

Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and Other Qualifications – Wave 11

Perceptions of Teachers and the General Public

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Executive summary

This report presents findings from the 11th wave of research conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) to assess attitudes to A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications – together with other related matters – among the general public, students, parents, teachers and, for the first time, headteachers.

Methodology¹

A telephone survey was conducted among 600 teachers of GCSE, A level and other academic qualifications offered to 14-19 year olds, selected from a sample of schools and colleges across England. The achieved sample included 402 A level teachers and 506 GCSE teachers. In addition, for the first time, 203 headteachers were interviewed. Fieldwork was conducted in November and December 2012.

The general public element of the research was undertaken face-to-face from November 2012 to January 2013, with 3,213 members of the general public, including 254 GCSE, A level or other academic qualifications students, and 416 parents of students currently, recently or about to study these qualifications.

There have been some changes to questions and the methodology since wave 10 in 2011, as detailed in the Introduction and Appendix A. As a result, we are not comparing 2012 teachers' data with previous findings, and are limiting ourselves to comparing 2012 general public data with only 2011², not previous years' data.³

Key findings

Most teachers and the general public were confident in the A level system.

From 2003, when this programme of research began, to 2011, there was a steady increase in A level teachers' confidence in the A level system. In 2012, the great majority of headteachers and teachers were confident in the system (84 per cent and 86 per cent respectively). Most headteachers (77 per cent) and teachers (79 per cent) said that their confidence was much the same as it had been a year earlier, although few felt *more* confident (one per cent and three per cent respectively). In contrast, a quarter of the general public reported an *increase* in their confidence in the A level

¹ Full details are set out in the Introduction and appendices to this report.

² 2011 data has been re-weighted in line with the protocols adopted for 2012.

³ Data we quote are statistically significant and based on a minimum of 100 respondents in the subgroup, except where noted.

system compared with a few years ago (25 per cent), especially students (43 per cent).

There was a very strong feeling from professionals and the public alike about the value and importance of the A level qualification. Teachers and the general public agreed that it is more important than ever to get a higher qualification like the A level (91 per cent of headteachers, 85 per cent of teachers and 84 per cent of A level students). Similar proportions valued the A* grade as being useful for universities to identify top students. Agreement from the general public on these issues was lower, but this is perhaps because the issue is less relevant to them.

A large majority of headteachers and teachers (75 per cent and 78 per cent) considered that *all/at least three-quarters of A level students* get the right grade. A third of the general public did not express a view, but 66 per cent of people did give an opinion considered that at least three-quarters of A level students get the right grade (75 per cent of parents and 74 per cent of students).

Confidence in the GCSE system was much lower than in the A level system.

The proportions of headteachers and teachers feeling confident in GCSEs (56 per cent and 55 per cent) were around 30 percentage points lower than for A levels. Over three-quarters of headteachers (80 per cent) and three in five teachers (60 per cent) reported having *less* confidence in the GCSE system that they had the previous year (92 per cent of English teachers). However, the general public overall was neutral when comparing its confidence in the GCSE system with a few years ago: just over a quarter (27 per cent) were more confident and the same proportion was less confident.

Fewer than two-thirds of headteachers, teachers and parents felt that either *all/at least three-quarters of GCSE students get the right grade* (62 per cent, 63 per cent and 58 per cent respectively), less in all cases than they felt about A levels. Students were more positive: 72 per cent felt that *all/at least three-quarters* get the right grade (more than they felt about A levels).

All headteachers and teachers were aware of the 2012 English GCSE grading controversy. It had a significant impact on their reported confidence in GCSE examinations. Four in five headteachers (81 per cent) and two-thirds of teachers (64 per cent) reported that their confidence in GCSE examinations had been affected “a lot” or “a fair amount”. English (A level and GCSE) teachers’ confidence was particularly affected: 94 per cent reported being affected “a lot” or “a fair amount” by the controversy.

The controversy also had a significant impact on the public’s confidence, although less than on teachers. Two-thirds of the public and students (64 per cent and 67 per

cent) and over three-quarters of parents (79 per cent) had heard of the controversy. Two-fifths of the public and parents, who had heard of the controversy, reported that their confidence in the system had been affected “a lot” or “a fair amount” (40 per cent and 45 per cent respectively).

Over half of the general public considered that other academic qualifications, vocational qualifications and mixed qualifications are of equal value to traditional academic qualifications, such as A levels and GCSEs, although this was not the case among headteachers and teachers.

A higher proportion of headteachers than teachers believed that other academic qualifications (such as iGCSEs, Pre-U and EBacc) are of equal value to traditional qualifications like A levels and GCSEs (54 per cent compared with 43 per cent). Half of the general public agreed with this (50 per cent) as did rather more parents (57 per cent) and students (64 per cent).

The views of headteachers and teachers were similar regarding whether vocational qualifications are of equal value to traditional qualifications (40 per cent and 38 per cent respectively). This was also the case for mixed qualifications (42 per cent of headteachers and 37 per cent of teachers agreed).

Over half of the general public agreed with this view of vocational and mixed qualifications (54 per cent and 52 per cent) as did rather more parents (58 per cent and 59 per cent) and students (61 per cent and 62 per cent).

Almost half of teachers, and three-quarters of headteachers, knew “a lot” or “a fair amount” about Ofqual. But the public’s awareness remained low.⁴

Unprompted awareness of Ofqual among teachers increased each year from 2008 to 2011. In 2012, although only around a quarter of headteachers (24 per cent) and one in twelve teachers claimed to “know a lot” about it, unprompted awareness of Ofqual was very high (99 per cent and 89 per cent respectively) knowing at least a little about it. *All* headteachers and teachers were aware of Ofqual’s role once prompted⁵.

Familiarity with Ofqual among the general public overall remained low: just one in ten (15 per cent) knew at least a little about the regulator, with similar lack of awareness among parents and students, six per cent and four per cent of whom knew a lot or a

⁴ Respondents were asked about their knowledge of Ofqual in two ways. First they were asked an “unprompted question” which simply asked how much, if anything, they knew about Ofqual. Second, they were given a short “prompt”, or briefing, about Ofqual and asked whether they had been aware before that day that Ofqual was the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England.

⁵ The form of the unprompted and prompted questions is set out in the text.

fair amount, respectively. There was a significant increase in *prompted* awareness of Ofqual, however. After being read a description of Ofqual's role⁶, 24 per cent of the general public said that they were aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England, compared with 14 per cent in 2011. Awareness particularly rose among parents (to 35 per cent) and students (to 22 per cent).

