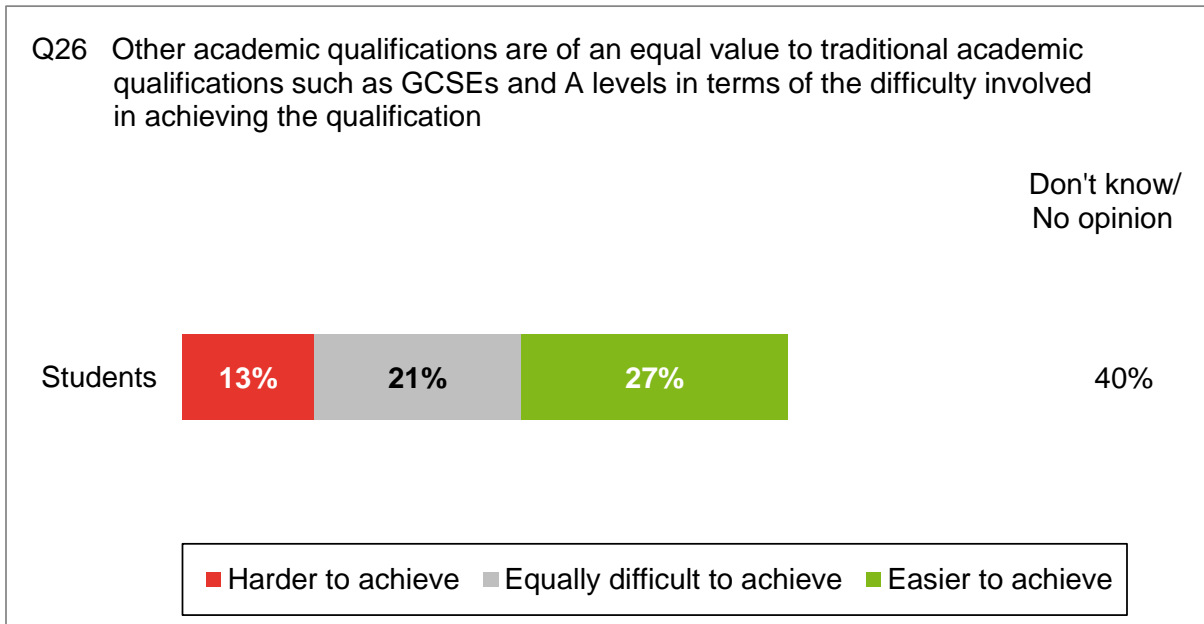
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 84:** Understanding of the difference between traditional qualifications and other academic qualifications – parents



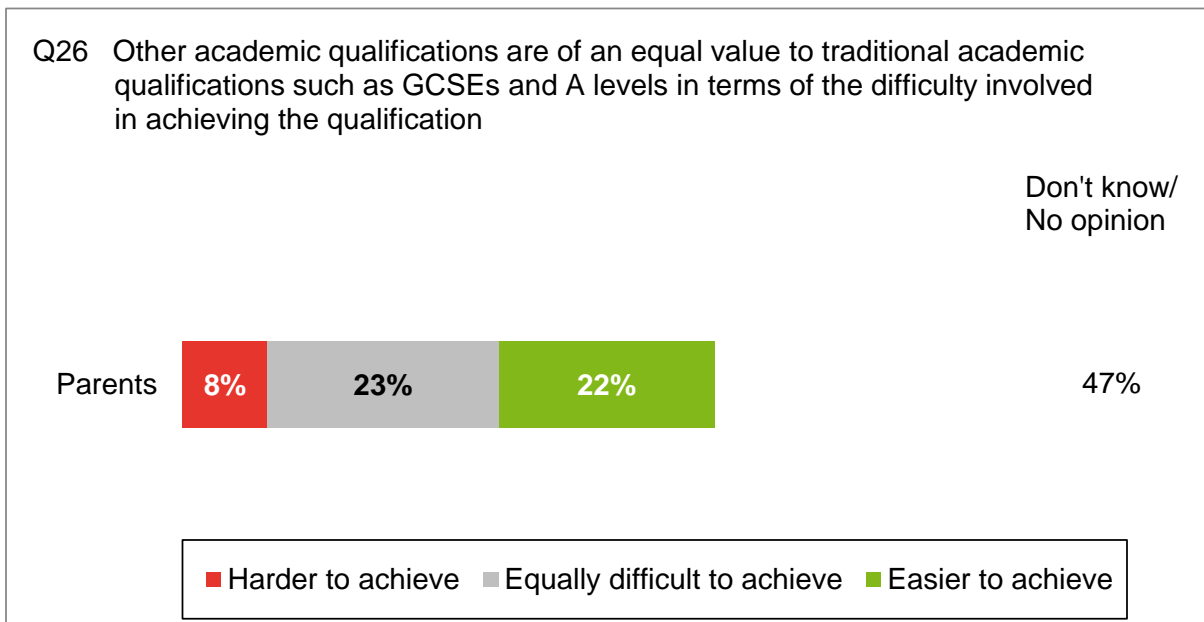
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 85:** Perceptions of the value of other academic qualifications – students



*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 86:** Perceptions of the value of other academic qualifications – parents



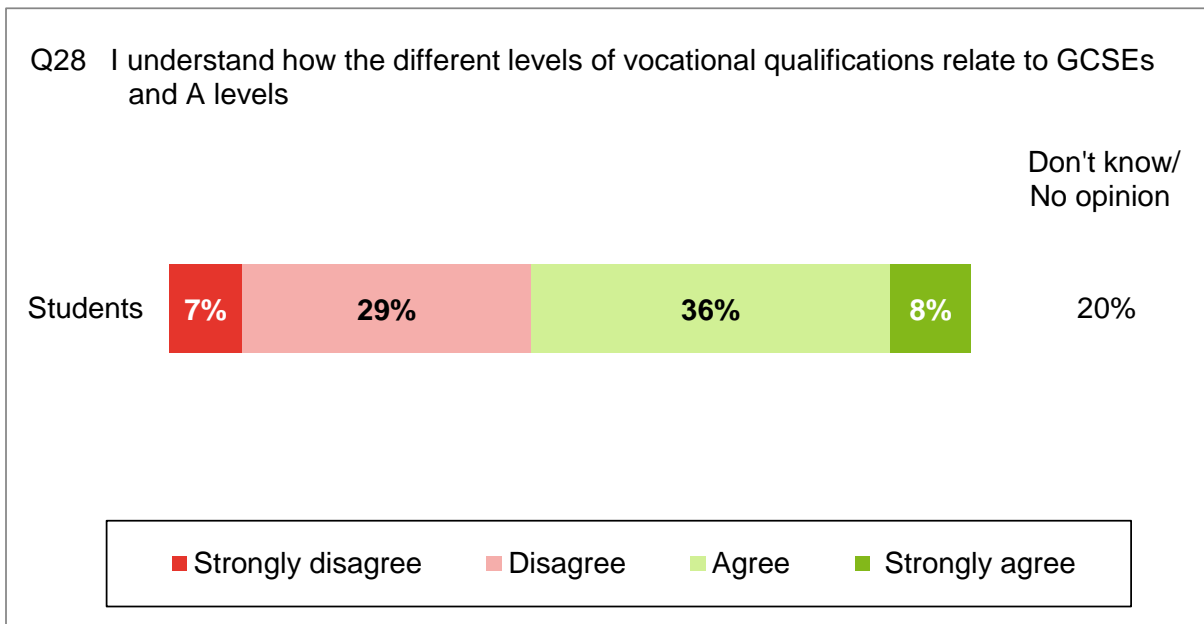
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*



### Vocational qualifications

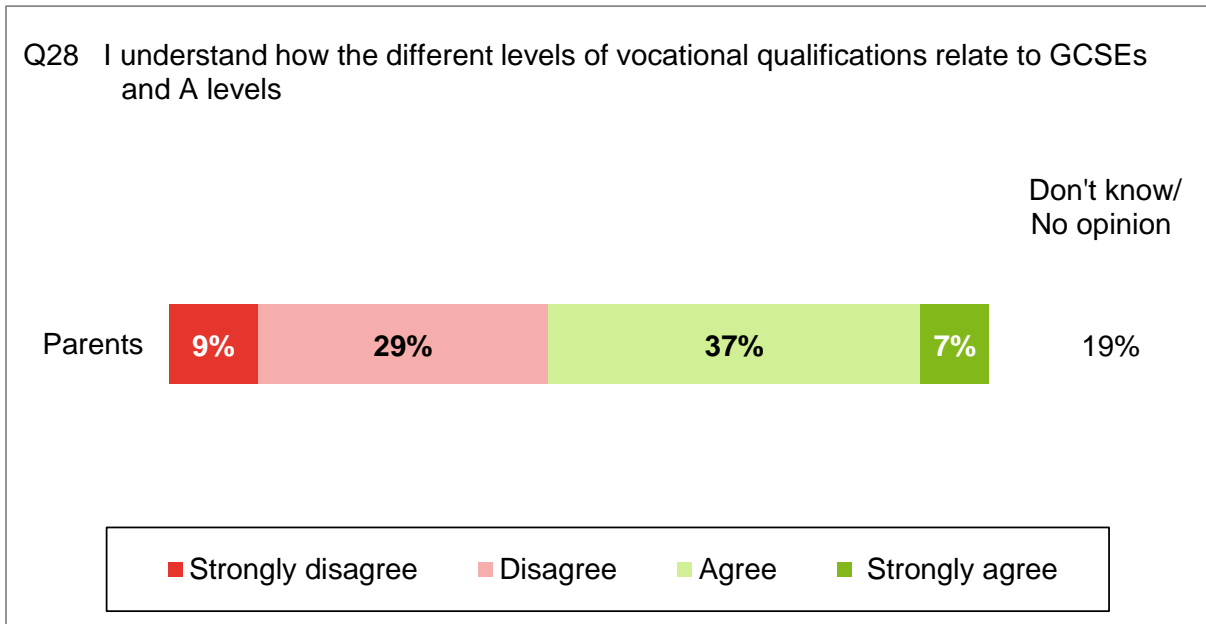
Participants were questioned about their understanding and perception of vocational qualifications. Forty-four per cent of both students and parents reported understanding the relationship between vocational qualifications and traditional academic qualifications, with 36 per cent of students and 38 per cent of parents not claiming an understanding (see figures 87 and 88). In terms of the difficulty in achieving these qualifications, a high proportion did not know or did not register an opinion (31 per cent of students and 32 per cent parents). Of those who did provide a definite response, 74 per cent of students (51 per cent of all student respondents) and 51 per cent of parents (35 per cent of all parent respondents) felt that vocational qualifications were easier to achieve (see figures 89 and 90).

**Figure 87:** Understanding of the different levels of vocational qualifications – students



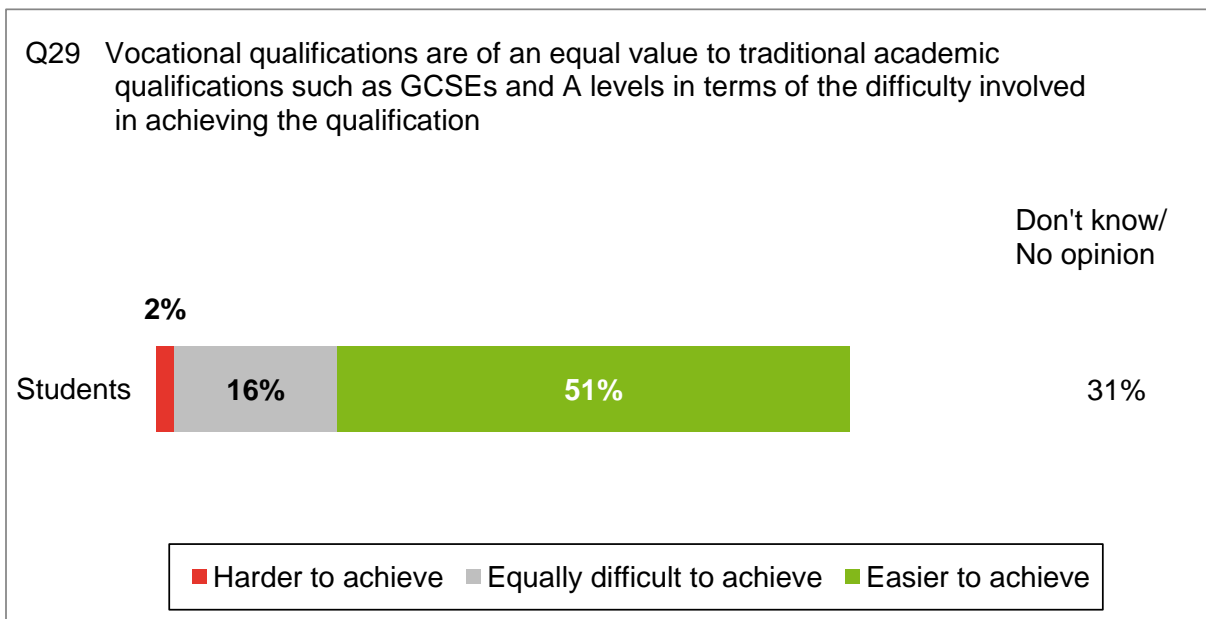
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 88:** Understanding of the different levels of vocational qualifications – parents



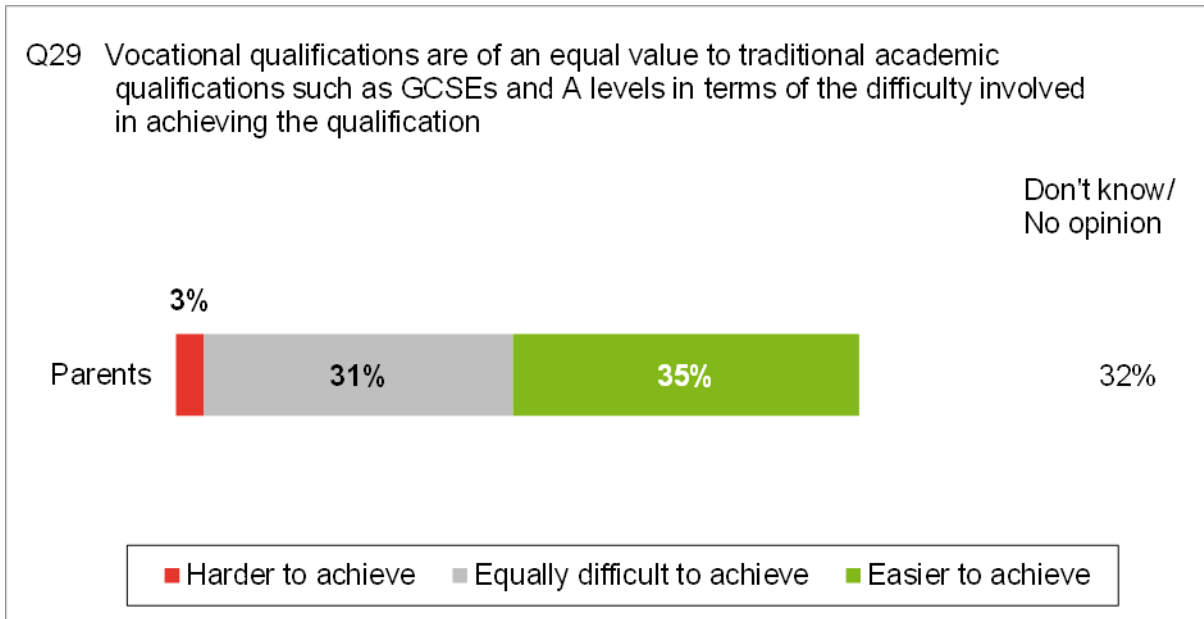
Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.

**Figure 89:** Perceived value of vocational qualifications – students



Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.

**Figure 90:** Perceptions of the value of vocational qualifications – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

## **Awareness and perceptions of Ofqual**

### **Awareness**

Participants were first asked an unprompted question about their knowledge of Ofqual. This was followed up by participants being presented with an explanatory statement about Ofqual (see page 48), after which further awareness and perceptions questions were presented.

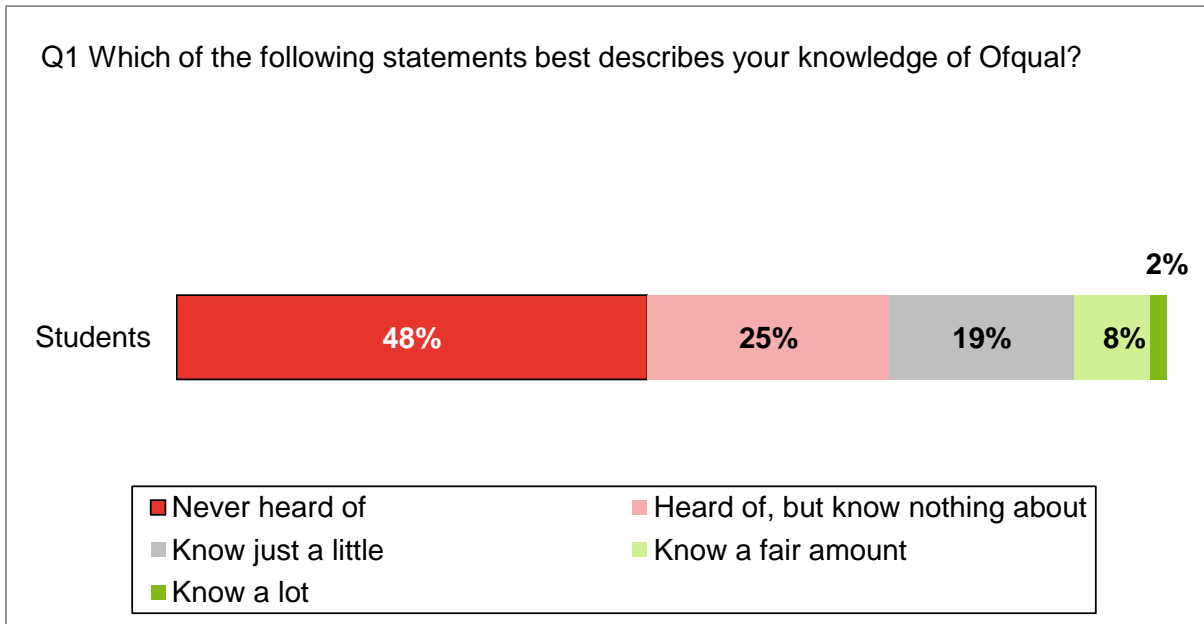
Understandably, a far lower percentage of student and parent respondents reported awareness and knowledge of Ofqual compared with headteachers and teachers. Twenty-nine per cent of students reported at least some knowledge of Ofqual's role compared with 36 per cent of parents. Following exposure to the prompt, 39 per cent of students and 45 per cent of parents reported that they were previously aware of Ofqual's role as the independent exams regulator (see figures 91 to 94).

### **Effectiveness**

Respondents who stated that they were aware of Ofqual's role as independent regulator were asked a series of additional questions regarding their perceptions of Ofqual. When asked whether Ofqual was effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications, more students agreed (49 per cent) than disagreed (35 per cent), with similar opinions being expressed by parents (44 per cent vs. 34 per cent) (see figures 95 and 96).

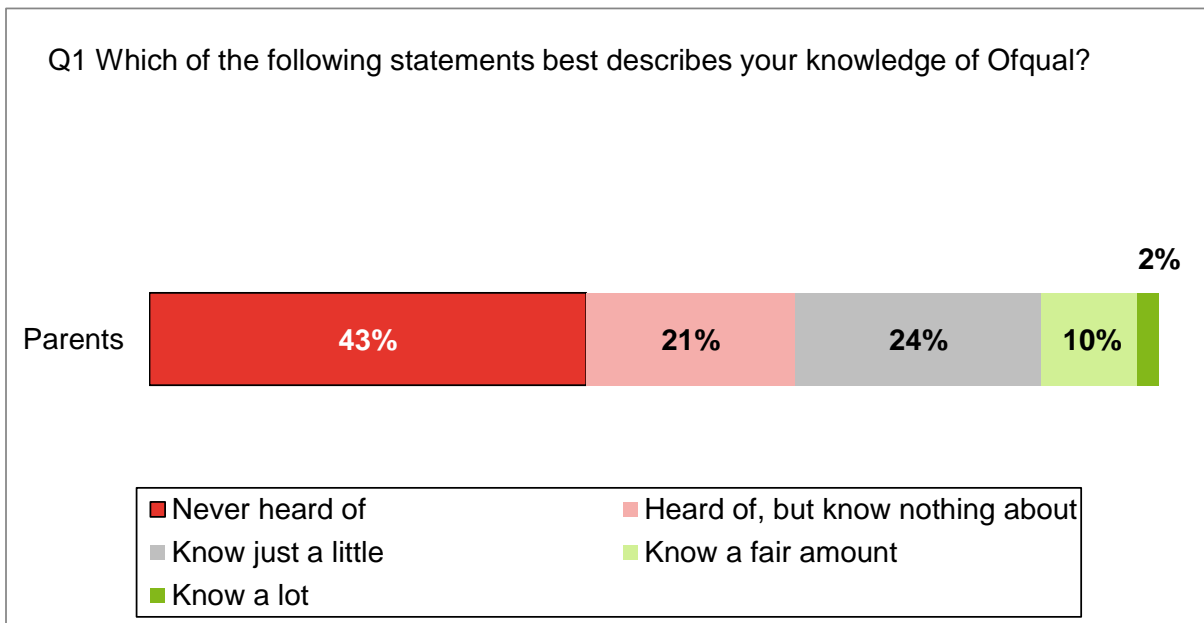
Those respondents who perceived Ofqual not to be effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications were asked to give reasons why they thought this was so (see figure 97 for student responses and appendix A for parent responses). The two most cited issues by both students and parents were the perceived existence of inconsistent marking (75 per cent of students and 83 per cent of parents) and inconsistent grading (70 per cent of students and 75 per cent of parents).

**Figure 91:** Unprompted awareness of Ofqual – students



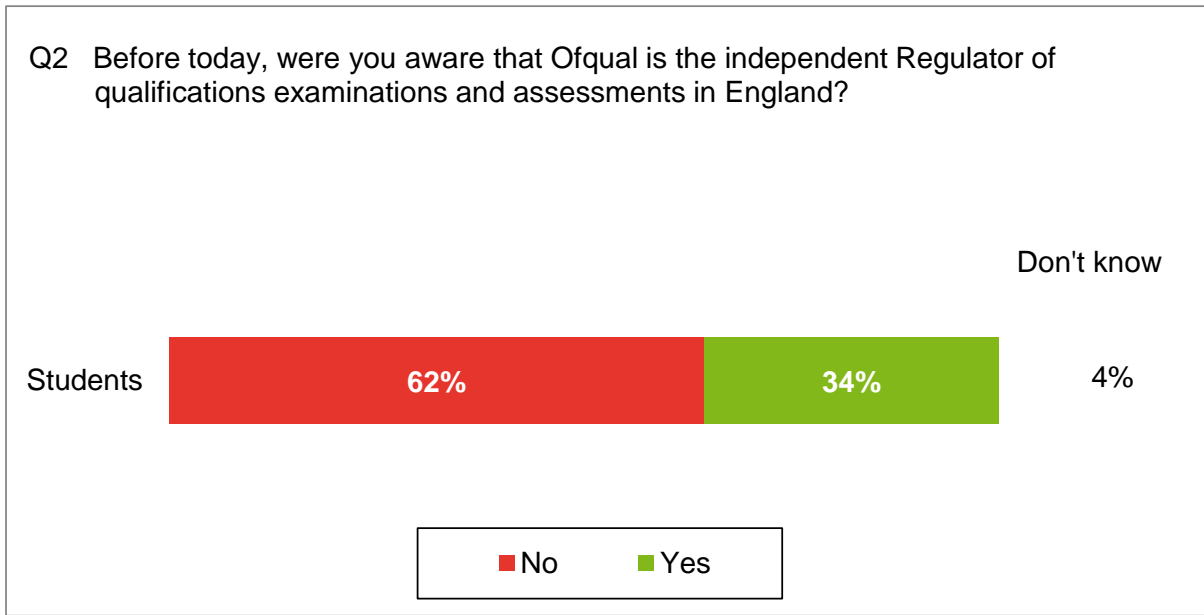
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 92:** Unprompted awareness of Ofqual – parents



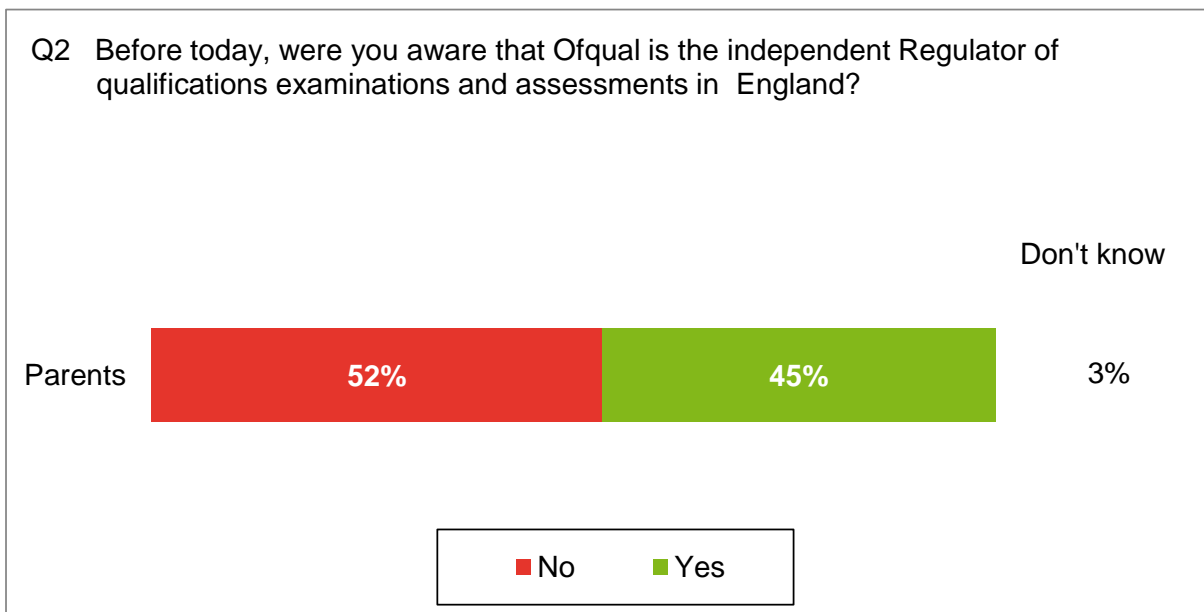
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 93:** Prompted awareness of Ofqual – students



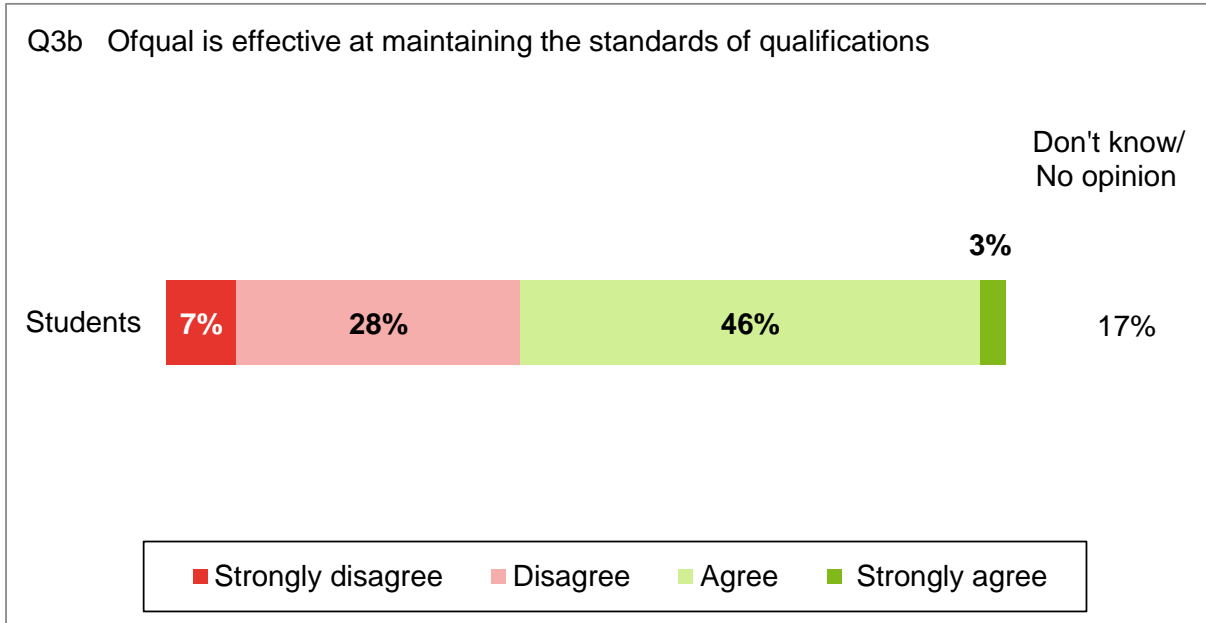
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 94:** Prompted awareness of Ofqual – parents



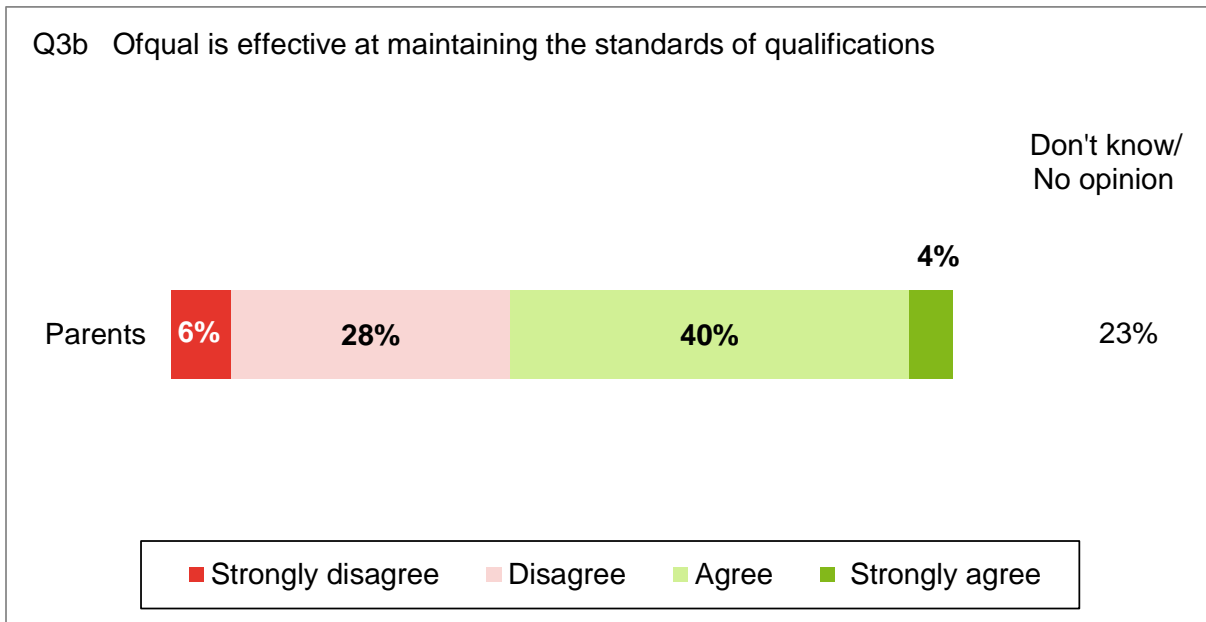
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 95:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – students



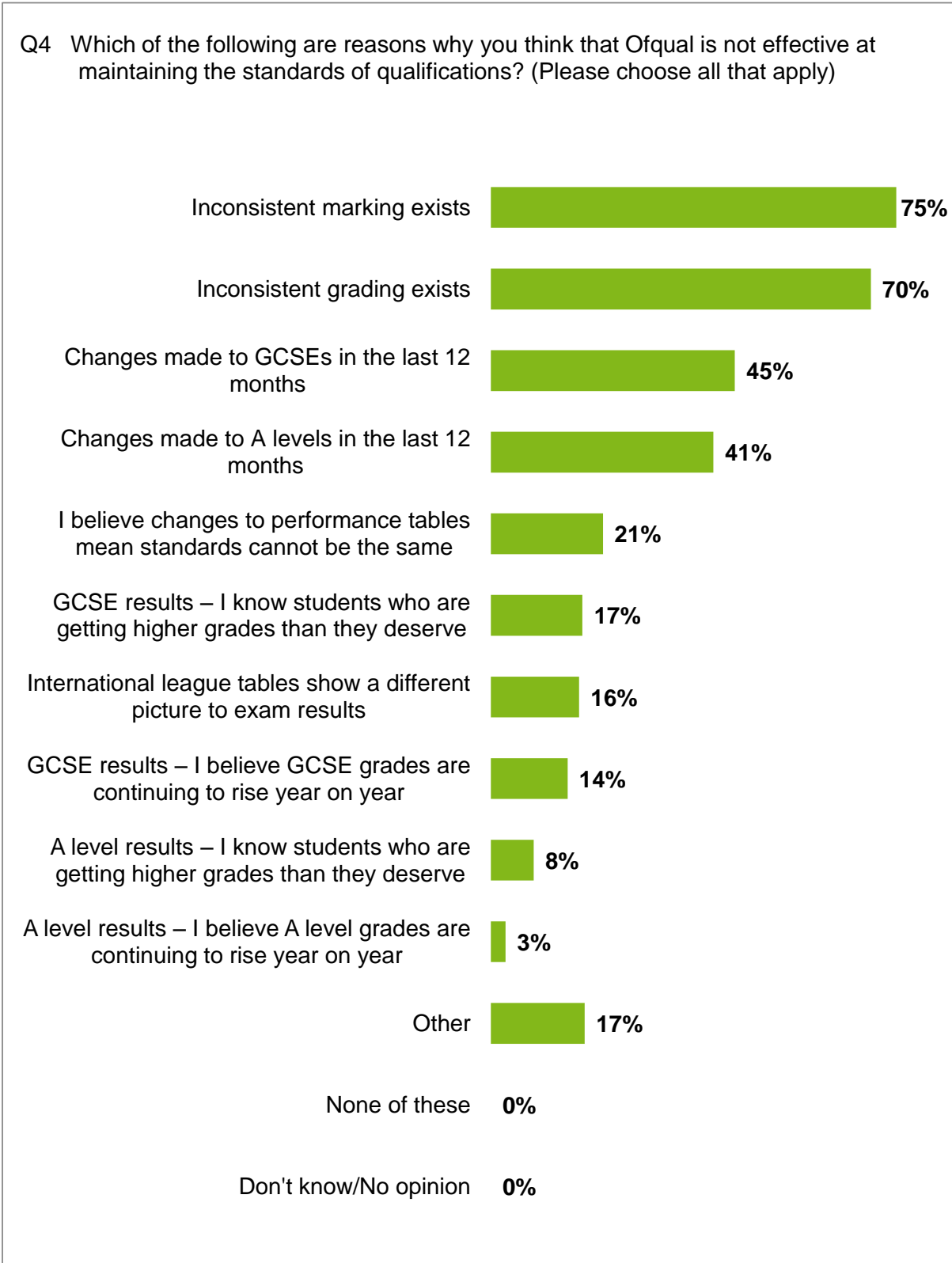
*Effective base: 120 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 96:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – parents



*Effective base: 144 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 97:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s ineffectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – students



*Effective base: 41 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*



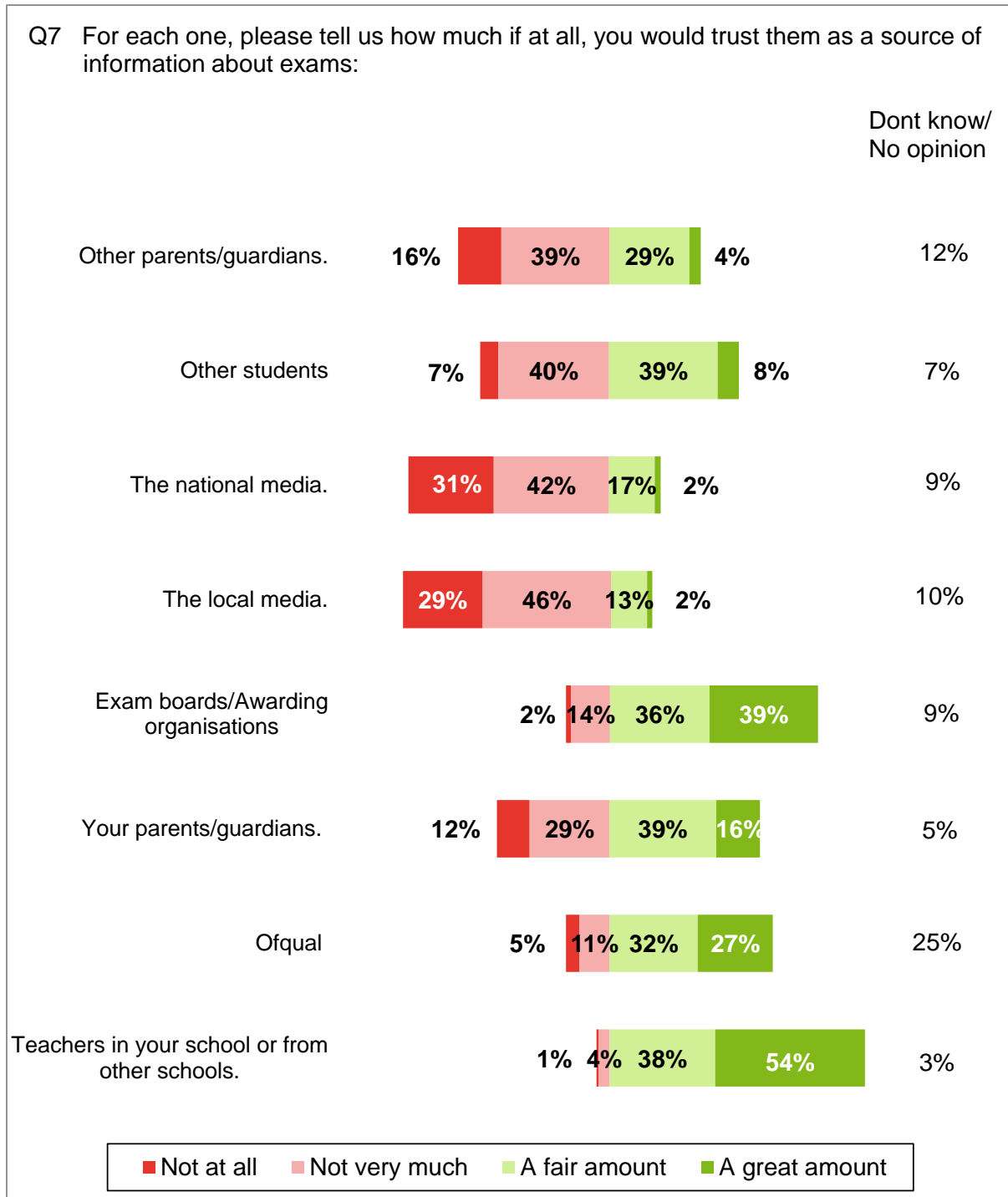
## **Trust in examination information**

Students and parents were asked how much they would trust various different sources of information about exams (see figures 98 and 99).

The most trusted source of information for students and parents was teachers in the student's school or teachers from other schools, with 92 per cent of students and 83 per cent of parents reporting either a great deal or a fair amount of trust. The second most trusted source of information was exam boards/awarding organisations (75 per cent of students and 66 per cent registering at least a fair amount of trust). Ofqual was quite well trusted by students and parents, with 79 per cent of students and 73 per cent of parents that registered a view reporting at least a fair amount of trust. Parents notably trusted their children for this information to a reasonable degree (67 per cent reported at least a fair amount of trust).

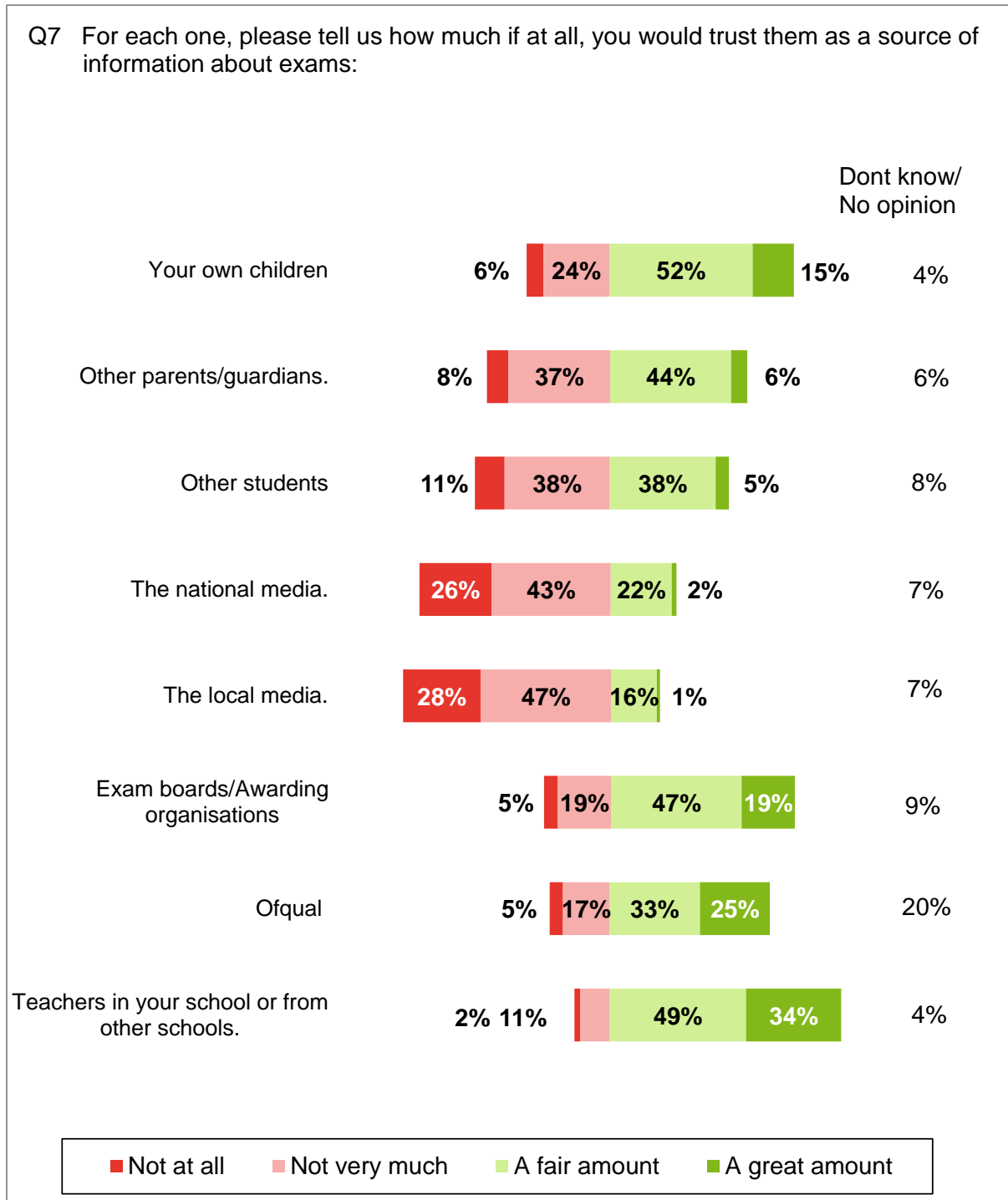
When parents were asked where they would most likely raise a concern about their children's grades, they overwhelmingly indicated that they would contact the teacher or school (29 per cent likely and 61 per cent very likely). More parents were likely to contact Ofqual than not. See figure 100 for the full set of responses.

