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Official Statistics

Appeals for GCSE, AS, A level and Project qualifications: 2020 to 2021 academic year

Published 21 April 2022

Applies to England

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Introduction

This report presents figures for the number of appeals made during the 2020 to 2021 academic year in England for GCSE, AS and A level and Project qualifications. It also gives information on the number of qualification grades challenged and changed due to those appeals. The report covers all the opportunities to enter for the qualifications during the academic year: autumn 2020, November 2020 and June

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2021 for GCSE qualifications, autumn 2020 and June 2021 for AS and A level qualifications and autumn 2020, November 2020, January 2021 and June 2021 for Project qualifications.

In addition to the November 2020 series for GCSE maths and English, and Project qualifications, the exceptional autumn 2020 series was put in place as part of the [exceptional arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020](#) to give candidates who had been unable to receive a grade in summer 2020, such as private candidates, the opportunity to do so. The autumn series also allowed students who were disappointed with their grade in summer 2020 the opportunity to improve their grade.

As for the June 2021 series, on 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced that [exams could not go ahead as planned](#), because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Ofqual and the Department for Education [consulted jointly on alternative arrangements to award grades](#). The [Secretary of State then issued a direction to Ofqual](#), setting out government policy that students taking GCSE, AS, A level and Project qualifications in England, should be [awarded grades based on teacher assessment](#).

As part of Ofqual's [General Qualifications Alternative Awarding Framework](#), every student had the right to appeal their grade if they so wished in summer 2021. Before a grade was submitted, teachers should have made students aware of the evidence being used to assess the student's performance and on which their grade would be based. Students should have had the opportunity to make their teachers aware of any mitigating circumstances they believe should have been taken into account.

If a student believed there had been an error in their grade or the way it was determined, awarding organisations required centres to undertake an initial review to check its processes were followed correctly and no errors were made. This was referred to as a centre review. If the centre found an error that they judged would have affected the grade, they could submit a revised grade to the awarding organisation.

If the student still believed there to be an error that their centre had not found, they could ask their centre to submit an appeal to the awarding organisation for them. Depending on a student's grounds for appeal, the awarding organisation would check whether the centre followed its own processes and the awarding organisation's requirements and reviewed the evidence used to determine the grade. Again depending on a student's grounds for appeal, the awarding organisation then provided a view on whether the selection of evidence and the grade awarded constituted a reasonable exercise of academic judgement. The awarding organisation also checked if it had made an administrative error where any concerns about this were raised.

If the awarding organisation found the grade did not reflect a reasonable exercise of academic judgement, it would determine the alternative grade and inform the centre. If the awarding organisation found the selection of evidence was inappropriate and other evidence should have been included, or identified a procedural issue, it would direct the centre to review the grade and could impose a grade if necessary.

In cases where the student disagreed with the centre or the awarding organisation, the case could be referred to [Ofqual's Examinations Procedure Review Service \(EPRS\)](#). The awarding organisation's decision on the grade following appeal would stand unless the EPRS found that the awarding organisation had made a procedural error.

Appeals did not lead to adjustments in grades where the original grade was a reasonable exercise of academic judgement supported by evidence in line with the centre's policy. Grades could remain the same or go up or down as the result of an appeal.

A centre would only have reported to the awarding organisation that it had undertaken a centre review if the centre had identified an administrative or procedural error in determining a student's grade, which resulted in it requesting the awarding organisation to change the student's grade. Centre reviews where the centre did not identify an administrative or procedural error were not reported to the awarding organisation. As a result, in this bulletin only centre reviews where the centre identified a procedural or administrative error can be reported on, which means that the total number of centre reviews undertaken and grades challenged are undercounted.

An appeal on a student's grade could be made on multiple grounds. Appeals that were made on multiple grounds are counted as one appeal received because the overall appeal has the same identifier.

The summer 2021 appeals process differed to that of [summer 2020](#). Furthermore, when students take exams set and marked by awarding organisations, most concerns about grades awarded are considered through reviews of marking, not appeals. Reviews of marking were not available in summer 2021 because students did not take exams set and marked by awarding organisations.

Due to the exceptional nature of the appeals process in summer 2021, as well as the additional autumn 2020 series, direct comparisons of appeals in 2020 to 2021 and previous years are not valid and should not be made.

Please note that a number of appeals, grades challenged and changed for summer 2021 were still being processed at the time of the [provisional summer 2021 appeals publication](#) in January. With respect to the previous report, this release presents updated figures, when the majority of appeals have been completed, and includes all figures for the whole academic year.

Key details

The key details regarding the number of appeals made for GCSE, AS and A level, and Project qualifications for the 2020 to 2021 academic year in England were:

1. Overall, 17,610 of the 6.1 million grades certified for GCSEs, AS and A levels were challenged (0.3% of all grades certified)
2. Overall, 6,200 of the 6.1 million grades certified for GCSEs, AS and A levels were changed as part of an upheld appeal (0.1% of all grades certified)
3. One appeal may cover several grades and the number of appeals received for GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2020 to 2021 was 16,090. Of these appeals 5,770 (36% of appeals received) were upheld
4. The most common ground for an appeal for GCSE, AS and A level was 'Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement: determination of grade'
5. For Project qualifications in 2020 to 2021 there were 105 appeals received, covering 130 grades, 0.3% of the 52,100 grades certified for projects in 2020 to 2021
6. Most upheld appeals, for all qualifications covered, resulted in a grade change.

Qualification and exam series breakdown

GCSE, AS and A levels, and Project qualifications

The number of appeals received by exam series for GCSEs, AS and A levels and Project qualifications

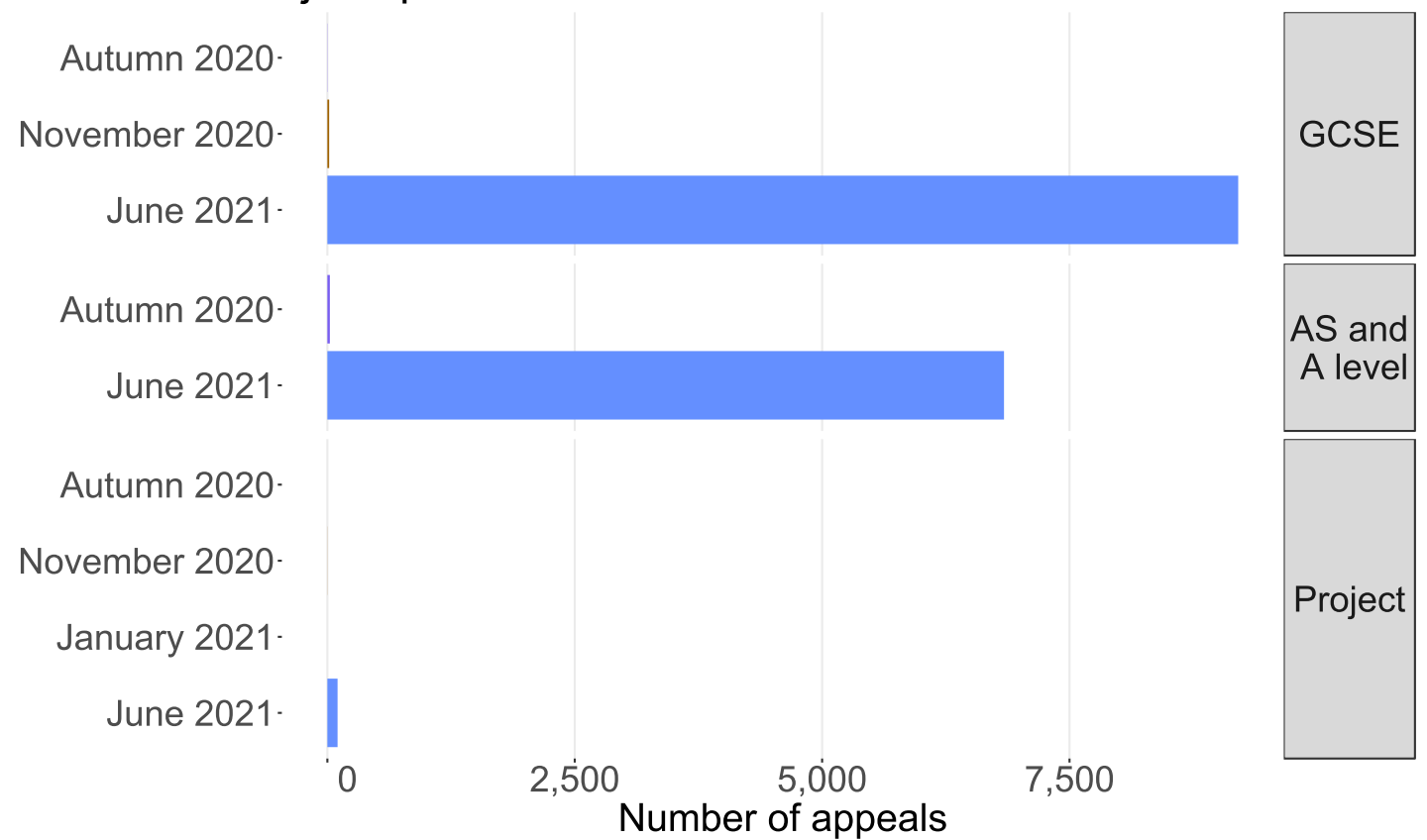


Table 1: Number of appeals received by exam series for GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Project qualifications

Qualification level	Autumn 2020	November 2020	January 2021	June 2021
GCSE	fewer than 5	20	-	9,205
AS and A level	25	-	-	6,840
Project	0	fewer than 5	0	105

Total number of appeals received, upheld and leading to a grade change

Usually, an appeal may be submitted by a centre if they are dissatisfied with the result of a review of marking or moderation or if they wish to contest the outcome of a reasonable adjustment or special consideration request, or a malpractice decision. The appeal may be upheld at either a preliminary appeal or an appeal hearing, and this may lead to a change in one or more of the qualification grades involved.