In the year or two after Ofqual was set up in 2008, many teachers were unwilling to express a view about Ofqual's effectiveness. In 2012, however, a third of headteachers and half of teachers judged that Ofqual is effective at regulating the exam system (32 per cent and 50 per cent) and maintaining the standards of qualifications (36 per cent and 52 per cent).⁷ Unsurprisingly, given the public's low awareness of Ofqual, two-thirds (65 per cent) had no view on its effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications. Those who expressed an opinion were evenly balanced in their views: 16 per cent considered Ofqual to be effective, while 19 per cent considered it to be ineffective. Students were more positive, however. Thirty per cent considered it to be effective, while 13 per cent disagreed.

Headteachers' and teachers' most trusted sources of information about how examinations are marked and graded continued to be other teachers and professional associations. The public, on the other hand, relied a lot on people they know, rather than institutions.

Other teachers and professional organisations were trusted by around nine in ten headteachers and teachers (by 97 per cent and 92 per cent of headteachers and by 94 per cent and 88 per cent of teachers). Awarding organisations were trusted by around three-quarters of headteachers (75 per cent) and four in five teachers (84 per cent) and Ofqual by 54 per cent of headteachers and 74 per cent of teachers. Headteachers and teachers who did not trust Ofqual as a source of information about examinations identified two main reasons: the summer 2012 GCSE English concerns (mentioned by 36 per cent and 22 per cent respectively), and a concern that Ofqual is not independent of the government (mentioned by 22 per cent and 24 per cent).

⁶ After being asked about how much they know about Ofqual unprompted, respondents were told: "Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Their aim is to ensure that learners get the result they deserve, and that the qualifications they receive count, both now and in the future". They were then asked: "Before today, were you aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications examinations and assessments in England?"

⁷ The proportion of headteachers and teachers who said Ofqual is ineffective at regulating the examinations system is 60 per cent and 37 per cent respectively. Similar proportions felt Ofqual is ineffective at maintaining the standards of qualifications (54 per cent and 37 per cent respectively).

Awarding organisations were the most trusted source of information about examinations for the general public (trusted by 46 per cent), with even higher trust among parents and students (56 per cent and 75 per cent respectively). Awarding organisations apart however, parents and students trusted people they personally knew more than they trusted institutions: their families, other parents or students. Ofqual was the general public's most trusted institution after awarding organisations, being trusted by a third of the general public for information about examinations (33 per cent), two-fifths of parents (40 per cent) and over half of students (57 per cent).

Introduction

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) to conduct the 11th wave of the Ofqual Perception survey. This longitudinal study is designed to measure teachers', parents', students' and the general public's perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications in England.

This study follows ten waves of surveys measuring perceptions of A levels from 2003 to 2011 (and, since 2004, perceptions of GCSEs).⁸ Since 2011, the research has also included questions about other academic qualifications and vocational qualifications⁹ for 14-19 year olds. In 2012, Ofqual further extended this research to obtain perceptions on “mixed qualifications” (qualifications that have both an academic and vocational component¹⁰) and the scope of the research programme was increased to also capture the views of headteachers. Separate research was also commissioned into the views of employers and higher education institutions.¹¹

Objectives of the research

The objectives of the research were to investigate:

- perceptions and confidence in qualifications taken by young people, particularly A levels, GCSEs and other academic, mixed and vocational qualifications;
- confidence in qualifications' standards and the examination system – both in its implementation and regulation; and

⁸ Prior to 2008 the survey was commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

⁹ Vocational qualifications were defined as qualifications taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job.

¹⁰ Please refer to the glossary for definitions of these types of qualification.

¹¹ Two research projects aimed at exploring the views of employers and higher education institutions were conducted simultaneously as separate pieces of work by Opinion Leader Research. Findings for these audiences are reported separately.

- awareness and perceptions of Ofqual.

While these objectives are broadly similar to those of previous waves of the research, additional questions have been added this year, reflecting the increased focus on a variety of qualifications. The majority of the survey continues to examine perceptions of the examinations system in general, A levels and GCSEs.

We have tried to maintain continuity with previous surveys, where possible, so that perceptions can be tracked over time. However, in many instances, this has not been possible due to changes to question wording and/or sampling and weighting approaches. The implications of these changes to the existing methodology are discussed later in this chapter.

Background

Since the coalition government was formed in 2010 there have been a number of changes in the way young people are educated and assessed in England. Wave 11 of the survey took place within the context of political discussion and media publicity about qualifications' standards and Ofqual's work in maintaining standards.

Following years of debate surrounding grade inflation and the rigour of A level and GCSE qualifications, the 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching*,¹² proposed reforms to both A levels and GCSEs, including a departure from a modular approach to teaching and assessing GCSEs and A levels, and removing the opportunity for students to re-sit large numbers of units, in order to address grade inflation. A report from the House of Commons Education Committee published in June 2012¹³ stated that confidence in GCSEs and A levels had been undermined by criticisms from universities and employers, by errors on question papers in summer 2011 and by grade inflation

The GCSE qualification attracted further discussion when results published in August 2012 showed a fall in GCSE grades, particularly in English. Following complaints about inconsistent grade boundaries from some schools due to certain students not receiving the GCSE grades they expected the issue came to a head with a judicial review. This was still underway in the High Court at the time of fieldwork for this research.

¹² The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010 (Department for Education) www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/CM%207980

¹³ House of Commons Education Select Committee, The Administration of Examinations for 15-19 year olds in England. First report of session 2012-13: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/141/141.pdf

Another significant development relating to GCSEs was the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) as a performance measure in the 2010 performance tables, which recognises where students achieve GCSE grade A*-C across certain academic subjects. Research by Ipsos MORI found that it resulted in changes to the curriculum offer and/or GCSE option blocks offered in almost half of schools in the 2011/12 academic year.¹⁴ Proposals to develop and implement an EBacc Certificate (EBCs) that could see a single awarding organisation deliver qualifications in each EBacc subject were under consideration during the fieldwork period for this study although they were abandoned in early February 2013.¹⁵

There has also been 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 form of assessment for entry, there have been widespread concerns about the effectiveness of the system as a means of helping universities choose the right candidates. The Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (2010)¹⁶, highlighted a commitment to involve universities and learned organisations in the future development of A levels to make sure 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, which included nine new general conditions of recognition for GCE qualifications.¹⁷ The majority of stakeholders participating in the consultation welcomed the increased role of universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) in the development of A levels, and strongly supported the general principles of the proposed regulatory approach.¹⁸

In 2011, research carried out by Ipsos MORI for Ofqual among a variety of audiences including A level teachers, higher education institutions and employers, found that perceptions of A levels were generally positive.¹⁹ Higher education sector interviewees felt that A levels remained the “gold standard” for their subjects when compared with alternative level three qualifications. Past research also showed that

¹⁴ A survey of teachers conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Department of Education (2012) found that 47 per cent felt that the EBacc had impacted on their curriculum offer and 48 per cent reported changes to their option blocks as a result.