**Figure 98:** Trusted sources of information about exams – students



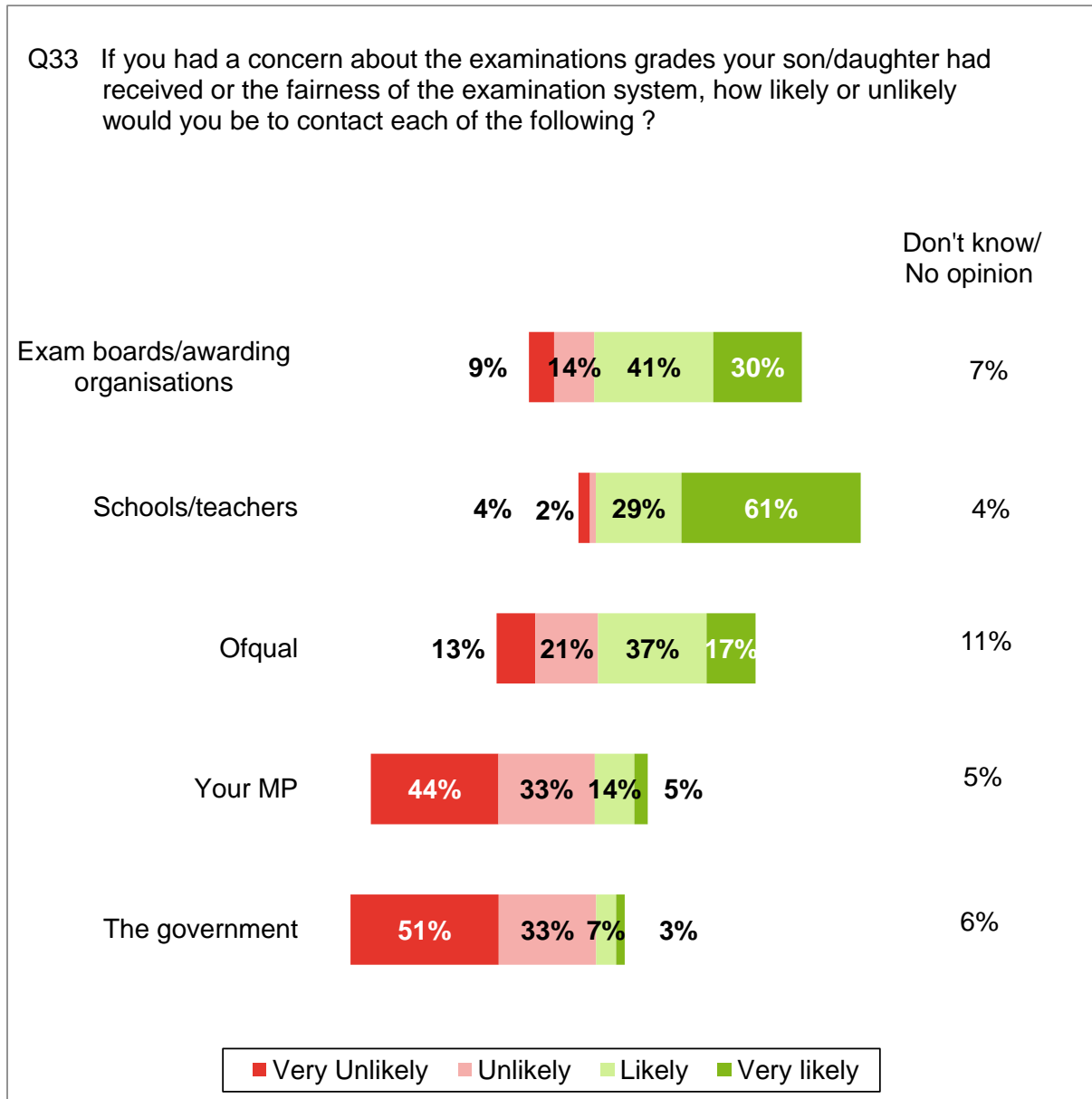
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 99:** Trusted sources of information about exams – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure 100:** Organisations to contact in the event of a query – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

## General public’s perceptions

### Confidence in the A level system

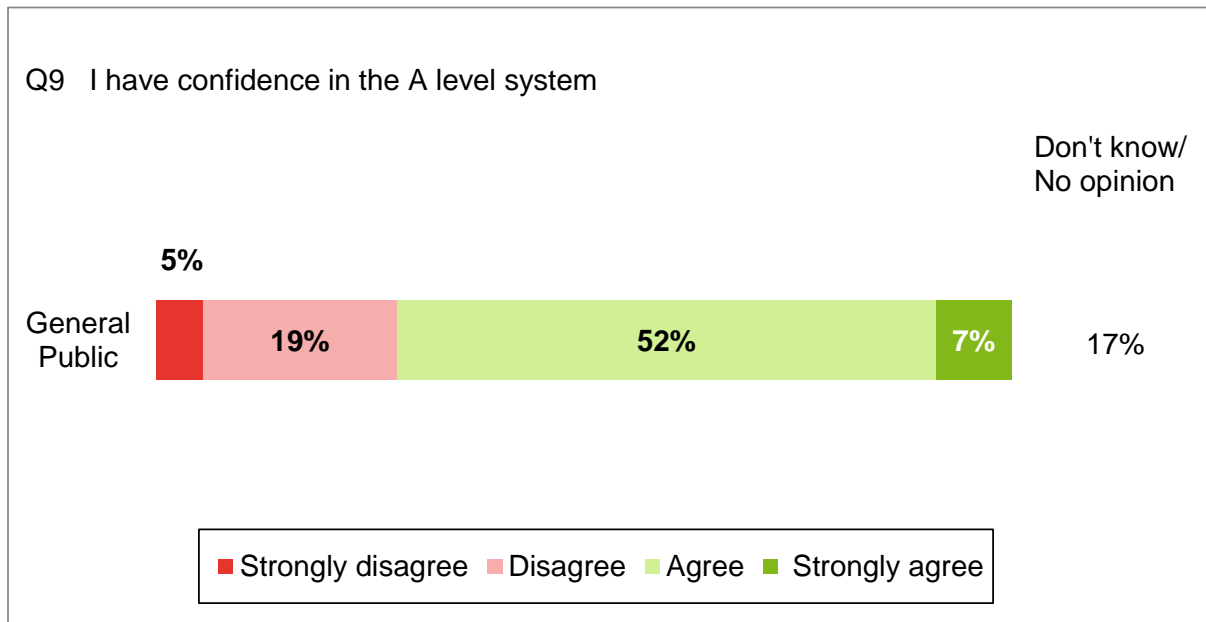
Confidence in the A level system was reasonably high among the general public, with 59 per cent of respondents expressing confidence and 24 per cent expressing a lack of confidence (see figure 101).

The general public reported that they had largely the same confidence in the A level system as last year, with 60 per cent of respondents (77 per cent of those registering a definitive response) expressing this view. Fourteen per cent stated that they had less confidence than last year (see figure 102).

As with the other respondent groups, a popular perceived strength of the A level system is that A levels are generally viewed as a trusted qualification, with 59 per cent selecting this reason (see figure 103). A relatively large proportion (42 per cent) also deemed A levels good preparation for further study.

The perceived constant change in the examination system was again the most frequently cited weakness among the general public, with 40 per cent selecting this reason. Sixteen per cent of respondents indicated that they had no concerns about the system. See figure 104 for a full set of responses.

**Figure 101:** Confidence in the A level system – general public



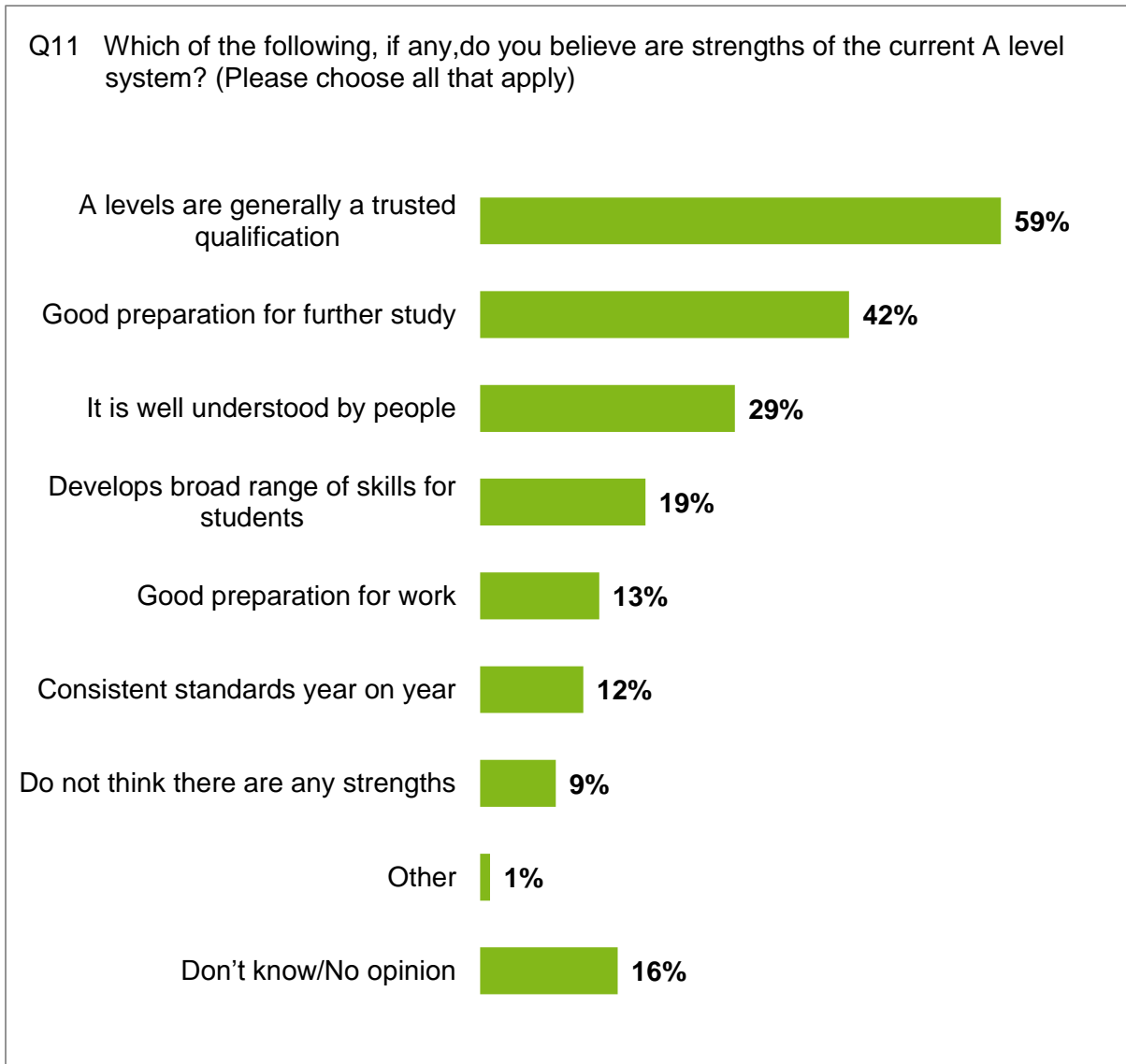
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 102:** Confidence in the A level system compared to last year – general public



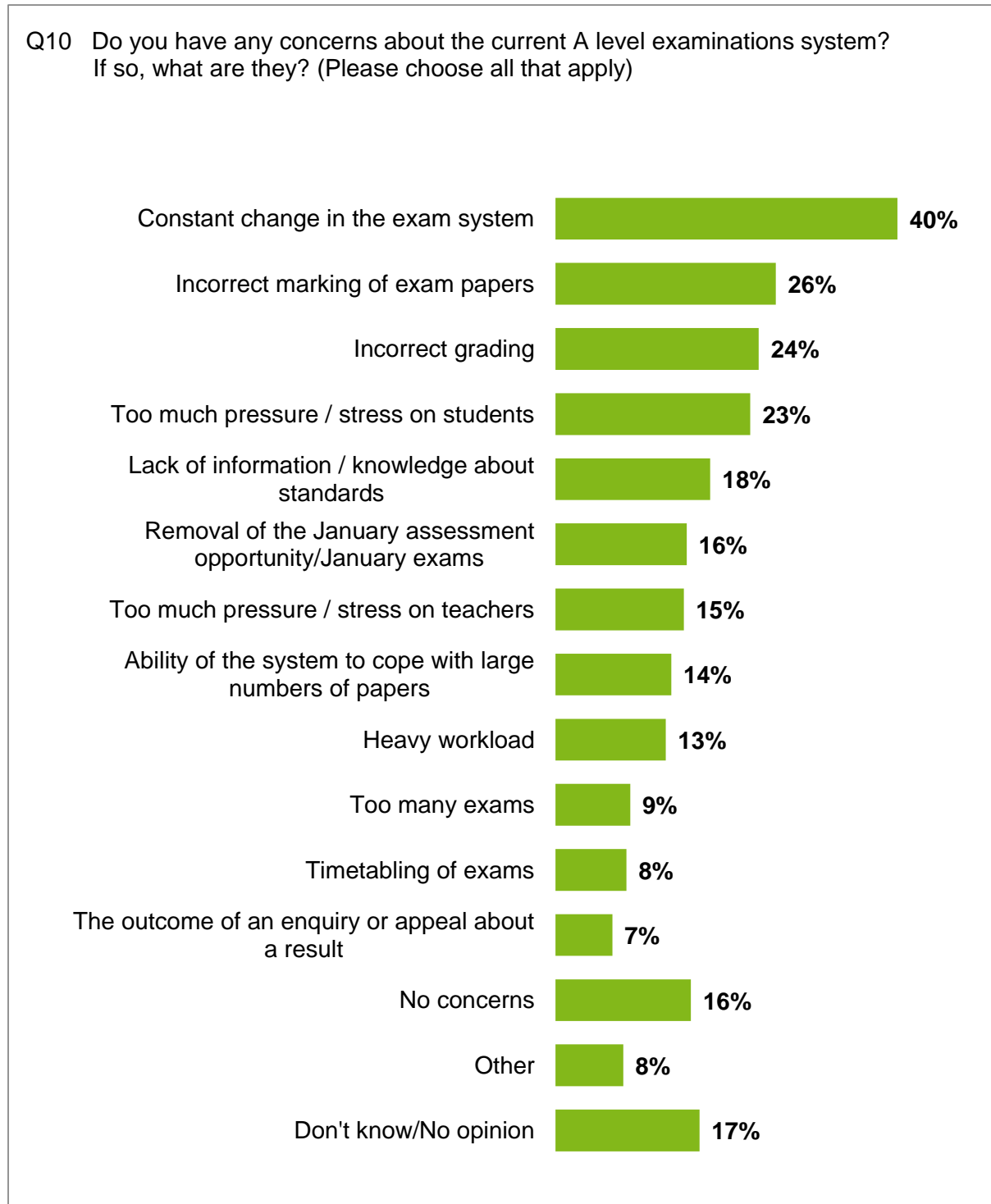
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 103:** Strengths of the A level system – general public



*Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.*

**Figure 104:** Concerns about the A level system – general public



Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.



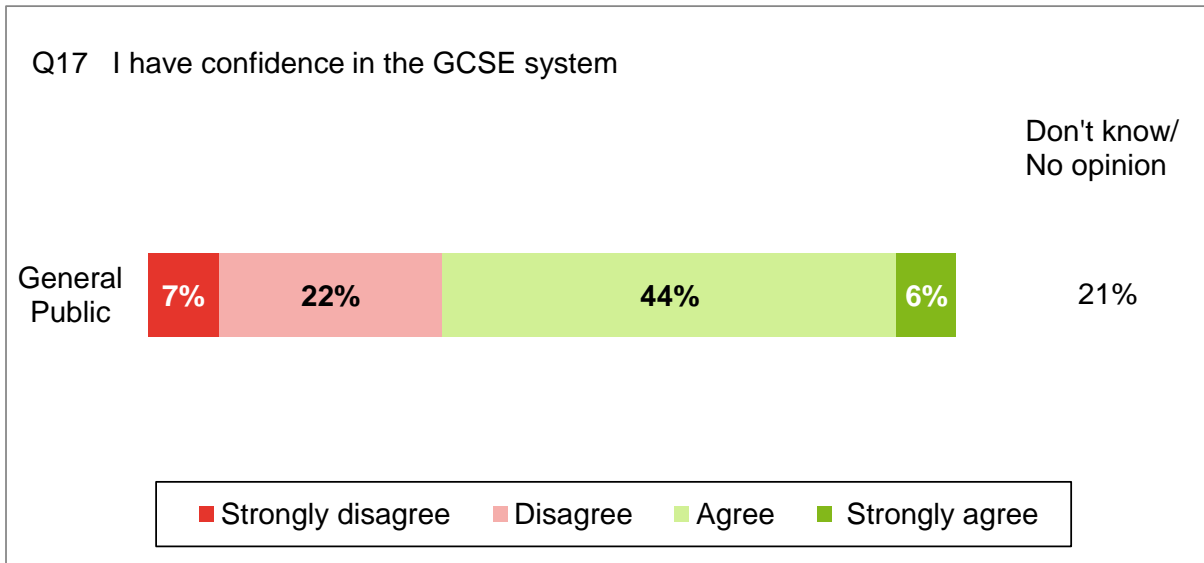
## **Confidence in the GCSE system**

Overall, 50 per cent of respondents from the general public expressed confidence in the GCSE system, 29 per cent expressed a lack of confidence and 21 per cent did not express an opinion (see figure 105). The reported confidence relative to last year remains the same for the majority of the general public (59 per cent), with 17 per cent reporting having less confidence and only three per cent having more confidence than last year. Twenty-two per cent expressed no opinion (see figure 106).

Respondents were invited to comment on what they believed to be the strengths of the GCSE system (see figure 107). The most frequently expressed strength was that GCSEs are generally a trusted qualification (40 per cent). Other responses included “GCSEs are good preparation for further study” (36 per cent) and “GCSEs are well understood by people” (30 per cent). Thirteen per cent did not perceive the system to have any strengths.

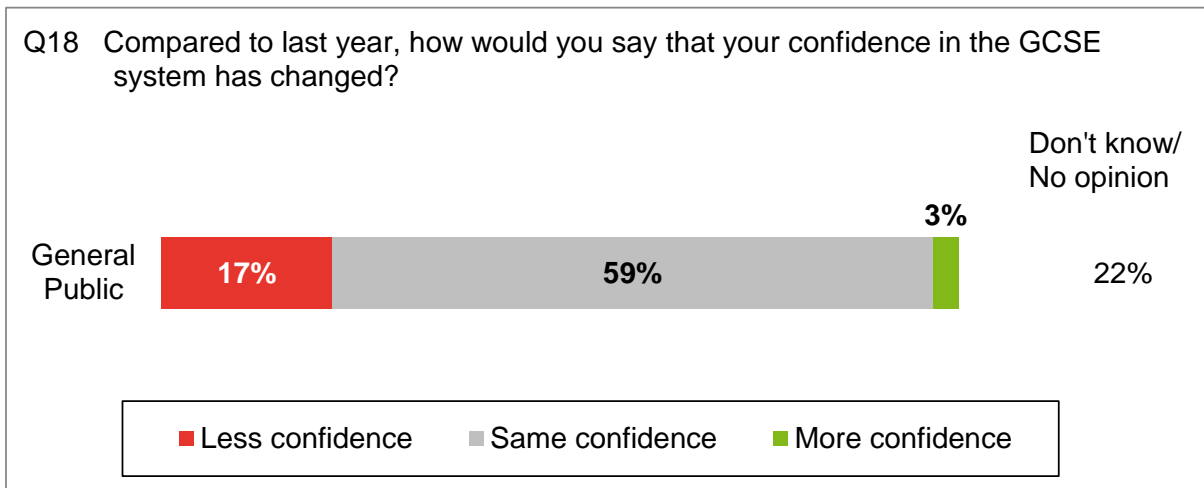
When questioned about concerns, as with all other respondent groups, the general public most frequently expressed concern regarding constant changes to the exam system (37 per cent). Incorrect marking and incorrect grading were the next most frequently selected concerns (22 per cent for both). Twenty-one per cent did not express an opinion. See figure 108 for the full range of options and responses.

**Figure 105:** Confidence in the GCSE system – general public



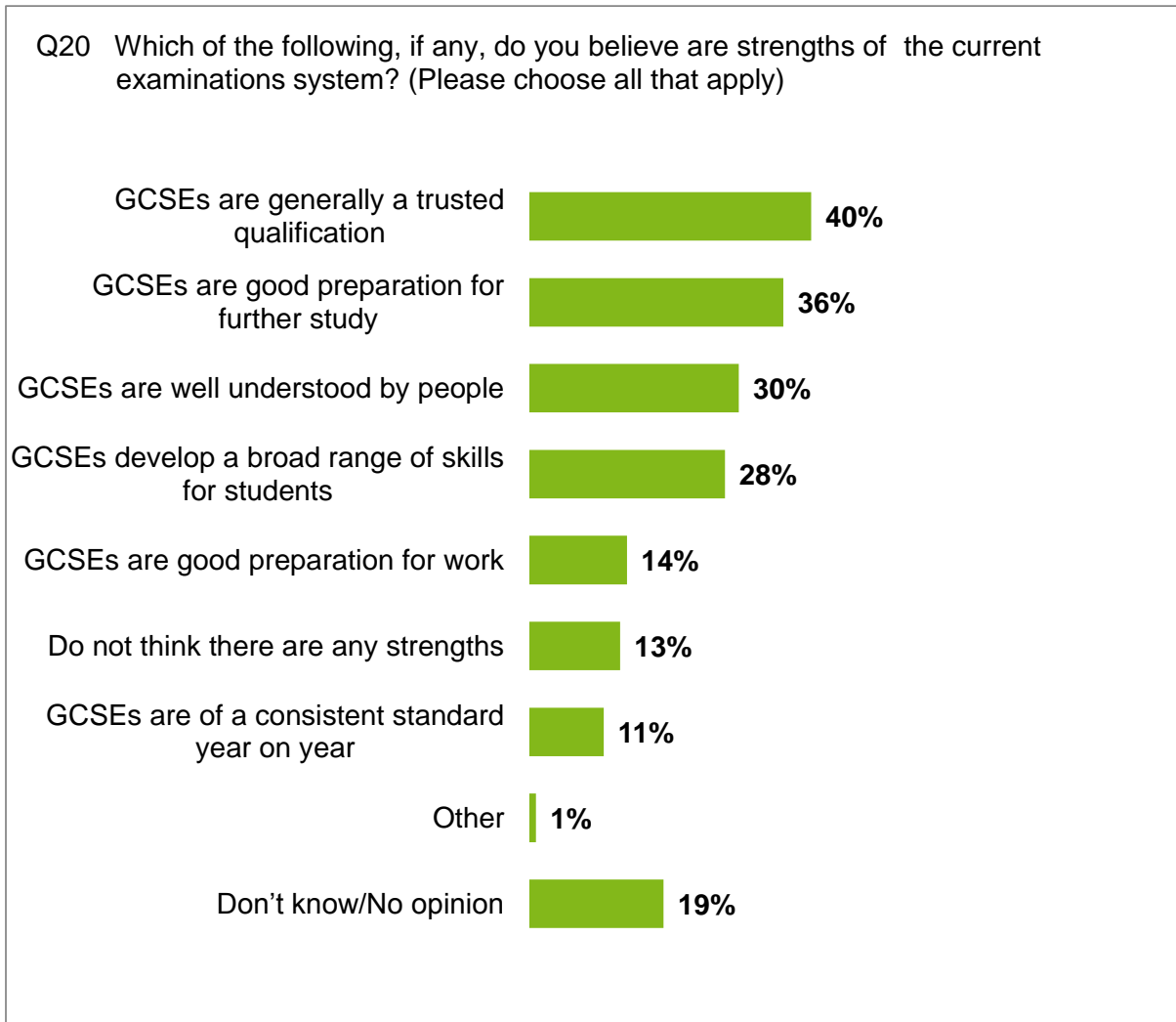
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 106:** Confidence in the GCSE system compared to last year – general public



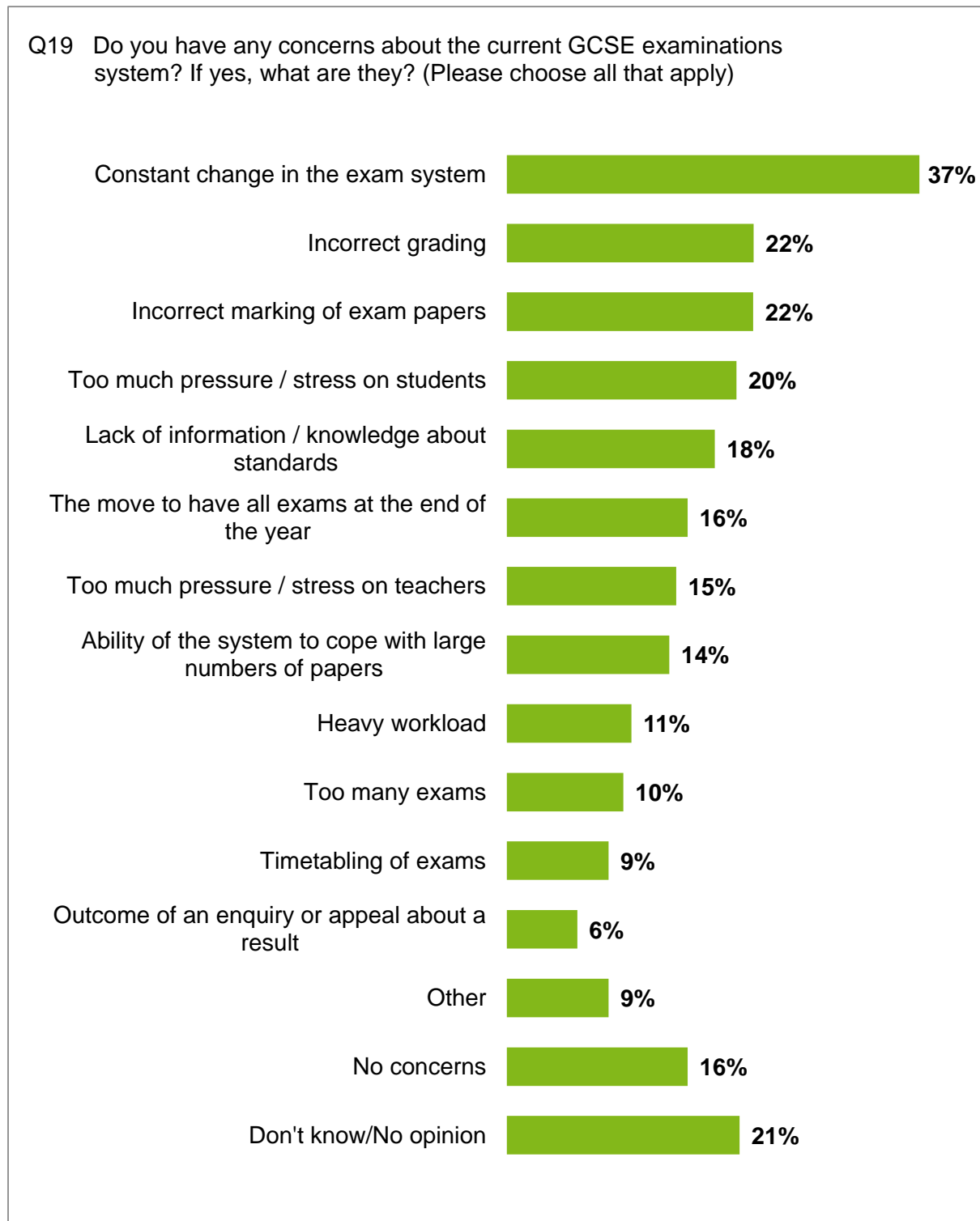
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 107:** Strengths of the GCSE system – general public



*Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.*

**Figure 108:** Concerns about the GCSE system – general public



*Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.*

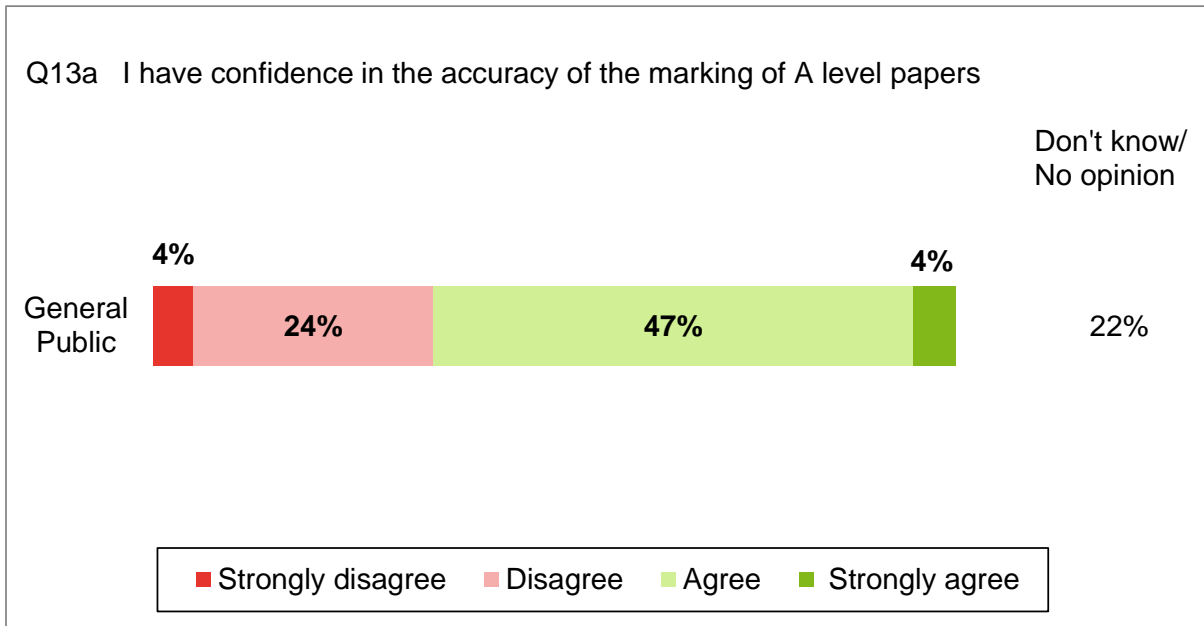
## **Perceptions of marking and grading**

Respondents were questioned about their perceptions of marking at both GCSE and A level. Responses from the general public are presented in figure 109 (A level) and figure 110 (GCSE). Overall, half of the general public questioned (51 per cent) were confident in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers and 47 per cent were confident about the marking of GCSEs. Across both levels, 28 per cent of respondents expressed a lack of confidence and 24 per cent chose not to express an opinion or did not know.

When asked whether they thought that all students received the right grade, more respondents perceived that they did not. Forty-five per cent of respondents thought that all A level students did not receive the right grade compared with 20 per cent who did (see appendix A). A very similar response pattern was received for GCSE, with 45 per cent believing not all students received the right grade and 19 per cent believing they did.

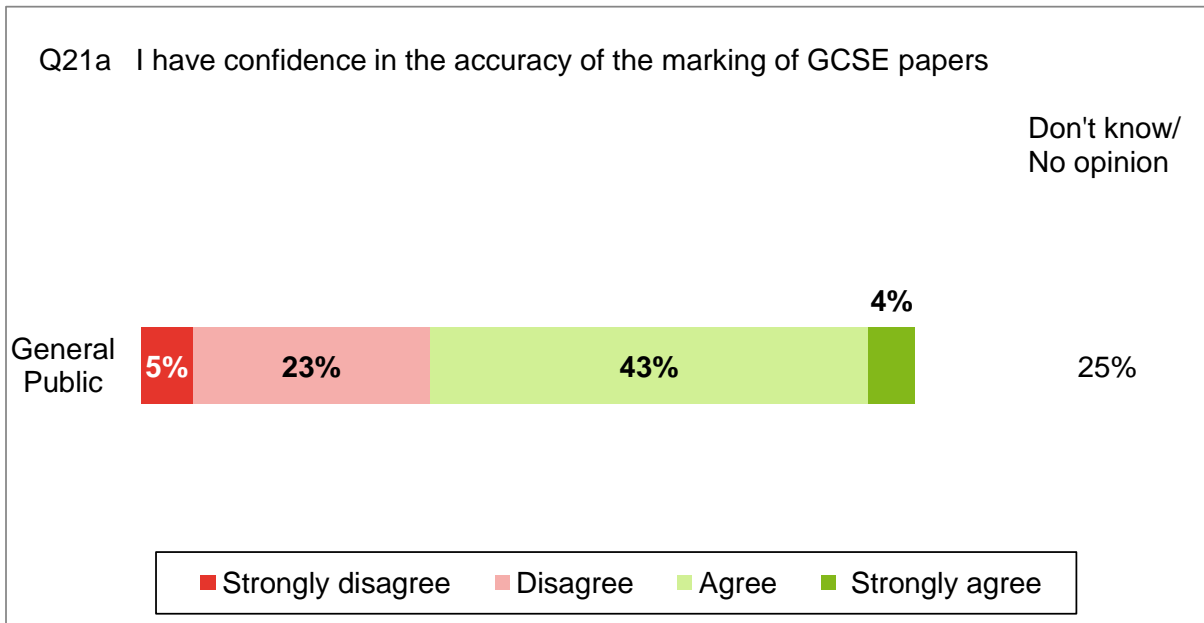
Respondents who felt that not all students got the right grade were questioned regarding their reasons for this view. At A level, inaccurate marking was the most frequently selected response (62 per cent), followed by students being inadequately prepared by their school or college for exams (44 per cent) and grade boundaries not being properly set (44 per cent) (see figure 111). A similar response pattern was observed at GCSE.

**Figure 109:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A levels – general public



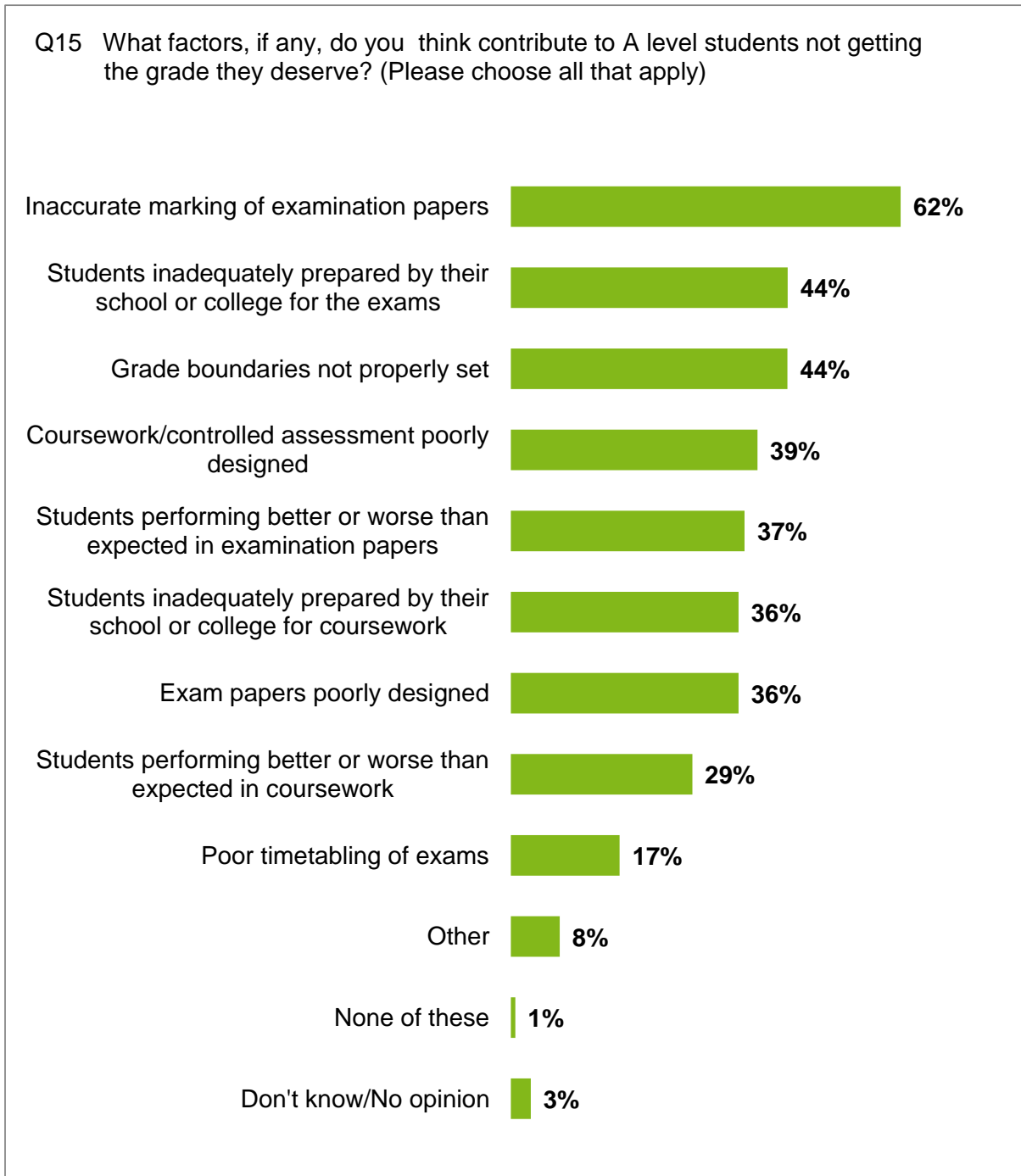
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 110:** Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs – general public



Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 111:** Factors contributing to incorrect grading at A level – general public



*Effective base: 773 members of the general public in England.*

## Perceptions of other qualifications

### Other academic qualifications

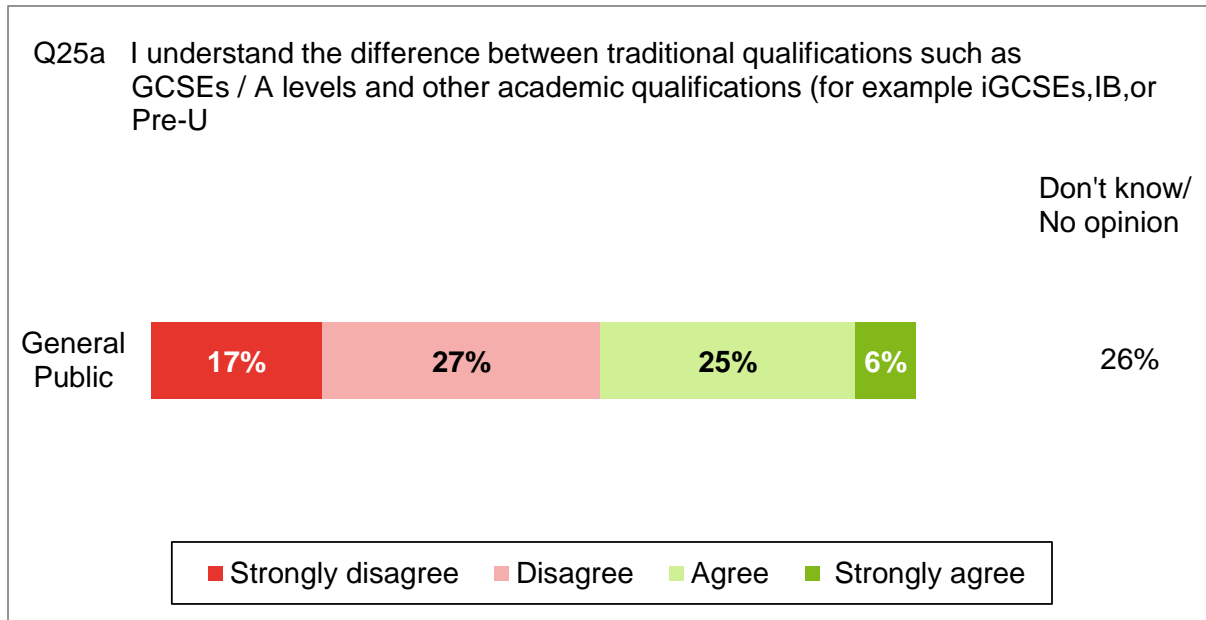
When questioned about their understanding of academic qualifications other than GCSEs and A levels, 44 per cent of respondents from the general public did not understand the difference whereas 31 per cent reported that they did (see figure 112). Regarding whether or not these qualifications were perceived to be more or less difficult to achieve than traditional qualifications, 57 per cent of respondents did not have, or did not register, an opinion. Nineteen per cent viewed them to be equally difficult to achieve, 17 per cent viewed non-GCSE and A level academic qualifications to be easier and 7 per cent perceived them to be harder (see figure 113).

### Vocational qualifications

Regarding vocational qualifications, 37 per cent of respondents claimed a good understanding of how different levels of these qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels whereas 34 per cent did not. Twenty-nine per cent did not express an opinion (see figure 114).

Of those who expressed a definitive opinion regarding the difficulty to achieve a vocational qualification compared to a traditional academic equivalent, just over half perceived them to be easier (see figure 115).