For summer 2021 the [standard post-results service](#) was not available as students had not taken awarding organisation marked exams. There was instead a [new centre review and appeals process](#), which consisted of 2 stages. An error could be identified as part of a centre review or an appeal to the awarding organisation upheld, and this may have led to a change in the qualification grade involved.

In summer 2021, a student who believed an error had been made when determining their grade would submit an appeal to their centre, so that they could check whether an administrative or procedural error had been made. If a centre did find an error in the grade submitted, it could submit a revised grade for the awarding organisation to consider. If a centre did not believe an error had been made and the student still felt

that there was an error in their result, the centre would submit an appeal to the awarding organisation on the student's behalf.

A centre would only have reported a centre review to the awarding organisation if the centre had identified an administrative or procedural error in determining a student's grade, which resulted in a request to the awarding organisation to change the student's grade. Instances where the centre did not identify an administrative or procedural error were not reported to the awarding organisation. As a result, in this bulletin only centre reviews where the centre identified a procedural or administrative error can be reported on, which means that the total number of centre reviews undertaken and grades challenged are undercounted.

Due to the exceptional nature of the assessment and appeals process in summer 2021 and [summer 2020](#), direct comparisons of appeals in 2020 to 2021 and previous years are not valid and should not be made.

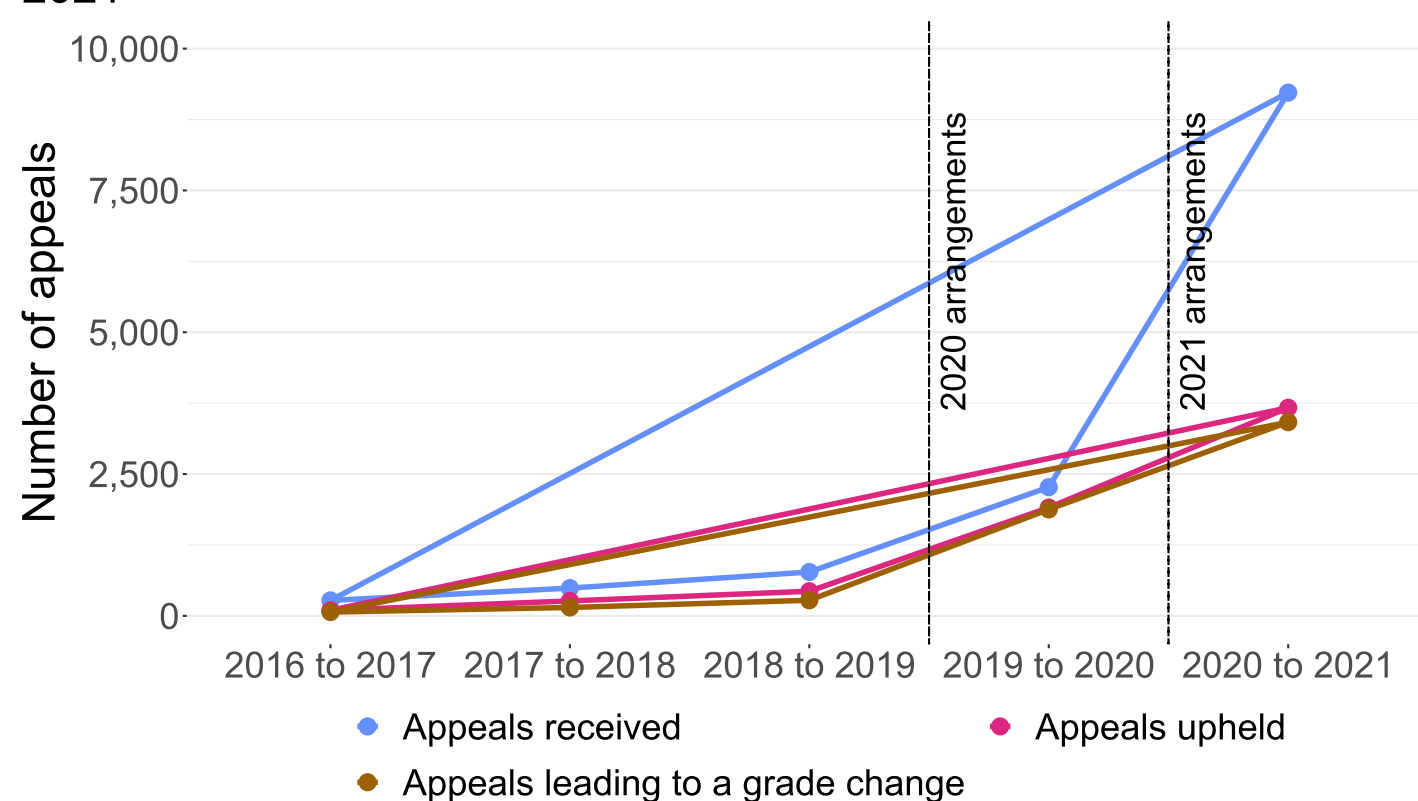
The data tables and charts contain figures on all grounds of appeals according to all awarding organisations.

GCSE

The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to grades changed has increased sharply for GCSE in 2020 to 2021. This reflects the different nature of the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021. When students take exams set and marked by awarding organisations, most concerns about grades awarded are considered through reviews of marking, not appeals. Reviews of marking were not available in summer 2020 and summer 2021 because students did not take exams set and marked by awarding organisations.

Due to the exceptional nature of the assessment and appeals process in summer 2021, direct comparisons of appeals in 2020 to 2021 and previous years are not valid and should not be made.

The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to grades changed for GCSE from 2016 to 2017 to 2020 to 2021



The percentage of appeals upheld, as a proportion of appeals submitted, has decreased for GCSE in 2020 to 2021 reflecting the different nature of the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021.

The percentage of appeals upheld for GCSE from 2016 to 2017 to 2020 to 2021

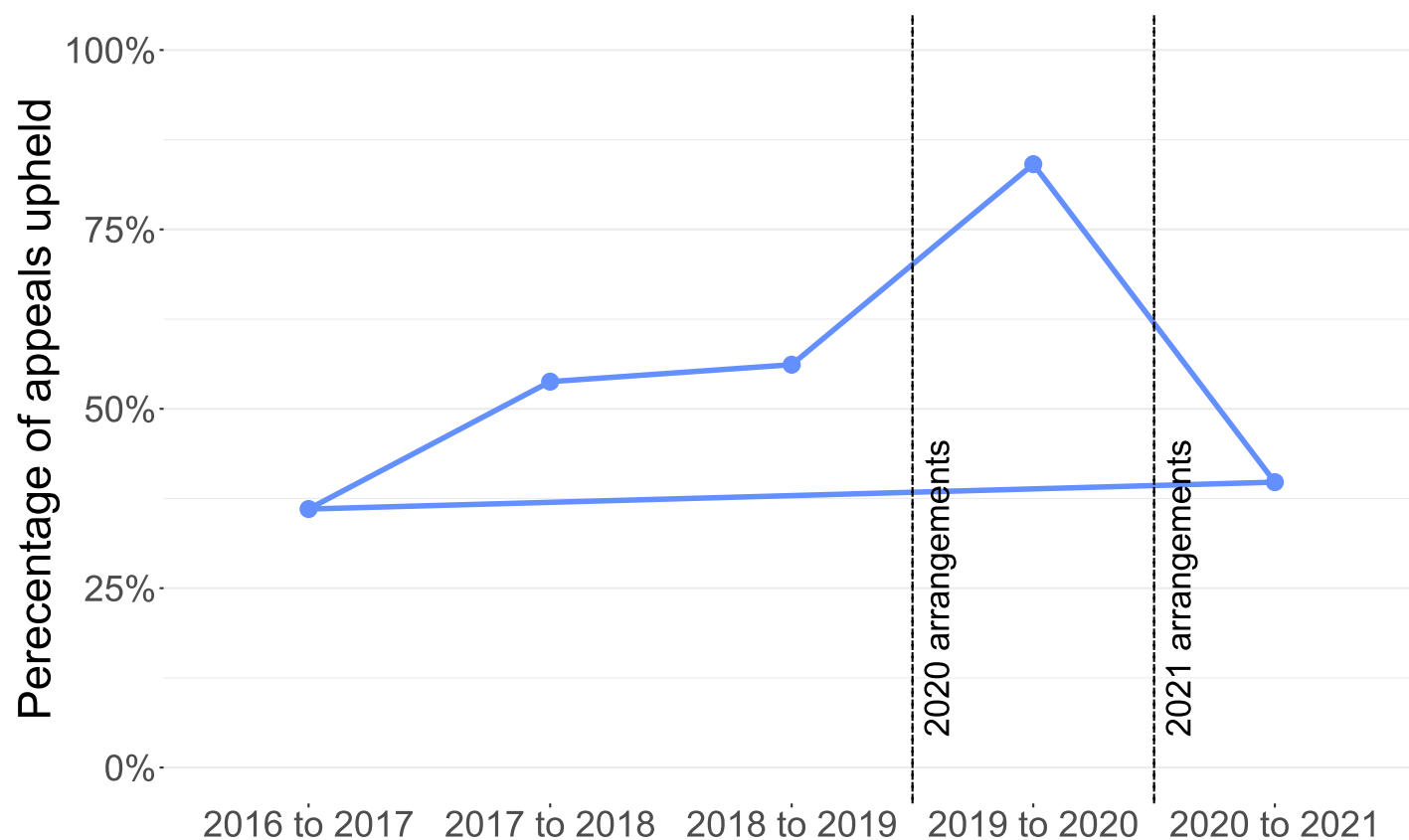


Table 2: The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to a grade change at GCSE in 2020 to 2021