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR249

¹⁵ See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21363396

¹⁶ See www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%207980

¹⁷ See www.ofqual.gov.uk/news/a-level-reform/

¹⁸ See www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-11-07-Analysis-of-the-consultation-into-he-involvement-in-a-levels-and-amended-criteria.pdf

¹⁹ Higton, J et al, Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute: *Fit for Purpose? The views of the higher education sector, teachers and employers on the suitability of A levels* (Ofqual, 2012) www.ofqual.gov.uk/

students have continued to see the value in the A level qualification. For example, in wave 10 of the current study,²⁰ the majority of students felt that it was more important than ever that students get a higher level qualification such as an A level.

Media reports in the months prior to fieldwork for the 2012 survey reflected increasing speculation as to the content of proposed reforms to the A level system and the possible impact on A levels, including the introduction of a “baccalaureate style” A level²¹ or “ABacc”.

Methodology

All eleven waves of the parents, students and general public research have been carried out using Ipsos MORI’s general public face-to-face omnibus. For Wave 11, we surveyed the following between 16th November 2012 and 17th January 2013:

- **3,213 members of the general public** in England.
- **254 students**, 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 iGCSE, the IB, the PRE-U and Freestanding Maths.
- **416 parents/carers** of students who are taking or have just taken A levels, GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications.

Ipsos MORI also conducted a telephone survey of school staff selected from a sample of schools and colleges across England between 16th November 2012 and 12th December 2013 comprising:

- **600 teachers** of GCSE and/or AS/A2 level and/or other academic qualifications, for 14-19 year olds.
- **203 headteachers**.

Detailed information about the methodology and sample composition can be found in Appendix A.

²⁰ Ipsos MORI: *Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and Other Qualifications: Wave 10* (Ofqual, 2012): www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-03-13-ofqual-perceptions-of-a-levels-gcse-wave-10.pdf

²¹ <http://m.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/oct/17/michael-gove-baccalaureate-a-levels?cat=politics&type=article>

Interpretation of the data

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

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

As has been the case in previous waves of the research, where ‘general public’ is referred to, this is inclusive of student and parent interviews. ‘Teachers’ include both A level and GCSE teachers unless otherwise stated and A level teachers may also teach GCSE and vice versa. Therefore, it should be highlighted that for analysis purposes these are not mutually exclusive groups.

Also in many instances a net percentage is reported, for example ‘strongly agree’ plus ‘tend to agree’. The net percentage takes into account rounding and may not always sum to the same total as if the answer categories are manually added together.

Teachers' and headteachers' perceptions

Summary

Perceptions of A levels and GCSEs: Most headteachers and teachers were confident in the A level system (84 per cent and 86 per cent respectively) and fewer than one in five reported any loss of confidence in the system compared with the previous year (19 per cent and 15 per cent). The A level qualification was strongly valued by headteachers and teachers. Five in six agreed that it is more important now than ever to get a higher qualification like the A level (91 per cent and 85 per cent) and felt that the A* grade has been useful for universities to identify top students (83 per cent and 86 per cent).

In contrast, fewer than three in five headteachers and teachers were confident in the GCSE system (56 per cent and 55 per cent respectively). And over three-quarters of headteachers and three in five teachers reported having less confidence in the GCSE system that they had the previous year (80 per cent and 60 per cent). Although teachers' confidence in the marking of GCSE papers was not much lower than their confidence in A level marking (59 per cent were confident in the accuracy of marking of GCSE papers), just a third of headteachers were confident in GCSE marking (34 per cent).

A large majority of headteachers and teachers (75 per cent and 78 per cent respectively) considered that either all or at least three-quarters of A level students get the right grade. However, less than two-thirds felt that three-quarters of GCSE students get the right grade (62 per cent and 63 per cent).

All headteachers and teachers were aware of the 2012 English GCSE grading controversy: It had a significant impact on their confidence in GCSE examinations. Four in five headteachers and two-thirds of teachers reported that their confidence in GCSE examinations had been affected "a lot" or "a fair amount" (81 per cent and 64 per cent). English teachers' confidence was particularly affected: 94 per cent reported being affected "a lot" or "a fair amount" by the controversy.

Perceptions of Ofqual: Three-quarters of headteachers, but less than half of teachers, knew "a lot" or "a fair amount" about Ofqual without being prompted with a description of Ofqual's role (76 per cent and 46 per cent). Over a third of headteachers and half of teachers thought that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications (36 per cent and 52 per cent) and regulating the examinations system (32 per cent and 50 per cent).

Perceptions of other qualifications: Headteachers were generally of the view that other academic qualifications are of an equal value to traditional qualifications (54 per cent agreed while 24 per cent disagreed). Teachers were less clear than headteachers about this issue (43 per cent agreed while 31 per cent disagreed).

Sources of information: Headteachers' and teachers' most trusted sources of information about how examinations are marked and graded continued to be other teachers and professional associations. Ofqual was trusted for this purpose by 54 per cent of headteachers and 74 per cent of teachers. Headteachers and teachers who did not trust Ofqual as a source of information about examinations cited two main reasons: the concerns around the summer 2012 GCSE English grading and that Ofqual is not independent of the government.