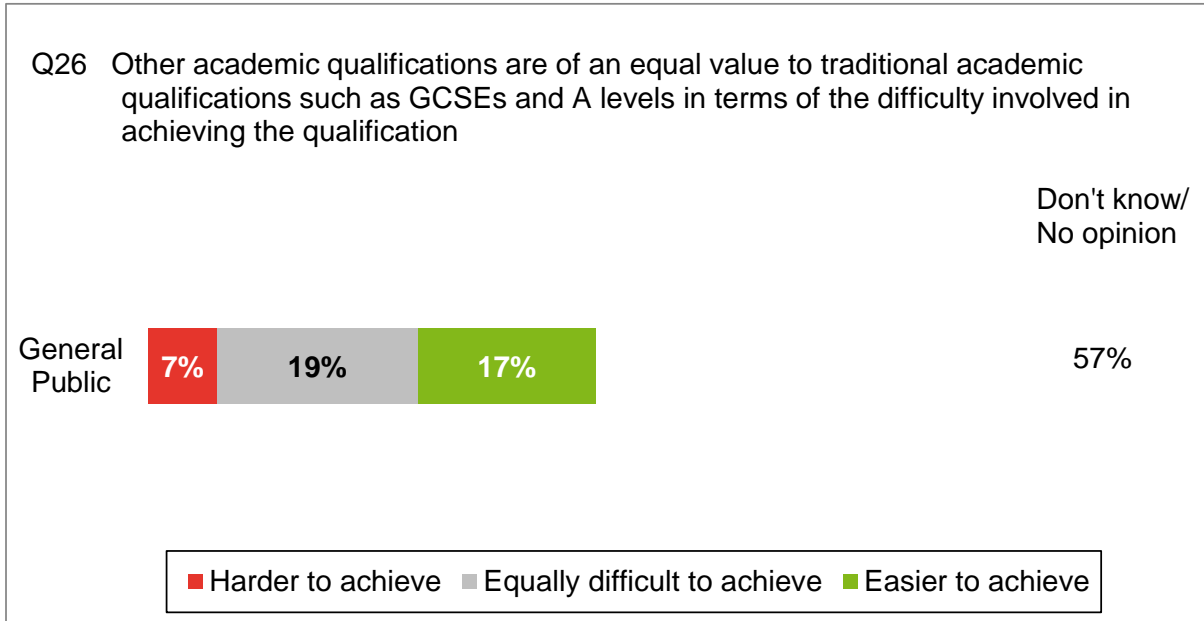
**Figure 112:** Understanding of the difference between traditional qualifications and other academic qualifications – general public



Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

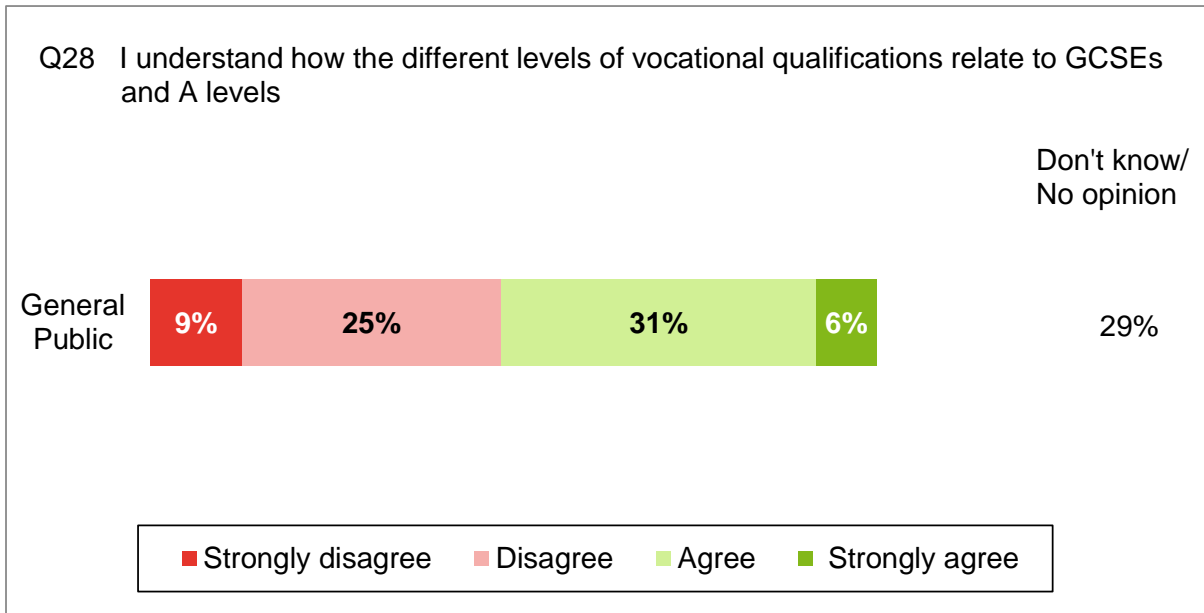


**Figure 113:** Perceptions of the value of other academic qualifications – general public



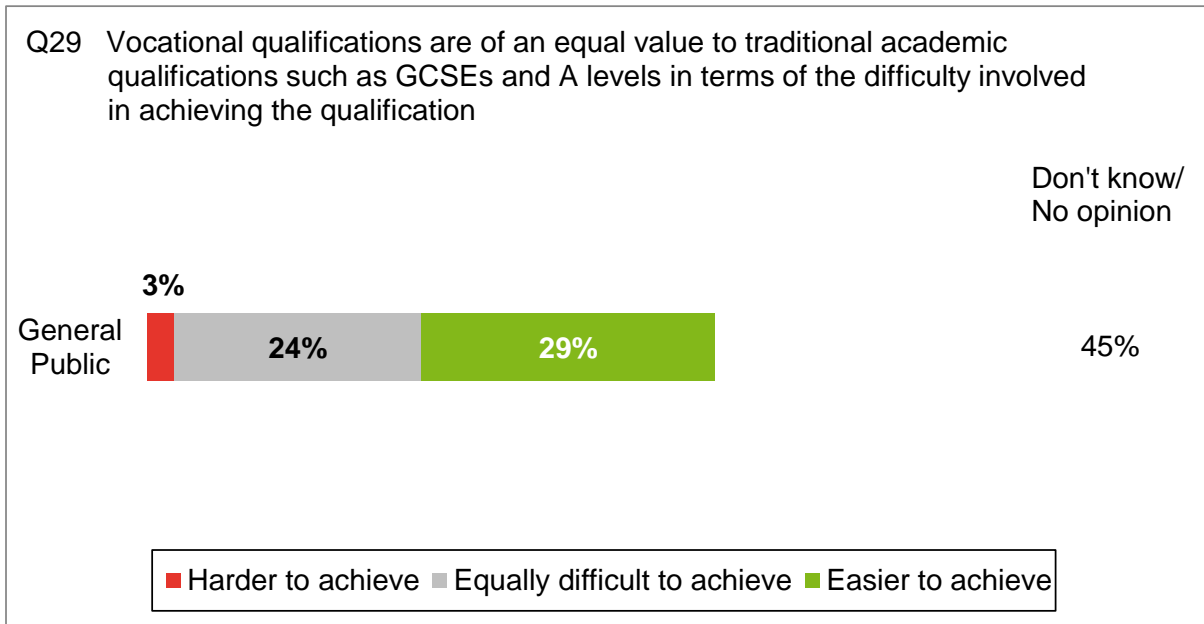
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 114:** Understanding of how the different levels of vocational qualifications relate to GCSEs and/or A levels – general public



Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 115:** Perceptions of the value of vocational qualifications – general public



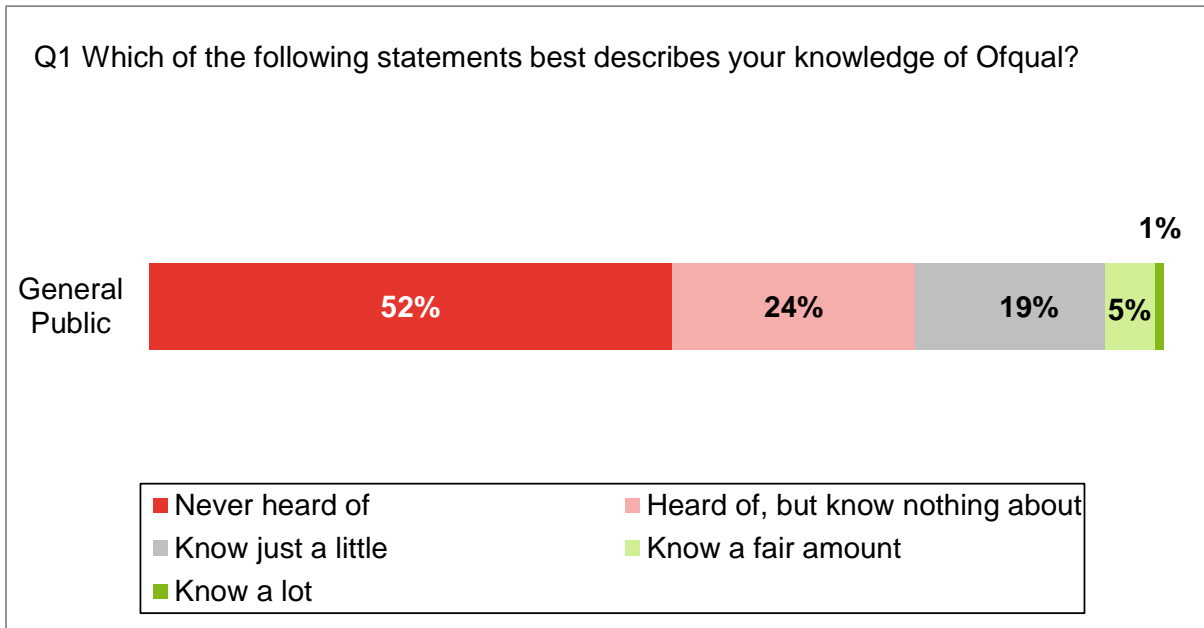
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England, YouGov online survey for Ofqual (February to March 2014).

### Awareness and perceptions of Ofqual

Prior to presenting respondents with a definition of Ofqual’s role (see page 48), one-quarter of respondents from the general public group reported knowing at least a little about Ofqual (see figure 116). Following presentation of the prompt, only one-third of respondents were aware of Ofqual’s role (see figure 117).

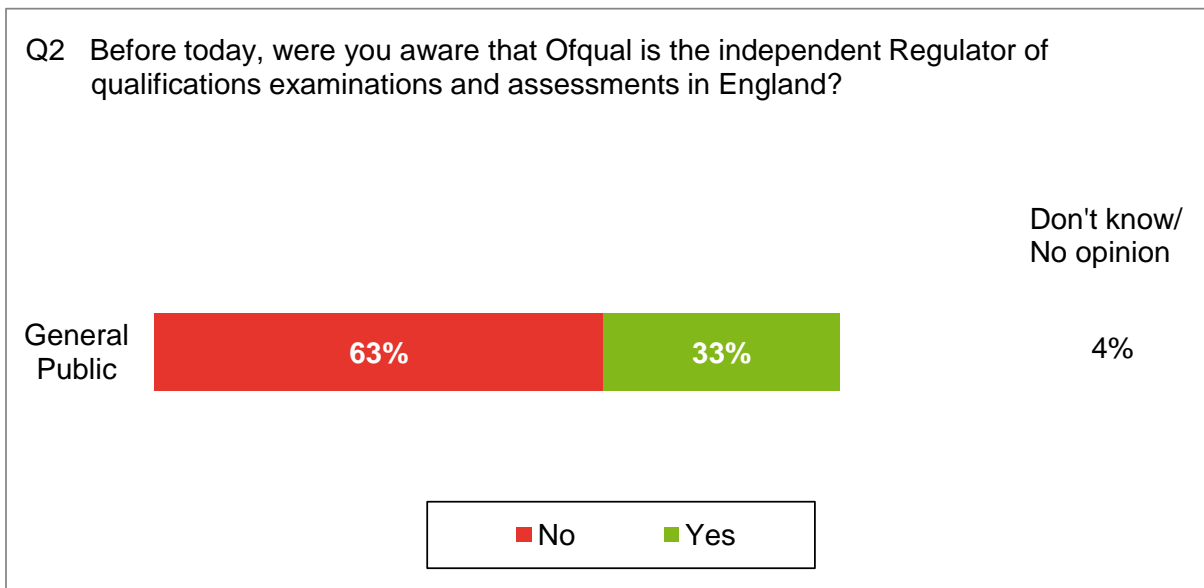
Those members of the public who stated that they were aware of Ofqual's role as an independent regulator were asked a series of additional questions regarding their perceptions of Ofqual. When asked about Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining standards of qualifications, 38 per cent perceived Ofqual to be effective and 35 per cent did not. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents did not know or expressed no opinion (see figure 118).

**Figure 116:** Unprompted awareness of Ofqual – general public



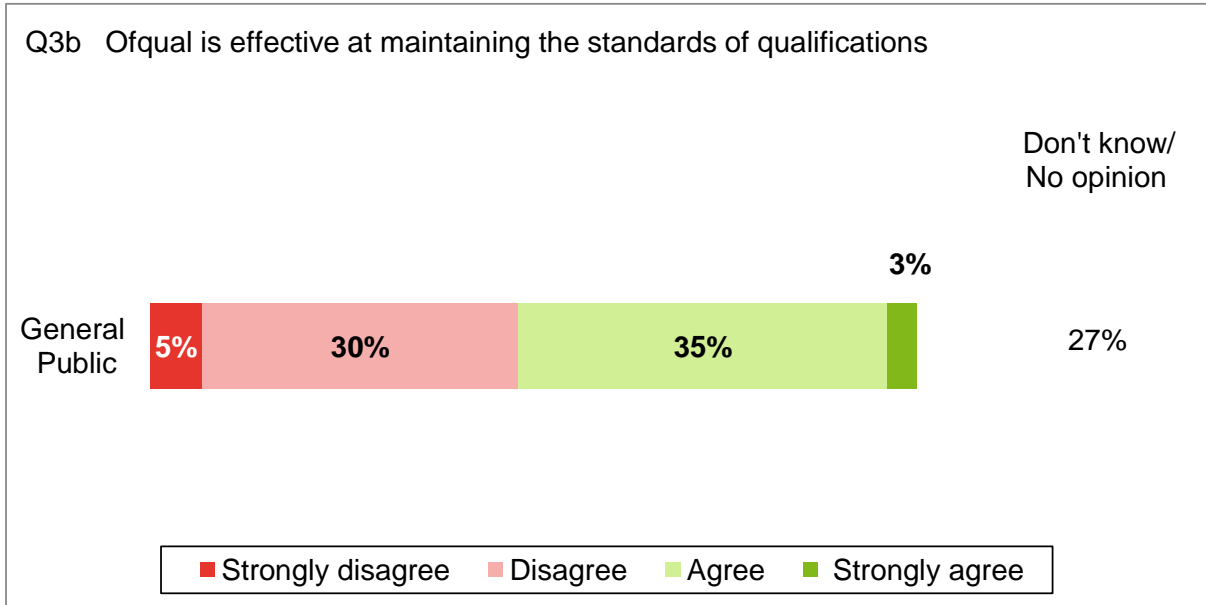
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 117:** Prompted awareness of Ofqual – general public



Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure 118:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – general public



Effective base: 586 members of the general public in England.

## Summary of findings

The following section draws together the key findings from the survey of the different respondent groups. Results have been grouped across respondent groups into the primary sections of the survey.

### Confidence in A levels

The confidence of respondents in the A level system was high. Eighty-one per cent of headteachers and 74 per cent of teachers expressed confidence, with lower proportions being reported for the other groups (down to 59 per cent for the general public). In addition a greater proportion of A level teachers registered confidence than did non-A level teachers (see figure 2). While it is encouraging that those within the system have confidence, to ensure that a qualification system is fit for purpose, it is clearly important that wider society also has high levels of confidence.

The most frequently cited strength of the A level system was that it is viewed as a trusted system, with this being the most popular selection for all respondent groups. Beyond this, teachers and headteachers prioritised the fact that A levels are well established, while A levels being viewed as providing good preparation for further study ranking highly across all respondent groups (56 per cent of headteachers, 57 per cent of teachers, 47 per cent of students, 47 per cent of parents and 42 per cent of the general public). Interestingly, in all the groups, less than 20 per cent of respondents felt that a strength of A levels was their usefulness in preparing students for work. However, given that the prevailing view is largely that A levels are most frequently used for university selection, this is not wholly unsurprising.

With the exception of students, all other respondent groups most frequently cited constant change in the system as being a weakness of A levels. This factor only ranked behind concerns around pressure/stress on students in the student respondent group. Parents' second most frequently cited weakness was pressure/stress on students (33 per cent) with pressure/stress on teachers being cited by 33 per cent of the teacher group. Headteachers frequently cited concerns around perceived incorrect marking (52 per cent) and incorrect grading (42 per cent).

### Confidence in GCSEs

Levels of confidence expressed across all respondent groups were lower at GCSE than at A level (55 per cent of headteachers, 54 per cent of teachers, 61 per cent of students, 55 per cent of parents and 50 per cent of the general public). Similar to the strengths selected at A level, the trustworthiness of the exam system was frequently cited at GCSE across all groups. In addition, GCSEs were frequently stated to provide good preparation for further study by students (42 per cent), parents (44 per cent) and the general public (36 per cent). GCSEs providing students with a broad range of skills also ranked reasonably highly for all respondent groups (44 per cent of headteachers, 39 per cent of teachers, 34 per cent of students, 35 per cent of

parents and 28 per cent of the general public). However, this did not translate into the perceived strength of preparing students for future work, with this option being relatively infrequently selected (as it was for A level).

The predominant weakness of the GCSE system was perceived to be the constant change in the system, with 79 per cent of headteachers, 69 per cent of teachers, 48 per cent of students, 53 per cent of students and 37 per cent of the general public citing this weakness. Similar to the responses received regarding A level, the concerns raised at GCSE by the different groups reflect where the impact of those issues are most likely to be felt. Namely, pressure on students was frequently cited by students (40 per cent) and parents (34 per cent) and pressure/stress on teachers was frequently cited by teachers (41 per cent). The move to end-of-year exams was cited as a prominent weakness by headteachers (44 per cent), teachers (40 per cent) and students (38 per cent) and is likely to underlie many of these concerns.

Given the high-profile nature of the current reforms and the implications of the detail of those reforms at both GCSE and A level (increased reliance on assessment at the end of the course), it is not surprising that these issues are being highlighted in this survey and that they are likely having the greatest impact on perceptions and confidence.

### **Marking and grading**

Regarding confidence in marking, headteachers were somewhat of an outlier from the other groups. In the other groups, at least around twice as many respondents expressed confidence in A level marking than did not, but the headteachers expressed much greater concern, with slightly more respondents expressing a lack of confidence than confidence. This tendency was also reflected at GCSE with headteachers having less confidence in marking (38 per cent confident and 57 per cent not confident) compared with other groups (for example 55 per cent vs. 39 per cent for teachers) and all groups having less confidence at GCSE than at A level. Given that the processes employed for the marking of GCSEs and A levels are notionally the same, this difference in opinion between the two levels could be a product of other issues rather than purely marking. Concerns around marking at GCSE may be more deeply felt than at A level, for two reasons. First, the high-profile interest around grading in recent years could mean that concerns regarding grading may actually be being reflected in views of marking. Second, the GCSE system faces greater scrutiny than the A level system due to the arguably greater consequences of GCSE results for schools.

Inaccurate marking and incorrect grade boundaries were the most frequently cited reasons for students receiving grades that they did not deserve. However, all respondent groups recognised that this may be partly due to students' performances varying on the day of the exam (better or worse than expected). For example, with

reference to A levels, 42 per cent of headteachers and 52 per cent of students cited this as a cause of students not getting the right grade.

### **Understanding of other qualifications**

Not surprisingly, the reported familiarity of respondents with the various different types of qualifications that are available varied greatly between groups. Eighty-seven per cent of headteachers reported having a good understanding of the difference between GCSE/A levels and other academic qualifications, with the equivalent figure for the general public being 31 per cent. The general public were marginally more confident about their understanding of the relationship between GCSE/A levels and vocational qualifications (37 per cent) and 76 per cent of headteachers reported that they understood the relationship between these two types of qualification.

Universally, when comparing the relative difficulty of achieving equivalent qualifications in non-GCSE/A level qualifications (alternative academic, vocational and applied), the prevailing view was that achieving these alternatives was either similar to GCSEs and A levels or that they were easier. Only a small proportion of respondents felt that achieving equivalent qualifications in these other areas was more difficult. However, it should be noted that many respondents did not feel in a position to judge, with a high proportion not responding or stating that they did not know. For example, 40 per cent of students did not provide a view of whether or not other academic qualifications were more or less difficult to achieve than GCSEs/A levels. This may be a reflection of the lack of awareness of these issues or may simply reflect the challenges of drawing comparisons of difficulty between potentially disparate groups of qualifications.

### **Perceptions and awareness of Ofqual**

The range of reported awareness of Ofqual's role varied hugely across respondent groups. Almost all headteachers reported to know at least something about what Ofqual do, while this was the case for only 24 per cent of respondents from the general public. Headteachers and teachers were most likely to express a view regarding Ofqual's effectiveness, with more than half (55 per cent of headteachers and 53 per cent of teachers) believing Ofqual is effective at regulating the examination system. However, a considerable proportion of both groups disagreed (41 per cent of headteachers and 35 per cent of teachers). Perceptions of Ofqual's effectiveness in maintaining qualification standards yielded similar but slightly more negative and opposed results. Fifty-five per cent of headteachers and 44 per cent of teachers believed that Ofqual is effective in maintaining qualifications standards, with 44 per cent of both groups believing that Ofqual is not.

Teachers were also asked to comment on their perceptions of Ofqual's performance at communicating with stakeholders. At least 40 per cent of both headteachers and teachers believed that when Ofqual makes a decision it is clearly explained and can be understood. However, evidence showed that communication with the teaching

profession could be improved. Forty-eight per cent of headteachers and 41 per cent of teachers thought that Ofqual did not provide enough information to allow them to understand how its decisions will work in practice. Likewise, around half of both headteachers (53 per cent) and teachers (47 per cent) did not perceive Ofqual as effective in communicating its decisions to stakeholders.

More than half of head teachers (73 per cent) and teachers (66 per cent) trusted us as a source of information. However, other teachers were the most trusted source of information for both headteachers (88 per cent) and teachers (87 per cent), followed by exam boards (84 per cent of both groups).

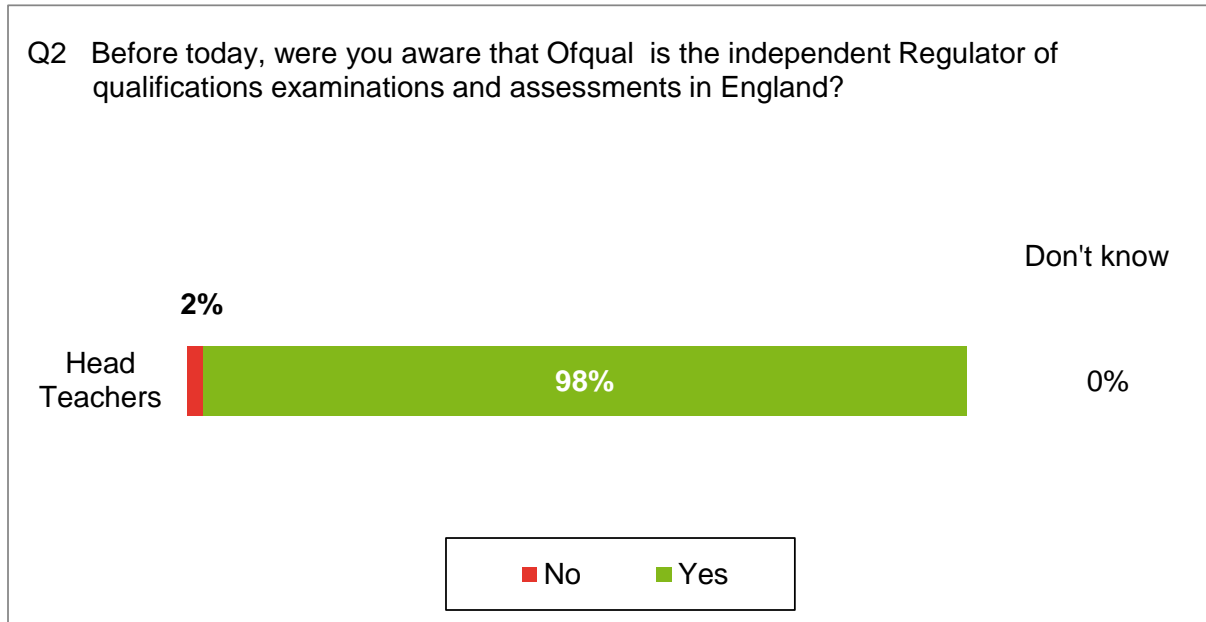
Those headteachers and teachers who did not trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams specified three main reasons for their views: Ofqual's perceived lack of independence from the government (60 per cent of headteachers and 52 per cent of teachers); lack of contact with, or information received from, Ofqual (29 per cent of headteachers and 49 per cent of teachers); and exam boards being the first point of call for information (28 per cent of headteachers and 53 per cent of teachers).



## Appendix A: Additional figures

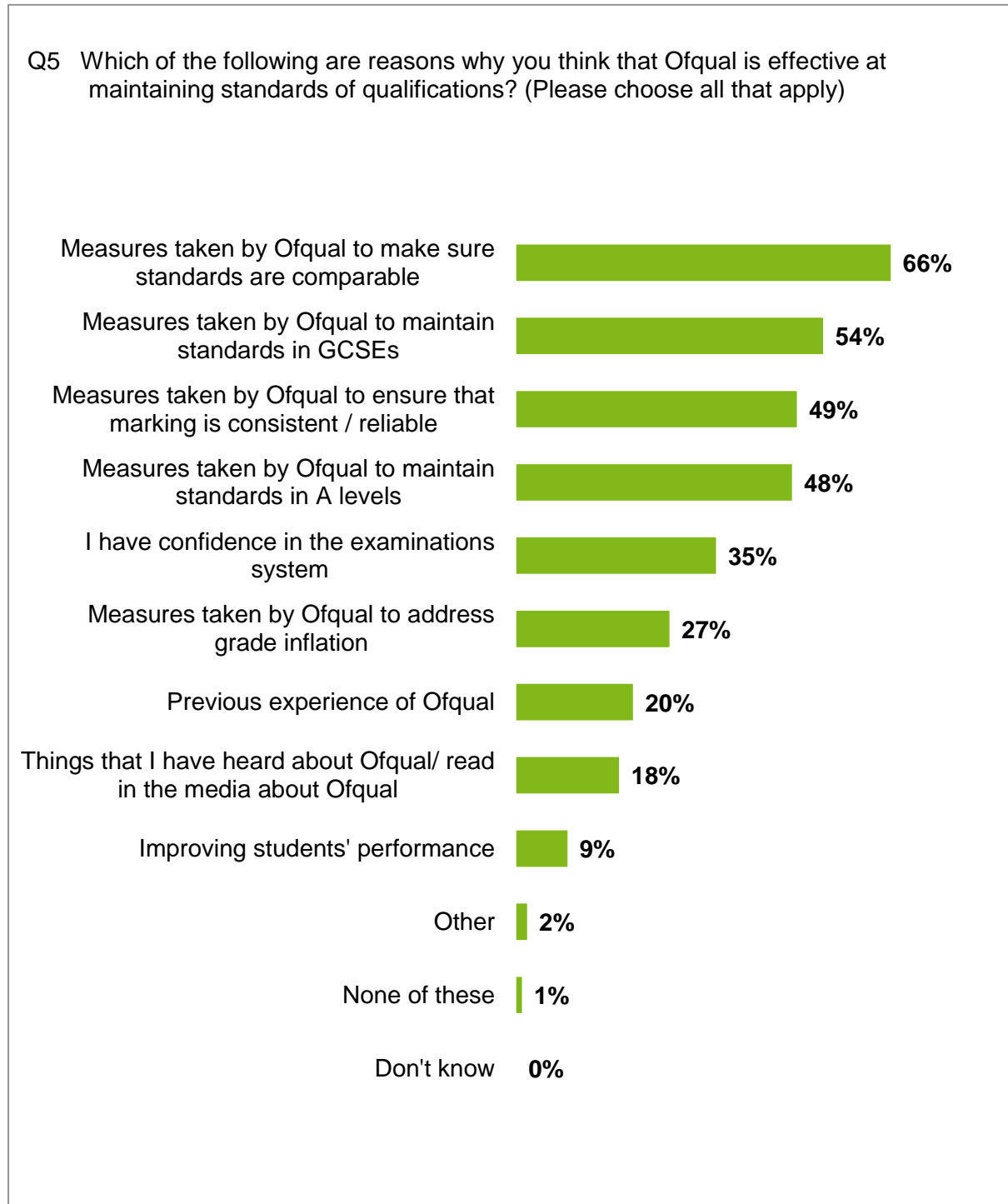
### Headteachers

**Figure A1:** Prompted awareness of Ofqual – headteachers



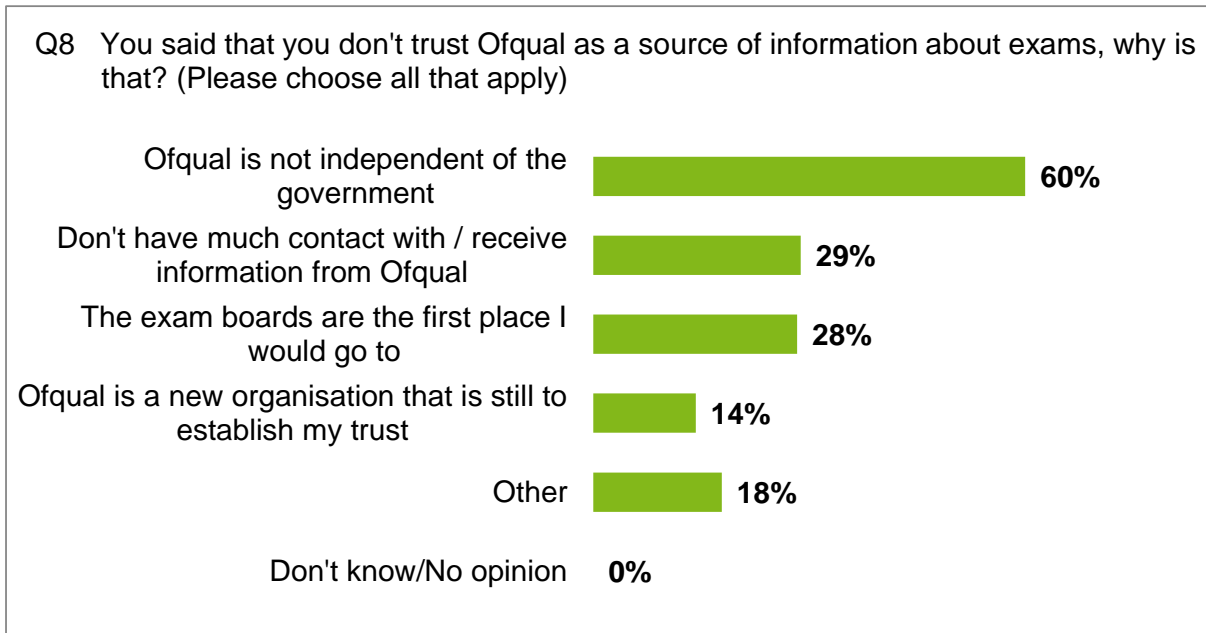
*Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.*

**Figure A2:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – headteachers



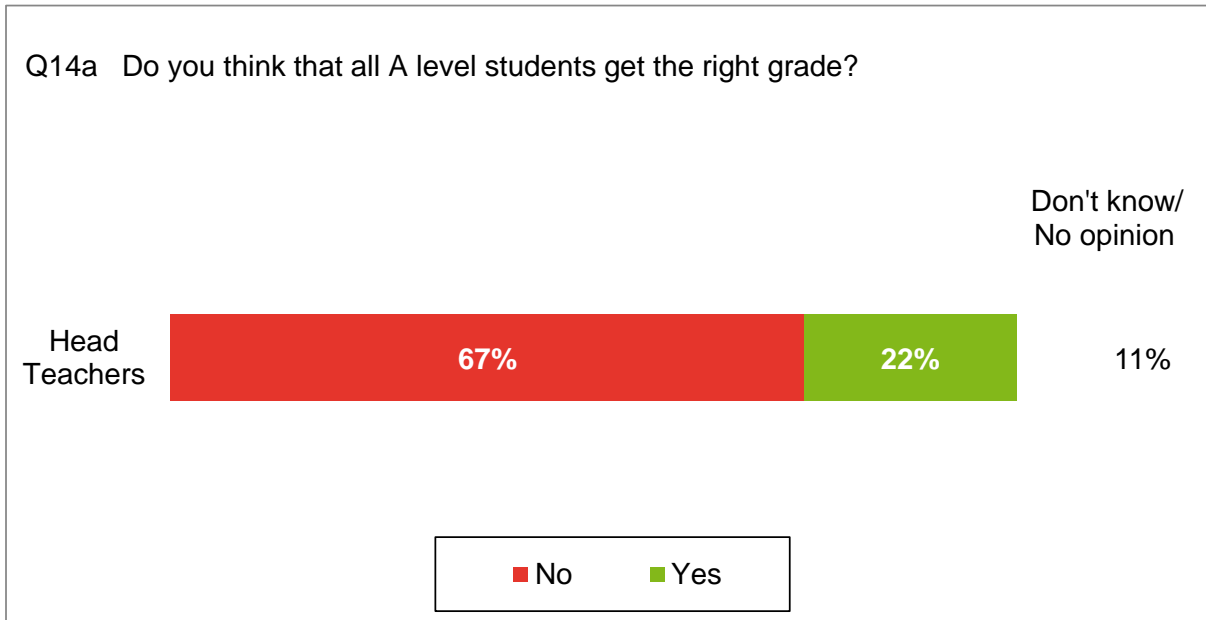
*Effective base: 92 headteachers in England.*

**Figure A3:** Reasons given for lack of trust in Ofqual – headteachers



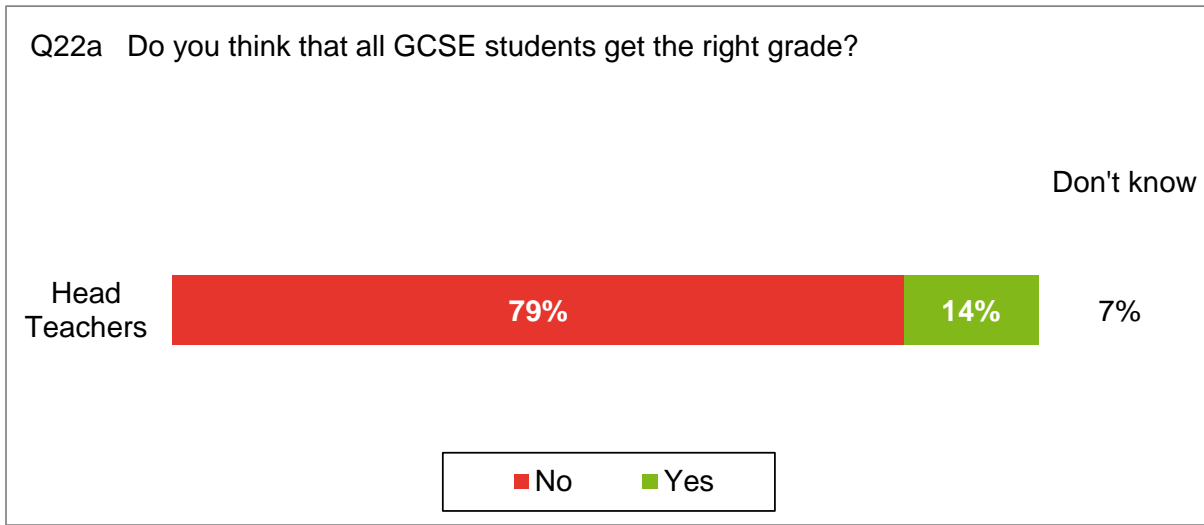
Effective base: 52 headteachers in England.

**Figure A4:** Perceptions of all A level students getting the right grades – headteachers



Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

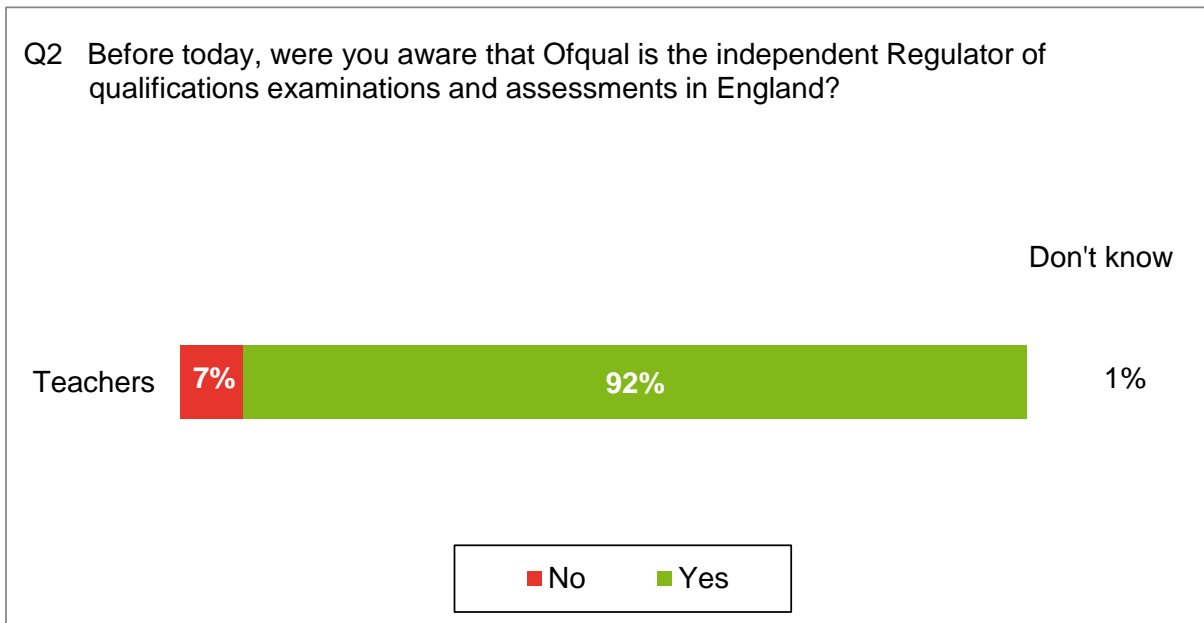
**Figure A5:** Perceptions of all GCSE students getting the right grades – headteachers



Effective base: 205 headteachers in England.