Year	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	% of appeals upheld	Appeals leading to at least one grade change	% of upheld appeals leading to at least one grade change
2016 to 2017	270	100	36%	65	68%
2017 to 2018	490	265	54%	150	56%
2018 to 2019	775	435	56%	275	63%
2019 to 2020	2,270	1,910	84%	1,875	98%
2020 to 2021	9,225	3,670	40%	3,415	93%

Note: Data for the November series was not collected for GCSEs in 2016 to 2017

The number of GCSE appeals increased from 2,270 in 2019 to 2020 to 9,225 in 2020 to 2021. The number of appeals upheld increased from 1,910 in 2019 to 2020 to 3,670 in 2020 to 2021 and the number of appeals upheld which led to a grade change has increased from 1,875 in 2019 to 2020 to 3,415 in 2020 to 2021.

The percentage of appeals upheld in 2020 to 2021 (where 40% of appeals were upheld) has decreased compared with 2019 to 2020 (where 84% of appeals were upheld).

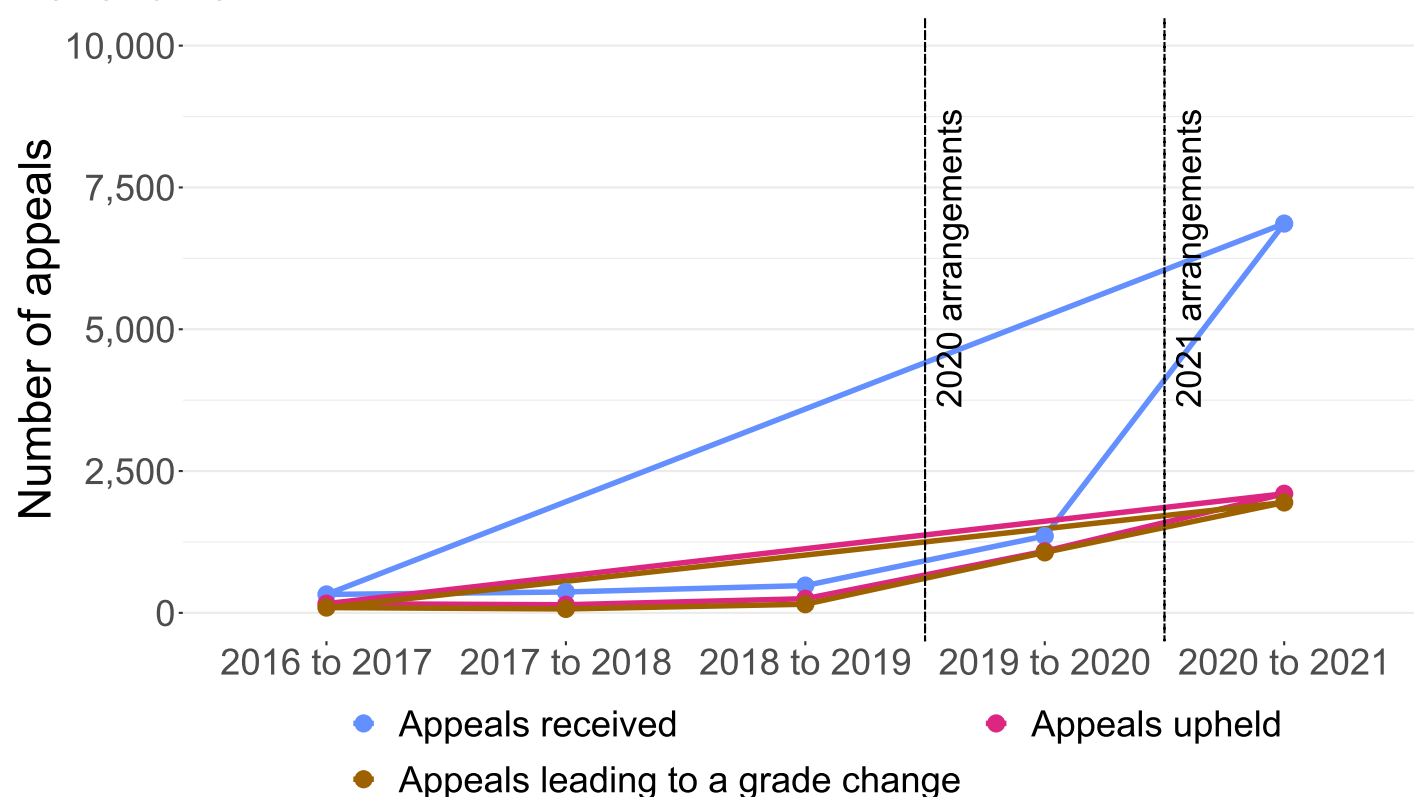
The changes between 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 reflect the difference in the appeals process in summer 2021. Direct comparisons between years are not valid and should not be made.

AS and A level

The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to grades changed has increased sharply for AS and A level in 2020 to 2021 reflecting the different nature of the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021. When students take awarding organisation set and marked exams, most concerns about grades awarded are considered through reviews of marking, not appeals. Reviews of marking were not available in summer 2020 and summer 2021 because students did not take awarding organisation set and marked exams.

Due to the exceptional nature of the assessment and appeals process in summer 2021, direct comparisons of appeals in 2020 to 2021 and previous years are not be valid and should not be made.

The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to grades changed for AS and A level from 2016 to 2017 to 2020 to 2021



The percentage of appeals upheld, as a proportion of appeals submitted, has decreased for AS and A level in 2020 to 2021 reflecting the different nature of the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021.

The percentage of appeals upheld for AS and A level from 2016 to 2017 to 2020 to 2021