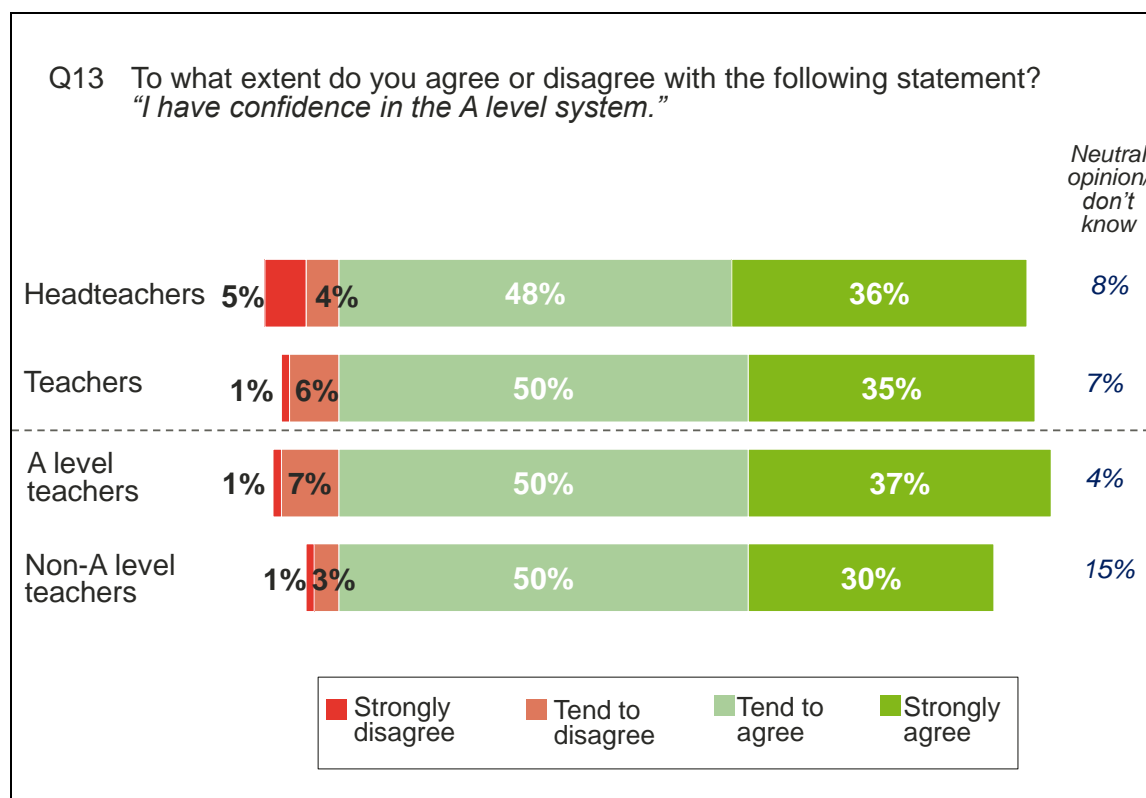
Perceptions of A levels

Headteachers and teachers were asked a range of questions about their perceptions of the A level system, including: confidence in the system, perceived value of the A level qualification and the views of specific aspects of the system such as accuracy of marking and grading.

Confidence in the A level system

From 2003, when this programme of research began, to 2011, there was a steady increase in A level teachers' confidence in the A level system. Results obtained in 2012 showed that confidence in the system is still high. Eighty four per cent of headteachers and 86 per cent of teachers expressed confidence in the A level system as illustrated in Figure 1. A level teachers had more confidence than non-A level teachers (88 per cent compared with 81 per cent).

Figure 1. Confidence in the A level system



Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 332 who teach A levels and 169 who do not teach A levels, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

In the past, we have found greater confidence in the A level system among teachers in maintained secondary schools than those in independent schools. This remained

the case in 2012: 90 per cent of teachers in maintained secondary schools (11-18) were confident in the system, compared with 78 per cent of those in independent schools (11-18).²² There was greater confidence among maths teachers than English teachers (92 per cent and 78 per cent respectively).²³

Over three-quarters of headteachers (77 per cent), teachers and A level teachers²⁴ (79 per cent in each case) said that their confidence in the A level system was about the same as it had been the previous year (Figure 2). This was also consistent among non-A level teachers (80 per cent). Very few felt more confident than the previous year: just one per cent of headteachers and three per cent of teachers. One in six headteachers and teachers (19 per cent and 15 per cent respectively), however, had less confidence in the A level system than the previous year.

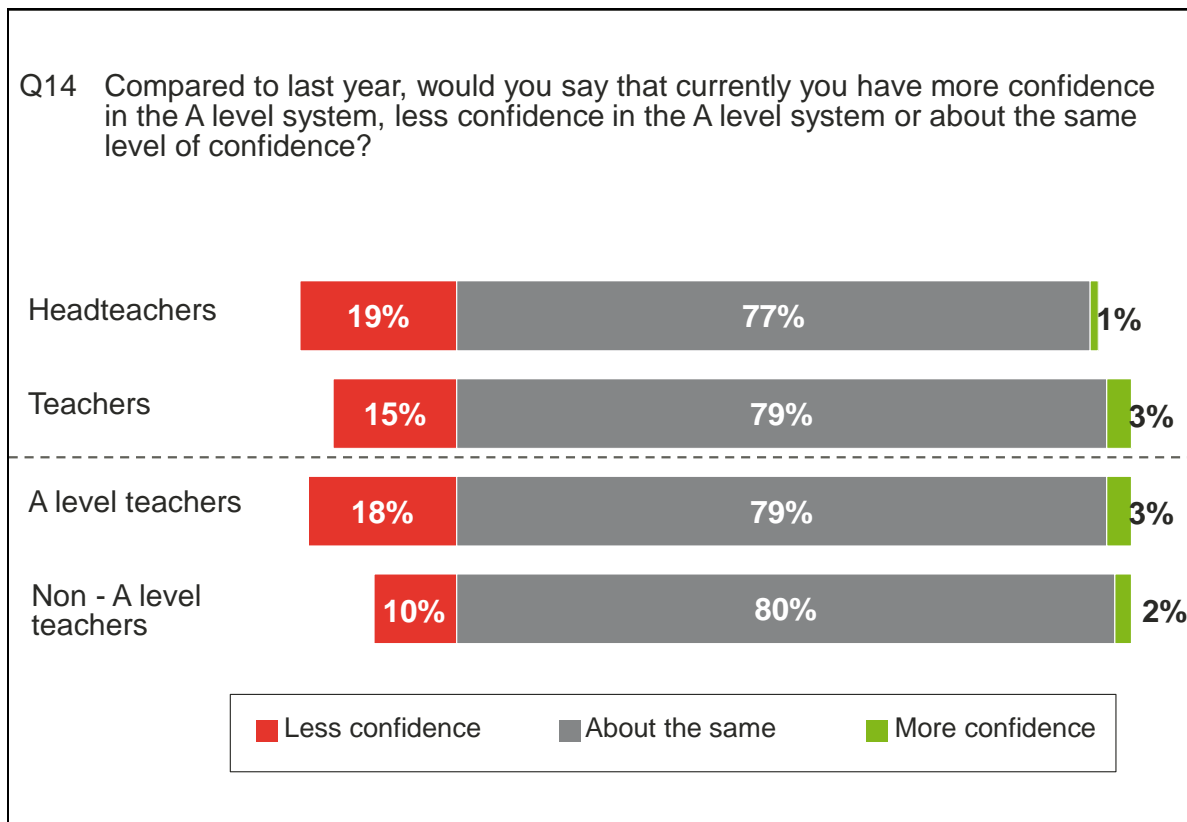
There was a relationship between how teachers felt their confidence in the A level system had changed over the previous year and their reported levels of confidence about the marking and grading of A level papers. For example, teachers reported feeling less confident in the A level system if they did not have confidence in the accuracy of A level marking (35 per cent, compared with 15 per cent overall), or felt that less than three-quarters of students are awarded the right grade (34 per cent).