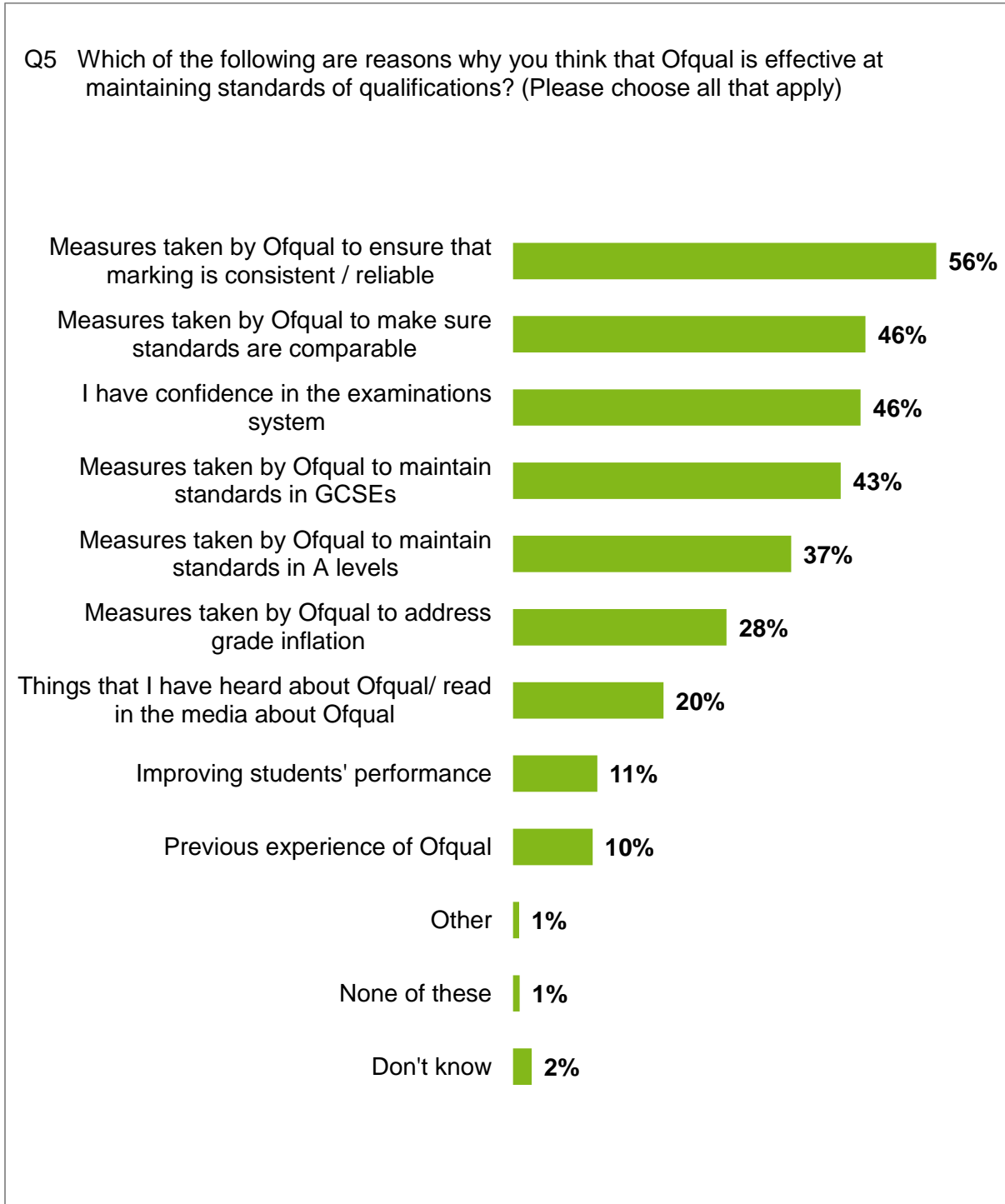
## Teachers

**Figure A6:** Prompted awareness of Ofqual – teachers



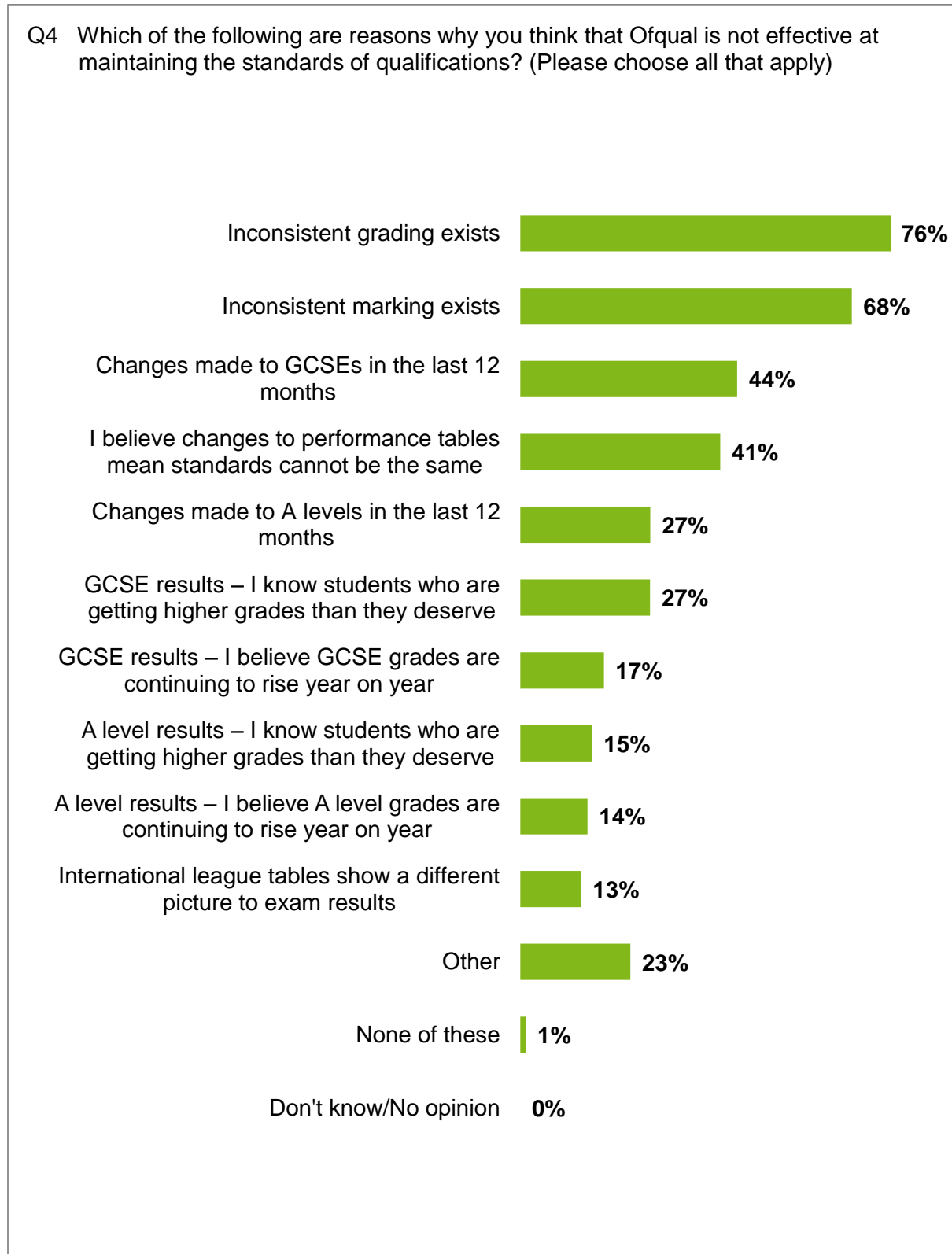
Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

**Figure A7:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – teachers



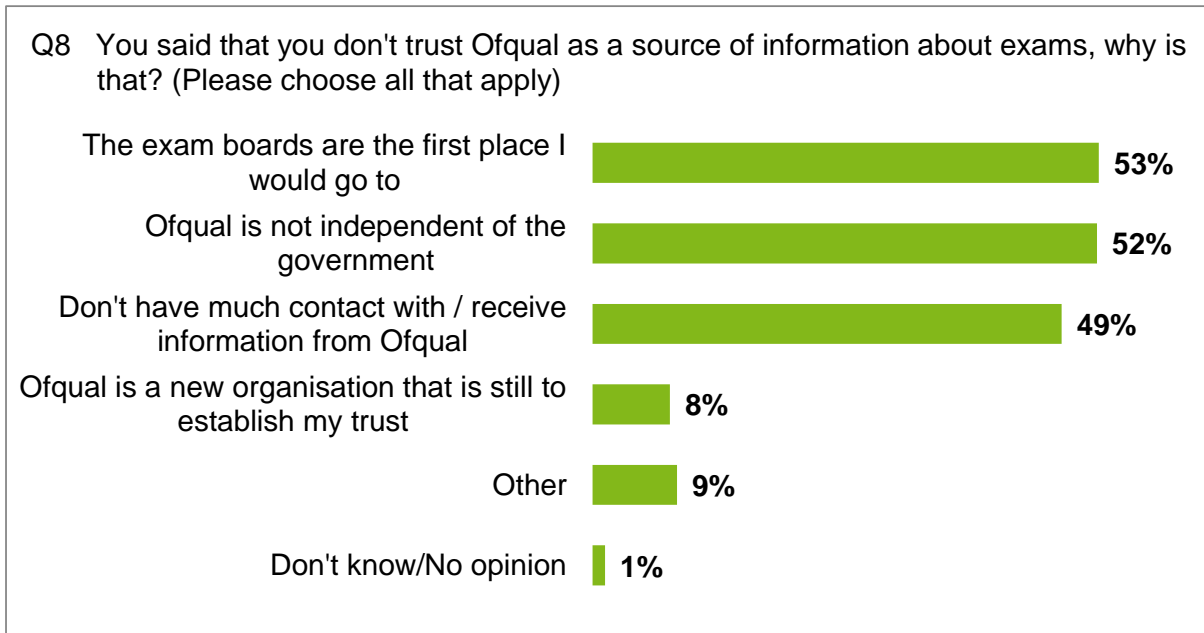
*Effective base: 201 teachers in England.*

**Figure A8:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s ineffectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – teachers



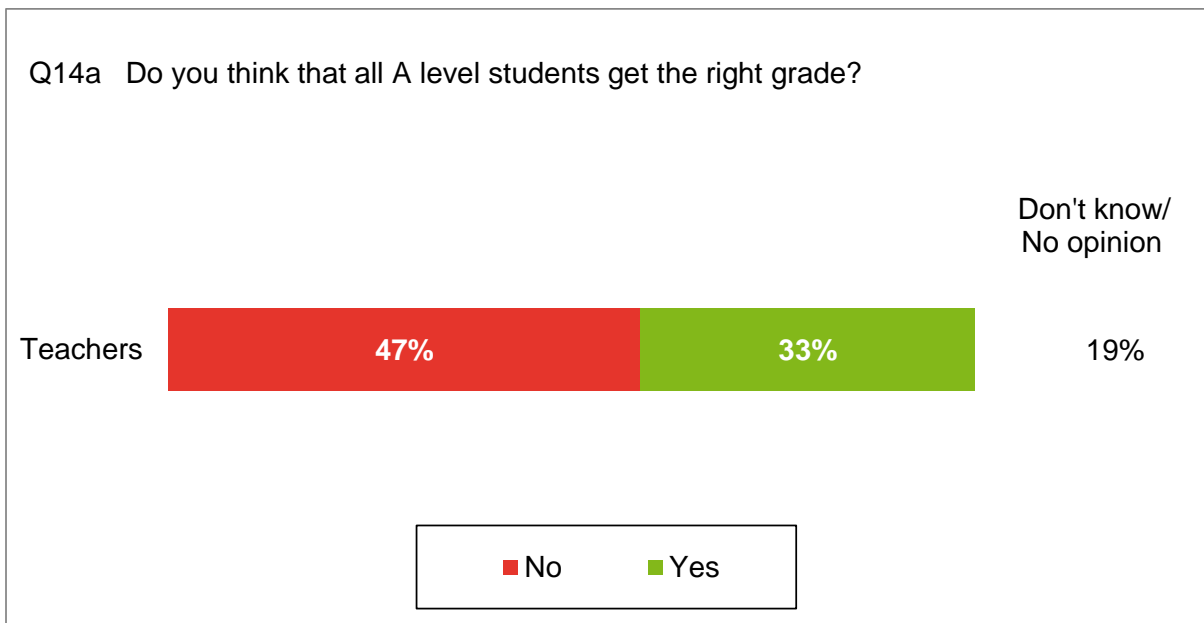
Effective base: 216 teachers in England.

**Figure A9:** Reasons given for lack of trust in Ofqual – teachers



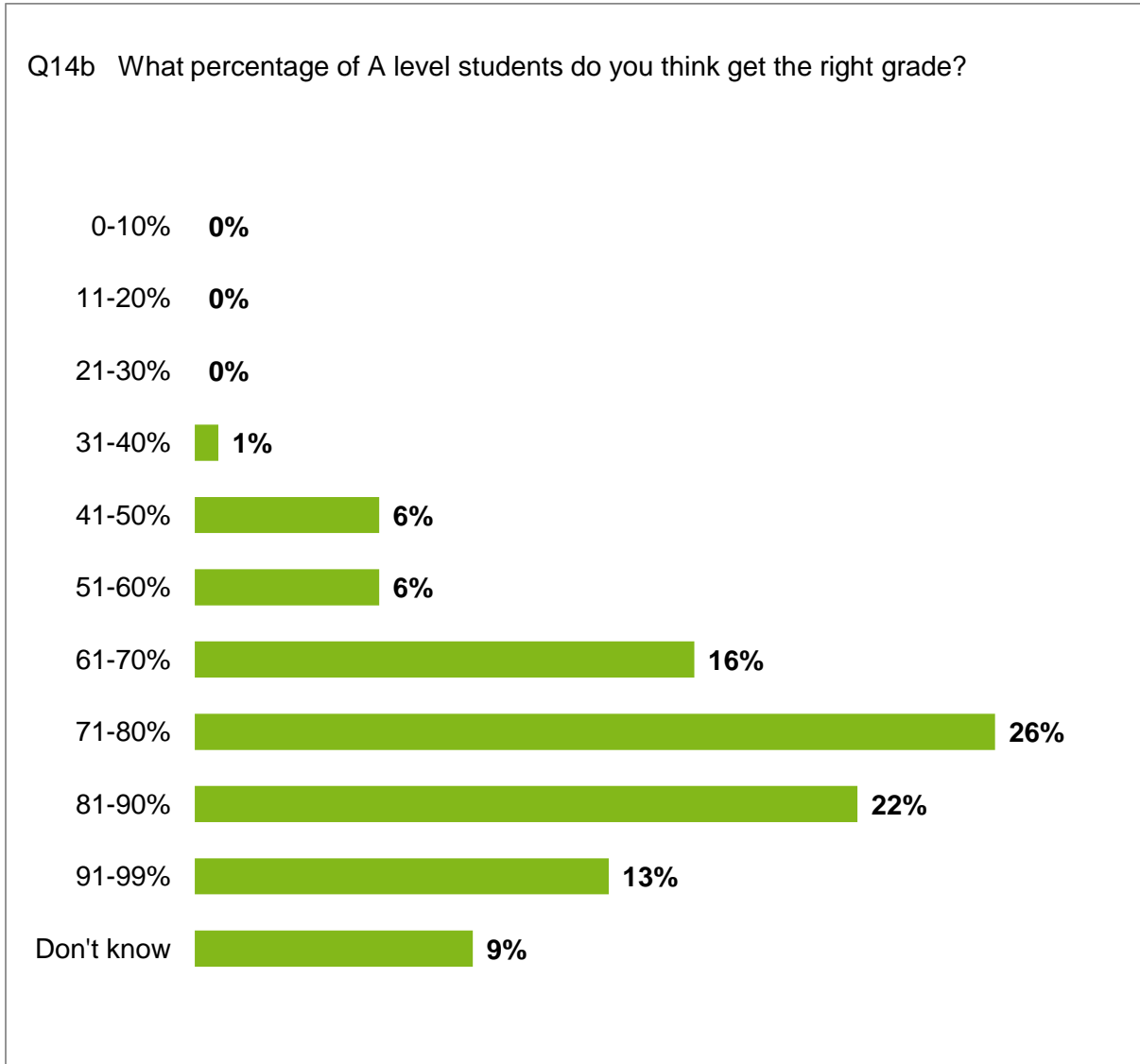
Effective base: 153 teachers in England.

**Figure A10:** Perceptions of all A level students getting the right grades – teachers



Effective base: 530 teachers in England.

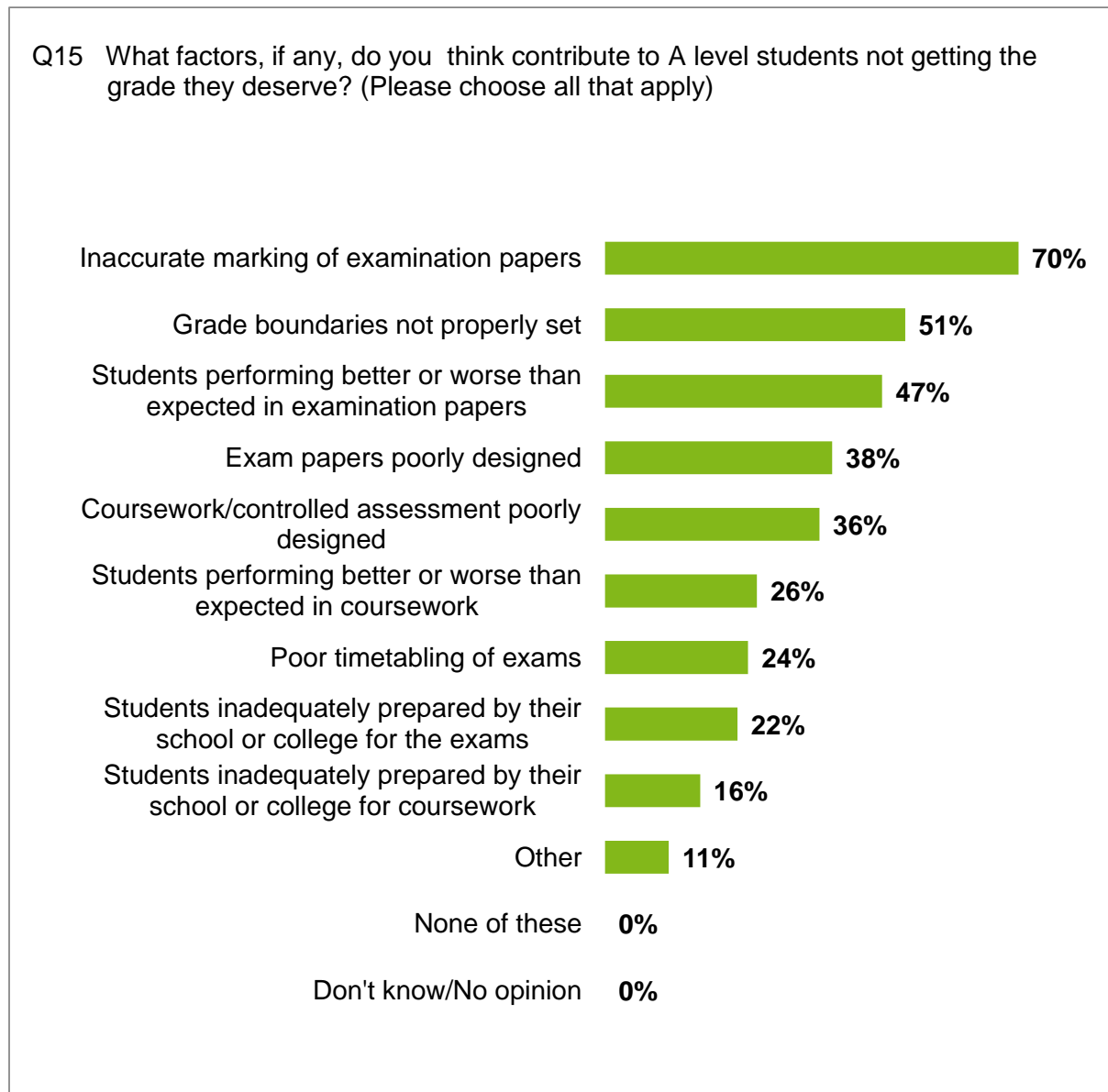
**Figure A11:** Perceptions of the percentage of A level students getting the right grade – teachers



*Effective base: 245 teachers in England.*

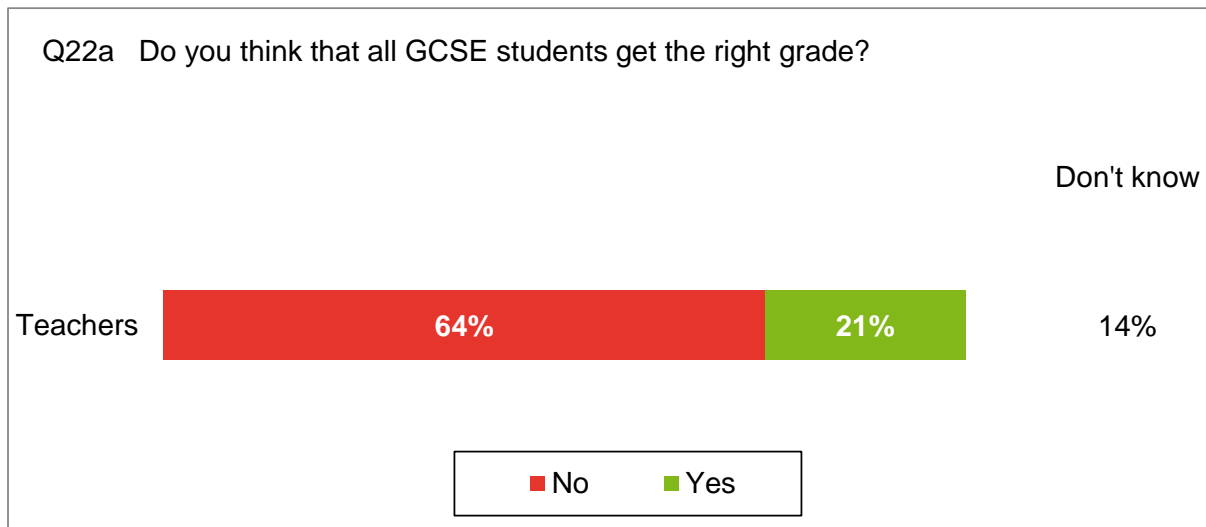


**Figure A12:** Factors contributing to incorrect grading at A level – teachers



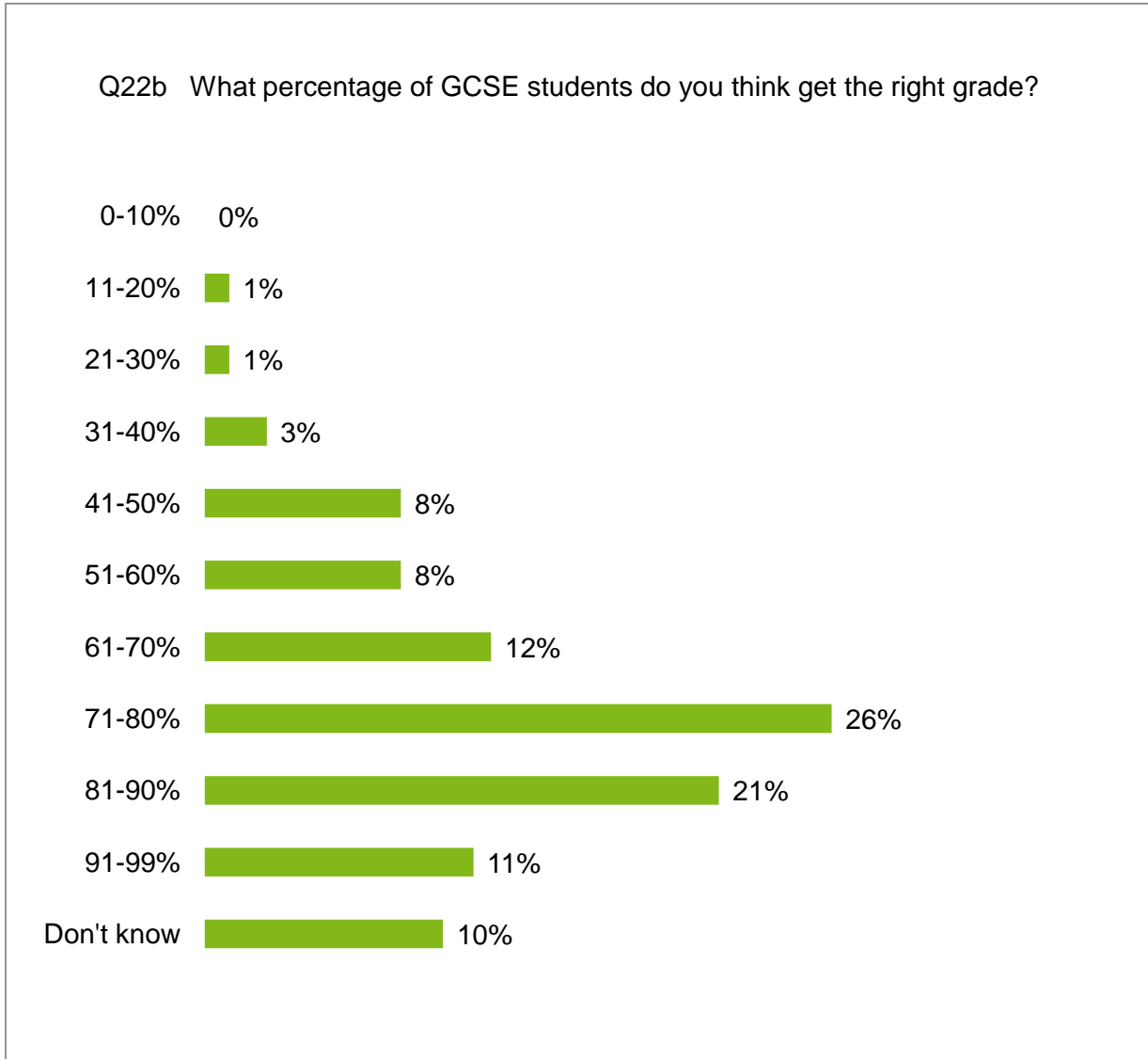
*Effective base: 245 teachers in England.*

**Figure A13:** Perceptions of all GCSE students getting the right grade – teachers



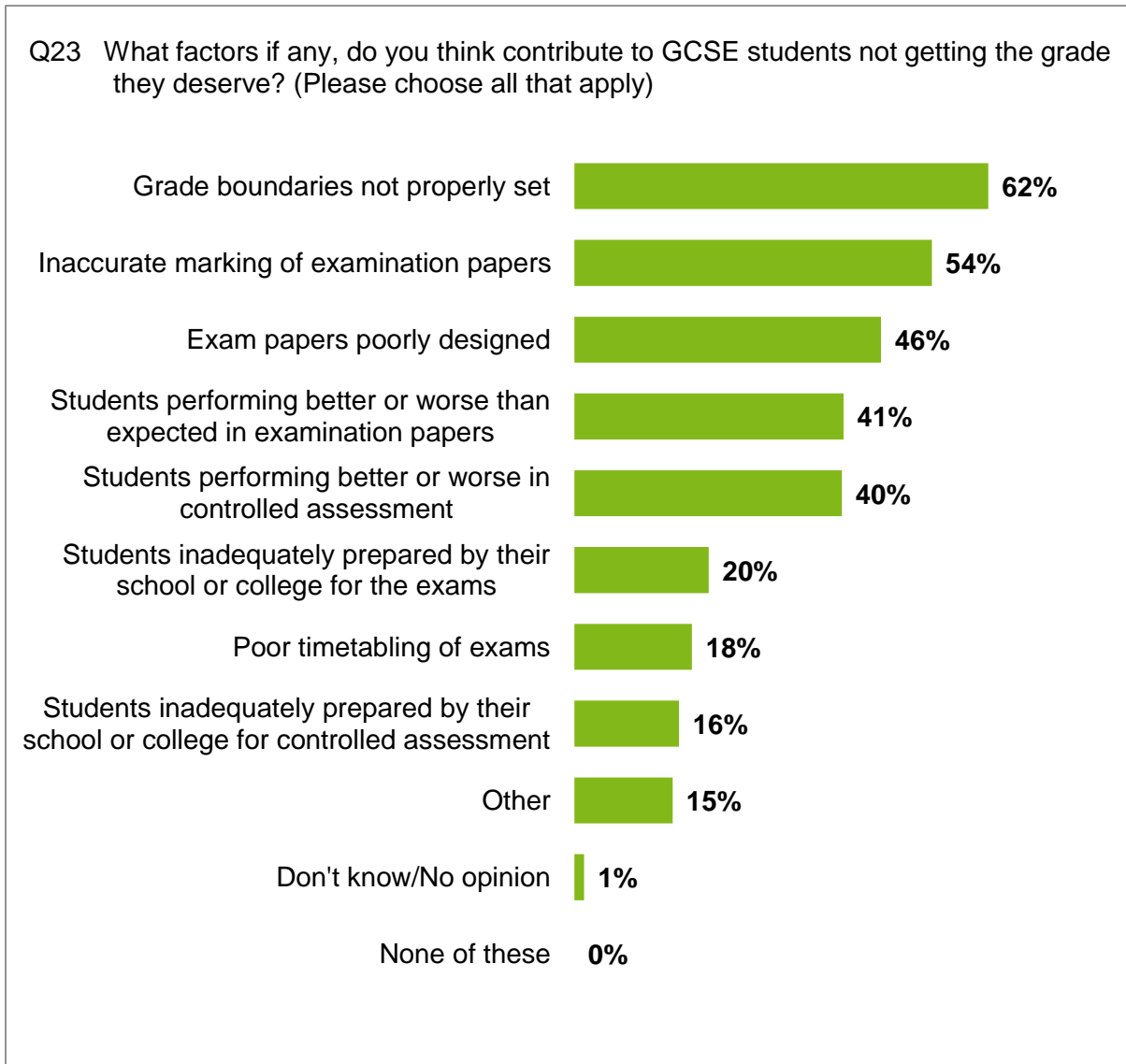
*Effective base: 530 teachers in England.*

**Figure A14:** Perceptions of the percentage of GCSE students getting the right grade – teachers



*Effective base: 346 teachers in England.*

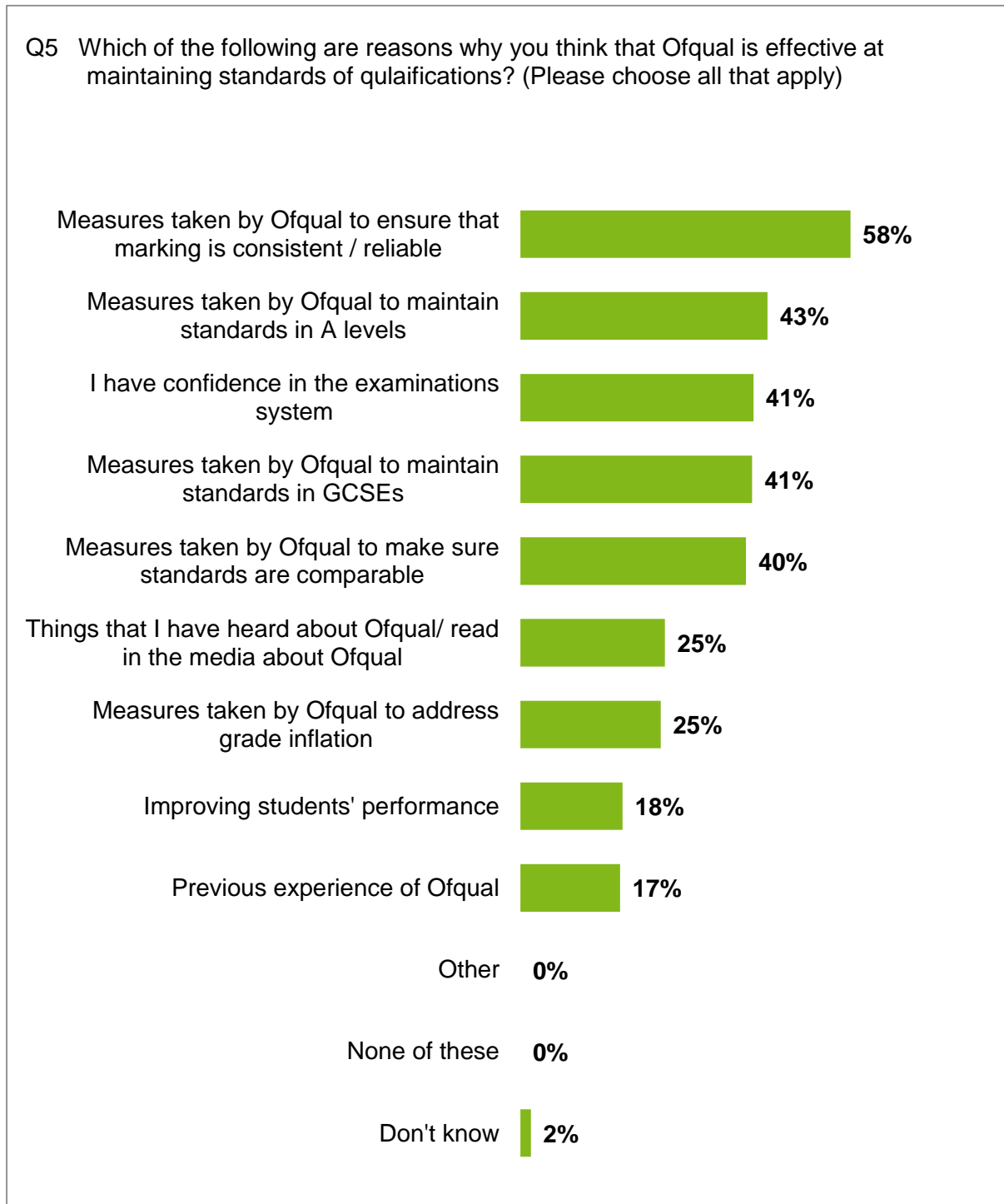
**Figure A15:** Factors contributing to incorrect grading at GCSE – teachers



*Effective base: 159 teachers in England.*

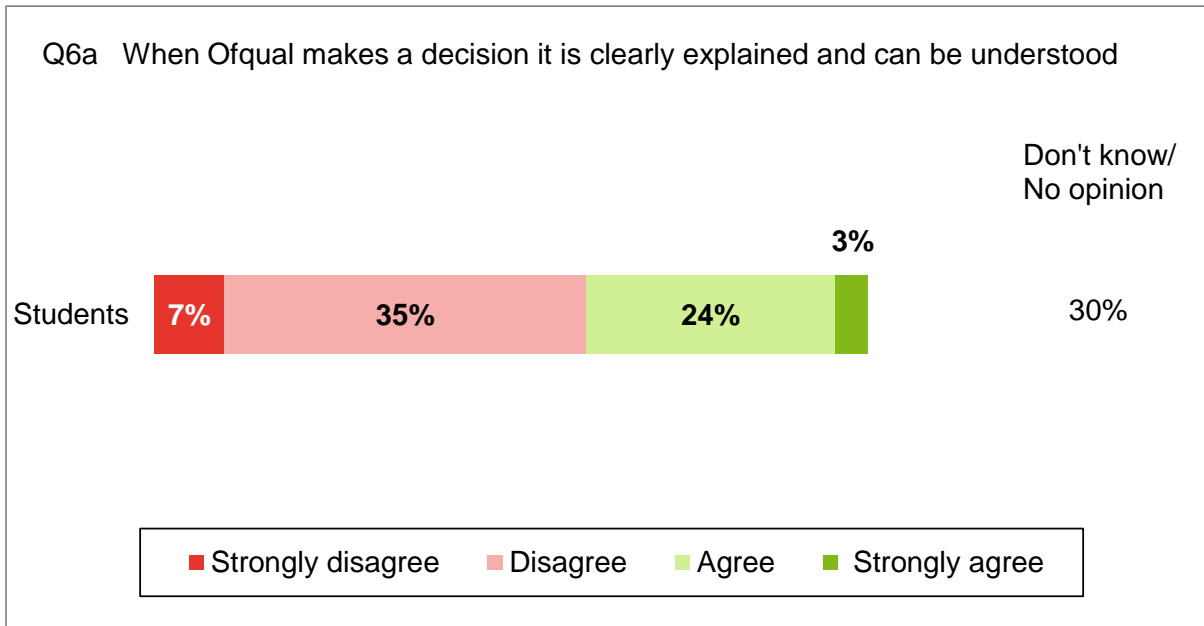
## Students

**Figure A16:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – students



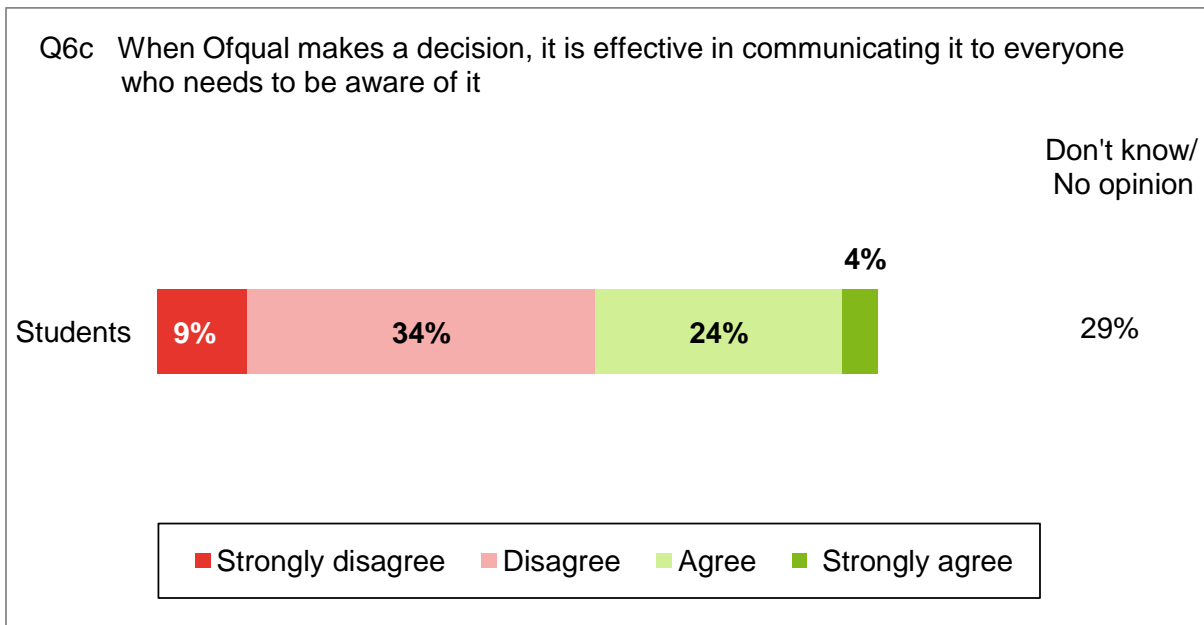
*Effective base: 57 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A17:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s clarity of decision-making – students



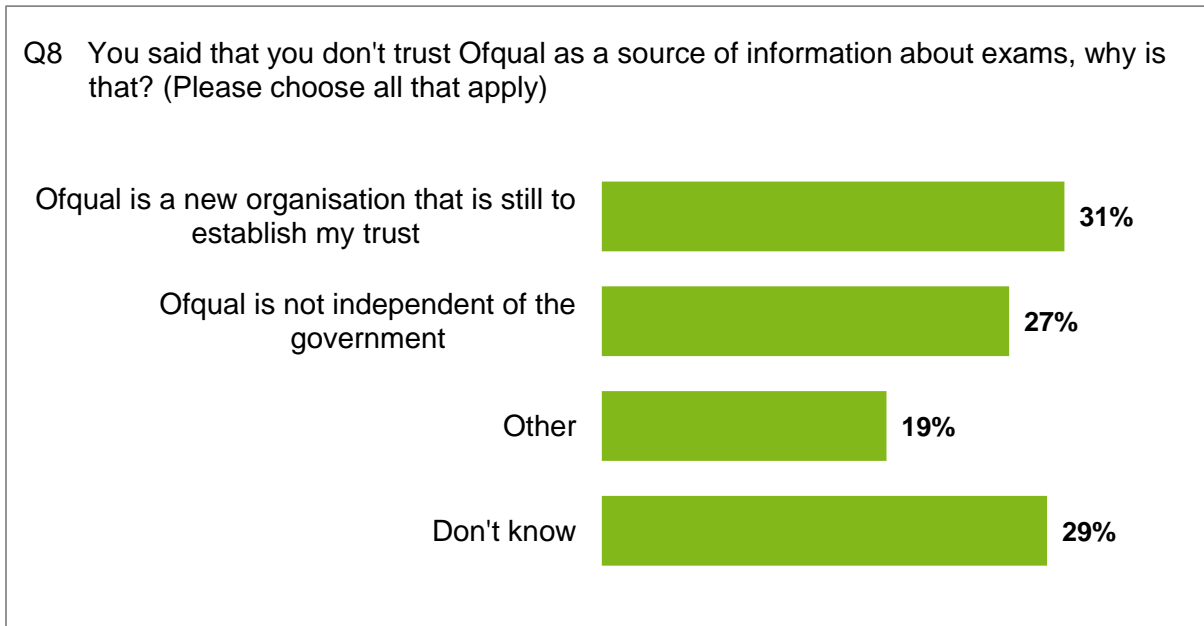
*Effective base: 57 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A18:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at communicating with stakeholders – students



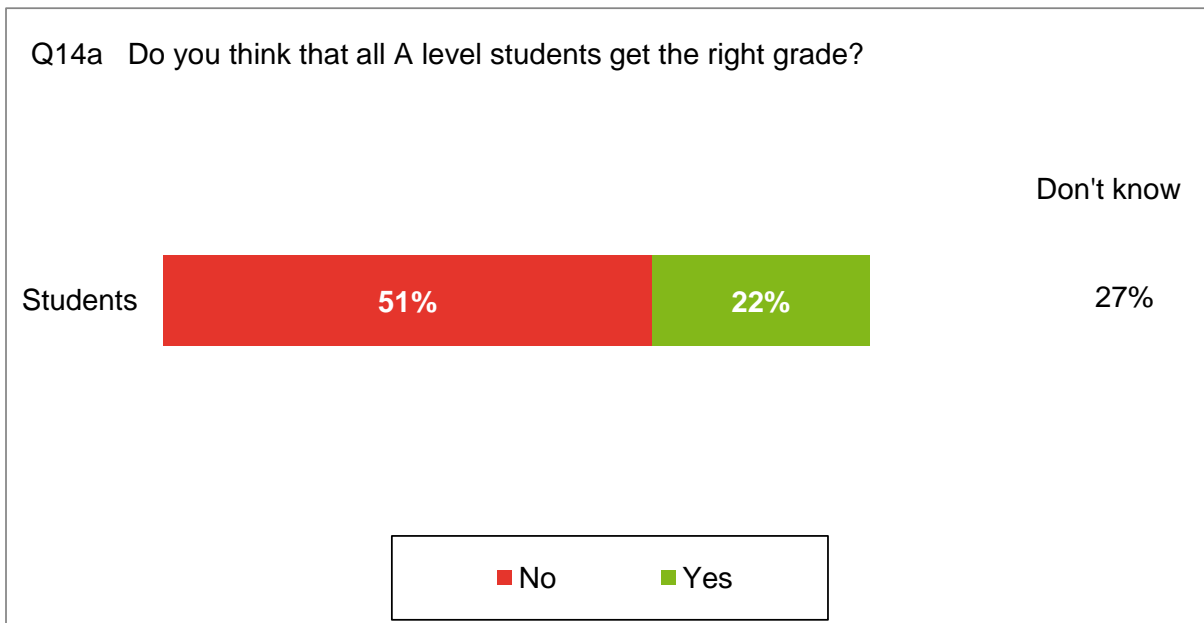
*Effective base: 120 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A19:** Reasons given for lack of trust in Ofqual – students



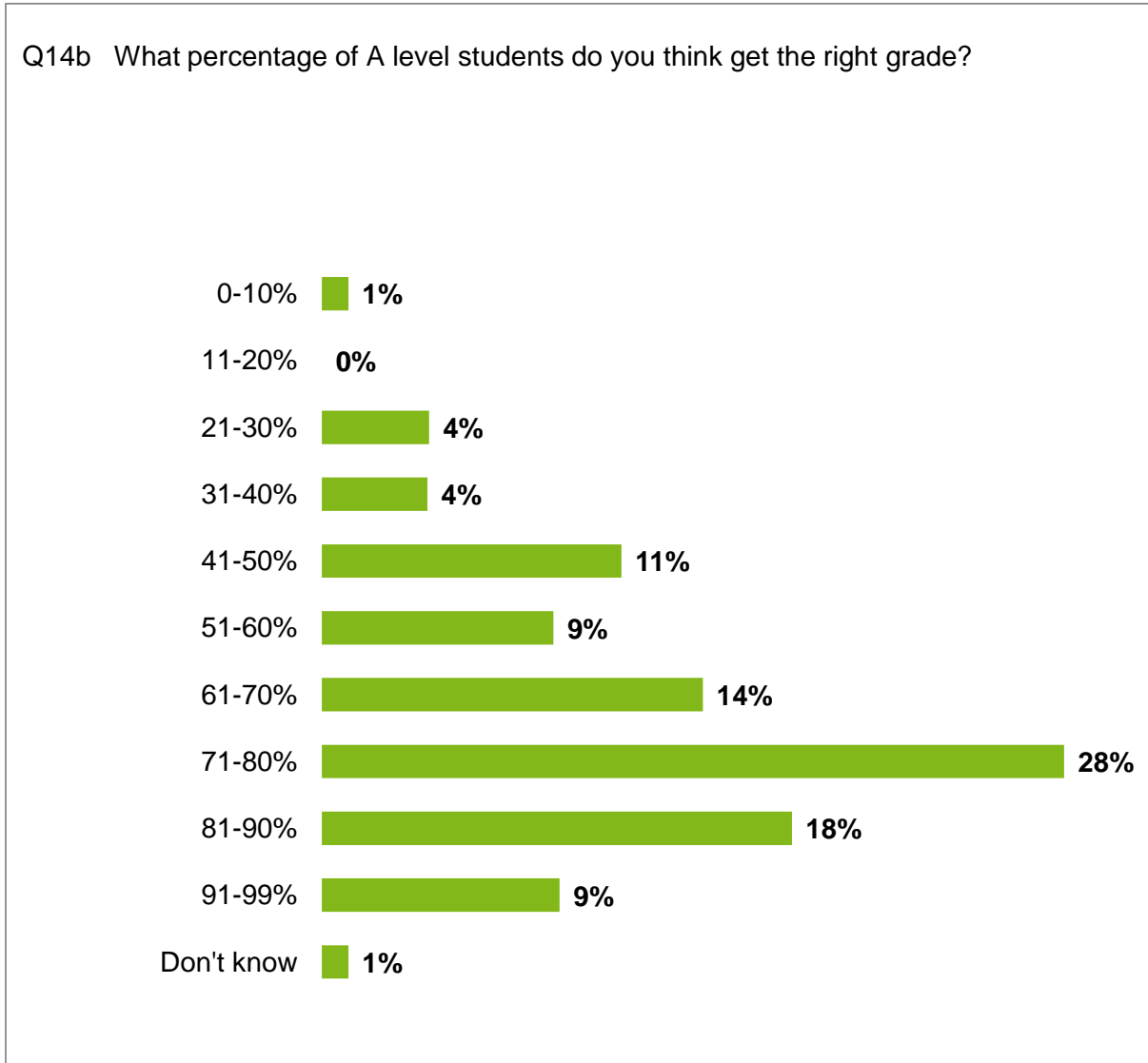
*Effective base: 54 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A20:** Perceptions of all A level students getting the right grade – students