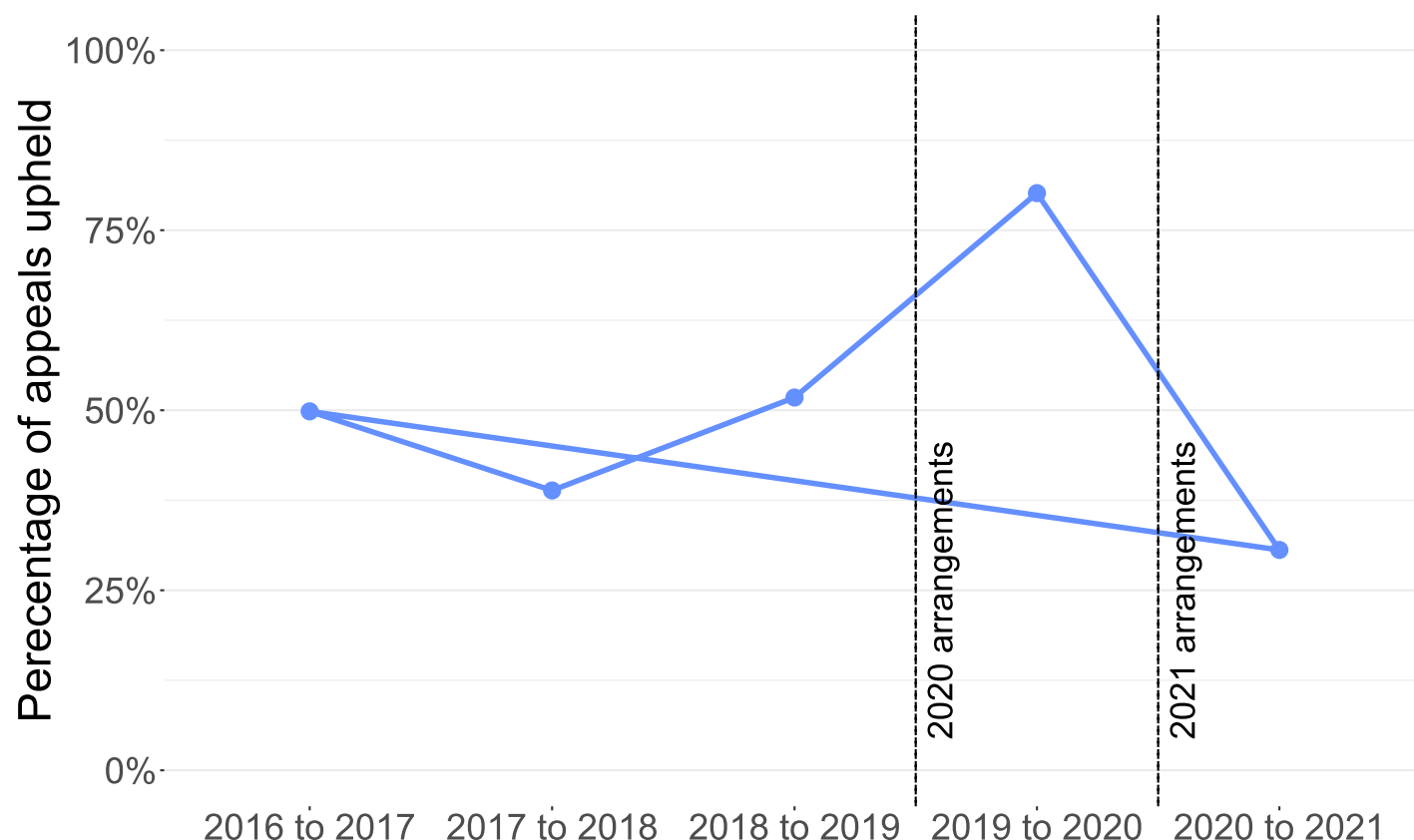


Table 3: The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to a grade change for AS and A level in 2020 to 2021

Year	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	% of appeals upheld	Appeals leading to at least one grade change	% of upheld appeals leading to at least one grade change
2016 to 2017	325	160	50%	95	57%
2017 to 2018	370	145	39%	70	48%
2018 to 2019	480	250	52%	150	61%
2019 to 2020	1,355	1,085	80%	1,065	98%
2020 to 2021	6,865	2,100	31%	1,945	93%

The number of AS and A level appeals increased from 1,355 in 2019 to 2020 to 6,865 in 2020 to 2021. The number of appeals upheld increased from 1,085 in 2019 to 2020 to 2,100 in 2020 to 2021 and the number of appeals upheld which led to a grade change has increased from 1,065 in 2019 to 2020 to 1,945 in 2020 to 2021.

The percentage of appeals upheld in 2020 to 2021 (where 31% of appeals were upheld) has decreased compared with 2019 to 2020 (where 80% of appeals were upheld).

The changes between 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 reflect the difference in the appeals process in summer 2021. Direct comparisons between years are not valid

and should not be made.

Nature of appeals in 2020 to 2021

In summer 2021 an appeal could be [made on grounds of procedural errors, administrative errors, or on grounds that the selection of evidence or the grade determined based on the evidence reflected an unreasonable academic judgement.](#)

A procedural error might have been identified by a centre following a student's request for a centre review. A centre might have identified as part of a centre review that it made an administrative or procedural error in connection with a teacher assessed grade.

If the student still believed there to be an error that their centre had not found, they would ask their centre to submit an appeal to the awarding organisation for them. The appeal could be made on the basis that there was a procedural error, an administrative error or a grade reflected an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement by the centre. An appeal on unreasonable exercise of academic judgement could be made on the grounds that:

- the centre's judgement as to the evidence which was used to determine a teacher assessed grade was unreasonable
- the centre's judgement as to the teacher assessed grade indicated by the evidence it selected was unreasonable

Appeals on the grounds of academic judgement could only be considered by awarding organisations and not by centres.

These grounds for appeals did not exist in previous years and therefore comparisons on the nature of appeals of summer 2021 with previous years are not possible.

In autumn 2020 and November 2020 (when students taking GCSEs, AS and A levels were assessed by exams set and marked by an awarding organisation), an appeal could be made for a range of reasons, for instance: to contest the result of a review of marking, or to contest a malpractice decision or a decision on reasonable adjustments or special consideration. Please note that there were no moderation reviews in the autumn 2020 series as there was no non-examined assessment.

An appeal on a student's grade can be made on multiple grounds. In this section each ground for appeal is counted separately. This means the total number of appeals in this section will not match the total number of appeals reported elsewhere.

GCSE

Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement: determination of grade was the most common ground for GCSE appeal in 2020 to 2021 with 4,985 appeals received.

Nature of GCSE appeals for 2020 to 2021

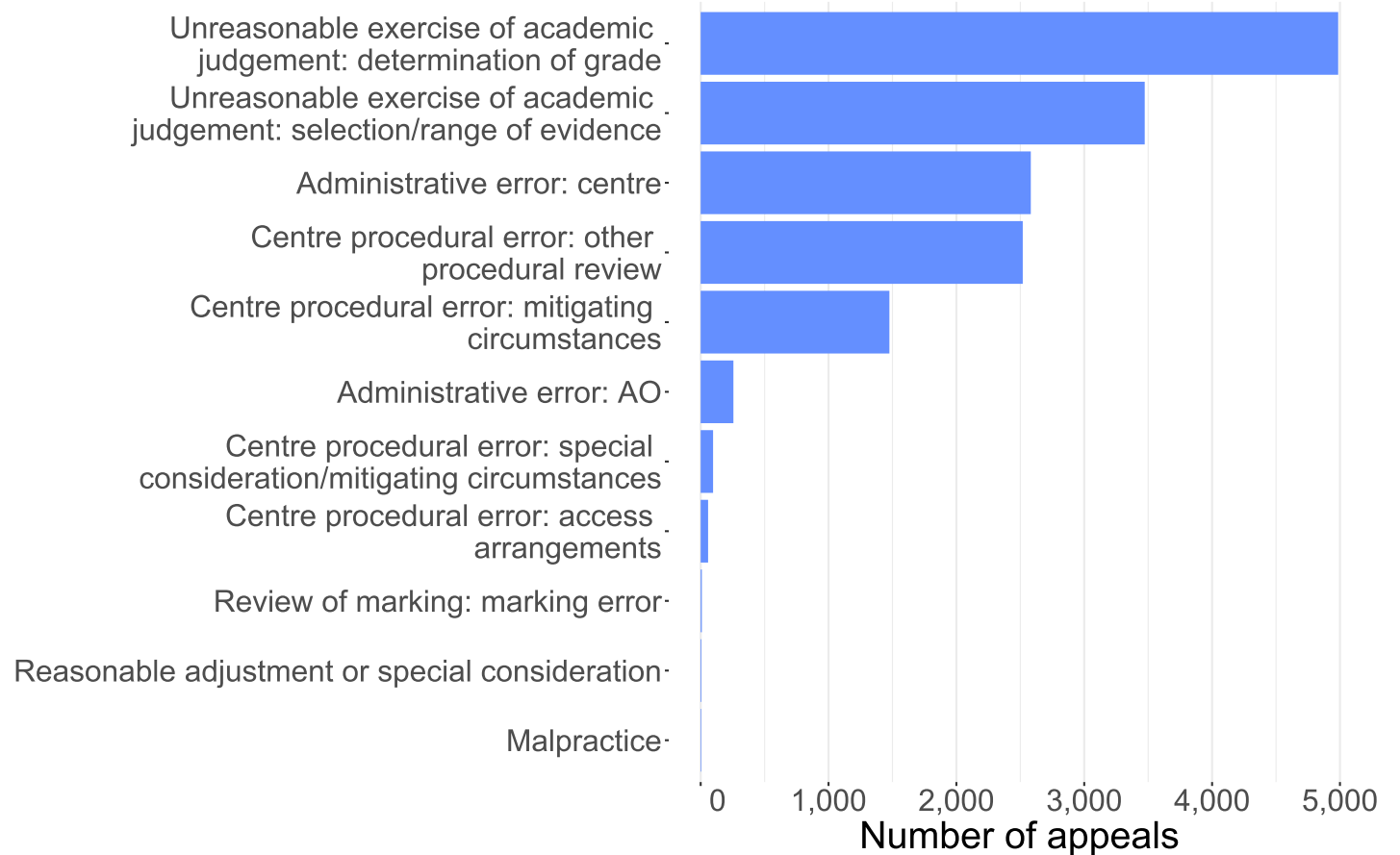


Table 4: Nature of GCSE appeals for 2020 to 2021

Nature of appeal	Number of appeals received
Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement: determination of grade	4,985
Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement: selection/range of evidence	3,475
Administrative error: centre	2,580
Centre procedural error: other procedural review	2,520
Centre procedural error: mitigating circumstances	1,475
Administrative error: AO	255
Centre procedural error: special consideration/mitigating circumstances	95
Centre procedural error: access arrangements	60
Review of marking: marking error	10
Malpractice	5
Reasonable adjustment or special consideration	5

AS and A level

Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement: determination of grade was the most common ground for AS and A level appeals in 2020 to 2021 with 4,260 appeals received.