²² We should retain some caution about this data because of base sizes. Data is based on 110 teachers from maintained secondary schools (11-18) and 100 from independent schools (11-18).

²³ Based on 116 English teachers and 124 maths teachers.

²⁴ It should be noted that these are not a mutually exclusive group from the teacher sample.

Figure 2. Confidence in the A level system compared to last year

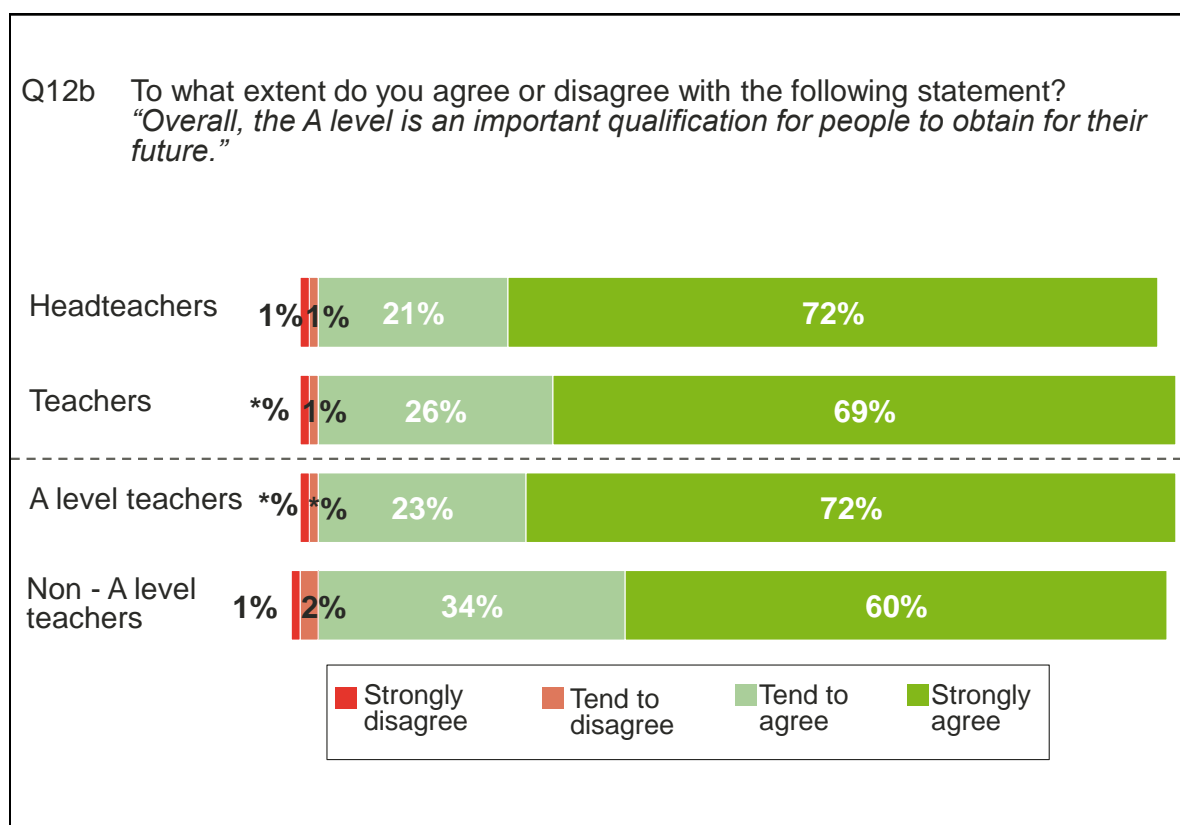


Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 332 who teach A levels and 169 who do not teach A levels, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Perceptions of the importance and value of the A level qualification

Headteachers and teachers overwhelmingly considered that “the A level is an important qualification for people to obtain for the future”: Ninety three per cent of headteachers and 95 per cent of teachers overall considered this to be the case (Figure 3). This figure was consistent regardless of whether teachers taught the A level qualification or not (95 per cent of A level teachers and 94 per cent of non-A level teachers agreed). A similar pattern had been found in previous waves of this research.

Figure 3. The importance of the A level as a qualification for people’s future

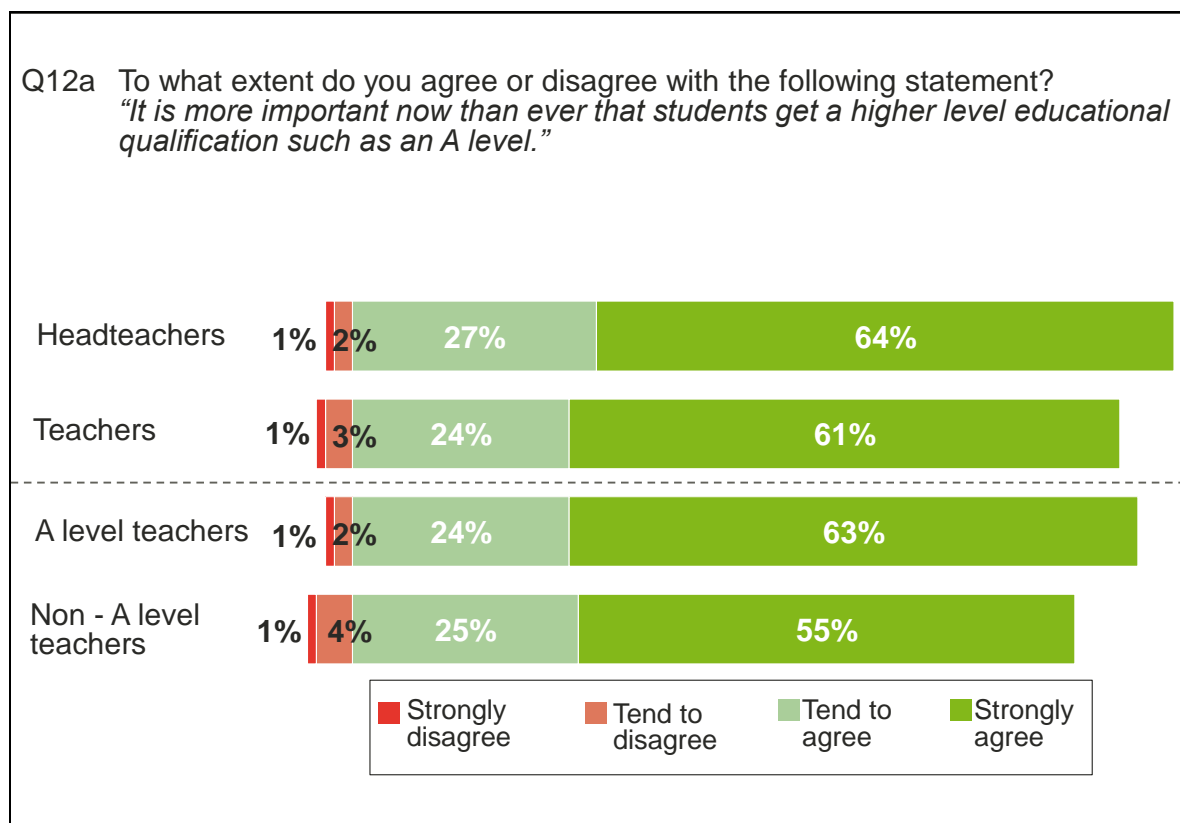


Note: * means between 0 per cent and 0.5 per cent.