*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

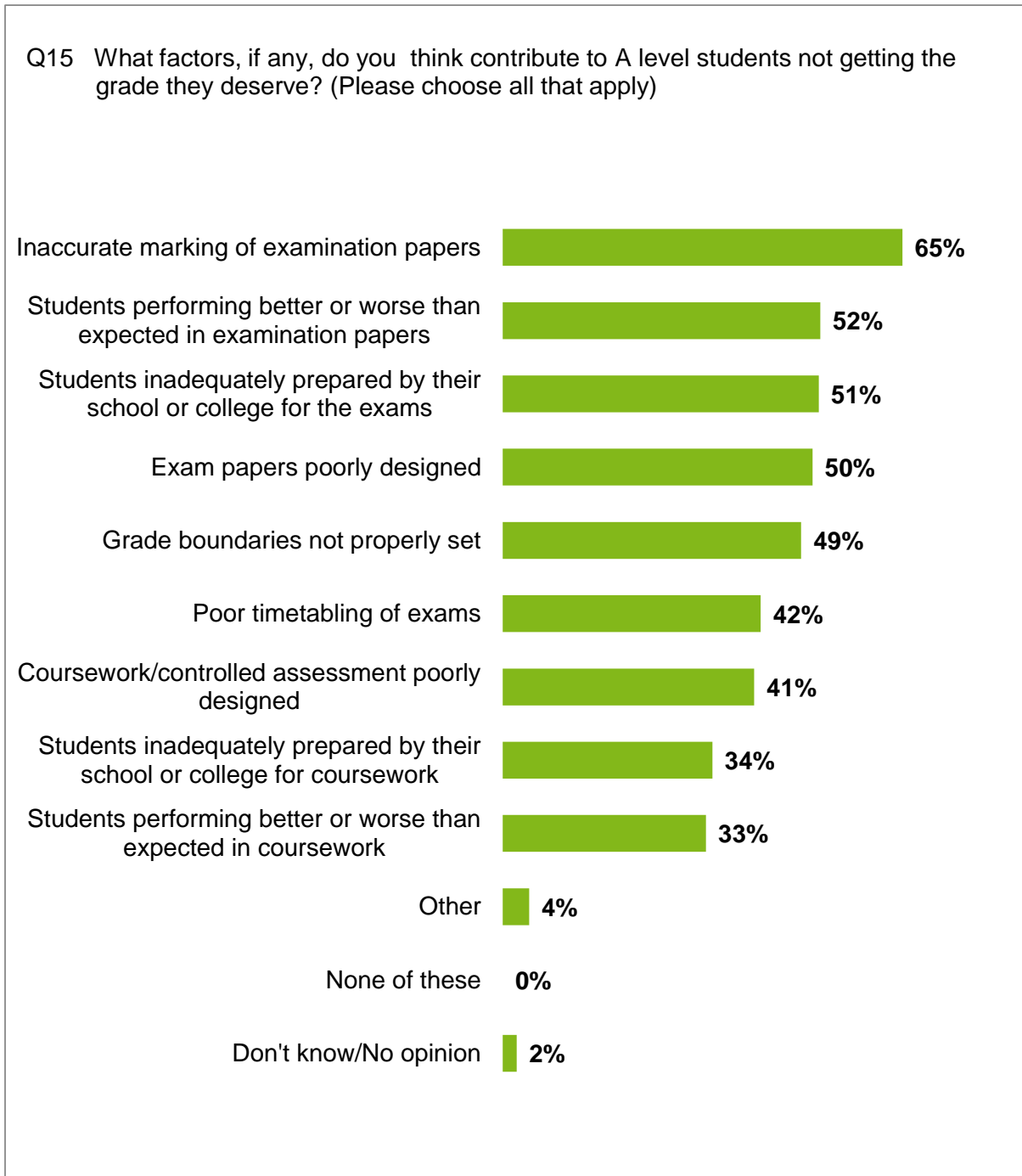
**Figure A21:** Perceptions of the percentage of A level students not getting the right grade – students



*Effective base: 181 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

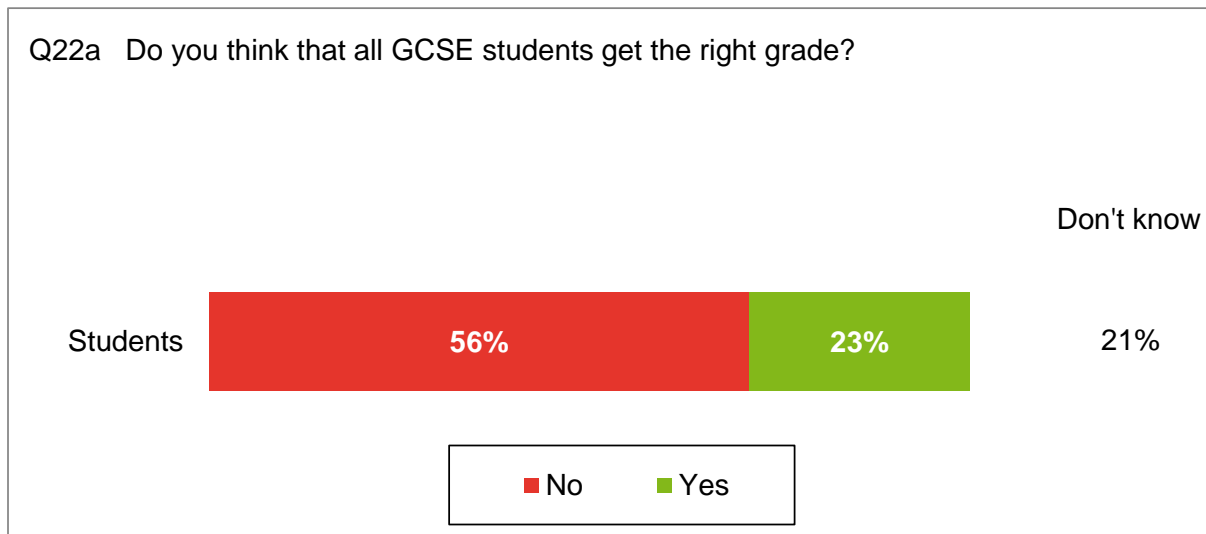


**Figure A22:** Factors contributing to incorrect grading at A level – students



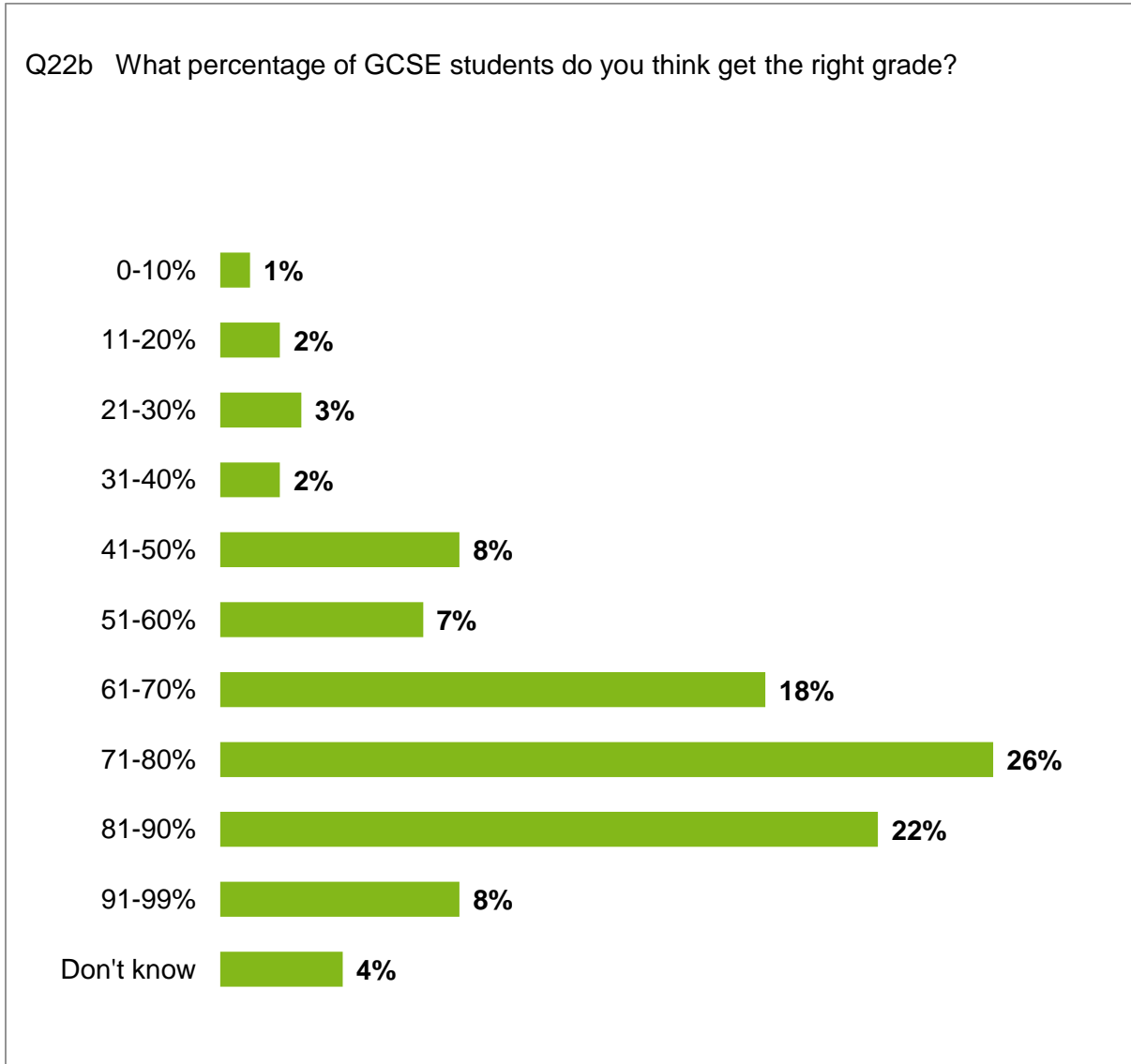
*Effective base: 181 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A23:** Perceptions of all GCSE students getting the right grade – students



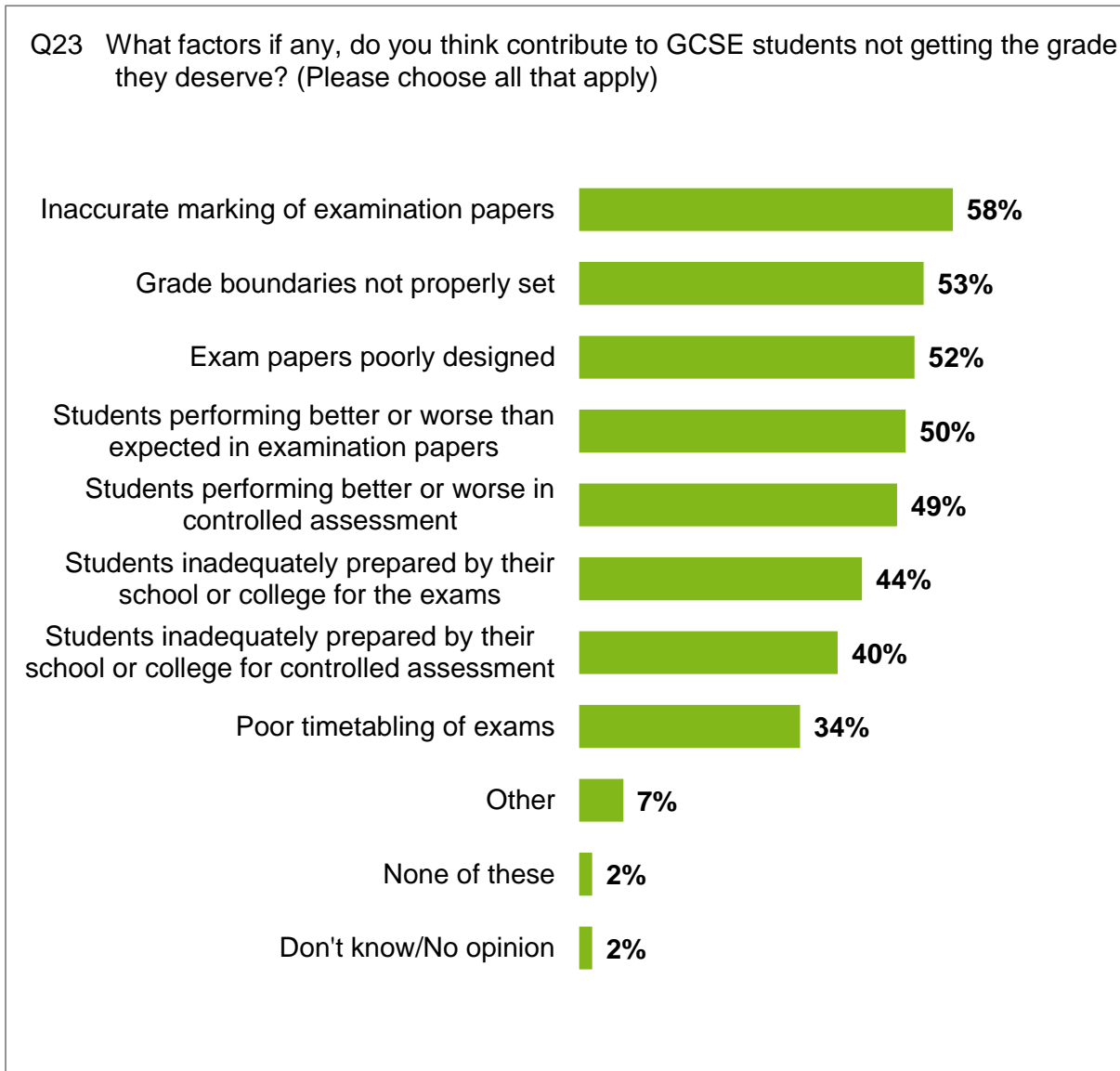
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A24:** Perceptions of the percentage of GCSE students not getting the right grade – students



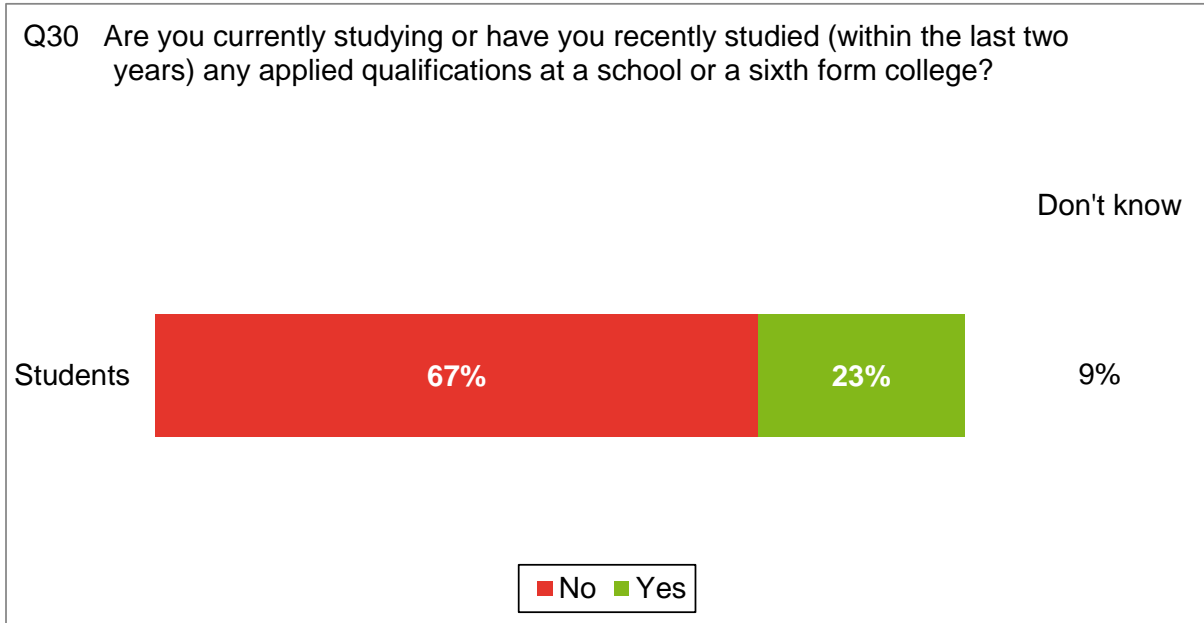
*Effective base: 200 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A25:** Factors contributing to incorrect grading at GCSE – students



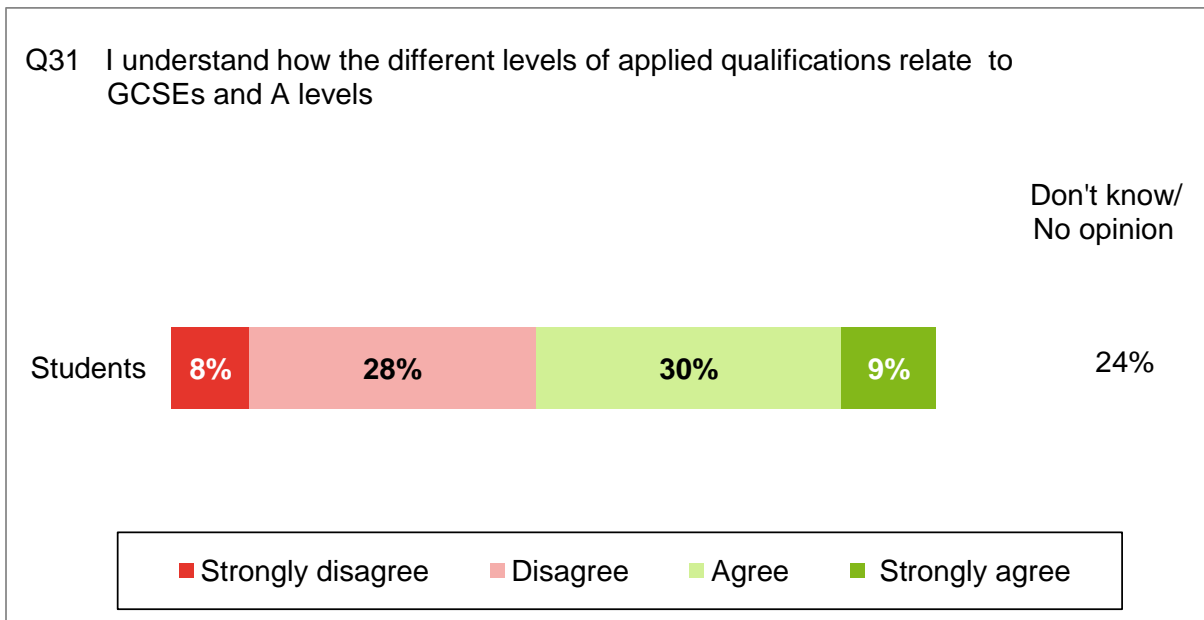
*Effective base: 200 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A26:** Students who are studying or have recently studied applied qualifications – students



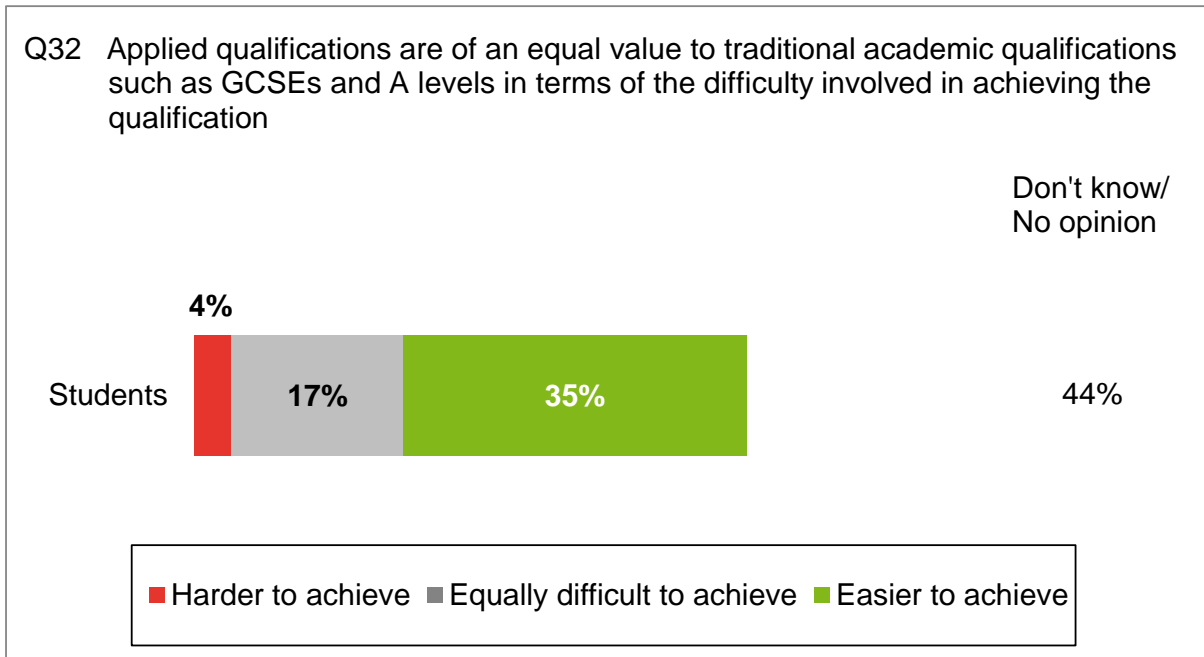
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A27:** Understanding of the different levels of applied qualifications – students



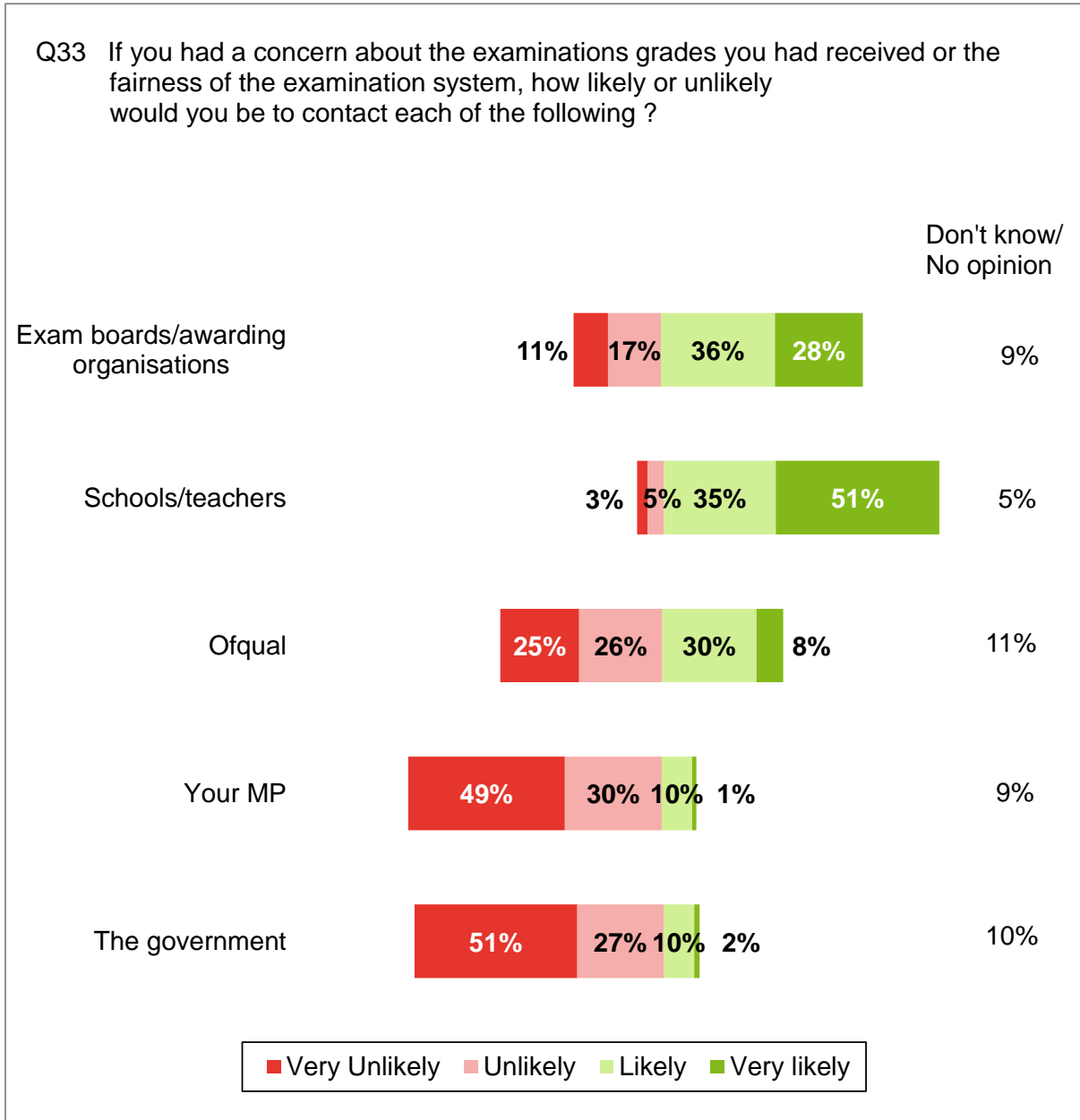
*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A28:** Perceptions of the value of applied qualifications – students



*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

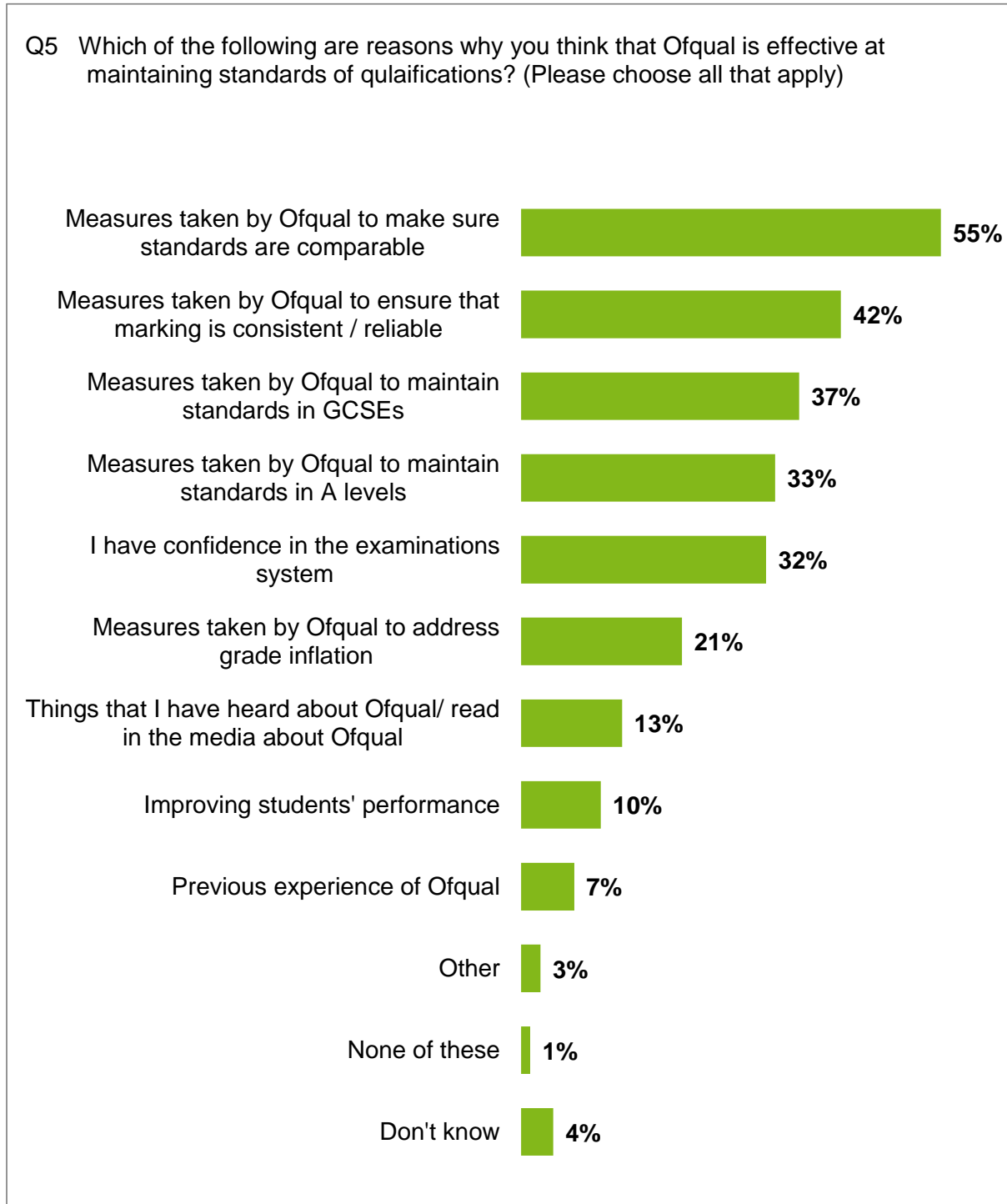
**Figure A29:** Organisations to contact in the event of a query – students



*Effective base: 353 students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Parents**

**Figure A30:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – parents

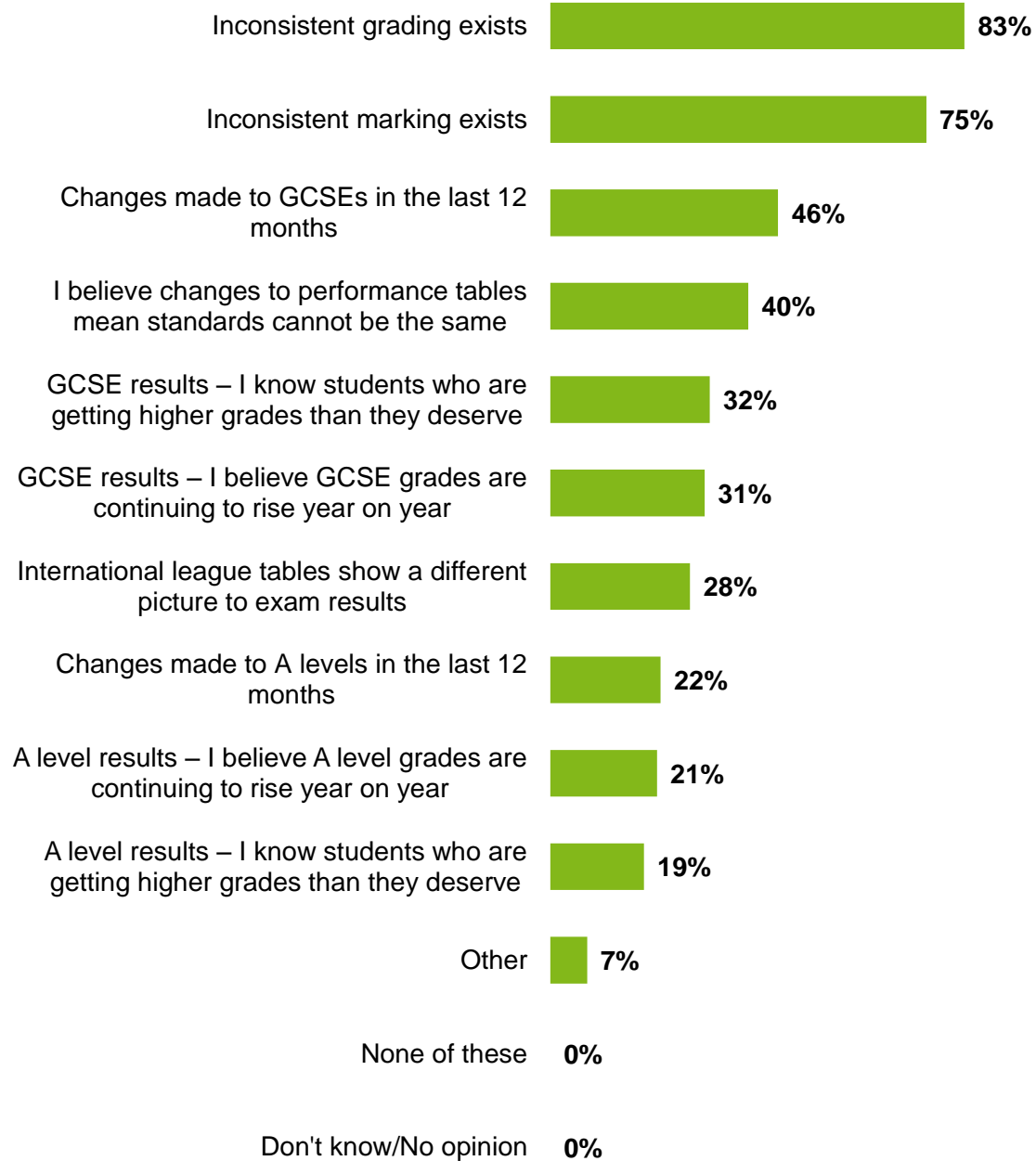


*Effective base: 63 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A31:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s ineffectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – parents

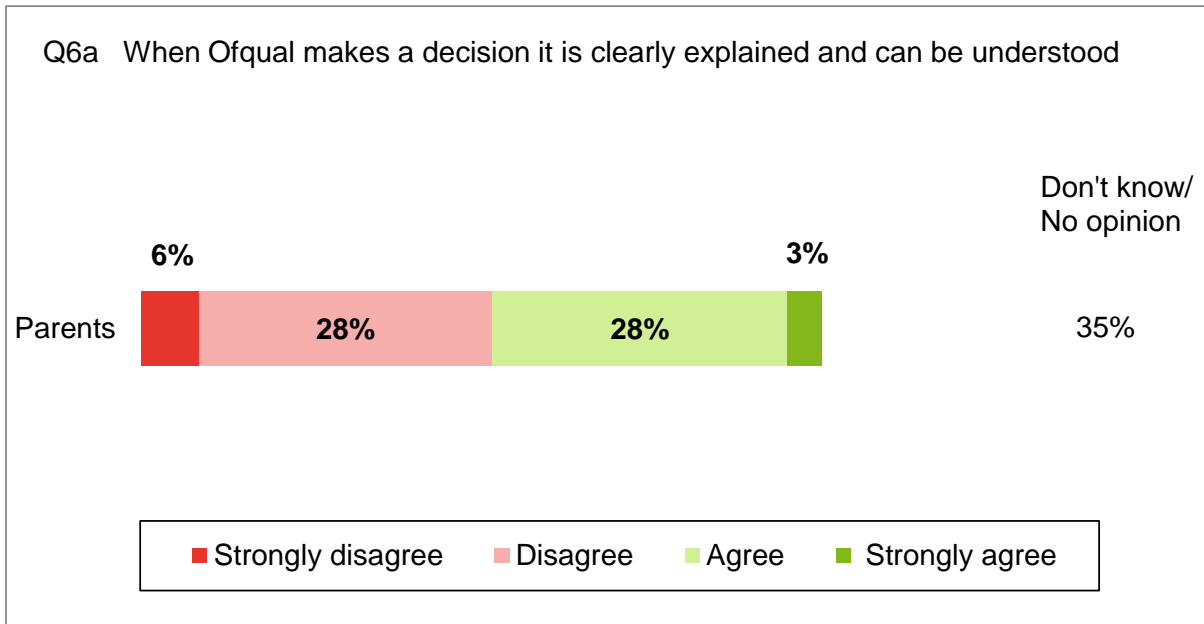


Q4 Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is not effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)



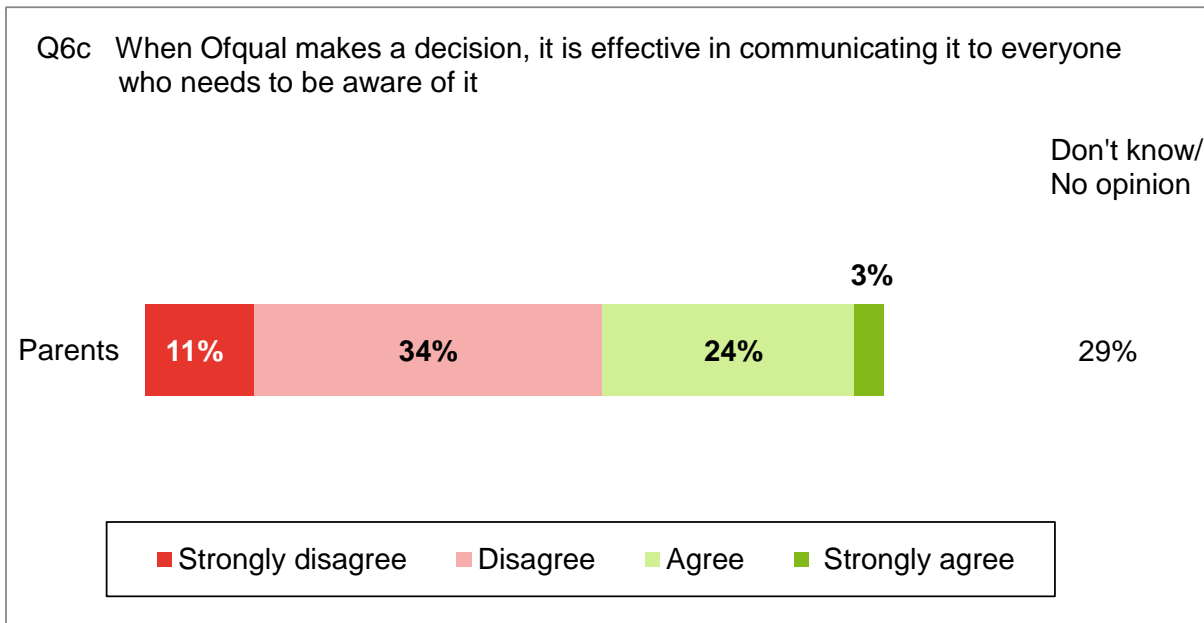
*Effective base: 50 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A32:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s clarity of decision-making – parents



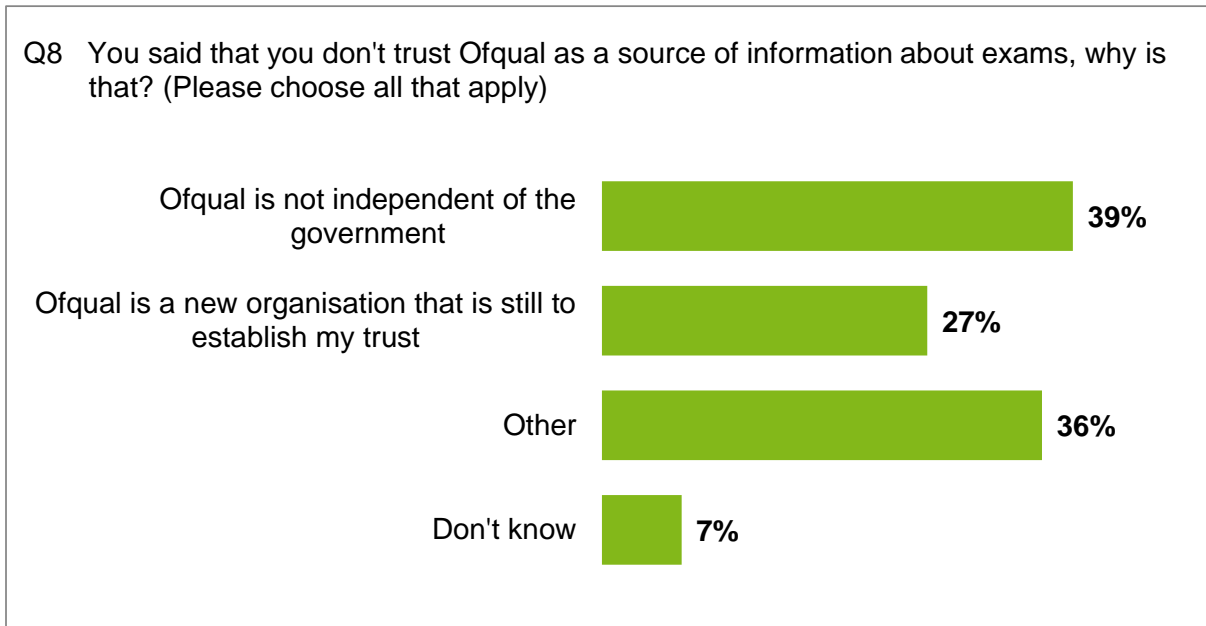
Effective base: 144 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.

**Figure A33:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at communicating with stakeholders – parents



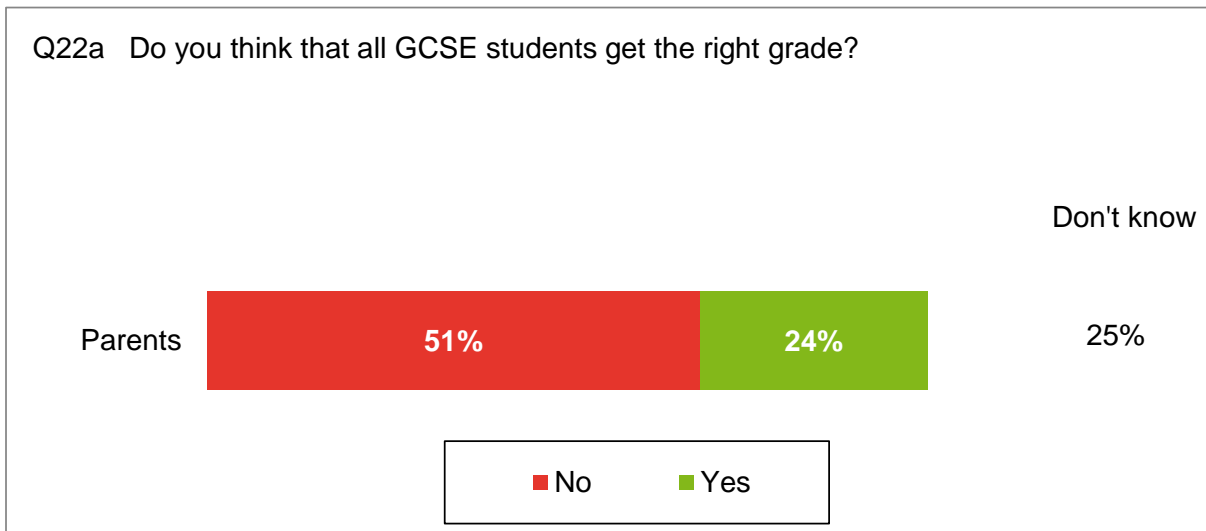
Effective base: 144 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.