Nature of AS and A level appeals for 2020 to 2021

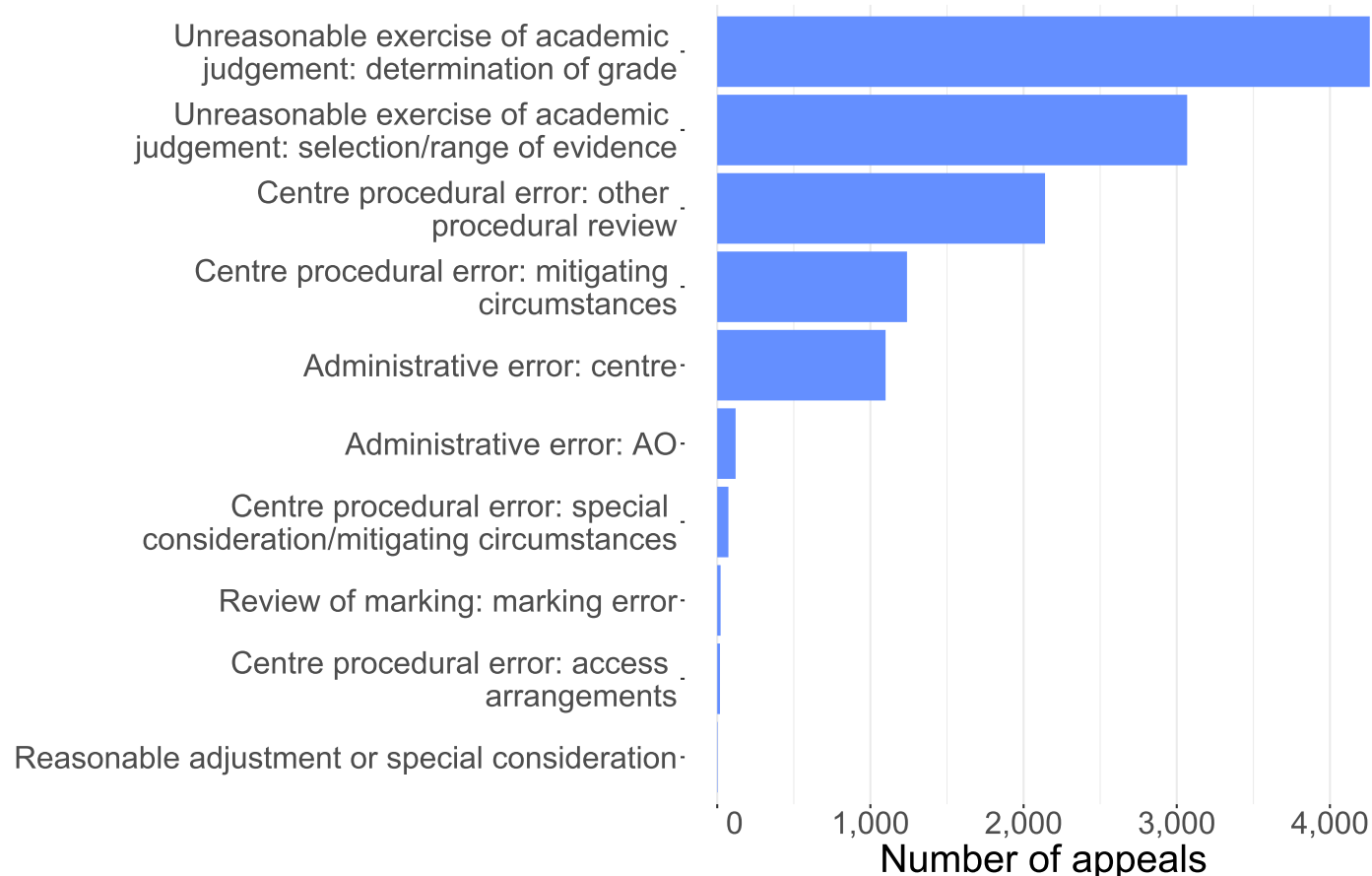


Table 5: Nature of AS and A level appeals for 2020 to 2021

Nature of appeal	Number of appeals received
Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement: determination of grade	4,260
Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement: selection/range of evidence	3,070
Centre procedural error: other procedural review	2,140
Centre procedural error: mitigating circumstances	1,240
Administrative error: centre	1,100
Administrative error: AO	120
Centre procedural error: special consideration/mitigating circumstances	75
Review of marking: marking error	20
Centre procedural error: access arrangements	20
Reasonable adjustment or special consideration	fewer than 5

The appeals process in 2020 to 2021

For summer 2021, as students had not taken awarding organisation marked exams, there was a [new appeals process](#), which consisted of 2 stages:

1. Centre reviews: if a student believed there had been an error, centres should have undertaken an initial process review to check all its processes were followed

correctly and no errors were made. This was referred to as a centre review. If the centre found an error that they judged would have affected the grade, they should submit a revised grade to the awarding organisation.

2. Appeals to the awarding organisation: if the student still believed there to be an error after a centre review, they would ask their centre to submit an appeal to the awarding organisation for them. The awarding organisation would check that the centre followed its own processes and awarding organisation requirements. Depending on a student's grounds for appeal, the awarding organisation would also review the evidence used to inform the teacher assessed grade and provide a view on whether the grade awarded was a reasonable exercise of academic judgement. The awarding organisation also checked if it made an administrative or procedural error where any concerns about this were raised.

The summer 2021 approach differed from how appeals are normally implemented in the [standard post-results service](#). The normal process used in autumn 2020 and November 2020 also consists of 2 stages:

1. Preliminary appeals ('stage 1' appeal): a review by a senior awarding organisation member who has not been previously involved in the individual case. As a result of a preliminary appeal, the case is either upheld or not upheld
2. Appeal hearings ('stage 2' appeal): when the applicant and awarding organisation present their cases to the panel. Appeal hearings occur if the applicant is dissatisfied with the result of the preliminary appeal, they may decide to progress to an appeal hearing.

An appeal panel consists of 3 or more members, at least one of which is independent from the awarding organisation (meaning they have not been an employee, examiner, committee or board member of the awarding organisation in the previous 5 years).

Due to the differences of the summer 2021 assessment and appeals process comparisons with previous years or exam series are not possible. As such, data from autumn 2020 and November 2020 are presented in a different table to data from Summer 2021.

Summer 2021

In summer 2021, around 97% of all centre reviews received by the awarding organisations resulted in a grade change. Only centre reviews where centres identified a procedural or administrative error were reported to the awarding organisations. Therefore, we cannot report on the number of centre reviews which were undertaken where the centre did not believe a mistake was made. This means that the total number of centre reviews undertaken is undercounted. As a result, the percentage of centre reviews leading to a grade change will most likely be inflated. Around 8% of all appeals to the awarding organisation received resulted in a grade change. Overall, 33% of all appeals received resulted in at least one grade change.

The nature of appeals received and appeals resulting in a grade change for summer 2021

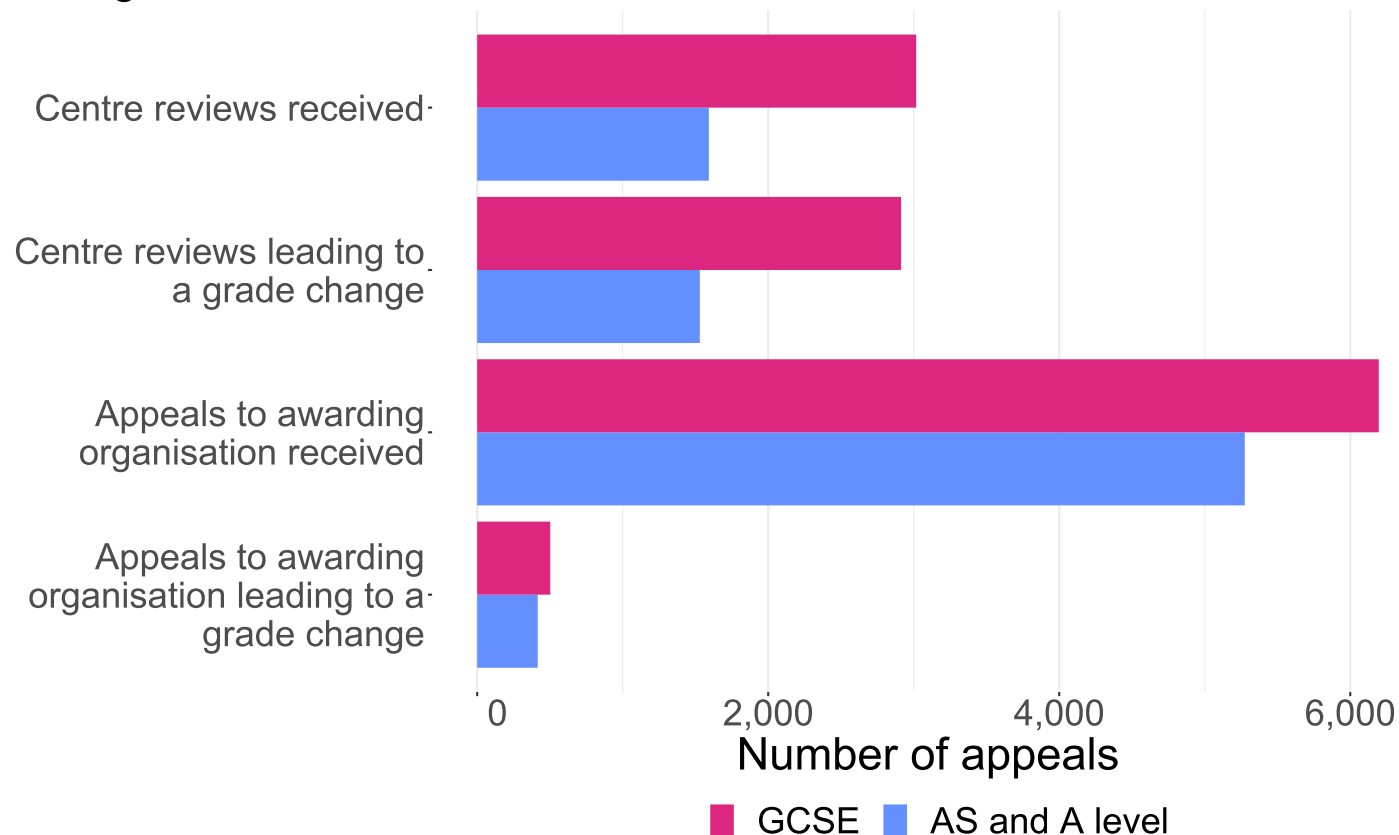


Table 6: The nature of appeals received and appeals resulting in a grade change for summer 2021 for GCSE; AS and A level