Effective base : 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 332 who teach A levels and 169 who do not teach A levels, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Nine out of ten headteachers (91 per cent), five in six teachers (85 per cent) and A level teachers (88 per cent) also considered that “it is more important now than ever that students get a higher level of educational qualification such as an A level” (Figure 4). Whilst the majority of non-A level teachers also considered this to be the case (80 per cent), agreement amongst this group was significantly lower than amongst A level teachers. In wave 10 (2011), we found that there had been an increase in the proportion of teachers who felt this to be the case, compared with all previous waves. Although no direct comparisons can be made between wave 11 (2012) data and previous years, it would appear that the strength of this view has not diminished over the last year.

Figure 4. The importance of getting a higher level qualification



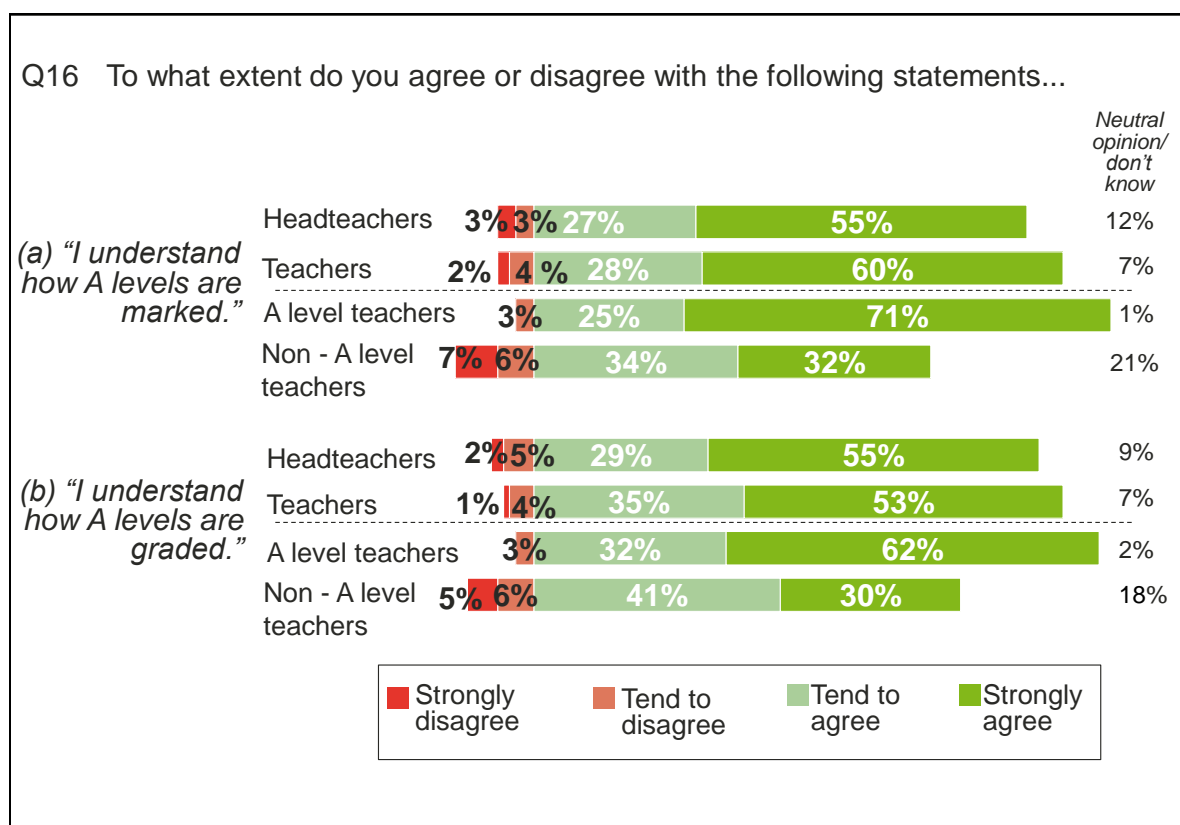
Effective base : 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 332 who teach A levels and 169 who do not teach A levels, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Understanding how A levels and marked are graded

The great majority of headteachers and teachers reported that they understood how A levels are both marked and graded: 82 per cent and 87 per cent respectively said they understood how they are marked and 84 per cent and 87 per cent said they understood how they are graded (Figure 5).

Almost all A level teachers felt they understood how A levels are marked (96 per cent) and graded (94 per cent). Understanding of A level marking and grading was significantly lower amongst non-A level teachers (66 per cent said they understood A level marking and 71 per cent said they understood A level grading).

Figure 5. Teachers’ perceptions of how A levels are marked and graded



Notes: After statement (a), the following text was read to respondents: "By marking we mean the process of giving a student credit for their right answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme". After statement (b), the following was read: "By grades we mean the overall performance categories (for instance A*, A, B, C, D) into which students are grouped".

Effective base : 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 332 who teach A levels and 169 who do not teach A levels, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers

Headteachers and teachers were three times more likely to have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers than not (Figure 6).