**Figure A34:** Reasons given for lack of trust in Ofqual – parents



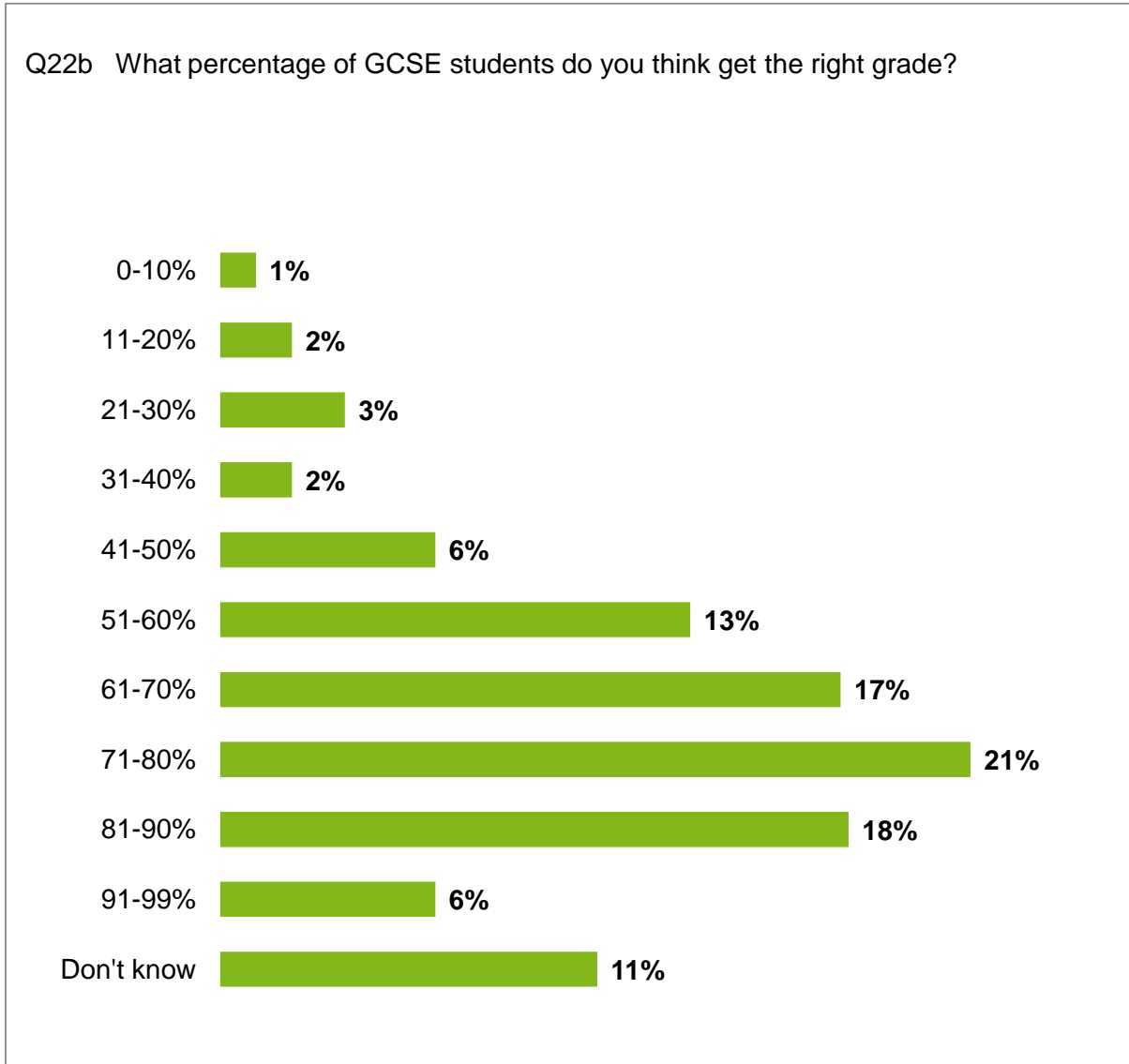
*Effective base: 70 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A35:** Perceptions of all GCSE students getting the right grade – parents



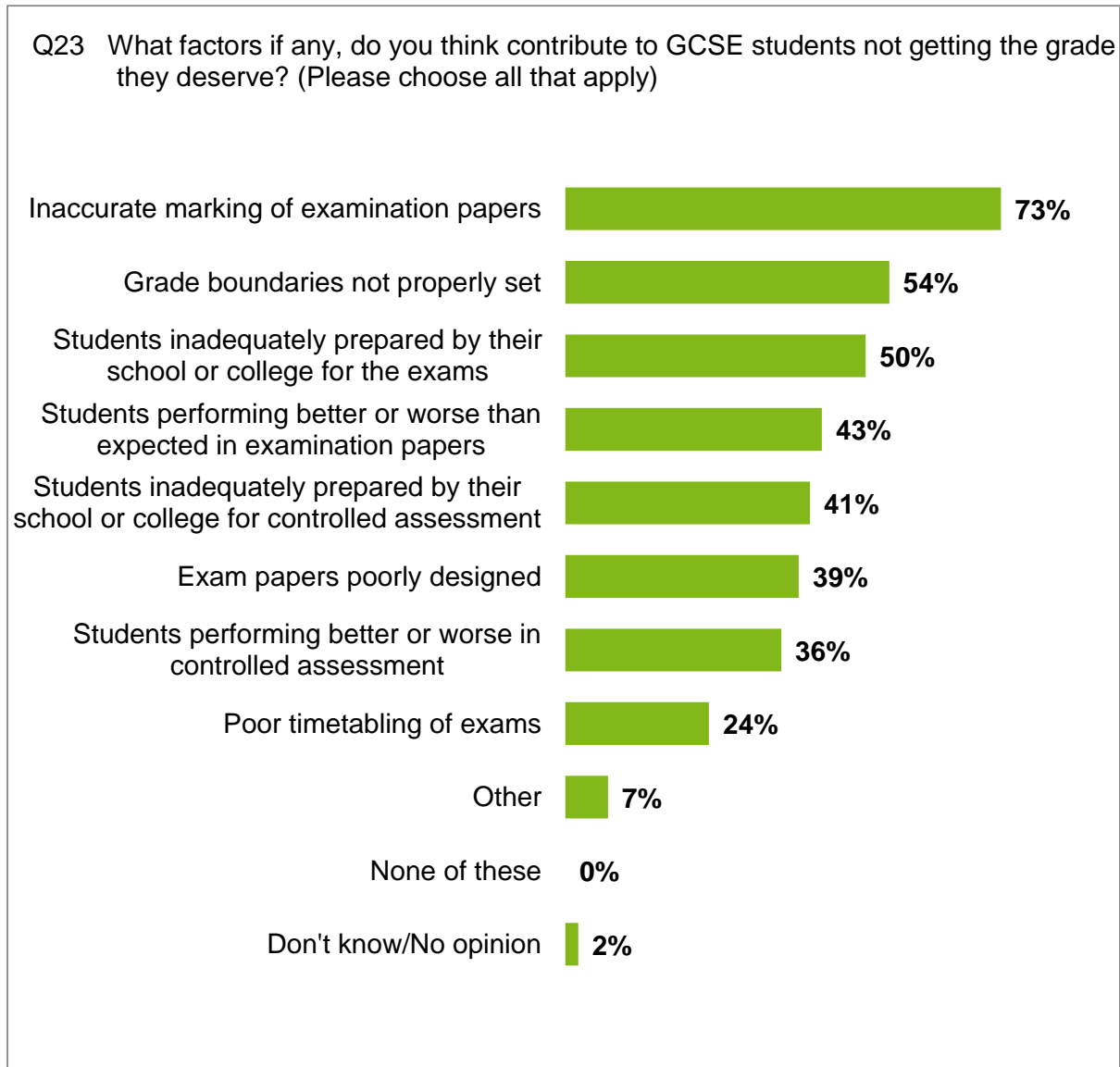
*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A36:** Perceptions of the percentage of GCSE students not getting the right grade – parents



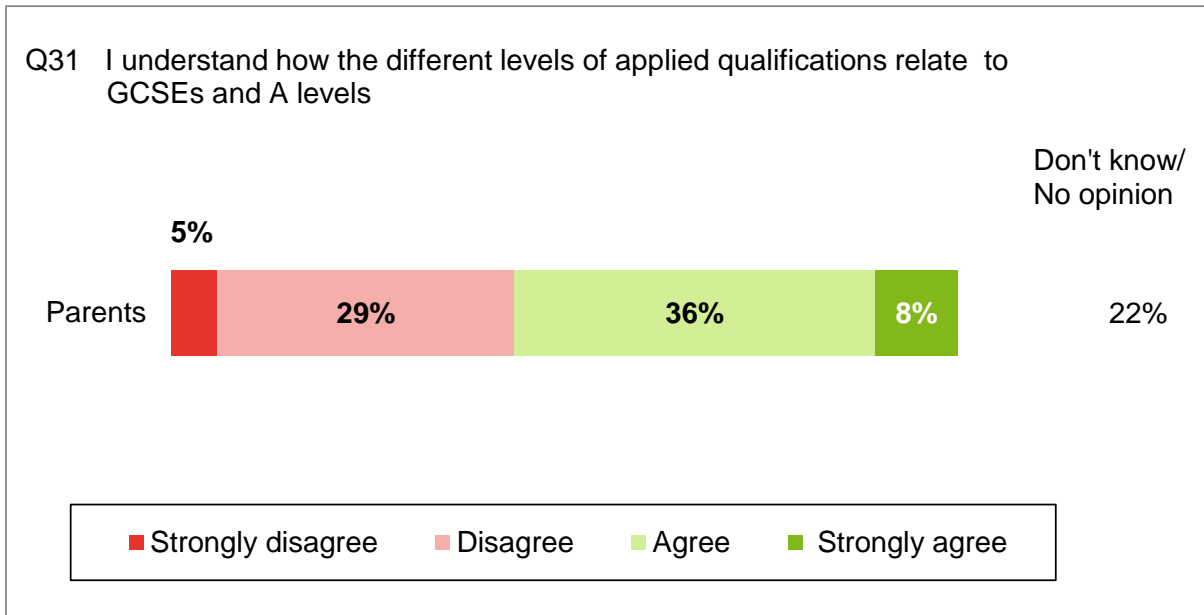
*Effective base: 157 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A37: Factors contributing to incorrect grading at GCSE – parents**



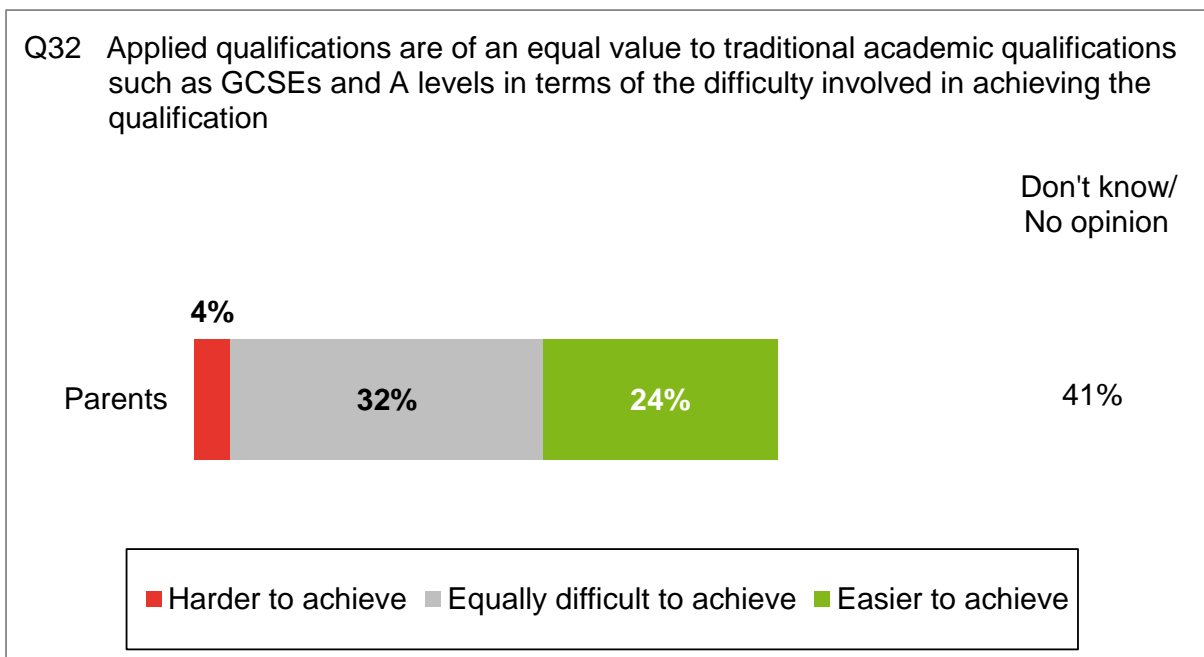
*Effective base: 157 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

**Figure A38:** Understanding of the different levels of applied qualifications – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

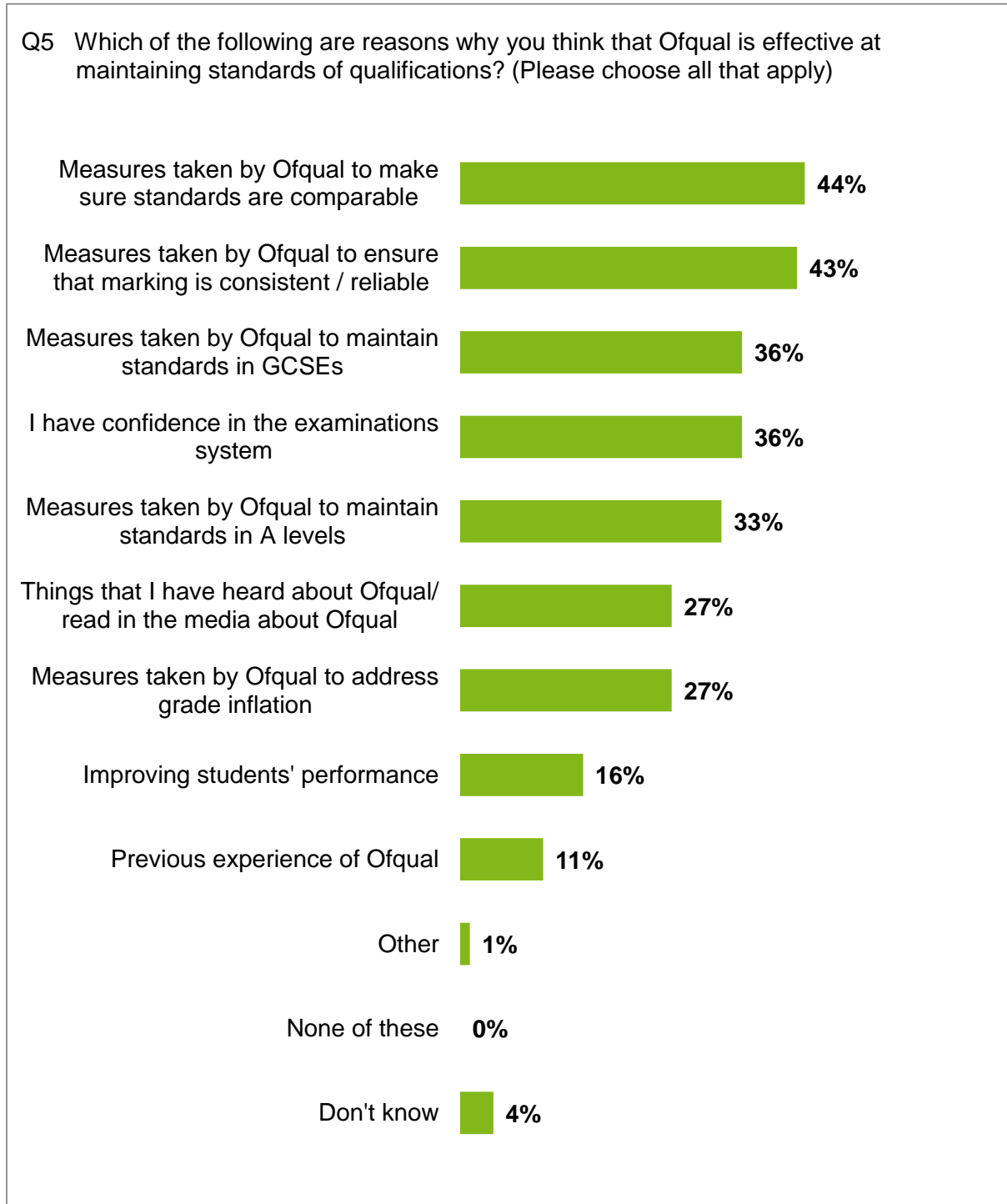
**Figure A39:** Perceptions of the value of applied qualifications – parents



*Effective base: 305 parents of students taking, who have taken or who are about to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications in England.*

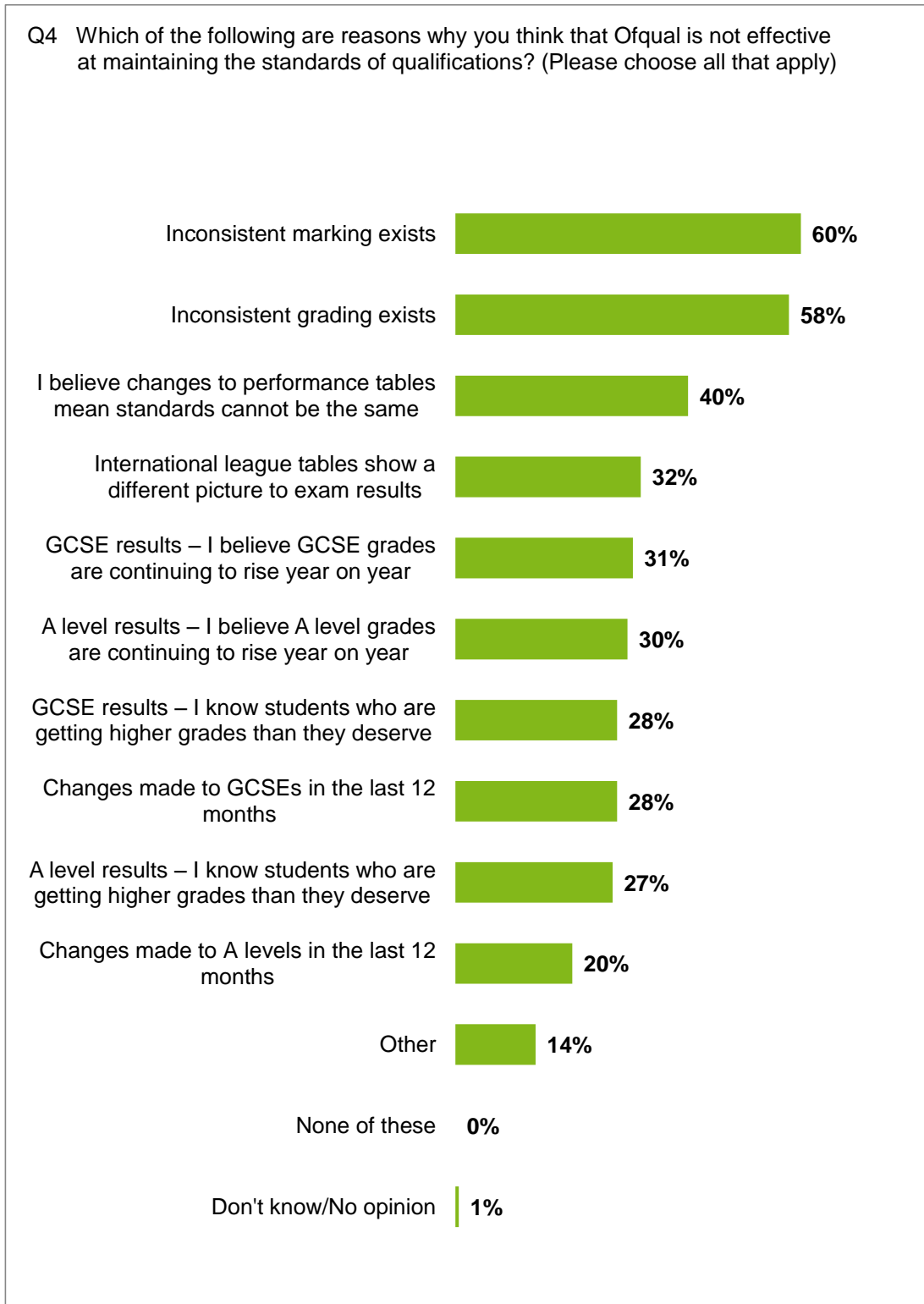
**General public**

**Figure A40:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – general public



*Effective base: 222 members of the general public in England.*

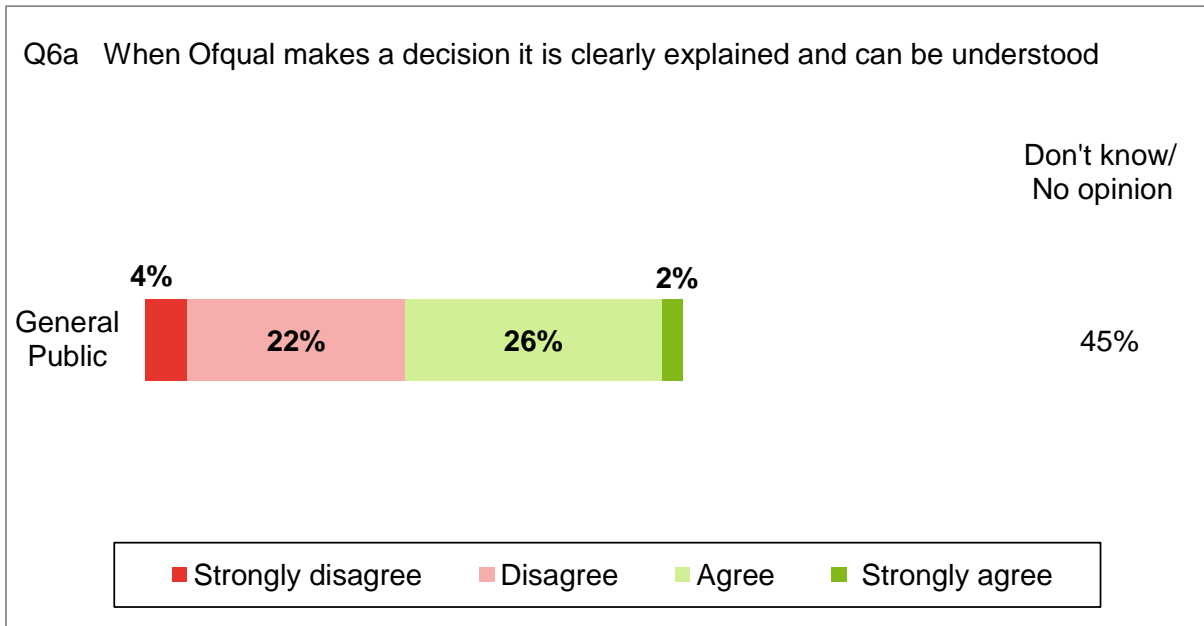
**Figure A41:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s ineffectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications – general public



Effective base: 207 members of the general public in England.

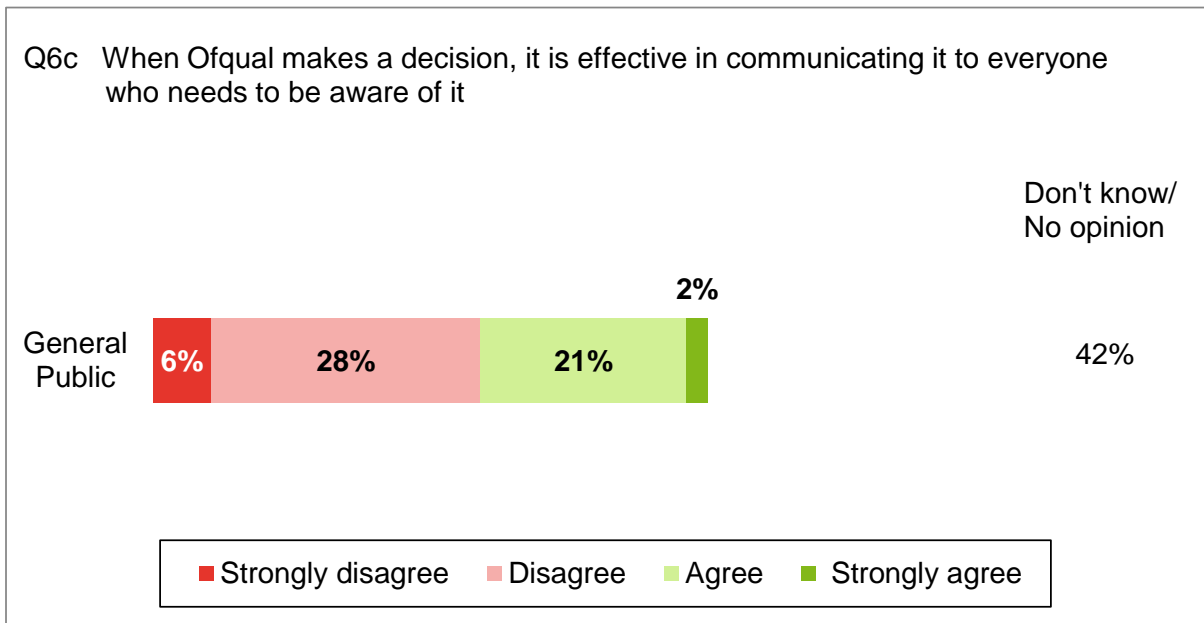


**Figure A42:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s clarity of decision-marking – general public



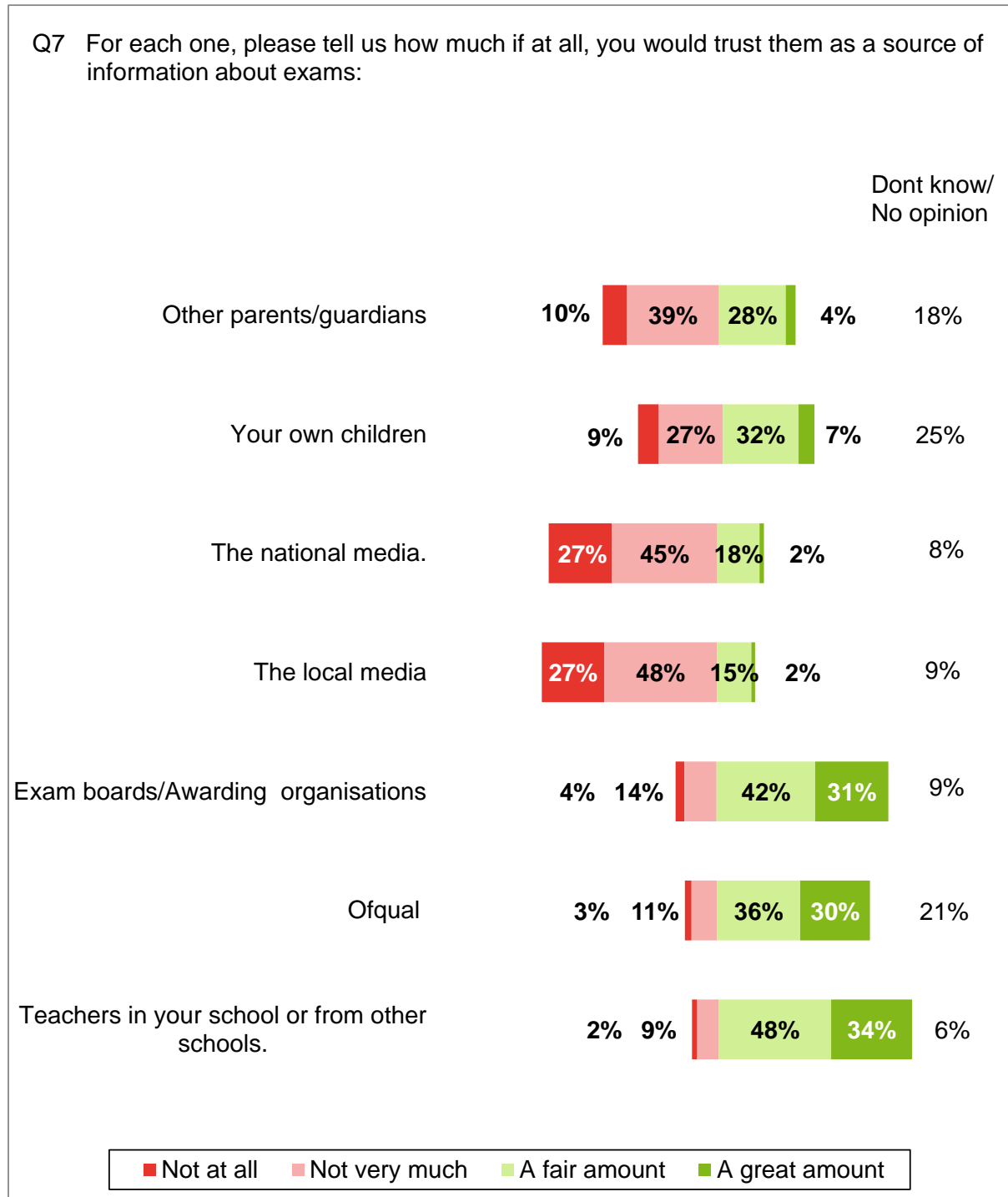
Effective base: 586 members of the general public in England.

**Figure A43:** Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness in communicating with stakeholders – general public



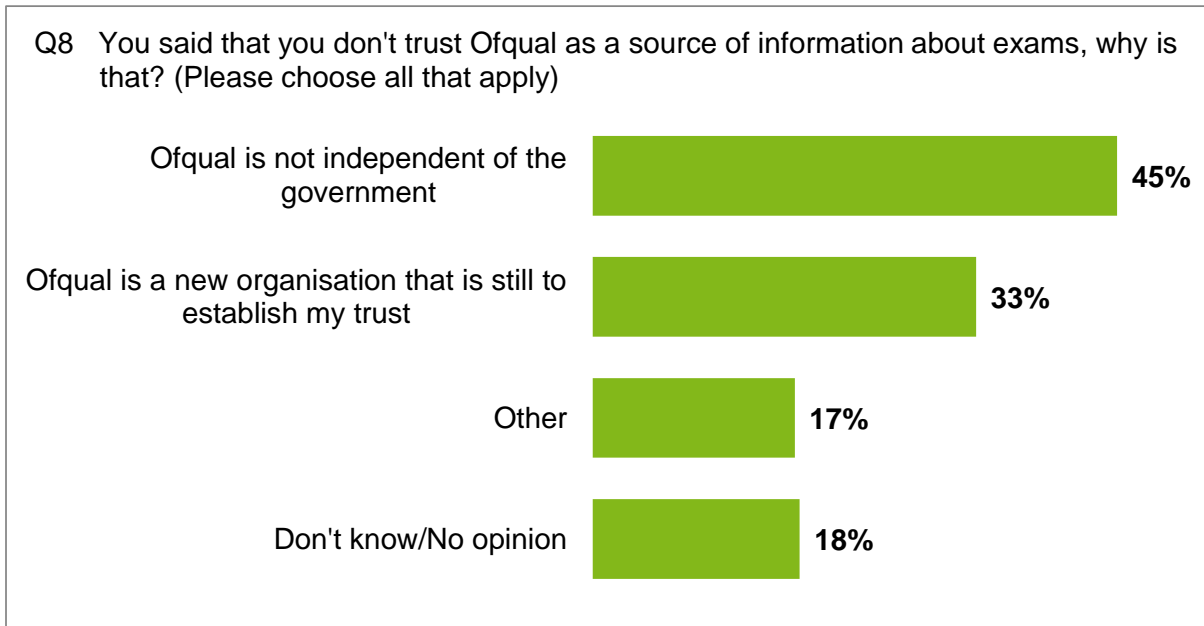
Effective base: 586 members of the general public in England.

**Figure A44:** Trusted sources of information about exams – general public



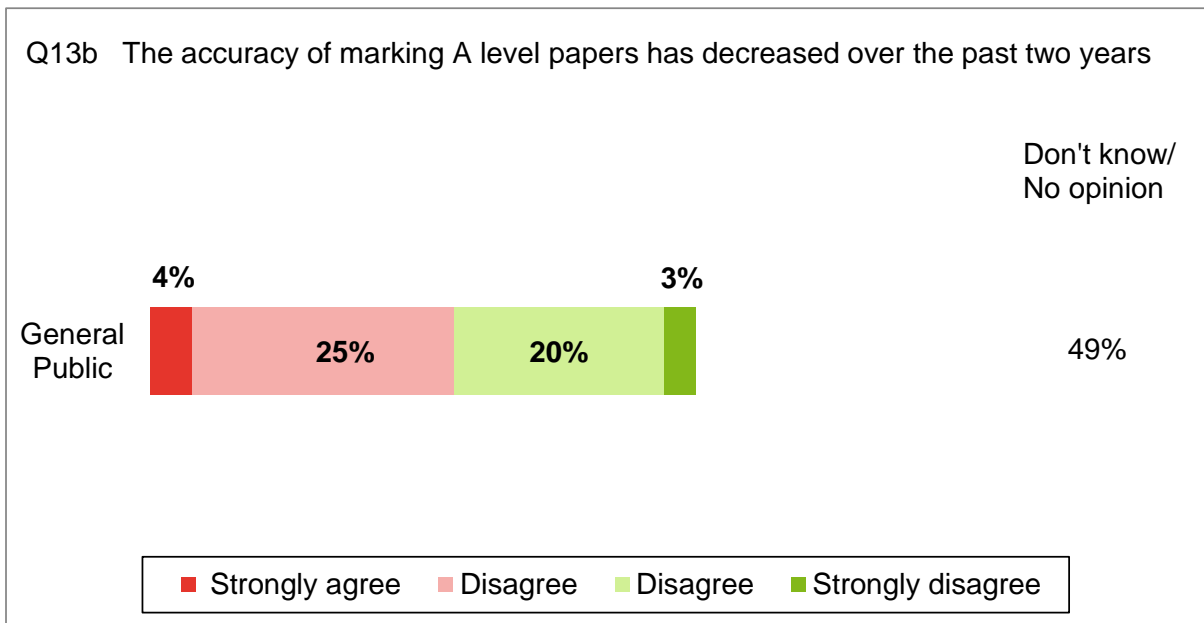
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure A45:** Reasons given for lack of trust in Ofqual – general public



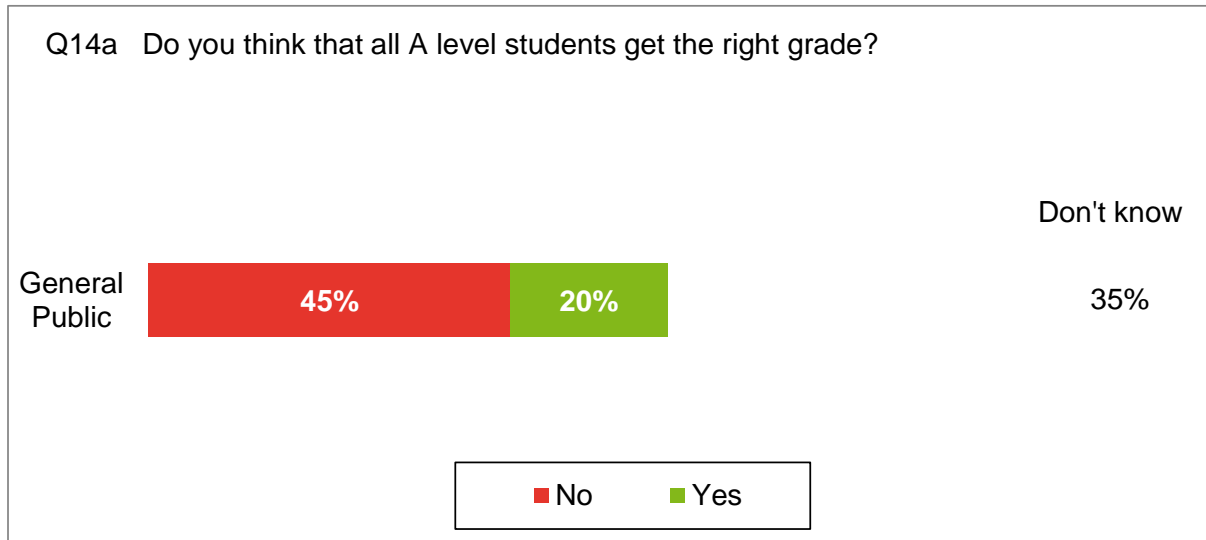
Effective base: 240 members of the general public in England.

**Figure A46:** Confidence about changes in the accuracy of marking over the past two years – general public



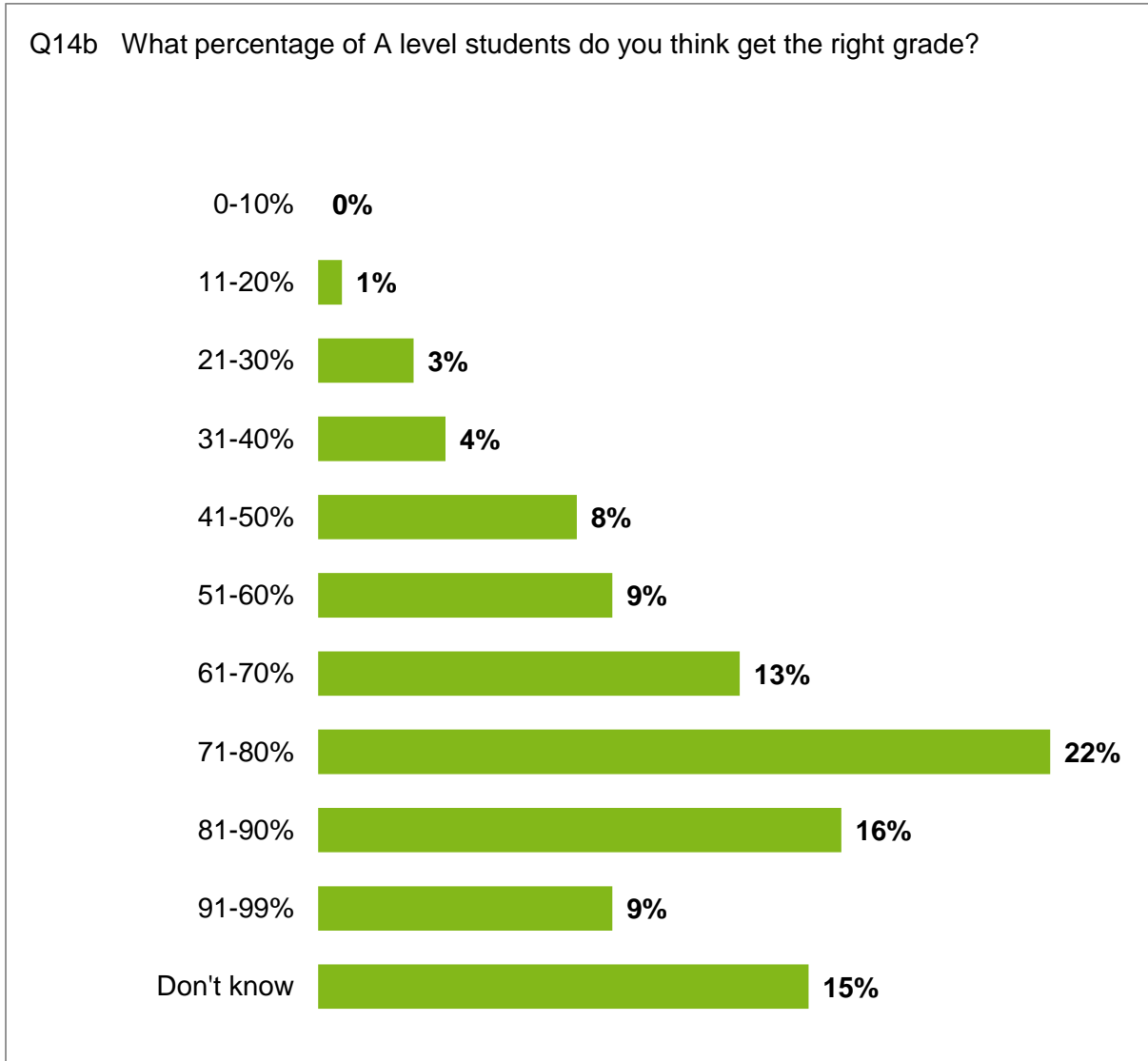
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure A47:** Perceptions of all A level students getting the right grade – general public



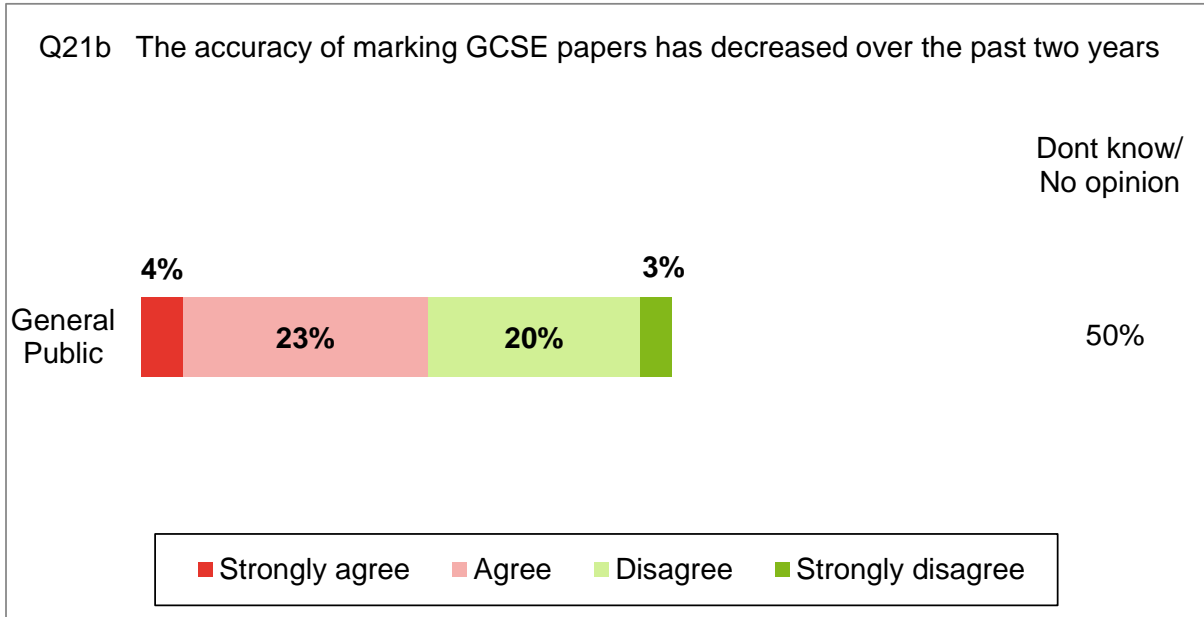
*Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.*

**Figure A48:** Perceptions of the percentage of A level students getting the right grade – general public



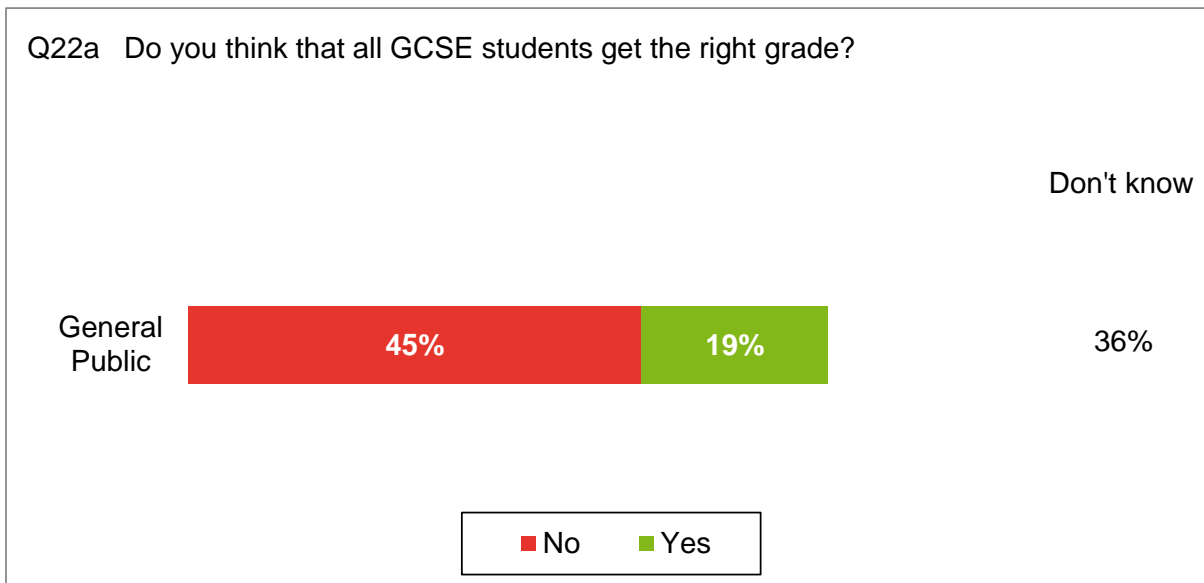
*Effective base: 773 members of the general public in England.*