Exam Series	Qualification level	Number of centre reviews	Number of appeals to AOs	Centre reviews leading to at least one grade change	Appeals to AOs leading to at least one grade change
June 2021	GCSE	2,995	6,195	2,905	500
June 2021	AS and A level	1,565	5,275	1,525	415

At the time when data was reported to Ofqual, there were 15 GCSE appeals and 10 AS and A level appeals where the outcome of the appeal was pending the outcomes from [Examinations Procedure Review Service](#).

Autumn and November 2020

In respect of autumn 2020, around 22% of all preliminary appeals received resulted in at least one grade change. No appeal hearings were upheld in autumn 2020.

In respect of November 2020, around 6% of all preliminary appeals received resulted in at least one grade change. There were no appeal hearings in November 2020.

Table 7: The nature of appeals received and appeals resulting in a grade change for autumn 2020 and November 2020 for GCSE and autumn 2020 for AS and A level

Exam Series	Qualification level	Number of preliminary appeals	Number of appeal	% of preliminary appeals	Preliminary appeals leading to
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			hearings	leading to appeal hearings	at least one grade change
Autumn 2020	GCSE	fewer than 5	0	0%	fewer than 5
November 2020	GCSE	20	0	-	5
Autumn 2020	AS and A level	25	fewer than 5	8%	fewer than 5

Grades challenged and changed

Under usual circumstances, a single appeal may represent one or more qualification grades which are being challenged, for example when a centre appeals its results for a qualification taken by a number of its students. An upheld appeal may result in a change to all, some, or none of the associated qualification grades. Furthermore, a single appeal may represent one or more units for the qualification grade challenged (this is not relevant for June 2021 where appeals were at subject level) and students are awarded 2 grades for GCSE combined science. Therefore, an increase or decrease in appeals received may not be mirrored in the number of grades challenged or changed.

Because only centre reviews where the centre identified a procedural or administrative error can be reported, the number of grades challenged reported in this bulletin will be affected. This means that the total number of grades challenged may be undercounted.

Additionally, a candidate may be involved in more than one appeal. In 2020 to 2021, there were 12,810 GCSE, and AS and A level candidates whose grades were involved in an appeal. There were 6,200 (0.1%) of the approximately 6.1 million grades certified for these qualifications in 2020 to 2021 that were changed as part of an upheld appeal.

Overall, 17,610 of the 6.1 million grades certified for GCSE, and AS and A level were challenged (0.3% of all grades certified) and 6,200 of the 6.1 million grades certified for GCSE, and AS and A level were changed as part of an upheld appeal (0.1% of all grades certified).

There were 10,385 grades challenged and 4,125 grades changed for GCSE and 7,225 grades challenged and 2,080 grades changed for AS and A levels in 2020 to 2021.

The number of grades challenged and changed in 2020 to 2021 for GCSE, and AS and A level

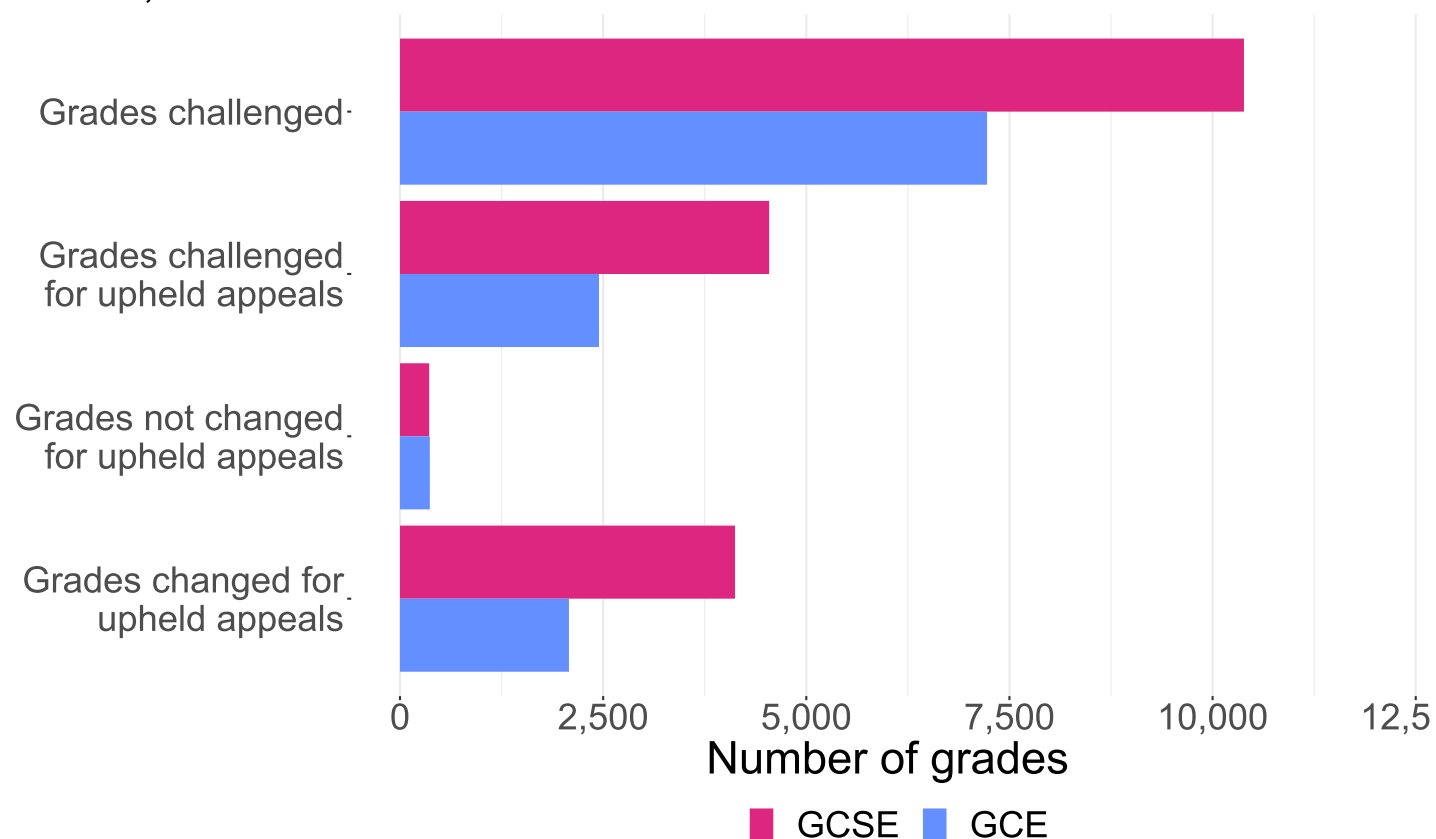


Table 8: The number of grades challenged and changed in 2020 to 2021 for GCSE, and AS and A level