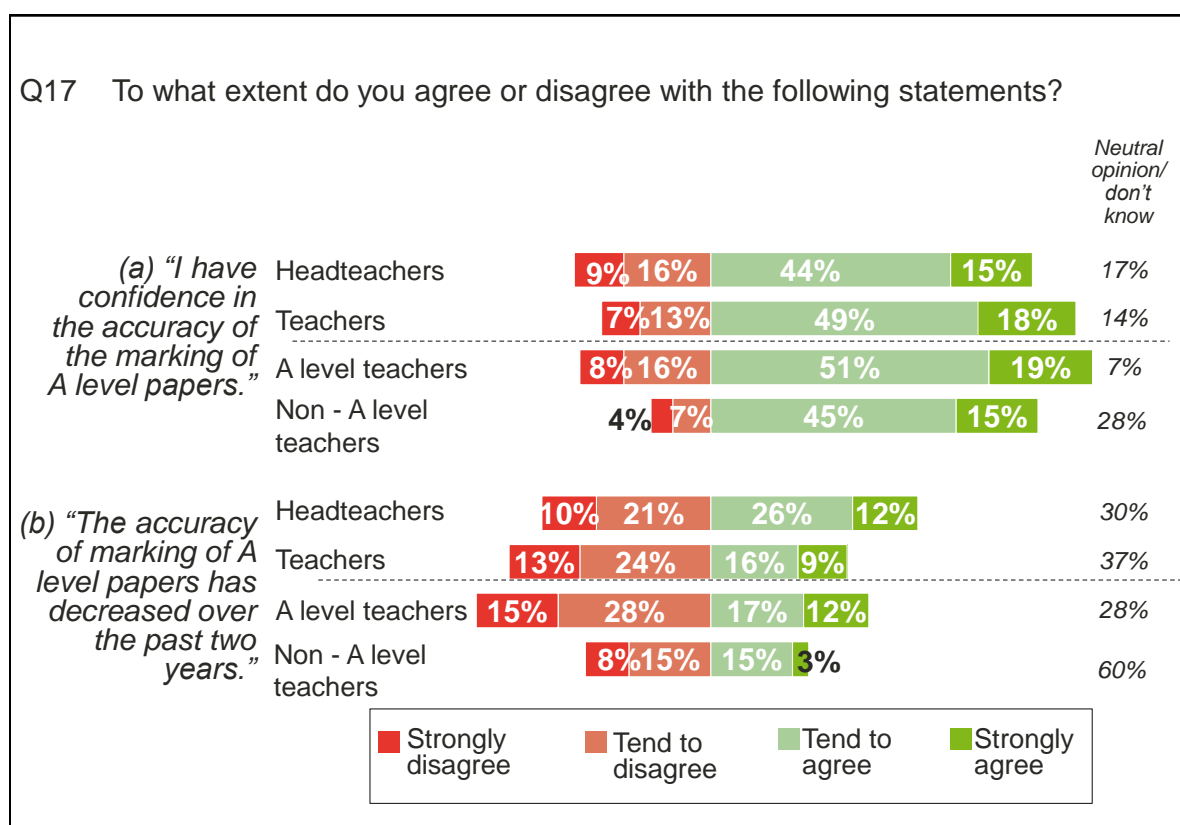
Two-thirds of teachers (67 per cent) and six in ten headteachers (58 per cent) were confident about the accuracy of marking with just one in five teachers (20 per cent) and a quarter of headteachers (25 per cent) not sharing this confidence. A level teachers were even more positive (70 per cent having confidence). Confidence was lower among non-A level teachers (61 per cent).

Respondents were asked whether or not they agreed that the accuracy of marking of A level papers had declined over the past two years. Over a quarter of headteachers

(30 per cent) and over a third of teachers (37 per cent) were not able to express an opinion one way or the other. Two in five (39 per cent) headteachers agreed and 31 per cent disagreed.

Teachers were less inclined to think that the accuracy of marking had declined. More teachers disagreed (37 per cent) than agreed (26 per cent) that the accuracy of marking had declined; 43 per cent of A level teachers disagreed with the statement while 29 per cent agreed.

Figure 6. Teachers’ confidence in the accuracy of A level marking



Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 332 who teach A levels and 169 who do not teach A levels, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

The accuracy of A level grades

Confidence in the accuracy of marking of A levels papers is high; the majority of headteachers and teachers thought that most A level students get the right grade (Figure 7).

Although just six per cent of headteachers and 14 per cent of teachers (15 per cent of A level teachers) believed that *all* A level students get the right grade, around four in five headteachers and teachers believed that either *all or at least three-quarters* of

A level students get the right grade (75 per cent and 78 per cent respectively). Rather more A level teachers judge this to be the case (84 per cent) than non-A level teachers (65 per cent). Teachers who were confident in the accuracy of A level marking were more confident that students would get the right grade: 87 per cent of those who were confident in the accuracy of A level marking felt that all/at least three-quarters of students get the right grade, compared with 65 per cent of teachers who were not confident in the marking.

This finding is reinforced by responses to an open question asking teachers what factors they think contribute to students not getting the grade they deserve.²⁵ The most-reported reason for students not getting the right grade was the inaccurate marking of exam papers (discussed below).

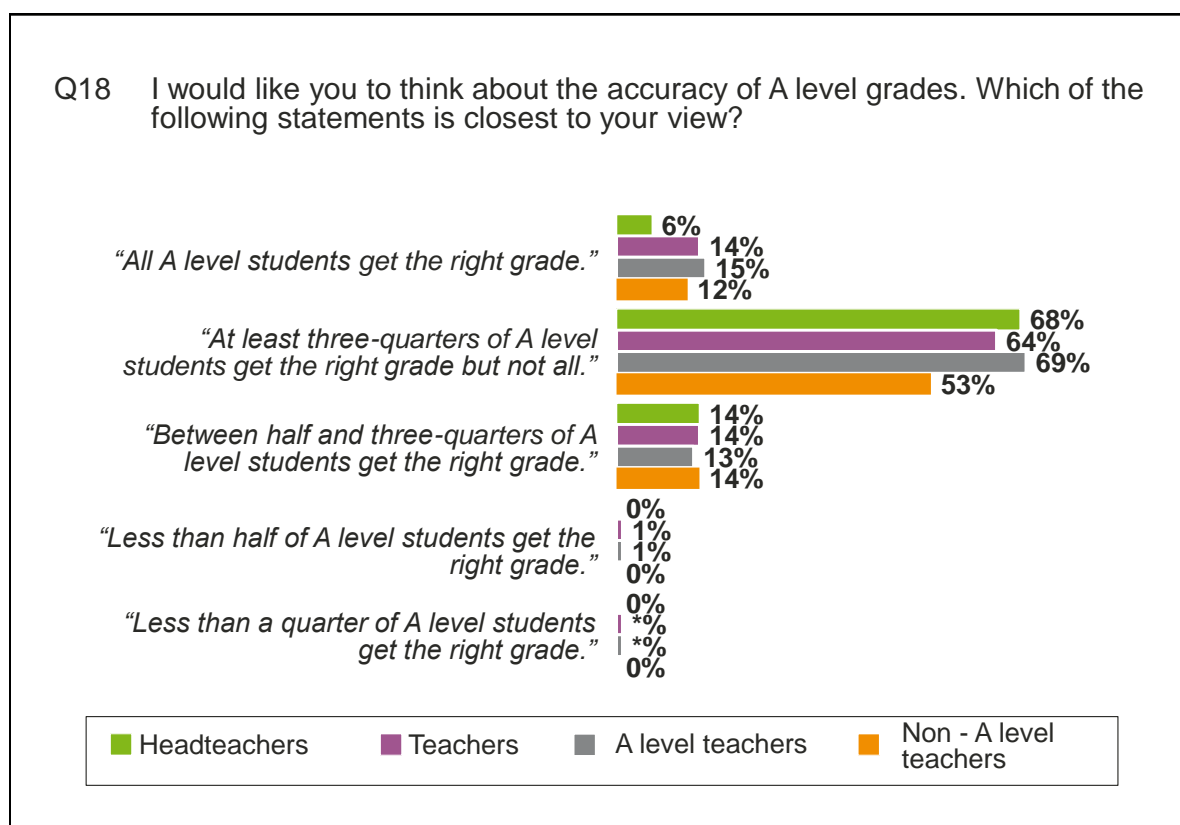
Inaccurate marking of exam papers is the main contributing factor reported by teachers and headteachers for students not getting the right grades. Fifty five per cent of headteachers and 38 per cent of teachers mentioned inaccurate marking as a factor in A level students not getting the right grade. No other factor was reported by more than a fifth of headteachers or teachers, although headteachers were more likely than teachers to identify grade boundaries not being properly set (18 per cent compared with 11 per cent of teachers). Because of low base sizes, this data has not been charted.