**Figure A49:** Perceptions about changes in the accuracy of marking over the past two years – general public



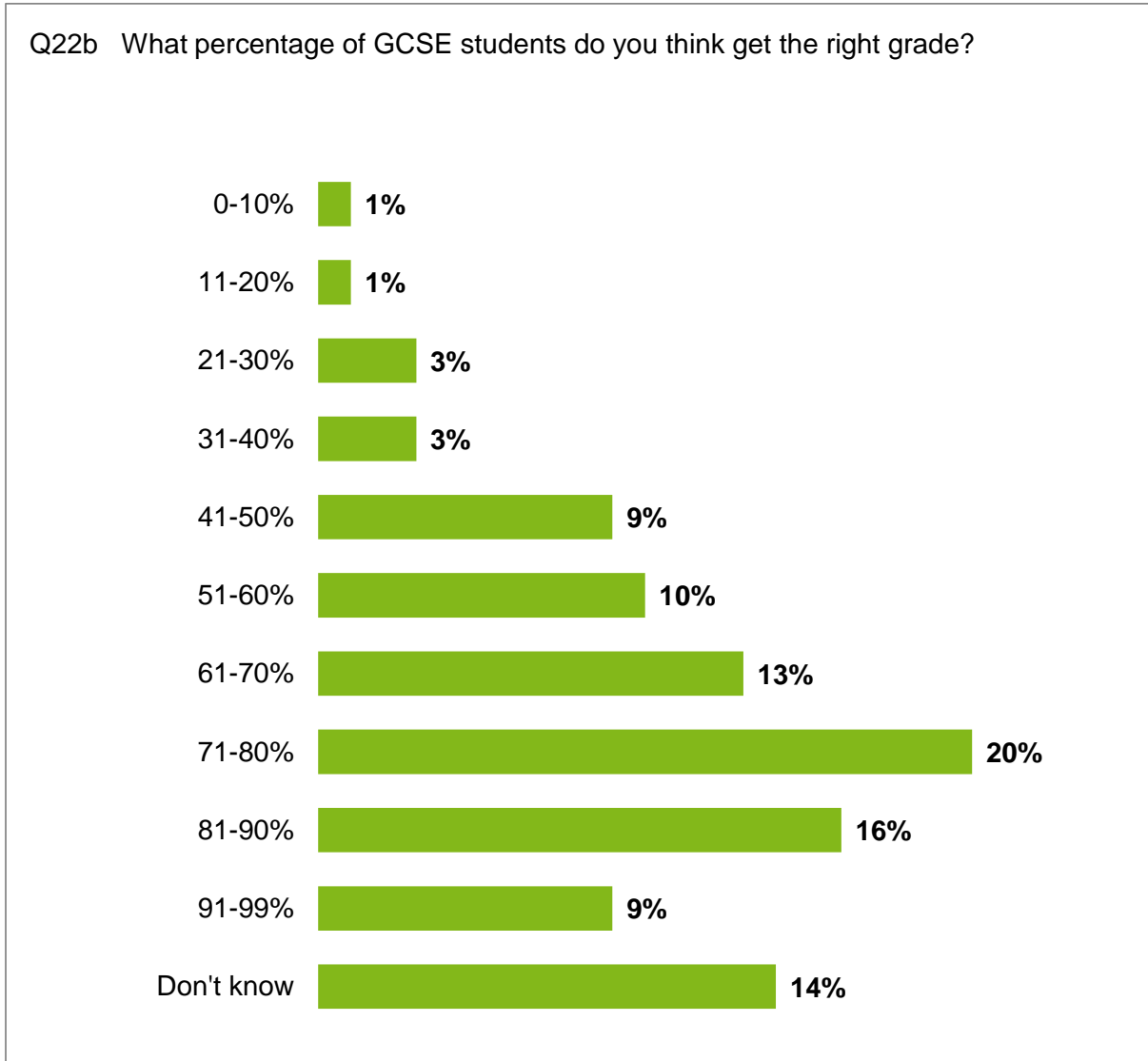
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure A50:** Perceptions of all GCSE students getting the right grade – general public



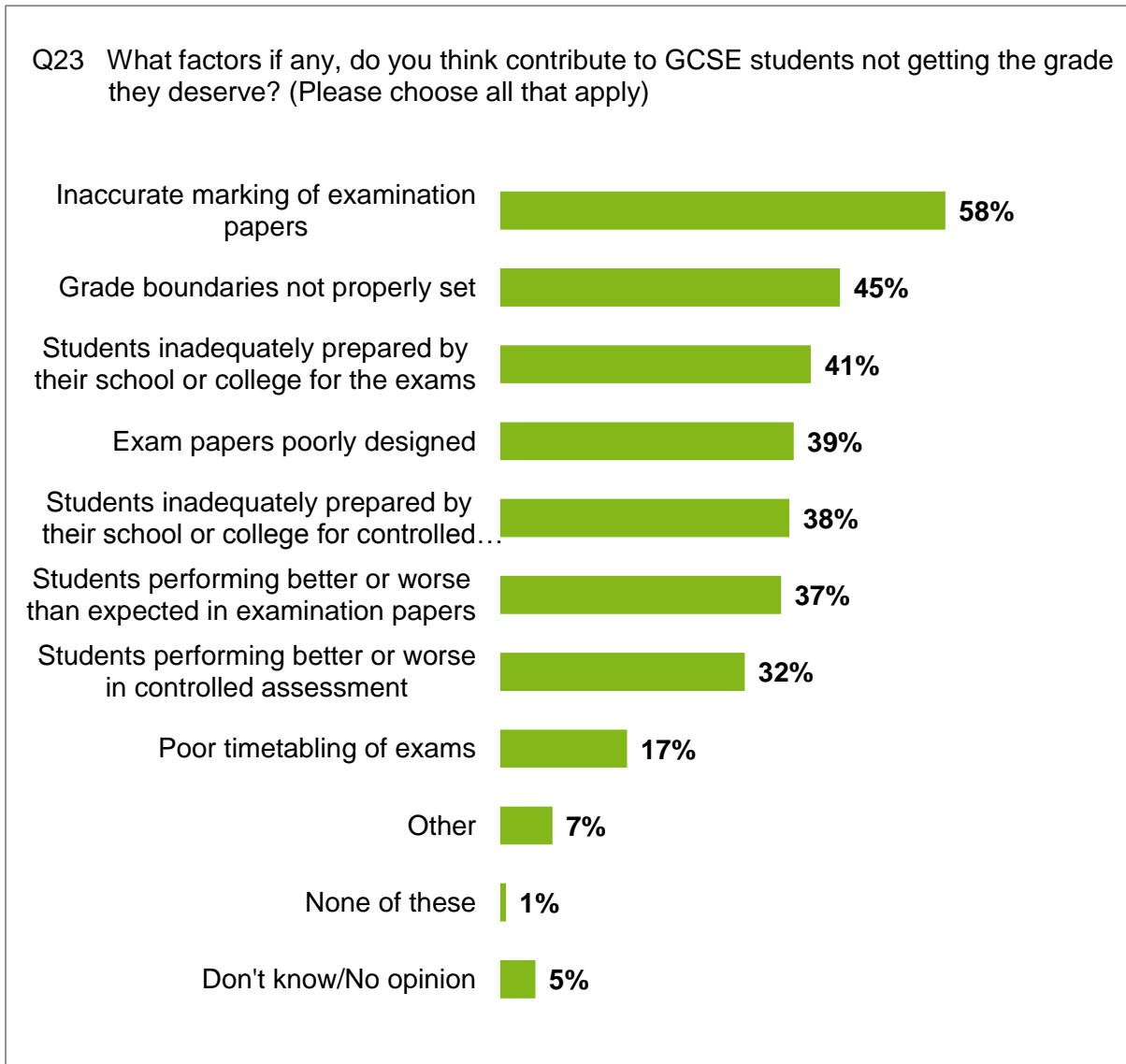
Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure A51:** Perceptions of the percentage of GCSE students not getting the right grade – general public



*Effective base: 774 members of the general public in England.*

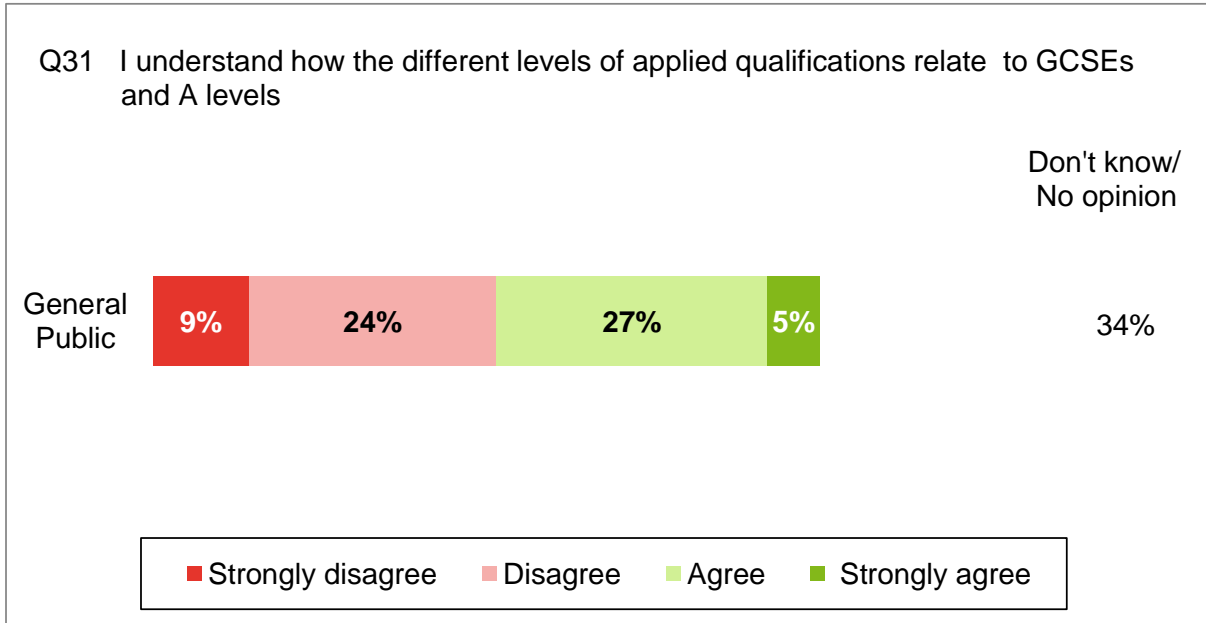
**Figure A52:** Factors contributing to incorrect grading at GCSE – general public



*Effective base: 774 members of the general public in England.*

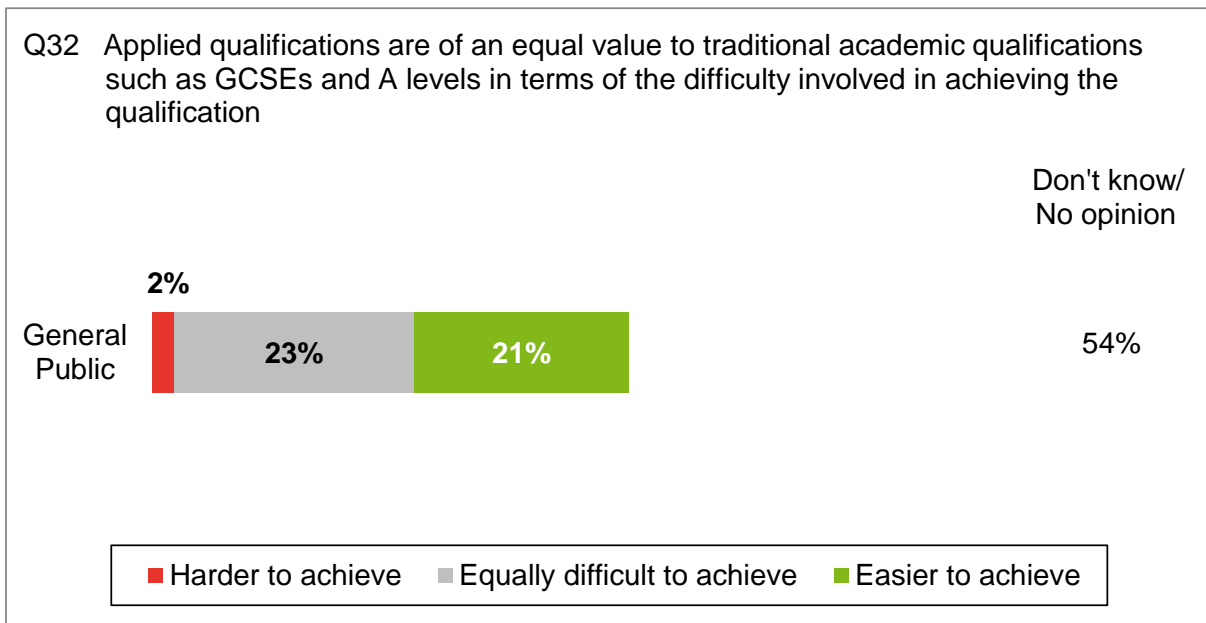


**Figure A53:** Understanding of how the different levels of applied qualifications relate to GCSEs and/or A levels – general public



Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

**Figure A54:** Perceptions of the value of applied qualifications – general public



Effective base: 1,722 members of the general public in England.

## Appendix B: Sampling, response rates and additional methodology information

### Sampling and response rates

#### Perceptions Survey: headteachers and teachers

##### Sample coverage

The sample was designed to be a representative sample of headteachers/deputy heads and teachers of A levels, GCSEs and other academic and vocational qualifications of secondary schools and colleges across England, providing coverage across the following types of establishment:

- Local authority maintained schools
- Academy and free schools
- Independent schools
- Further education colleges and sixth form centres.

To make sure that the survey was representative of centres teaching qualifications for 14 to 19 year olds, only certain types of schools/colleges were eligible to take part. Eligible types of schools and colleges matched the definition used in previous waves of the survey and included secondary and middle-deemed-secondary schools, academies teaching Key Stage 4/post-16, independent schools teaching Key Stage 4/post-16 and post-16 institutions.

##### Sample frame

The samples of headteachers and teachers were drawn from the following two sources:

- **Education Company's Education List<sup>15</sup>**. The contacts in schools were drawn from the Education Company's Education List. The list contains over five million education data profiles, including 400,000 named teachers and lecturers with email addresses, details and profiles of more than 100,000 schools. This is the most accurate and comprehensive education data set available anywhere in the UK.

This list was used as a database to select contacts in schools to be surveyed. As data are held on schools' characteristics, YouGov was able to develop a sample that was representative of school size, school type and region. Sample targets were set and the total sample was structured to meet the proportions relevant to the school population in England. The database contained named

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<sup>15</sup> [www.educationcompany.co.uk/education-data/the-education-list-2](http://www.educationcompany.co.uk/education-data/the-education-list-2)

contacts with generic school email addresses, which allowed the survey to be targeted at specific subject teachers in the specified schools.

- **YouGov panel.** The fieldwork was also carried out via teachers and headteachers already registered with the YouGov panel, who had consented to participate in research with YouGov. A ‘quota sampling’ approach was adopted to draw the final sample from the panel to make sure that the sample was representative of school type, size and region.

## Sample selection

The sample was selected to ensure the representativeness of the results in line with the school and teacher population in England. The sample frame was designed using data from the Department for Education’s *School Capacity*<sup>16</sup> and EduBase.<sup>17</sup> The sample frame was stratified by the following variables:

- School type (maintained, academy, special school/pupil referral unit, independent)
- English region.

To maintain broad consistency with the sampling approach adopted in wave 11, two samples were drawn that had different characteristics between the headteacher (senior leader) sample and the teacher sample. While drawing a sample of schools was appropriate for the headteacher survey, it was decided that in order to examine the views of a representative sample of teachers in England, multiple teachers would need to be selected from the larger establishments. This meant that, as with the wave 11 survey, the sampling design for the teacher survey took account of the number of teachers working in each school/establishment.

Using the Education List database, a random stratified sample of school contacts were drawn in line with the above parameters. This sample was compared with the Department of Education’s school population statistics to ensure they were broadly in line. In total, a sample of 10,000 school contacts that matched the sample criteria were drawn at random from the Education List database.

The headteacher sample was drawn at random from the list of eligible schools. As previously discussed, the teacher sample was drawn to take into account the numbers of teachers at the different types of establishment and multiple teacher contacts were included for larger schools.

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<sup>16</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-capacity-academic-year-2012-to-2013](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-capacity-academic-year-2012-to-2013)

<sup>17</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/edubase/home.xhtml](http://www.education.gov.uk/edubase/home.xhtml)

Alongside the sample drawn from the Education List database, a random sample of 4,000 headteachers (senior leaders) and teachers from the YouGov panel were contacted to take part in the research. These respondents were contacted at random and were sampled to be proportionate of the school population and the teacher population.

### Sample size

The achieved sample size and breakdown of the sample by key characteristics for school/teacher samples is shown in figures B1 to B4.

**Figure B1:** Profile of achieved sample by role, headteachers – unweighted %

<b>Role</b>	<b>Senior leaders N = 230</b>	<b>Teachers N = 698</b>	<b>Total N = 928</b>
Headteacher/Principal	35%	–	9%
Deputy headteacher/Principal	35%	–	9%
Classroom or subject teacher/Lecturer	–	50%	38%
Course leader	–	11%	8%
Curriculum coordinator	–	6%	5%
Head of year	–	6%	4%
Member of the senior management and/or leadership team	30%	–	8%
Programme manager	–	2%	1%
Subject manager	–	24%	18%
Other	–	1%	1%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B2:** Profile of achieved sample by region – unweighted %

<b>Region</b>	<b>Senior leaders N = 230</b>	<b>Teachers N = 698</b>	<b>Total N = 928</b>
East Midlands	7%	7%	7%
East of England	9%	14%	12%
London	14%	10%	11%
North East	4%	4%	4%
North West	11%	10%	10%
South East	31%	28%	29%
South West	9%	10%	10%
West Midlands	7%	11%	10%
Yorkshire and Humber	8%	7%	7%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B3:** Profile of achieved sample by school type – unweighted %

<b>School type</b>	<b>Senior leaders N = 230</b>	<b>Teachers N = 698</b>	<b>Total N = 928</b>
Community	20%	23%	22%
Voluntary aided	5%	5%	5%
Voluntary controlled	1%	1%	1%
Foundation	6%	4%	4%
Free school	0%	0%	0%
Academy	37%	41%	40%
Independent/private school	21%	14%	16%
FE College	7%	10%	10%
Pupil referral unit	0%	0%	0%
Other	3%	2%	2%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B4:** Profile of achieved sample by school size – unweighted %

School type	Senior leaders N = 230	Teachers N = 698	Total N = 928
Small (0–800)	27%	27%	27%
Medium	37%	36%	36%
Large (1,201+)	37%	36%	36%
Don't know	0%	1%	1%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

### Perceptions Survey: public, parents and students

#### Sample coverage

The public, parent and student sample was drawn from the YouGov online research panel of 400,000 adults who have previously consented to take part in surveys conducted by YouGov.

Three distinct samples were drawn:

- A nationally representative survey sample of 1,818 individuals (adults aged 16 plus) in England. These were sampled to be representative of the adult population in England using YouGov’s English weighting profile of age interlocked with gender, region and social grade.
- A survey of 382 young people aged 14 to 19 who are just about to take, are currently taking or have recently taken A levels, GCSEs and other academic and vocational qualifications. These were sampled to be representative of England by gender, age within the age range and region (using England representative statistics).
- A survey of 310 parents of young people who meet the ‘student’ criteria defined above. These were sampled to be representative of parents by gender, social grade and English region.

#### Sample frame

The samples of members of the public, parents and students were drawn from the YouGov panel. The samples were selected to ensure representativeness of the results in line with the population of each sample group in England.

For nationally representative samples, YouGov draws a subsample of the panel that is representative in terms of age and gender interlocked, social class and region, and invites this subsample to complete a survey.

Only the selected and invited subsample has access to the questionnaire via their username and password, and respondents can only ever answer each survey once.

### Sample size

The achieved sample size and breakdown of the public, parent and student sample by key characteristics is shown in figures B5 to B13.

**Figure B5:** Profile of achieved public sample by region – unweighted %

Region	Public N = 1,818
North East	5%
North West	14%
Yorkshire and the Humber	10%
East Midlands	9%
West Midlands	10%
East of England	11%
London	15%
South East	16%
South West	10%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B6:** Profile of achieved public sample by gender – unweighted %

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Public N = 1,818</b>
Male 16–24	6%
Male 25–34	8%
Male 35–44	9%
Male 45–54	9%
Male 55–64	7%
Male 65+	9%
Female 16–24	7%
Female 25–34	9%
Female 35–44	8%
Female 45–54	9%
Female 55–64	12%
Female 65+	6%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B7:** Achieved public sample by social grade – unweighted %

<b>Social grade</b>	<b>Public N = 1,818</b>
ABC1	58%
C2DE	42%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014



**Figure B8:** Profile of achieved parent sample by region – unweighted %

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<b>Region</b>	<b>Parents N = 321</b>
North East	4%
North West	11%
Yorkshire and the Humber	10%
East Midlands	9%
West Midlands	11%
East of England	13%
London	13%
South East	17%
South West	11%

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Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B9:** Profile of achieved parent sample by gender – unweighted %

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<b>Gender</b>	<b>Parents N = 321</b>
Male	49%
Female	51%

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Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B10:** Profile of achieved parent sample by social grade – unweighted %

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<b>Social grade</b>	<b>Parents N = 321</b>
ABC1	63%
C2DE	37%

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Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B11:** Profile of achieved student sample by region – unweighted %

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<b>Region</b>	<b>Students N = 382</b>
North East	7%
North West	15%
Yorkshire and the Humber	10%
East Midlands	11%
West Midlands	8%
East of England	10%
London	13%
South East	14%
South West	12%

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Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B12:** Profile of achieved student sample by gender – unweighted %

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Students N = 382</b>
Male	47%
Female	53%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B13:** Profile of achieved student sample by social grade – unweighted %

<b>Social grade</b>	<b>Students N = 382</b>
ABC1	21%
C2DE	79%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

## Data weighting and verification

### Data weighting

Wave 11 of the survey was the first to introduce a weighting scheme that incorporated more detailed weights than just Government Office region. The wave 12 survey follows this approach and non-response weights have been calculated in an effort to reduce the level of non-response bias caused by varying response rates among subgroups of the population.

For each sample, YouGov reviewed the achieved sample against the population profile for key variables – for example, the type of school, gender, social grade, age and region. Where differences existed, weights were calculated to correct these to ensure that a representative sample was achieved.

A summary of the weights applied by job role and school type interlocked and region size are shown in figures B14 to B19.

**Figure B14:** Summary of achieved teacher sample and weighting scheme

	Teachers sample		Teachers sample	
	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Teachers – School type	<i>N</i> = 698	<i>N</i> = 698		
Local authority maintained school	228	230	0.64	1.62
Academy	285	237	0.56	1.41
Independent school	95	49	0.33	0.83
FE college	72	168	1.47	3.71
Other	18	14	0.45	1.15
Senior – School type	<i>N</i> = 230	<i>N</i> = 230		
Local authority maintained school	73	67	0.55	1.40
Academy	84	88	0.65	1.64
Independent school	49	54	0.77	1.94
FE college	17	19	0.94	2.38
Other	7	2	0.16	0.40
Region	<i>N</i> = 928	<i>N</i> = 928		
North East	41	37	0.58	2.31
North West	94	121	0.58	3.64
Yorkshire and the Humber	67	74	0.48	2.99
East Midlands	62	74	0.60	2.09
West Midlands	93	102	0.50	1.76
East of England	115	102	0.66	1.44
London	102	158	0.74	4.63
South East	264	167	0.28	1.77

South West      90                      93                      0.51                      1.76

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B15:** Profile of achieved teacher sample – unweighted %

Characteristic	Unweighted N	Unweighted %	Weighted %
<b>School type</b>			
Local authority maintained school	228	33%	32%
Academy	285	41%	35%
Independent school	95	14%	11%
FE college	72	10%	20%
Other	18	3%	2%
<b>Teaching experience</b>			
NQT/first year of teaching	10	1%	1%
1–3 years	31	4%	5%
4–7 years	108	15%	15%
8–15 years	227	32%	32%
16 years and over	322	46%	47%
<b>Qualifications taught (multi-code)</b>			
GCSEs	595	85%	75%
AS level	415	59%	58%
A2 level	410	58%	57%
Other academic qualifications for 14–19 year olds	140	20%	23%
Vocational qualifications	124	18%	21%
Applied qualifications that include both an academic and vocational component	50	7%	10%
None of these	0	0%	0%
Do not teach	0	0%	0%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B16:** Profile of achieved senior leader sample

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Unweighted N</b>	<b>Unweighted %</b>	<b>Weighted %</b>
<b>School type</b>			
Local authority maintained school	73	32%	29%
Academy	84	37%	38%
Independent school	49	21%	24%
FE college	17	7%	8%
Other	7	3%	1%
<b>Teaching experience</b>			
NQT/first year of teaching	0	0%	0%
1–3 years	1	0%	0%
4–7 years	5	2%	2%
8–15 years	39	17%	17%
16 years and over	184	80%	81%
<b>Qualifications taught (multi-code)</b>			
GCSEs	162	70%	71%
AS	128	56%	57%
A2 level	129	56%	58%
Other academic qualifications for 14–19 year olds	43	19%	18%
Vocational qualifications	50	22%	22%
Applied qualifications that include both an academic and vocational component	26	11%	12%
None of these	7	3%	3%
Do not teach	23	10%	10%

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B17:** Summary of achieved public sample and weighting scheme

	<b>Public sample</b>		<b>Public sample</b>	
	<b>Unweighted base</b>	<b>Weighted base</b>	<b>Smallest weight factor</b>	<b>Largest weight factor</b>
	<i>N</i> = 1,818	<i>N</i> = 1,818		
<b>Region</b>				
North East	88	91	0.62	1.78
North West	246	236	0.55	1.77
Yorkshire and the Humber	185	182	0.55	1.77
East Midlands	157	164	0.60	1.92
West Midlands	188	182	0.57	1.82
East of England	202	200	0.59	1.89
London	268	291	0.65	2.09
South East	296	291	0.56	1.79
South West	188	182	0.57	1.81
<b>Age and gender</b>				
Male 16–24	107	127	1.05	1.38
Male 25–34	144	145	0.90	1.19
Male 35–44	160	164	0.93	1.22
Male 45–54	158	145	0.83	1.09
Male 55–64	133	127	0.86	1.13
Male 65+	170	164	0.89	1.16
Women 16–24	134	127	0.82	1.07
Women 25–34	168	145	0.78	1.02
Women 35–44	152	164	0.98	1.29
Women 45–54	165	164	0.91	1.20
Women 55–64	211	145	0.63	0.83
Women 65+	116	200	1.59	2.09
<b>Social grade</b>				
ABC1	1047	1000	0.55	1.87
C2DE	771	818	0.62	2.09

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

**Figure B18:** Summary of achieved parent sample and weighting scheme

	Parent sample		Parent sample	
	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
	N = 321	N = 321		
<b>Region</b>				
North East	14	16	0.95	1.40
North West	36	42	0.99	1.47
Yorkshire and the Humber	31	32	0.88	1.29
East Midlands	28	29	0.86	1.27
West Midlands	36	32	0.72	1.06
East of England	43	35	0.69	1.02
London	41	51	1.09	1.61
South East	56	51	0.80	1.18
South West	36	32	0.76	1.12
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	158	154	0.69	1.55
Female	163	167	0.72	1.61
<b>Social grade</b>				
ABC1	202	177	0.69	1.14
C2DE	119	144	0.98	1.61

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014



**Figure B19:** Summary of achieved student sample and weighting scheme

	Student sample		Student sample	
	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
	<i>N</i> = 365	<i>N</i> = 365		
<b>Region</b>				
North East	24	18	0.70	0.86
North West	55	47	0.78	0.96
Yorkshire and the Humber	36	37	0.93	1.16
East Midlands	41	33	0.71	0.88
West Midlands	31	36	1.09	1.35
East of England	37	40	0.98	1.21
London	47	58	1.16	1.44
South East	51	58	1.04	1.29
South West	43	37	0.78	0.97
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	173	182	0.79	1.44
Female	192	183	0.70	1.27
<b>Age</b>				
14–15 year olds	118	122	0.76	1.44
16–17 year olds	123	122	0.70	1.32
18–19 year olds	124	122	0.70	1.32

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

### Statistical reliability and confidence intervals

Because samples rather than the entire populations were questioned, 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 per cent of the people in a (weighted) sample of 1,000 respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary more than three (plus or minus) percentage points from the result that would have been obtained from a census of the entire population (using the same procedures).

Weighting data, while 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 that is used for statistical analysis. The tolerances presented below are based on the effective sample size.

Figure B20 provides a useful rule of thumb when judging the statistical significance of the figures contained in the final data sets.

**Figure B20:** Summary of effective base sizes and relevant confidence intervals

Confidence intervals	Weighted base	Effective base	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Teacher sample			+ -	+ -	+ -
All teachers	698	530	3.5	5.3	5.8
All headteachers	230	205	2.4	3.7	4.0
Public					
All members of the public	1,818	1,722	1.4	2.1	2.4
Parents	321	305	3.4	5.2	5.7
Students	365	353	3.1	4.8	5.2

Source: YouGov Technical Report 2014

### Additional methodology information

Over the last ten years, YouGov has carefully recruited a panel of over 400,000 UK adults to take part in its surveys. Panel members are recruited from a host of different online and offline sources, including via standard advertising, strategic partnerships with a broad range of websites and advertising word campaigns. The YouGov brand name is very strong and many members sign up after media coverage, through word of mouth, the panel community website or through existing member referrals.

When a new panel member is recruited, a host of socio-demographic information is recorded. Age, gender, region, highest educational attainment, terminal age of education, ethnicity, employment status, religious affiliation, marital status, children in the household, housing tenure, household income and other variables are all recorded at initial registration and updated periodically where appropriate.

A key feature of the YouGov panel is that it does not sell panel members to other research agencies or panel providers for them to run their surveys with them.

YouGov only engages active survey-takers. Naturally, it does not survey any opt-outs or invalid emails. More importantly, it evaluates each participant on the recency and frequency of their survey activity. As panellists become less active, they work to re-engage them in the survey-taking process. However, if they fail to do so, they are automatically excluded from further participation.

YouGov ensures that panellists are not invited to surveys too frequently and it can also exclude people based on recent participation in specific surveys – or surveys in general. These exclusions can be customised on a per survey basis.

YouGov has a proprietary, automated sampling system that invites respondents based on their profile information and how that aligns with targets for surveys that are currently active. Respondents are automatically, randomly selected, based on survey availability and how that matches their profile information.

### **Weighting – teachers, parents, students and public**

YouGov used rim weighting as the standard approach to ensure the data were representative of the targets across each of the rims. For example, job role is one rim and school type is used as another. Rim weighting is an iterative process, whereby it recalculates the weights a number of times until the required degree of accuracy is reached. All weights are capped at six. The advantage of using the rim weighting approach is that the weighting can include a greater number of variables and it is not necessary to have targets for all the interlaced cells.

## **Appendix C: Impact of moving to an online survey**

The wave 12 survey is the first to be conducted using an online data collection method. The various modes of data collection have their advantages and disadvantages and differences will be seen in the results of the same or similar questions asked using various modes.

Irrespective of any perceived or real impact on the accuracy of the findings due to the change in collection method, it is important to note that, when looking to compare data over time when different modes have been used, the data may vary for methodological rather than legitimate reasons. In addition, changes have been made to the sampling approach and the design of questionnaires, which makes time series analysis unreliable regardless of any switch in the mode of data collection.

A key advantage of online research is the neutrality of the interview mode. Independent research has found that respondents modify their answers in the presence of an interviewer, including when the interviewer is on the other end of the telephone. This lack of 'social distance' can mean that respondents feel compelled to give a 'safe' answer.

In this study to understand any differences that might occur in the change between modes a parallel wave with all sample groups was conducted. A key finding has been the higher prevalence of "Don't know / No opinion" responses in the offline public surveys compared to those seen in the online responses.

The results of this mode analysis have shown that direct experience of the issues is an important factor questions related to teachers or the exam system, parents and students do not respond significantly differently when questioned online or offline. It is only the wider general public samples (where direct experience may be considered lower) that are much less likely to offer an opinion when asked by an interviewer compared to when answering online.

The key factor here would be the presence of the interviewer and the decision to offer a "Don't know / No opinion" response. While a proportion of online respondents offer a "Don't know / No opinion" response, it appears that they are more likely to consider the question and give an opinion than offline respondents.

The importance of direct experience can be shown by the results of the comparison of teachers' data. Teachers are all starting from a similar base in terms of levels of awareness and there were very few differences in the levels of "Don't know / No opinion" responses from teachers surveyed online and offline.

The key finding from a comparison of the online and offline modes of data collection with teachers is the increased propensity to provide a more positive response when

asked a question by an interviewer compared to when individuals answer online in their own time and in private.

Importantly, the largest differences between the online and offline samples are seen with regards to the teachers group. It may be that respondents were less likely to express their concern about these organisations in person, in an interview that was being conducted in a formal school environment and was being recorded. Online responses are considered more effective for capturing sensitive data in a way that gives the respondent a greater sense of anonymity.

These are interesting findings to put the wave 12 responses in context with previous data. However, due to the changes in the questionnaires, many direct time series comparisons are not possible and any modelling to the wave 12 data has not been applied to account for these mode differences.

## Appendix D: Users and user feedback

### Users of these statistics

The users of these statistics include Ofqual, the Department for Education, and the examination boards. They use these statistics to provide key information about public confidence in GCSEs and A levels.

### User feedback

- Following feedback from those producing previous reports and from users of the report there have been several changes to how the survey was conducted in wave 12:
  - This year, data from all respondent groups was collected using online questionnaires. This change reflect improvements in both technology and practice, with online data collection not only being more efficient but also arguably more reliable than the existing collection approach.
- Improvements have also been made to the sampling to make sure that the samples drawn are unbiased and representative of the population.
- Changes were made to the wording of some questions to improve respondent understanding.

Ofqual are conducting a rolling series of online surveys to help statistical releases meet your needs.

Ofqual would especially like to invite you to take part in the online survey<sup>18</sup> for this release. It will take about ten minutes to complete. Your responses will remain entirely confidential in any reports published about the survey.

If you would like to take part in the survey, have any questions or would prefer a paper or large-type copy, please contact us at: [statistics@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@ofqual.gov.uk).

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<sup>18</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/standards/statistics/perceptions](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/standards/statistics/perceptions)

## Appendix E: Questionnaires

This appendix contains the questions that were asked of each group of respondents. While many questions are consistent between the four questionnaires (and five groups), specific questions and available responses were tailored to the particular audience.

The details below represent the text that was given to the recipients. In addition, there was a degree of routing in the questionnaires so that further questions were not asked of people for whom it was not relevant. These routing instructions have been excluded from what follows for reasons of clarity.

Questions numbered with an S (for example S3) are screening questions to determine whether a respondent is from the correct audience.

### **Questionnaire for teachers and headteachers**

Both teachers and headteachers were asked to complete the same series of questions.

### **Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications – 2014**

YouGov has been commissioned by Ofqual to carry out a national survey to understand perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications. So we have a range of views we are asking questions to headteachers, teachers, students, parents and the general public.

This survey is important to Ofqual and similar questions have been asked annually since 2003. The findings of this survey are used by Ofqual to gain an insight into the confidence of various stakeholders; to monitor people's perceptions of the qualification system; and to highlight areas where Ofqual can do more to support public understanding.

### **Your response**

As with all YouGov studies, your opinions and views will remain entirely confidential and will not be reported in a way that can identify either individuals or individual schools.

Completing this survey should take you approximately 10 minutes. You have been selected at random to take part in this survey and please do take the opportunity to take part based on your current experience.

The survey will close on Friday 28th February 2014.

Before we start asking the main questions in this survey we would like to ask you some background details. This will allow us to understand whether different groups of

people have different views of qualifications. For example, those who have been teaching for many years or who are relatively new to the profession. It will also allow us to only ask those questions which are appropriate to your experiences.

S3 – Which ONE of the following best describes your current professional role?

- Headteacher / Principal
- Deputy Headteacher / Principal
- Classroom or subject teacher / Lecturer
- Course leader
- Curriculum co-ordinator
- Head of Year
- Member of the senior management and / or leadership team
- Programme manager
- Subject manager
- Other (open response)
- None of these
- I do not work in education

S1 – Which of the following qualifications do you currently teach? (Please choose all that apply)

- GCSEs
- AS
- A2
- Other academic qualifications for 14–19 year olds
- Vocational qualifications
- Applied qualifications that include both an academic and vocational component
- None of these
- Do not teach



S2 – You said that you teach other academic qualifications, which do you teach?  
(Please choose all that apply)

- IGCSEs
- The International Baccalaureate
- The Pre-U
- Freestanding Maths
- Other (open response)

S4 – How many years teaching experience do you have?

- NQT/first year of teaching
- 1–3 years
- 4–7 years
- 8–15 years
- 16 years and over

S5 – Which, if any, of the following categories of subjects do you teach? (Please choose all that apply)

- English
- Maths
- Science
- EBacc humanities
- Non-EBacc humanities
- Languages
- Art, music or drama
- Design technology
- IT
- Other (open response)

S6 – Which of the following BEST describes the school / college you work at?

- Community
- Voluntary aided
- Voluntary controlled
- Foundation
- Free school
- Academy
- Independent / private school
- FE college
- Other (open response)

S7 – How many students are at your school?

- 0–800
- 801–1,200
- 1,201+
- Don't know

S8 – Which of the following BEST describes what part of the country you work in?

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- East of England
- West Midlands
- East Midlands
- London
- South East
- South West

## **Awareness of Ofqual**

This first section asks about whether you have heard of Ofqual and how much you understand about its role.

Q1 – Which of the following statements best describes your knowledge of Ofqual?

- Know a lot about Ofqual
- Know a fair amount about Ofqual
- Know just a little about Ofqual
- Heard of Ofqual, but know nothing about it
- Never heard of Ofqual

Q2 – Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The aim of Ofqual is to make sure that learners get the results they deserve, and that the qualifications they receive count, both now and in the future.

Before today, were you aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England?

- Yes, I was aware of this
- No, I was not aware of this
- Don't know

## **Perceptions of Ofqual**

This section asks about your perceptions of Ofqual. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Q3 – Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q4 – Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is not effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Changes made to GCSEs in the last 12 months
- Changes made to A levels in the last 12 months
- A level results – I know students who are getting higher grades than they deserve
- A level results – I believe A level grades are continuing to rise year on year
- GCSE results – I know students who are getting higher grades than they deserve
- GCSE results – I believe GCSE grades are continuing to rise year on year
- I believe changes to performance tables mean standards cannot be the same
- Inconsistent marking exists
- Inconsistent grading exists
- International league tables show a different picture to exam results
- Other (open response)
- Don't know
- None of these

Q5 – Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Previous experience of Ofqual
- Things that I have heard about Ofqual / read in the media about Ofqual / my teachers have told
- I have confidence in the examination system
- Measures taken by Ofqual to address grade inflation
- Measures taken by Ofqual to make sure standards are comparable
- Measures taken by Ofqual to maintain standards in GCSEs
- Measures taken by Ofqual to maintain standards in A levels

- Measures taken by Ofqual to ensure that marking is consistent / reliable
- Improving students' performance
- Other (open response)
- Don't know
- None of these

Although the government is responsible for deciding education policy, as the independent regulator, Ofqual sets out the rules and requirements for the design and delivery of assessments and qualifications. For example, Ofqual sets out the rules for allowing reasonable adjustments for candidates with particular needs who are taking exams.

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

Q6a – When Ofqual makes a decision it is clearly explained and can be understood.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q6b – When Ofqual makes a decision, it provides enough detail to allow people to understand how it will work in practice.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q6c – When Ofqual makes a decision, it is effective in communicating it to everyone who needs to be aware of it.

- I strongly agree with this statement

- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

### Trust in examination information

One of the duties of Ofqual is to ensure that the public understand the examination system. Therefore, we would like to ask you how you would find out information on exams, so we can understand how best to make sure accurate information is available.

We are now going to list some groups of people that could provide you with some information about how exams are marked and graded. For each one, please tell us how much if at all, you would trust them as a source of information about exams:

	A great amount	A fair amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know / No opinion
Q7a – Teachers in your school or from other schools					
Q7b – The Department for Education					
Q7c – Ofqual – the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments					
Q7d – Exam boards / Awarding organisations					
Q7e – Local authorities					
Q7f – The local media					
Q7g – The national media					
Q7h – Professional associations					

Q8 – You said that you don't trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams, why is that? (Please choose all that apply)

- Ofqual is not independent of the government
- Ofqual is a new organisation that is still to establish my trust
- Don't have much contact with / receive information from Ofqual
- The exam boards are the first place I would go to
- Other (open response)
- Don't know

### **Perceptions of A level qualifications – importance and value of the A level qualification**

The next section will ask you about your views on GCE A levels, including AS levels. These are usually taken by those over the age of 16 in either schools or colleges.

In order for us to identify whether there are differences between the different disciplines, can we ask that you focus your answers on those subjects you told us you teach.

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

Q9 – I have confidence in the A level system.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q10 – Do you have any concerns about the current A level examination system? If so, what are they? (Please choose all that apply)

- No concerns
- Incorrect grading
- Incorrect marking of exam papers
- The outcome of an enquiry or appeal about a result

- Timetabling of exams
- Heavy workload
- Too many exams
- Lack of information / knowledge about standards
- Constant change in the exam system
- Removal of the January assessment opportunity / January exams
- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
- Too much pressure / stress on students
- Too much pressure / stress on teachers
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion

Q11 – Which of the following, if any, do you believe are strengths of the current A level examination system? (Please choose all that apply)

- It is well understood by people
- A levels are, generally, a trusted qualification
- Consistent standards year on year
- Good preparation for further study
- Good preparation for work
- Develops broad range of skills for students
- Other (open response)
- Do not think there are any strengths
- Don't know / No opinion

Q12 – Compared to last year, how would you say that your confidence in the A level system has changed?

- I have more confidence in the A level system than last year
- I have less confidence in the A level system than last year



- I have about the same confidence in the A level system as last year
- Don't know / No opinion

A critical part of the A level system is the marking and grading of exams. The next few questions will ask specifically about this part of the process. By grades we mean A\*, A, B, C, D etc.

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

Q13a – I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q13b – The accuracy of marking A level papers has decreased over the past two years

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q14a – Do you think that all A level students get the right grade?

- Yes, I do
- No, I don't
- Don't know

Q14b – What percentage of A level students do you think get the right grade? Please select a %, if you are unsure please provide your best estimate.

0 ————— 100%

- Don't know

Q15 – What factors, if any, do you think contribute to A level students not getting the grade they deserve? (Please choose all that apply)

- Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers
- Students performing better or worse than expected in coursework
- Inaccurate marking of examination papers
- Exam papers poorly designed
- Coursework / controlled assessment poorly designed
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for the exams
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for coursework
- Poor timetabling of exams
- Grade boundaries not properly set
- Other (open question)
- Don't know
- None of these

Unlike the previous questions, we would be grateful if you could consider your wider experience of working in education rather than just your own subject in answering this question.