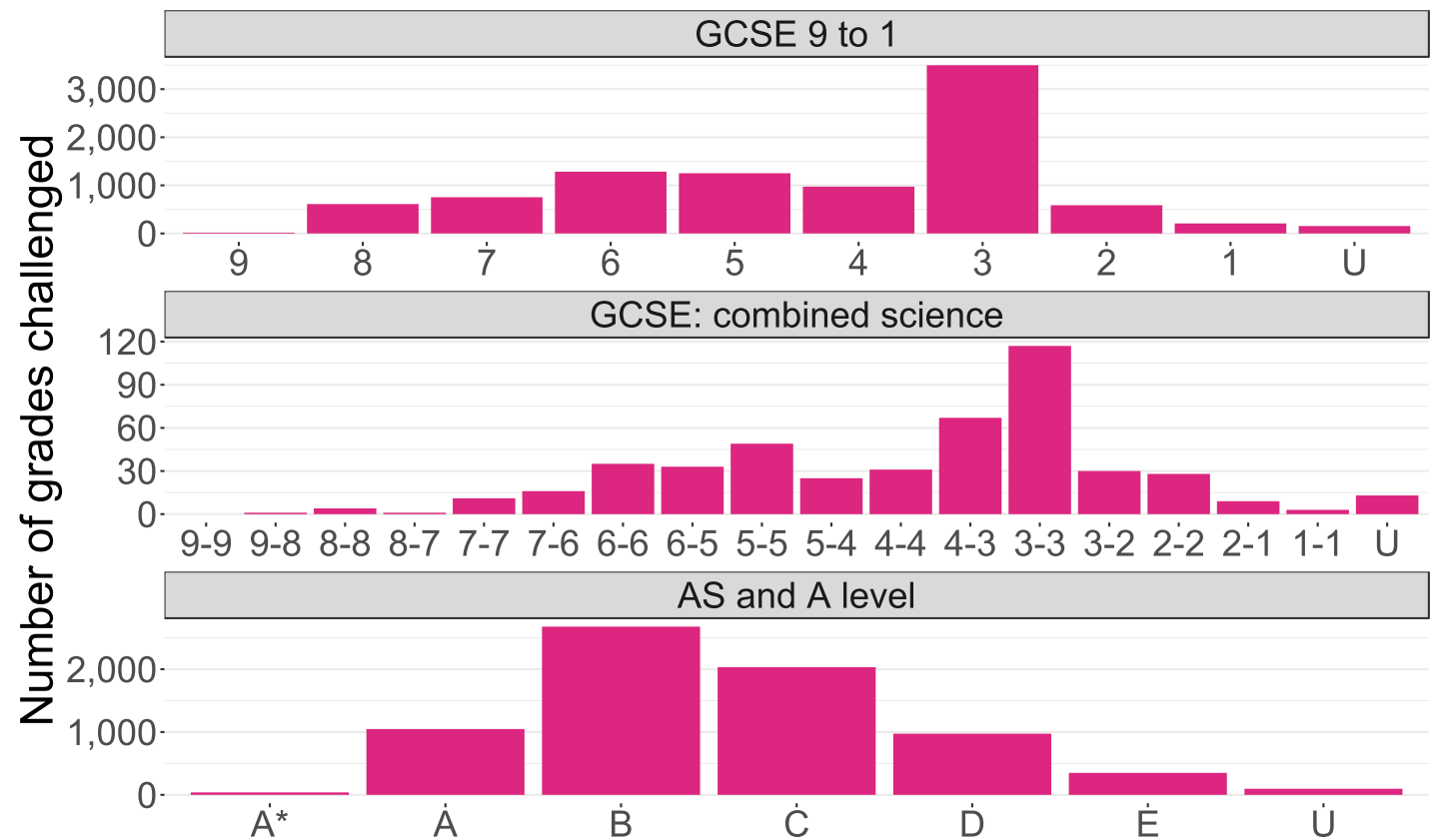
Qualification level	Grades challenged	Grades challenged for upheld appeals	Grades changed for upheld appeals	Grades not changed for upheld appeals
GCSE	10,385	4,545	4,125	360
AS and A level	7,225	2,450	2,080	365

The number of grades changed or unchanged refers only to grades included as part of an upheld appeal. It also does not include cases where either the pre or post appeal qualification grade is unknown, not awarded (for example, when a candidate is absent) or yet to be determined. In 2020 to 2021, at the time when data was reported to Ofqual, there were 60 GCSE grades and 5 AS and A level grades from upheld appeals where either the pre or post appeal qualification grade was unknown, not awarded or yet to be determined.

Grades challenged at appeal

Grade 3 was the most contested grade for GCSE 9 to 1, grade 3-3 the most contested grades for GCSE: combined science and grade B the most contested grade for AS and A level.

Grades challenged at appeal in 2020 to 2021 for GCSE 9 to 1, GCSE: combined science and AS and A level



Source: [Table 7: Data tables for appeals for GCSE, AS, A level and Projects: 2020 to 2021 academic year](#)

Raw mark changes for upheld appeals

There were no marks awarded in summer 2021 and therefore appeals following the Summer 2021 exam series did not result in any mark changes.

In the autumn 2020 AS and A level series, there were 5 grades for which marks changed following an appeal and the majority of mark changes were a change of 1.

In the GCSE autumn 2020 and November 2020 series, there were 10 grades for which marks changed following an appeal and the majority of mark changes were a change of 1.

A full breakdown is published in the accompanying data tables [Table 8: Data tables for appeals for GCSE, AS, A level and Projects: 2020 to 2021 academic year](#)

Grade changes for upheld appeals

In this section the magnitude of grade changes made following an upheld appeal in 2020 to 2021 are reported. A small number of upheld appeals were for students who were not originally given a grade or where a student's grade had not been determined after an appeal was upheld. These instances are not reported in this section.

GCSE

Where an appeal was upheld and the original and resulting grades were known, 92%

of GCSE grades challenged had a grade change of one or more grade in 2020 to 2021. The significant majority of grade changes were of one grade only.

Grade changes from upheld appeals at GCSE

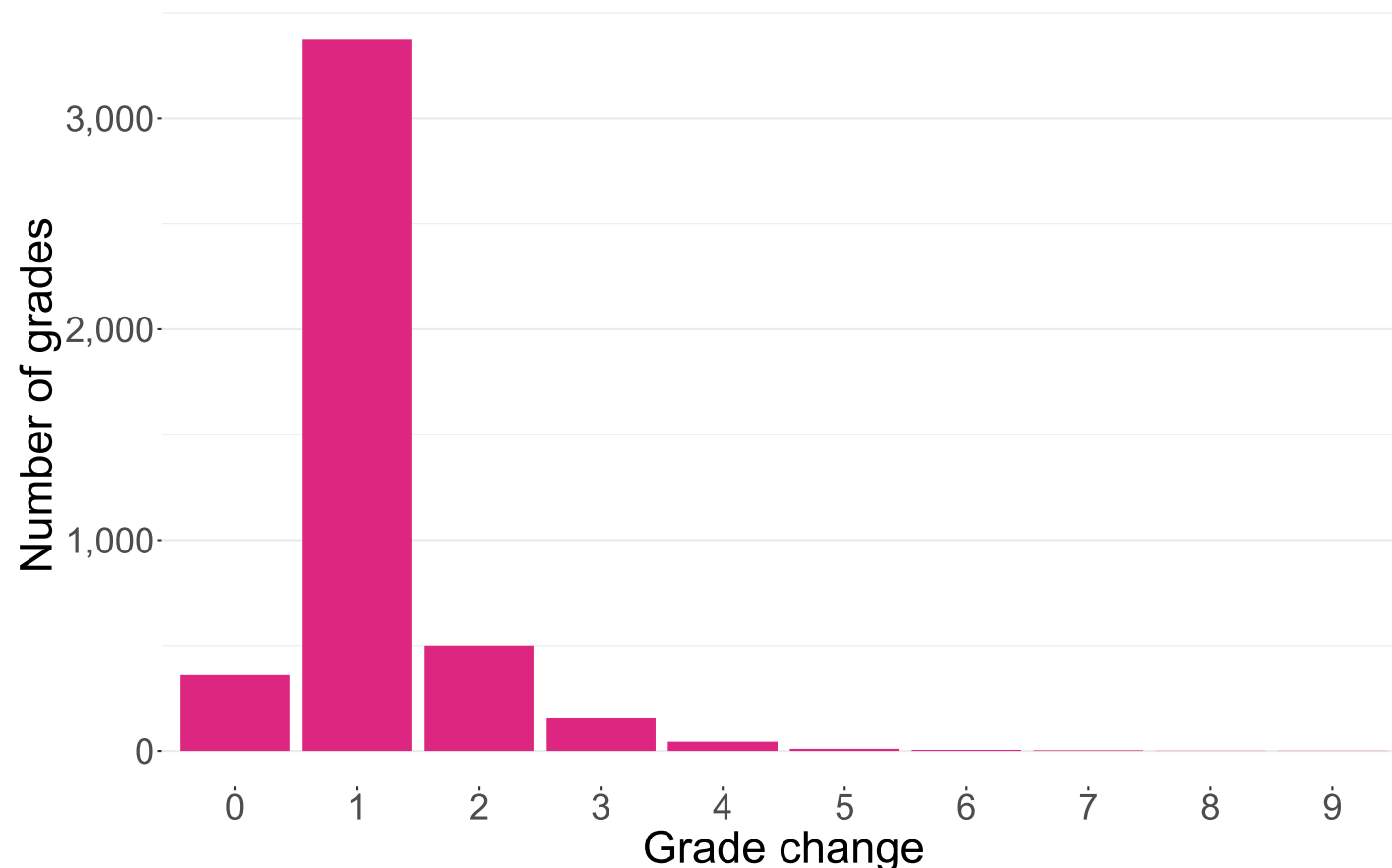


Table 9: Grade changes from upheld appeals at GCSE in 2020 to 2021

Grade change for upheld appeals	Number of grades	% of grades
Grade change of 0	360	8 %
Grade change of 1	3,375	76 %
Grade change of 2	500	11 %
Grade change of 3	160	4 %
Grade change of 4	45	1 %
Grade change of 5	10	0 %
Grade change of 6	5	0 %
Grade change of 7	fewer than 5	0 %
Grade change of 8	fewer than 5	0 %
Grade change of 9	fewer than 5	0 %

Overall, in upheld appeals (and where grades were known), 8% of GCSE grades challenged did not result in a qualification grade change in 2020 to 2021. Among those GCSE grades that were challenged in upheld appeals, 76% changed by one grade and 16% resulted in a change of 2 or more grades.

At the time when data was reported to Ofqual, there were 60 GCSE grades challenged for upheld appeals where grades were either unknown, not awarded (for example, if the candidate was absent) or yet to be determined. These grades are not reported in this section.

AS and A level

Where an appeal was upheld and the original and resulting grades were known, 85% of AS and A level grades challenged had a grade change of one or more grade in 2020 to 2021. Again, the significant majority of grade changes were of one grade only.

Grade changes from upheld appeals at AS and A level

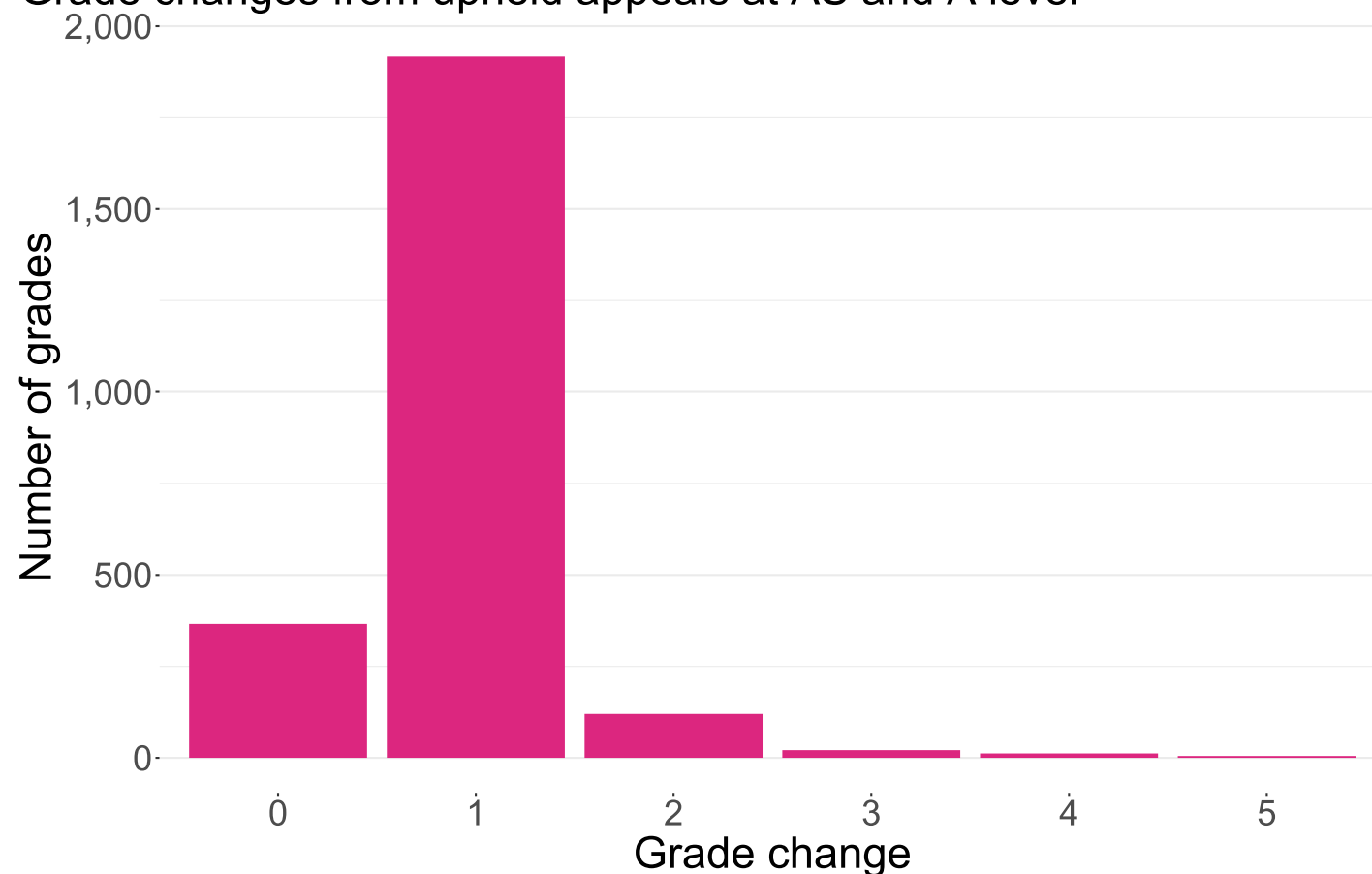


Table 10: Grade changes from upheld appeals at AS and A level in 2020 to 2021

Grade change for upheld appeals	Number of grades	% of grades
Grade change of 0	365	15 %
Grade change of 1	1,915	79 %
Grade change of 2	120	5 %
Grade change of 3	20	1 %
Grade change of 4	10	0 %
Grade change of 5	5	0 %

Overall, in upheld appeals (and where grades were known), 15% of AS and A level grades challenged in upheld appeals did not result in a qualification grade change in 2020 to 2021. Among those AS and A level grades that were challenged in upheld appeals, 79% changed by one grade and 6% resulted in a change of 2 or more grades.

At the time when data was reported to Ofqual, there were 5 AS and A level grades challenged for upheld appeals where grades were either unknown, not awarded (for example, if the candidate was absent) or yet to be determined. These grades are not reported in this section.

Project qualifications

Table 11: Appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed for project qualifications in 2020 to 2021

Year	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	Grades challenged	Grades changed
2017 to 2018	fewer than 5	fewer than 5	15	fewer than 5
2018 to 2019	10	fewer than 5	335	fewer than 5
2019 to 2020	15	15	20	15
2020 to 2021	105	35	130	30

In 2020 to 2021, there were 131 candidates for Project qualifications whose grades were involved in an appeal. Approximately 0.1% (30) of the 0.3% of the grades certified for Project qualifications in 2020 to 2021 were changed as a result of an appeal.

The number of appeals for Project qualifications increased from 15 in 2019 to 2020 to 105 in 2020 to 2021. The number of appeals upheld increased from fewer than 5 in 2019 to 2020 to 35 in 2020 to 2021 and the number of appeals upheld which led to a grade change has increased from fewer than 5 in 2019 to 2020 to 30 in 2020 to 2021. The percentage of appeals upheld in 2020 to 2021 has decreased (36%) compared with 87% in 2019 to 2020. The changes between 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 reflect the difference in the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021. Direct comparisons between years are not valid and should not be made.

Contextual information

This report presents data on requests for appeals made to awarding organisations for the academic year 2020 to 2021. The qualifications covered in this report are GCSEs, AS and A levels and Project qualifications in England.

For summer 2021 the [standard post-results service](#) was not available as students had not taken awarding organisation marked exams. There was instead a [new centre review and appeals process](#). In this process, the number of appeals received may not be mirrored in the number of grades challenged or changed because students are awarded 2 grades for GCSE combined science. In summer 2021 an appeal could be [made on grounds of procedural and administrative errors, or on grounds of unreasonable academic judgement](#).

A procedural error might have been identified by a centre following a student's request for a centre review or by the awarding organisation where the student's grounds of an appeal raise procedural issues. A centre might have identified as part of a centre review that it made an administrative error in connection with a teacher assessed grade.

If the student still believed there to be an error that their centre had not found, they would ask their centre to submit an appeal to the awarding organisation for them. The appeal could be made on the basis that there was a procedural error, an administrative error or a grade reflected an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement by the centre. An appeal on unreasonable exercise of academic judgement could be made on the grounds that:

1. the centre's judgement as to the evidence which should be used to determine a teacher assessed grade was unreasonable
2. the centre's judgement as to the teacher assessed grade indicated by the evidence it selected was unreasonable

Appeals on the grounds of academic judgement could only be considered by awarding organisations and not by centres.

A centre would only have reported a centre review to the awarding organisation if the centre had identified an administrative or procedural error in determining a student's grade which resulted in the centre requesting the awarding organisation to change the student's grade. Instances where the centre did not identify an administrative or procedural error were not reported to the awarding organisation. As a result, in this bulletin only centre reviews where the centre identified a procedural or administrative error can be reported on. This means that the total number of centre reviews having been undertaken and grades challenged are undercounted.

However, as external assessments took place in autumn 2020, November 2020 and January 2021, appeals could be submitted if a school or college was dissatisfied with the result of a review of marking, review of moderation, a malpractice decision, or the outcome of a reasonable adjustment or special consideration request.

Appeals were made at the exam component level and, if related to the same issue, could cover more than one candidate. The [Joint Council for Qualifications \(JCQ\) guide](#) to the awarding bodies' appeals process describes 2 steps for appeals:

1. Preliminary appeal ('stage 1' appeal): a review by a senior awarding organisation member who has not previously been involved with the particular case.
2. Appeal hearing ('stage 2' appeal): applicants and awarding bodies present their respective cases to the panel of 3 or more members, one of which must be independent of the awarding organisation.

It is therefore clear that, due to the exceptional nature of the assessment and appeals process in summer 2021, direct comparisons of appeals in 2020 to 2021 and previous years are not valid and should not be made.

Further information on this release is available in the [background information as well as data tables accompanying this report](#).

User feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs please contact us at data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk.

Head of profession: Nadir Zanini

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