Q16 – Still thinking about grading, are there any subjects you are particularly concerned about? (Open response)

### **Perceptions of GCSE qualifications – importance and value of the GCSE qualifications**

The next section will ask you about your views on GCSEs. Most schools offer these to their students between the ages of 14 and 16, but they are also taken by older students in either schools or colleges.

These qualifications are different to IGCSEs so please do not consider these in your answers. Questions on IGCSEs follow in a later section.

In order for us to identify whether there are differences between the different disciplines, can we ask that you focus your answers on those subjects you told us you teach.

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

Q17 – I have confidence in the GCSE system.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q18 – Compared to last year, how would you say that your confidence in the GCSE system has changed?

- I have more confidence in the GCSE system than last year
- I have less confidence in the GCSE system than last year
- I have about the same confidence in the GCSE system as last year
- Don't know / No opinion

Q19 – Do you have any concerns about the current GCSE examination system? If yes, what are they? (Please choose all that apply)

- No concerns
- Incorrect grading
- Incorrect marking of exam papers
- Outcome of an enquiry or appeal about a result
- Timetabling of exams
- Heavy workload
- Too many exams
- Lack of information / knowledge about standards
- Constant change in the exam system
- The move to have all exams at the end of the year
- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers

- Too much pressure / stress on teachers
- Too much pressure / stress on students
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion

Q20 – Which of the following, if any, do you believe are strengths of the current GCSE examination system? (Please choose all that apply)

- GCSEs are well understood by people
- GCSEs are generally a trusted qualification
- GCSEs are of a consistent standard year on year
- GCSEs are good preparation for further study
- GCSEs are good preparation for work
- GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students
- Other (open response)
- Do not think there are any strengths
- Don't know / No opinion

A critical part of the GCSE system is the marking and grading of exams. The next few questions will ask specifically about this part of the process. By grades we mean A\*, A, B, C, D etc.

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

Q21a – I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q21b – The accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers has decreased over the past two years.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q22a – Do you think that all GCSE students get the right grade?

- Yes, I do
- No, I don't
- Don't know

Q22b – What percentage of GCSE students do you think get the right grade? Please select a %, if you are unsure please provide your best estimate.

0 ————— 100%

- Don't know

Q23 – What factors, if any, do you think contribute to GCSE students not getting the grade they deserve? (Please choose all that apply)

- Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers
- Students performing better or worse in controlled assessment
- Inaccurate marking of examination papers
- Exam papers poorly designed
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for the exams
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for controlled assessment
- Poor timetabling of exams
- Grade boundaries not properly set
- Other (open response)

- Don't know / No opinion
- None of these

Unlike the previous questions, we would be grateful if you could consider your wider experience of working in education rather than just your own subject in answering this question.

Q24 – Still thinking about grading, are there any subjects you are particularly concerned about? (Open response)

### **Attitudes towards other qualifications**

Not all students study GCSEs and / or A levels in schools; a range of other qualifications are available which may be appropriate for some learners. In this section we ask about your views of these qualifications.

We appreciate that not everyone will have experience of all these alternatives, so please answer based on your knowledge and select “Don't know / No opinion” if this best describes your views.

We will talk about three broad types of qualifications which are taught in schools and colleges:

- Other academic qualifications which are similar to GCSE and A level;
- Vocational qualifications which cover the specific skills needed for a particular job; and
- Applied qualifications which cover a broad range of skills but in a particular work related context.

We provide further details below and some examples of each type before we ask questions about your views.

We would now like you to think about academic qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Examples of these include IGCSEs, International Baccalaureate, Pre-U and Freestanding Maths qualifications.

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

Q25a – I understand the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs / A levels and other academic qualifications (for example IGCSEs, IB or Pre-U).

- I strongly agree with this statement

- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q26 – Other academic qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- I agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- I disagree – they are easier to achieve
- I disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

We would like you to think about vocational qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Vocational qualifications are those which address skills that directly relate to the skills needed in a particular job. We are not asking about vocational qualifications which are taken in the workplace as part of a job.

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

Q28 – I understand how the different levels of vocational qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Vocational qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Q29 – Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- I agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- I disagree – they are easier to achieve
- I disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

We would like you to think about applied qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Examples of applied qualifications include BTECs, OCR Nationals, Principal Learning in Engineering or GCSEs in applied subjects.

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

Q31 – I understand how the different levels of applied qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Applied qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Q32 – Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- Agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- Disagree – they are easier to achieve
- Disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey – your input will be crucial for Ofqual and will increase its understanding of perceptions of the qualifications system and will highlight areas where Ofqual can do more to support public understanding.



## Questionnaire for students

S2 – Are you currently in Key Stage 4 at school (years 10 to 11) and intending to take any of the following qualifications when you are older? (Please choose all that apply)

- Yes – A level
- Yes – GCSE
- Yes – IGCSE
- Yes – The International Baccalaureate / IBacc / IB
- Yes – The Pre-U
- Yes – freestanding maths
- No
- Don't know

S3 – Are you currently studying for one or more of the following qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Yes – A level
- Yes – GCSE
- Yes – IGCSE
- Yes – The International Baccalaureate / IBacc / IB
- Yes – The Pre-U
- Yes – freestanding maths
- No
- Don't know

S4 – Have you completed one or more of the following qualifications within the last two years? (Please choose all that apply)

- Yes – A level
- Yes – GCSE
- Yes – IGCSE

- Yes – The International Baccalaureate / IBacc / IB
- Yes – The Pre-U
- Yes – freestanding maths
- No
- Don't know

### **Introduction**

This national survey seeks to understand your perceptions of qualifications and the examinations system. Similar questions have been asked annually since 2003. The findings of this survey are used to monitor people's perceptions of the qualification system and to highlight areas where more can be done to support young people's (and more generally the public's) understanding. Completing this survey should take you approximately 10 minutes and your account will be credited with 50 points for completing this survey.

### **Awareness of Ofqual**

This first section asks about whether you have heard of Ofqual and how much you understand about its role.

Q1 – Which of the following statements best describes your knowledge of Ofqual?

- Know a lot about Ofqual
- Know a fair amount about Ofqual
- Know just a little about Ofqual
- Heard of Ofqual, but know nothing about it
- Never heard of Ofqual

Q2 – Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The aim of Ofqual is to make sure that learners get the results they deserve, and that the qualifications they receive count, both now and in the future.

Before today, were you aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England?

- Yes, I was aware of this
- No, I was not aware of this

- Don't know

### Perceptions of Ofqual

This section asks about your perceptions of Ofqual. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Q3 – Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q4 – Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is not effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Changes made to GCSEs in the last 12 months
- Changes made to A levels in the last 12 months
- A level results – I know students who are getting higher grades than they deserve
- A level results – I believe A level grades are continuing to rise year on year
- GCSE results – I know students who are getting higher grades than they deserve
- GCSE results – I believe GCSE grades are continuing to rise year on year
- I believe changes to performance tables mean standards cannot be the same
- Inconsistent marking exists
- Inconsistent grading exists
- International league tables show a different picture to exam results
- Other (open response)
- Don't know
- None of these

Q5 – Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Previous experience of Ofqual
- Things that I have heard about Ofqual / read in the media about Ofqual / my teachers have told
- I have confidence in the examination system
- Measures taken by Ofqual to address grade inflation
- Measures taken by Ofqual to make sure standards are comparable
- Measures taken by Ofqual to maintain standards in GCSEs
- Measures taken by Ofqual to maintain standards in A levels
- Measures taken by Ofqual to ensure that marking is consistent / reliable
- Improving students' performance
- Other (open response)
- Don't know
- None of these

Although the government is responsible for deciding education policy, as the independent regulator, Ofqual sets out the rules and requirements for the design and delivery of assessments and qualifications. For example, Ofqual sets out the rules for allowing reasonable adjustments for candidates with particular needs who are taking exams.

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

Q6a – When Ofqual makes a decision it is clearly explained and can be understood.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q6c – When Ofqual makes a decision, it is effective in communicating it to everyone who needs to be aware of it.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

### Trust in exam information

One of the duties of Ofqual is to ensure that the public understand the exam system. Therefore, we would like to ask you how you would find out information on exams, so we can understand how best to make sure accurate information is available.

We are now going to list some groups of people that could provide you with some information about how exams are marked and graded. For each one, please tell us how much if at all, you would trust them as a source of information about exams:

	A great amount	A fair amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know / No opinion
Q7a – Teachers in your school or from other schools					
Q7c – Ofqual – the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments					
Q7d – Exam boards / Awarding organisations					
Q7f – The local media					
Q7g – The national media					
Q7J – Your parents / guardians					
Q7k – Other parents / guardians					
Q7l – Other students					

Q8 – You said that you don't trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams, why is that? (Please choose all that apply)

- Ofqual is not independent of the government
- Ofqual is a new organisation that is still to establish my trust
- Other (open response)
- Don't know

### **Perceptions of A level qualifications – importance and value of the A level qualification**

The next section will ask you about your views on A levels, including AS qualifications. These are usually taken by those over the age of 16 in either schools or colleges.

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

Q9 – I have confidence in the A level system.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q10 – Do you have any concerns about the current A level examinations system? If so, what are they? (Please choose all that apply)

- No concerns
- Incorrect grading
- Incorrect marking of exam papers
- The outcome of an enquiry or appeal about a result
- Timetabling of exams
- Heavy workload
- Too many exams

- Lack of information / knowledge about standards
- Constant change in the exam system
- Removal of the January assessment opportunity / January exams
- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
- Too much pressure / stress on students
- Too much pressure / stress on teachers
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion

Q11 – Which of the following, if any, do you believe are strengths of the current A level exams system? (Please choose all that apply)

- It is well understood by people
- A levels are, generally, a trusted qualification
- Consistent standards year on year
- Good preparation for further study
- Good preparation for work
- Develops broad range of skills for students
- Other (open response)
- Do not think there are any strengths
- Don't know / No opinion

Q12 – Compared to last year, how would you say that your confidence in the A level system has changed?

- I have more confidence in the A level system than last year
- I have less confidence in the A level system than last year
- I have about the same confidence in the A level system as last year
- Don't know / No opinion

A critical part of the A level system is the marking and grading of exams. The next few questions will ask specifically about this part of the process. By grades we mean A\*, A, B, C, D etc.

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

Q13a – I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q13b – The accuracy of marking A level papers has decreased over the past two years.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q14a – Do you think that all A level students get the right grade?

- Yes, I do
- No, I don't
- Don't know

Q14b – What percentage of A level students do you think get the right grade? Please select a %, if you are unsure please provide your best estimate.

0 ————— 100%

- Don't know

Q15 – What factors, if any, do you think contribute to A level students not getting the grade they deserve? (Please choose all that apply)



- Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers
- Students performing better or worse than expected in coursework
- Inaccurate marking of exam papers
- Exam papers poorly designed
- Coursework / controlled assessment poorly designed
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for the exams
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for coursework
- Poor timetabling of exams
- Grade boundaries not properly set
- Other (open question)
- Don't know
- None of these

Q16 – Still thinking about grading, are there any subjects you are particularly concerned about? (Open response)

### **Perceptions of GCSE qualifications – importance and value of the GCSE qualifications**

The next section will ask you about your views on GCSEs. Most schools offer these to their students between the ages of 14 and 16, but they are also taken by older students in either schools or colleges.

These qualifications are different to IGCSEs so please do not consider these in your answers. Questions on IGCSEs follow in a later section.

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

Q17 – I have confidence in the GCSE system.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement

- Don't know / No opinion

Q18 – Compared to last year, how would you say that your confidence in the GCSE system has changed?

- I have more confidence in the GCSE system than last year
- I have less confidence in the GCSE system than last year
- I have about the same confidence in the GCSE system as last year
- Don't know / No opinion

Q19 – Do you have any concerns about the current GCSE examination system? If yes, what are they? (Please choose all that apply)

- No concerns
- Incorrect grading
- Incorrect marking of exam papers
- Outcome of an enquiry or appeal about a result
- Timetabling of exams
- Heavy workload
- Too many exams
- Lack of information / knowledge about standards
- Constant change in the exam system
- The move to have all exams at the end of the year
- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
- Too much pressure / stress on teachers
- Too much pressure / stress on students
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion

Q10 – Which of the following, if any, do you believe are strengths of the current GCSE exam system? (Please choose all that apply)

- GCSEs are well understood by people
- GCSEs are generally a trusted qualification
- GCSEs are of a consistent standard year on year
- GCSEs are good preparation for further study
- GCSEs are good preparation for work
- GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students
- Other (open response)
- Do not think there are any strengths
- Don't know / No opinion

A critical part of the GCSE system is the marking and grading of exams. The next few questions will ask specifically about this part of the process. By grades we mean A\*, A, B, C, D etc.

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

Q21a – I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q21b – The accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers has decreased over the past two years.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement

- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q22a – Do you think that all GCSE students get the right grade?

- Yes, I do
- No, I don't
- Don't know

Q22b – What percentage of GCSE students do you think get the right grade? Please select a %, if you are unsure please provide your best estimate.

0 ————— 100%

- Don't know

Q23 – What factors, if any, do you think contribute to GCSE students not getting the grade they deserve? (Please choose all that apply)

- Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers
- Students performing better or worse in controlled assessment
- Inaccurate marking of exam papers
- Exam papers poorly designed
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for the exams
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for controlled assessment
- Poor timetabling of exams
- Grade boundaries not properly set
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion
- None of these

Q24 – Still thinking about grading, are there any subjects you are particularly concerned about? (Open response)

## Attitudes towards other qualifications

Not all students study GCSEs and / or A levels in schools; a range of other qualifications are available which may be appropriate for some learners. In this section we ask about your views of these qualifications.

We appreciate that not everyone will have experience of all these alternatives, so please answer based on your knowledge and select “Don’t know / No opinion” if this best describes your views.

We will talk about three broad types of qualifications which are taught in schools and colleges:

- Other academic qualifications which are similar to GCSE and A level.
- Vocational qualifications which cover the specific skills needed for a particular job.
- Applied qualifications which cover a broad range of skills but in a particular work related context.

We provide further details below and some examples of each type before we ask questions about your views.

We would now like you to think about academic qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Examples of these include IGCSEs, International Baccalaureate, Pre-U and freestanding maths qualifications.

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

Q25a – I understand the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs / A levels and other academic qualifications (for example IGCSEs, IB or Pre-U).

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don’t know / No opinion

Q26 – Other academic qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- I agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- I disagree – they are easier to achieve
- I disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

We would like you to think about vocational qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Vocational qualifications are those which address skills that directly relate to the skills needed in a particular job. We are not asking about vocational qualifications which are taken in the workplace as part of a job.

Q27 – Are you currently studying or have you recently studied (within the last two years) any vocational qualifications at a school or a sixth form college?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

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

Q28 – I understand how the different levels of vocational qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Vocational qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Q29 – Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- I agree they are equally difficult to achieve

- I disagree – they are easier to achieve
- I disagree – they are harder to achieve
- I don't know / No opinion

We would like you to think about applied qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Examples of applied qualifications include BTECs, OCR Nationals, Principal Learning in Engineering or GCSEs in applied subjects.

Q 30 – Are you currently studying or have you recently studied (within the last two years) any applied qualifications at a school or a sixth form college?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

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

Q31 – I understand how the different levels of applied qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Applied qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Q32 – Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- Agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- Disagree – they are easier to achieve
- Disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

### Organisations to contact for concerns about the exam system

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?

	Very likely to contact	Likely to contact	Unlikely to contact	Very unlikely to contact	Don't know / No opinion
Q33a – The government					
Q33b – Your MP					
Q33c – Ofqual – the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments					
Q33d – Schools / Teachers					
Q33e – Exam boards / Awarding organisations					

Q34 – And would there be any other group / organisation you would be likely to contact if you had a concern? (Open response)

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey – your input will be crucial for Ofqual and will increase its understanding of perceptions of the qualifications system and will highlight areas where Ofqual can do more to support public understanding.

### Questionnaire for parents

S5 – Do you have children in any the following age groups?

- 0–4
- 5–9
- 10–13
- 14–19
- Children aged 20 or older
- I don't have any children

S2 – Do you have a child who is currently in years 10 or 11 at school (aged 14–16) and intends to take any of the following qualifications when they are older?



- Yes – A level
- Yes – GCSE
- Yes – IGCSE
- Yes – The International Baccalaureate / IBacc / IB
- Yes – The Pre-U
- Yes – freestanding maths
- No
- Don't know

S3 – Do you have a child who is currently in their first or second year of studying any of the following qualifications?

- Yes – A level
- Yes – GCSE
- Yes – IGCSE
- Yes – The International Baccalaureate / IBacc / IB
- Yes – The Pre-U
- Yes – Freestanding Maths
- No
- Don't know

S4 – Do you have a child who has any of the following qualifications?

- Yes – A level
- Yes – GCSE
- Yes – IGCSE
- Yes – The International Baccalaureate / IBacc / IB
- Yes – The Pre-U
- Yes – freestanding maths

- No
- Don't know

### **Introduction**

This national survey seeks to understand your perceptions of qualifications and the examinations system. Similar questions have been asked annually since 2003. The findings of this survey are used to monitor people's perceptions of the qualification system and to highlight areas where more can be done to support public understanding. Completing this survey should take you approximately 10 minutes and your account will be credited with 50 points for completing this survey.

### **Awareness of Ofqual**

This first section asks about whether you have heard of Ofqual and how much you understand about its role.

Q1 – Which of the following statements best describes your knowledge of Ofqual?

- Know a lot about Ofqual
- Know a fair amount about Ofqual
- Know just a little about Ofqual
- Heard of Ofqual, but know nothing about it
- Never heard of Ofqual

Q2 – Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, exams and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The aim of Ofqual is to make sure that learners get the results they deserve, and that the qualifications they receive count, both now and in the future.

Before today, were you aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England?

- Yes, I was aware of this
- No, I was not aware of this
- Don't know

### **Perceptions of Ofqual**

This section asks about your perceptions of Ofqual. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Q3 – Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q4 – Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is not effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Changes made to GCSEs in the last 12 months
- Changes made to A levels in the last 12 months
- A level results – I know students who are getting higher grades than they deserve
- A level results – I believe A level grades are continuing to rise year on year
- GCSE results – I know students who are getting higher grades than they deserve
- GCSE results – I believe GCSE grades are continuing to rise year on year
- I believe changes to performance tables mean standards cannot be the same
- Inconsistent marking exists
- Inconsistent grading exists
- International league tables show a different picture to exam results
- Other (open response)
- Don't know
- None of these

Q5 – Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Previous experience of Ofqual

- Things that I have heard about Ofqual / read in the media about Ofqual / my child's school has told
- I have confidence in the examinations system
- Measures taken by Ofqual to address grade inflation
- Measures taken by Ofqual to make sure standards are comparable
- Measures taken by Ofqual to maintain standards in GCSEs
- Measures taken by Ofqual to maintain standards in A levels
- Measures taken by Ofqual to ensure that marking is consistent / reliable
- Improving students' performance
- Other (open response)
- Don't know
- None of these

Although the government is responsible for deciding education policy, as the independent regulator, Ofqual sets out the rules and requirements for the design and delivery of assessments and qualifications. For example, Ofqual sets out the rules for allowing reasonable adjustments for candidates with particular needs who are taking exams.

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

Q6a – When Ofqual makes a decision it is clearly explained and can be understood.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q6c – When Ofqual makes a decision, it is effective in communicating it to everyone who needs to be aware of it.

- I strongly agree with this statement

- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

### Trust in exam information

One of the duties of Ofqual is to ensure that the public understand the exam system. Therefore, we would like to ask you how you would find out information on exams, so we can understand how best to make sure accurate information is available.

We are now going to list some groups of people that could provide you with some information about how exams are marked and graded. For each one, please tell us how much if at all, you would trust them as a source of information about exams:

	A great amount	A fair amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know / No opinion
Q7a – Teachers in your child's school or from other schools					
Q7c – Ofqual – the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments					
Q7d – Exam boards / Awarding organisations					
Q7f – The local media					
Q7g – The national media					
Q7i – Your own children					
Q7k – Other parents / guardians					
Q7l – Other students					

Q8 – You said that you don't trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams, why is that? (Please choose all that apply)

- Ofqual is not independent of the government

- Ofqual is a new organisation that is still to establish my trust
- Other (open response)
- Don't know

### **Perceptions of A level qualifications – importance and value of the A level qualification**

The next section will ask you about your views on A levels, including AS levels. These are usually taken by those over the age of 16 in either schools or colleges.

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

Q9 – I have confidence in the A level system.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q10 – Do you have any concerns about the current A level examinations system? If so, what are they? (Please choose all that apply)

- No concerns
- Incorrect grading
- Incorrect marking of exam papers
- The outcome of an enquiry or appeal about a result
- Timetabling of exams
- Heavy workload
- Too many exams
- Lack of information / knowledge about standards
- Constant change in the exam system
- Removal of the January assessment opportunity / January exams

- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
- Too much pressure / stress on students
- Too much pressure / stress on teachers
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion

Q11 – Which of the following, if any, do you believe are strengths of the current A level examinations system? (Please choose all that apply)

- It is well understood by people
- A levels are, generally, a trusted qualification
- Consistent standards year on year
- Good preparation for further study
- Good preparation for work
- Develops broad range of skills for students
- Other (open response)
- Do not think there are any strengths
- Don't know / No opinion

Q12 – Compared to last year, how would you say that your confidence in the A level system has changed?

- I have more confidence in the A level system than last year
- I have less confidence in the A level system than last year
- I have about the same confidence in the A level system as last year
- Don't know / No opinion

A critical part of the A level system is the marking and grading of exams. The next few questions will ask specifically about this part of the process. By grades we mean A\*, A, B, C, D etc.

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

Q13a – I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q13b – The accuracy of marking A level papers has decreased over the past two years.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q14a – Do you think that all A level students get the right grade?

- Yes, I do
- No, I don't
- Don't know

Q14b – What percentage of A level students do you think get the right grade? Please select a %, if you are unsure please provide your best estimate.

0 ————— 100%

- Don't know

Q15 – What factors, if any, do you think contribute to A level students not getting the grade they deserve? (Please choose all that apply)

- Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers
- Students performing better or worse than expected in coursework
- Inaccurate marking of exam papers



- Exam papers poorly designed
- Coursework / controlled assessment poorly designed
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for the exams
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for coursework
- Poor timetabling of exams
- Grade boundaries not properly set
- Other (open question)
- Don't know
- None of these

Q16 – Still thinking about grading, are there any subjects you are particularly concerned about? (Open response)

### **Perceptions of GCSE qualifications – importance and value of the GCSE qualifications**

The next section will ask you about your views on GCSEs. Most schools offer these to their students between the ages of 14 and 16, but they are also taken by older students in either schools or colleges.

These qualifications are different to IGCSEs so please do not consider these in your answers. Questions on IGCSEs follow in a later section.

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

Q17 – I have confidence in the GCSE system.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q18 – Compared to last year, how would you say that your confidence in the GCSE system has changed?

- I have more confidence in the GCSE system than last year

- I have less confidence in the GCSE system than last year
- I have about the same confidence in the GCSE system as last year
- Don't know / No opinion

Q19 – Do you have any concerns about the current GCSE examinations system? If yes, what are they? (Please choose all that apply)

- No concerns
- Incorrect grading
- Incorrect marking of exam papers
- Outcome of an enquiry or appeal about a result
- Timetabling of exams
- Heavy workload
- Too many exams
- Lack of information / knowledge about standards
- Constant change in the exam system
- The move to have all exams at the end of the year
- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
- Too much pressure / stress on teachers
- Too much pressure / stress on students
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion

Q10 – Which of the following, if any, do you believe are strengths of the current GCSE examinations system? (Please choose all that apply)

- GCSEs are well understood by people
- GCSEs are generally a trusted qualification
- GCSEs are of a consistent standard year on year
- GCSEs are good preparation for further study

- GCSEs are good preparation for work
- GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students
- Other (open response)
- Do not think there are any strengths
- Don't know / No opinion

A critical part of the GCSE system is the marking and grading of exams. The next few questions will ask specifically about this part of the process. By grades we mean A\*, A, B, C, D etc.

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

Q21a – I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q21b – The accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers has decreased over the past two years.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q22a – Do you think that all GCSE students get the right grade?

- Yes, I do
- No, I don't
- Don't know

Q22b – What percentage of GCSE students do you think get the right grade? Please select a %, if you are unsure please provide your best estimate.

0 ————— 100%

- Don't know

Q23 – What factors, if any, do you think contribute to GCSE students not getting the grade they deserve? (Please choose all that apply)

- Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers
- Students performing better or worse in controlled assessment
- Inaccurate marking of examination papers
- Exam papers poorly designed
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for the exams
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for controlled assessment
- Poor timetabling of exams
- Grade boundaries not properly set
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion
- None of these

Q24 – Still thinking about grading, are there any subjects you are particularly concerned about? (Open response)

### **Attitudes towards other qualifications**

Not all students study GCSEs and / or A levels in schools; a range of other qualifications are available which may be appropriate for some learners. In this section we ask about your views of these qualifications.

We appreciate that not everyone will have experience of all these alternatives, so please answer based on your knowledge and select “Don't know / No opinion” if this best describes your views.

We will talk about three broad types of qualifications which are taught in schools and colleges:

- Other academic qualifications which are similar to GCSE and A level.
- Vocational qualifications which cover the specific skills needed for a particular job.
- Applied qualifications which cover a broad range of skills but in a particular work related context.

We provide further details below and some examples of each type before we ask questions about your views.

We would now like you to think about academic qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Examples of these include IGCSEs, International Baccalaureate, Pre-U and freestanding maths qualifications.

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

Q25a – I understand the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs / A levels and other academic qualifications (for example IGCSEs, IB or Pre-U).

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q26 – Other academic qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- I agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- I disagree – they are easier to achieve
- I disagree – they are harder to achieve
- I don't know / No opinion

We would like you to think about vocational qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Vocational

qualifications are those which address skills that directly relate to the skills needed in a particular job. We are not asking about vocational qualifications which are taken in the workplace as part of a job.

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

Q28 – I understand how the different levels of vocational qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Vocational qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Q29 – Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- I agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- I disagree – they are easier to achieve
- I disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

We would like you to think about applied qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Examples of applied qualifications include BTECs, OCR Nationals, Principal Learning in Engineering or GCSEs in applied subjects.

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

Q31 – I understand how the different levels of applied qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement

- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Applied qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Q32 – Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- Agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- Disagree – they are easier to achieve
- Disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

### Organisations to contact for concerns about the examination system

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?

	Very likely to contact	Likely to contact	Unlikely to contact	Very unlikely to contact	Don't know / No opinion
Q33a – The government					
Q33b – Your MP					
Q33c – Ofqual – the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments					
Q33d – Schools / Teachers					
Q33e – Exam boards / Awarding organisations					

Q34 – And would there be any other group / organisation you would be likely to contact if you had a concern? (Open response)

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey – your input will be crucial for Ofqual and will increase its understanding of perceptions of the qualifications system and will highlight areas where Ofqual can do more to support public understanding.

## Questionnaire for the general public

### Introduction

This national survey seeks to understand your perceptions of qualifications and the examinations system. Similar questions have been asked annually since 2003. The findings of this survey are used to monitor people's perceptions of the qualification system and to highlight areas where more can be done to support public understanding. Completing this survey should take you approximately 10 minutes and your account will be credited with 50 points for completing this survey.

### Awareness of Ofqual

This first section asks about whether you have heard of Ofqual and how much you understand about its role.

Q1 – Which of the following statements best describes your knowledge of Ofqual?

- Know a lot about Ofqual
- Know a fair amount about Ofqual
- Know just a little about Ofqual
- Heard of Ofqual, but know nothing about it
- Never heard of Ofqual

Q2 – Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The aim of Ofqual is to make sure that learners get the results they deserve, and that the qualifications they receive count, both now and in the future.

Before today, were you aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England?

- Yes, I was aware of this
- No, I was not aware of this
- Don't know

### Perceptions of Ofqual

This section asks about your perceptions of Ofqual. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Q3 – Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications.

- I strongly agree with this statement



- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q4 – Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is not effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Changes made to GCSEs in the last 12 months
- Changes made to A levels in the last 12 months
- A level results – I know students who are getting higher grades than they deserve
- A level results – I believe A level grades are continuing to rise year on year
- GCSE results – I know students who are getting higher grades than they deserve
- GCSE results – I believe GCSE grades are continuing to rise year on year
- I believe changes to performance tables mean standards cannot be the same
- Inconsistent marking exists
- Inconsistent grading exists
- International league tables show a different picture to exam results
- Other (open response)
- Don't know
- None of these

Q5 – Which of the following are reasons why you think that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications? (Please choose all that apply)

- Previous experience of Ofqual
- Things that I have heard about Ofqual / read in the media about Ofqual / my child's school has told
- I have confidence in the examinations system

- Measures taken by Ofqual to address grade inflation
- Measures taken by Ofqual to make sure standards are comparable
- Measures taken by Ofqual to maintain standards in GCSEs
- Measures taken by Ofqual to maintain standards in A levels
- Measures taken by Ofqual to ensure that marking is consistent / reliable
- Improving students' performance
- Other (open response)
- Don't know
- None of these

Although the government is responsible for deciding education policy, as the independent regulator, Ofqual sets out the rules and requirements for the design and delivery of assessments and qualifications. For example, Ofqual sets out the rules for allowing reasonable adjustments for candidates with particular needs who are taking exams.

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

Q6a – When Ofqual makes a decision it is clearly explained and can be understood.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q6c – When Ofqual makes a decision, it is effective in communicating it to everyone who needs to be aware of it.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement

- Don't know / No opinion

### Trust in exam information

One of the duties of Ofqual is to ensure that the public understand the exam system. Therefore, we would like to ask you how you would find out information on exams, so we can understand how best to make sure accurate information is available.

We are now going to list some groups of people that could provide you with some information about how exams are marked and graded. For each one, please tell us how much if at all, you would trust them as a source of information about exams:

	A great amount	A fair amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know / No opinion
Q7a – Teachers					
Q7c – Ofqual – the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments					
Q7d – Exam boards / Awarding organisations					
Q7f – The local media					
Q7g – The national media					
Q7i – Your own children					
Q7k – Other parents / guardians					

Q8 – You said that you don't trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams, why is that? (Please choose all that apply)

- Ofqual is not independent of the government
- Ofqual is a new organisation that is still to establish my trust
- Other (open response)
- Don't know

### Perceptions of A level qualifications – importance and value of the A level qualification

The next section will ask you about your views on GCE A levels, including AS. These are usually taken by those over the age of 16 in either schools or colleges.

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

Q9 – I have confidence in the A level system.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q10 – Do you have any concerns about the current A level examination system? If so, what are they? (Please choose all that apply)

- No concerns
- Incorrect grading
- Incorrect marking of exam papers
- The outcome of an enquiry or appeal about a result
- Timetabling of exams
- Heavy workload
- Too many exams
- Lack of information / knowledge about standards
- Constant change in the exam system
- Removal of the January assessment opportunity / January exams
- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
- Too much pressure / stress on students
- Too much pressure / stress on teachers
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion

Q11 – Which of the following, if any, do you believe are strengths of the current A level examination system? (Please choose all that apply)

- It is well understood by people

- A levels are, generally, a trusted qualification
- Consistent standards year on year
- Good preparation for further study
- Good preparation for work
- Develops broad range of skills for students
- Other (open response)
- Do not think there are any strengths
- Don't know / No opinion

Q12 – Compared to last year, how would you say that your confidence in the A level system has changed?

- I have more confidence in the A level system than last year
- I have less confidence in the A level system than last year
- I have about the same confidence in the A level system as last year
- Don't know / No opinion

A critical part of the A level system is the marking and grading of exams. The next few questions will ask specifically about this part of the process. By grades we mean A\*, A, B, C, D etc.

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

Q13a – I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q13b – The accuracy of marking A level papers has decreased over the past two years.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q14a – Do you think that all A level students get the right grade?

- Yes, I do
- No, I don't
- Don't know

Q14b – What percentage of A level students do you think get the right grade? Please select a %, if you are unsure please provide your best estimate.

0 ————— 100%

- Don't know

Q15 – What factors, if any, do you think contribute to A level students not getting the grade they deserve? (Please choose all that apply)

- Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers
- Students performing better or worse than expected in coursework
- Inaccurate marking of examination papers
- Exam papers poorly designed
- Coursework / controlled assessment poorly designed
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for the exams
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for coursework
- Poor timetabling of exams
- Grade boundaries not properly set
- Other (open question)
- Don't know

- None of these

Q16 – Still thinking about grading, are there any subjects you are particularly concerned about? (Open response)

### **Perceptions of GCSE qualifications – importance and value of the GCSE qualifications**

The next section will ask you about your views on GCSEs. Most schools offer these to their students between the ages of 14 and 16, but they are also taken by older students in either schools or colleges.

These qualifications are different to IGCSEs so please do not consider these in your answers. Questions on IGCSEs follow in a later section.

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

Q17 – I have confidence in the GCSE system.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q18 – Compared to last year, how would you say that your confidence in the GCSE system has changed?

- I have more confidence in the GCSE system than last year
- I have less confidence in the GCSE system than last year
- I have about the same confidence in the GCSE system as last year
- Don't know / No opinion

Q19 – Do you have any concerns about the current GCSE examinations system? If yes, what are they? (Please choose all that apply)

- No concerns
- Incorrect grading
- Incorrect marking of exam papers

- Outcome of an enquiry or appeal about a result
- Timetabling of exams
- Heavy workload
- Too many exams
- Lack of information / knowledge about standards
- Constant change in the exam system
- The move to have all exams at the end of the year
- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
- Too much pressure / stress on teachers
- Too much pressure / stress on students
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion

Q20 – Which of the following, if any, do you believe are strengths of the current GCSE examinations system? (Please choose all that apply)

- GCSEs are well understood by people
- GCSEs are generally a trusted qualification
- GCSEs are of a consistent standard year on year
- GCSEs are good preparation for further study
- GCSEs are good preparation for work
- GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students
- Other (open response)
- Do not think there are any strengths
- Don't know / No opinion

A critical part of the GCSE system is the marking and grading of exams. The next few questions will ask specifically about this part of the process. By grades we mean A\*, A, B, C, D etc.



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

Q21a – I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q21b – The accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers has decreased over the past two years.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q22a – Do you think that all GCSE students get the right grade?

- Yes, I do
- No, I don't
- Don't know

Q22b – What percentage of GCSE students do you think get the right grade? Please select a %, if you are unsure please provide your best estimate.

0 ————— 100%

- Don't know

Q23 – What factors, if any, do you think contribute to GCSE students not getting the grade they deserve? (Please choose all that apply)

- Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers

- Students performing better or worse in controlled assessment
- Inaccurate marking of examination papers
- Exam papers poorly designed
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for the exams
- Students inadequately prepared by their school or college for controlled assessment
- Poor timetabling of exams
- Grade boundaries not properly set
- Other (open response)
- Don't know / No opinion
- None of these

Q24 – Still thinking about grading, are there any subjects you are particularly concerned about? (Open response)

### **Attitudes towards other qualifications**

Not all students study GCSEs and / or A levels in schools; a range of other qualifications are available which may be appropriate for some learners. In this section we ask about your views of these qualifications.

We appreciate that not everyone will have experience of all these alternatives, so please answer based on your knowledge and select “Don't know / No opinion” if this best describes your views.

We will talk about three broad types of qualifications which are taught in schools and colleges:

- Other academic qualifications which are similar to GCSE and A level;
- Vocational qualifications which cover the specific skills needed for a particular job; and
- Applied qualifications which cover a broad range of skills but in a particular work related context.

We provide further details below and some examples of each type before we ask questions about your views.

We would now like you to think about academic qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Examples of these include IGCSEs, International Baccalaureate, Pre-U and Freestanding Maths qualifications.

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

Q25a – I understand the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs / A levels and other academic qualifications (for example IGCSEs, IB or Pre-U).

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Q26 – Other academic qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- I agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- I disagree – they are easier to achieve
- I disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

We would like you to think about vocational qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Vocational qualifications are those which address skills that directly relate to the skills needed in a particular job. We are not asking about vocational qualifications which are taken in the workplace as part of a job.

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

Q28 – I understand how the different levels of vocational qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels.

- I strongly agree with this statement

- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Vocational qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Q29 – Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- I agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- I disagree – they are easier to achieve
- I disagree – they are harder to achieve
- I don't know / No opinion

We would like you to think about applied qualifications taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14–19, which are not GCSEs or A levels. Examples of applied qualifications include BTECs, OCR Nationals, Principal Learning in Engineering or GCSEs in applied subjects.

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

Q31 – I understand how the different levels of applied qualifications relate to GCSEs and A levels.

- I strongly agree with this statement
- I agree with this statement
- I disagree with this statement
- I strongly disagree with this statement
- Don't know / No opinion

Applied qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty involved in achieving the qualification.

Q32 – Which of the following best describes your view on this statement?

- Agree they are equally difficult to achieve
- Disagree – they are easier to achieve
- Disagree – they are harder to achieve
- Don't know / No opinion

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey – your input will be crucial for Ofqual and will increase its understanding of perceptions of the qualifications system and will highlight areas where Ofqual can do more to support public understanding.

## Appendix F: Glossary of terms

**Base size:** The number of respondents answering the question.

**BTEC:** These are qualifications offered across a range of vocational subjects and levels including business studies and engineering. For the purposes of this survey, these qualifications are included as part of the grouping termed ‘mixed qualifications’.

**Design effect:** Bias resulting from adjustments made to the sample to make it representative of the population.

**EBacc:** The English Baccalaureate is a school performance measure.

**Effective base:** When sampling is undertaken, it creates a ‘design effect’ that can impact the reliability of the information collected. The effective base size is the base size that is left when removing this effect. It is used for significance testing.

**Freestanding mathematics (or freestanding maths):** A suite of mathematical qualifications available at Levels 1 to 3. They are often taken by students who have taken their GCSE maths a year early. For the purposes of this survey, these are included as part of the grouping termed ‘other academic qualifications’.

**General (academic) qualifications:** For the purpose of this survey, this type of qualification includes the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A level).

The GCSE is an academic qualification awarded in a specified subject, generally taken in a number of subjects by students aged 14 to 16 in secondary education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The A level is an academic qualification offered by educational bodies in the UK to students completing secondary or pre-university education. The qualification is generally studied for over two years and split into two parts, with one part studied in each year. The first part is known as the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and was previously known as the Advanced Supplementary, with the same abbreviation. The second part is known as the A2 level. The AS is a qualification in its own right, and the AS combined with the A2 level forms the complete A level qualification.

**Grading:** The process of grouping students into overall performance categories (for example A\*, A, B, C, D, E, F, G).

**IB:** International Baccalaureate – a qualification studied by 16 to 19 year olds in which students learn six subjects: three at a standard level and three at a higher level. The qualification also includes an extended essay element. For the purposes of

this survey, this qualification is included as part of the grouping termed ‘other academic qualifications’.

**Level 1/Level 2 qualifications also known as IGCSE:** regulated qualifications studied by 14 to 16 year olds as an alternative to a GCSE. For the purposes of this survey, these qualifications are included as part of the grouping termed ‘other academic qualifications’.

**Level of qualifications:** Qualifications are assigned a level from Entry then Level 1 through to Level 8:<sup>19</sup>

- Entry includes entry-level certificates and foundation learning tier pathways.
- Level 1 includes GCSEs graded D to G, the Foundation Diploma and Level 1 NVQs, Key Skills, Functional Skills and BTEC awards.
- Level 2 includes GCSEs graded A\* to C, the Higher Diploma and Level 2 NVQs, Key Skills, Functional Skills and BTEC awards.
- Level 3 includes AS/A levels, the Advanced and Progression Diplomas and Level 3 NVQs, Key Skills and BTEC awards.
- Level 4 includes certificates of higher education, Level 4 NVQs, Key Skills and BTEC Professional Awards.
- Level 5 includes diplomas of higher education, foundation degrees, the Higher National Diploma and BTEC professional awards.
- Level 6 includes bachelor degrees, graduate certificates, the National Diploma in Professional Production Skills and BTEC advanced professional awards.
- Level 7 includes master’s degrees, postgraduate certificates and BTEC advanced professional awards.
- Level 8 includes doctorates.

**Marking:** The process of giving a student credit for their right answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme.

**Mixed qualifications:** For the purposes of this survey, these include BTECs, OCR Nationals and Principal Learning. They are regarded as mixed qualifications as they provide a mixture of vocational and academic components. Available across a range

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<sup>19</sup> For further details, see: [www.ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/comparing-qualifications](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/comparing-qualifications)

of levels, they are designed to provide the same degree of difficulty (depending upon level) as, for example, GCSEs and A levels.

**OCR Nationals:** These are qualifications designed to provide learners with sector-specific industry-related qualifications to support entry to work or progression to further study. For the purposes of this survey, these qualifications are included as part of the grouping termed ‘other academic qualifications’.

**Other academic qualifications:** For the purposes of this survey, these qualifications include Level 1/Level 2 qualifications also known as IGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths. They are defined as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14 to 19 that include academic content but are not GCSEs or A levels.

**Pre-U:** The Pre-U is a qualification for 16 to 19 year olds designed as an alternative to the current A level qualification. For the purposes of this survey, this qualification is included as part of the grouping termed ‘other academic qualifications’.

**Principal Learning:** Originally a core component of the Diploma qualification, Principal Learning is a stand-alone qualification in its own right. The qualification is sector-based and subject-related and includes 50 per cent of practical (applied) learning. For the purposes of this survey, these qualifications are included as part of the grouping termed ‘mixed qualifications’.

**Sample frame:** The way that the population is structured before a sample for the survey is drawn.

**Sampling tolerances:** When using a sample for a survey rather than surveying the whole population, results can be expected to differ slightly. The difference between the two is known as the sampling tolerance and is established by ascertaining the standard deviation. For the purposes of this survey, the tolerance (or confidence level) used is at the 95 per cent level.

**Statistically significant:** If a result is termed statistically significant, it is unlikely to have occurred randomly. The process of determining whether a result is statistically significant is known as significance testing.

**Stratified sample:** A sample that has been divided into subgroups – for example, regions or type of institution. These subgroups may all consist of equal numbers or some might be higher or lower than others.

**Vocational qualifications:** These are qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job.



**Weighting:** The process of making some respondents in a survey more or less important than others to accurately reflect their position in the population being surveyed.

## Appendix G: Related Statistics and publications

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

- *Review of Quality of Marking in Exams in A Levels, GCSEs and Other Academic Qualifications – Final Report*<sup>20</sup>
- *Annual Qualifications Market Report 2013*<sup>21</sup>
- *GCSE and Equivalent results in England 2012/13 (Provisional); October 2013*<sup>22</sup>
- *A Level and other Level 3 Results: Academic Year 2012 to 2013 (revised)*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/standards/research/quality-of-marking](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/standards/research/quality-of-marking)

<sup>21</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2013-09-13-annual-qualifications-market-report-2013-main-report.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2013-09-13-annual-qualifications-market-report-2013-main-report.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/2013-gcse-and-equivalent-results-including-key-stage-3-provisional](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2013-gcse-and-equivalent-results-including-key-stage-3-provisional)

<sup>23</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-level-and-other-level-3-results-england-2012-to-2013-revised](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-level-and-other-level-3-results-england-2012-to-2013-revised)

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