English teachers²⁶ were slightly less confident than other teachers that students get the right A level grade, with 70 per cent believing either all or at least three-quarters of students do so (compared with 78 per cent of teachers overall).

²⁵ This question was only asked of respondents who did not think that *all* A level students get the right grade.

²⁶ This refers to all English teachers in the sample rather than just those who teach A level.

Figure 7. Teachers’ perceptions of the accuracy of A level grades



Note: *per cent means between 0 per cent and 0.5 per cent.

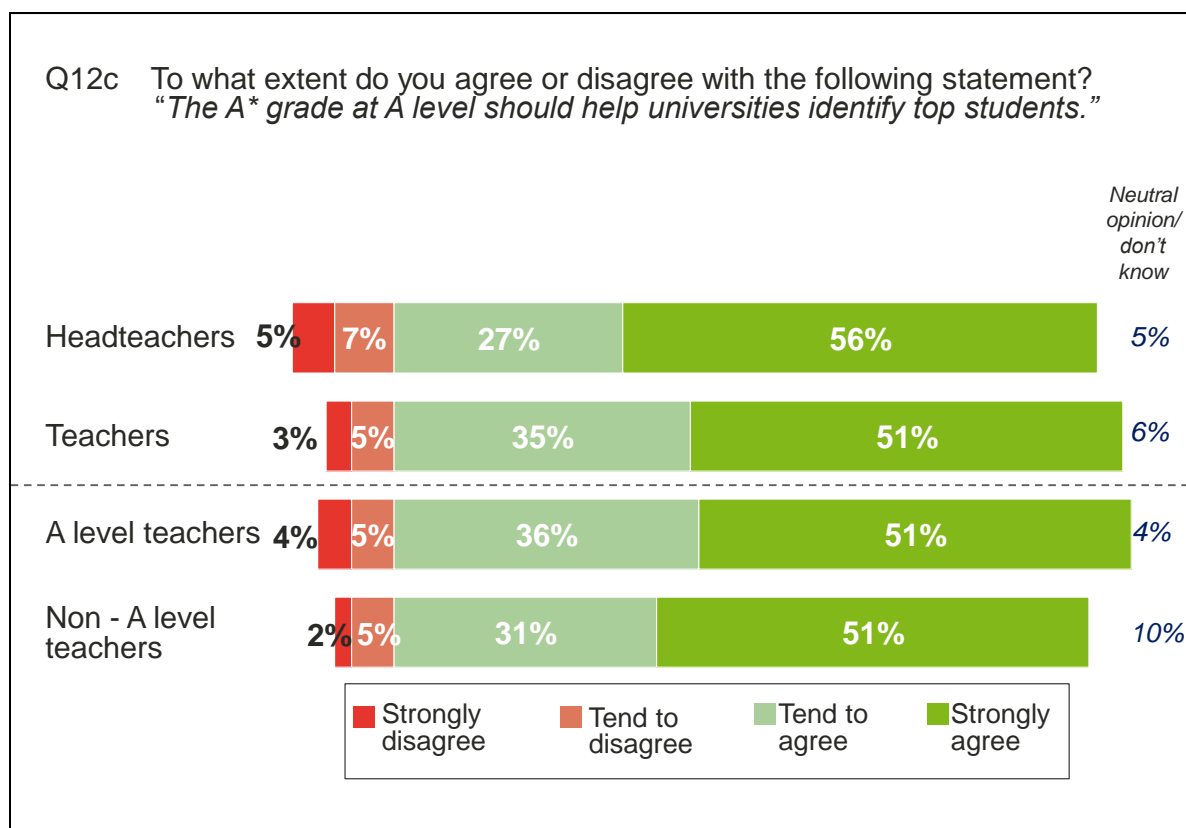
Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 332 who teach A levels and 169 who do not teach A levels, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

The inaccurate marking of exam papers was also identified by the public, parents and teachers as the factor most likely to contribute to A level students getting the wrong grade (Figure 33, page 61).

Perceptions of the A* grade

A clear majority of headteachers, teachers and A level teachers agreed that the A* grade, introduced in 2010 to help identify high achievers, should help universities identify top students: 83 per cent, 86 per cent and 87 per cent respectively (Figure 8). There was no significant difference with non-A level teachers.

Figure 8. Teachers’ perceptions of the A* grade at A level



Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 332 who teach A levels and 169 who do not teach A levels, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Teachers’ concerns about the A level system

Almost half of teachers and two-fifths of headteachers, had no concerns with the current A level system (47 per cent and 40 per cent respectively).

Fifty eight per cent of headteachers and 52 per cent of teachers expressed concern (unprompted). Only one issue was identified by at least 10 per cent of respondents: the incorrect marking of exam papers (mentioned by 14 per cent of headteachers, 10 per cent of teachers and 13 per cent of A level teachers). The second most-mentioned concern of teachers was too many re-sits; this was also one of the commonly mentioned concerns of headteachers (six per cent among both groups). Removal of the modular system/ issues with the linear system was also mentioned by 6 per cent of headteachers. No other concern was mentioned by more than five per cent of headteachers or teachers. We have not charted the responses here given the low bases for each of the wide range of issues identified.

Perceptions of GCSEs

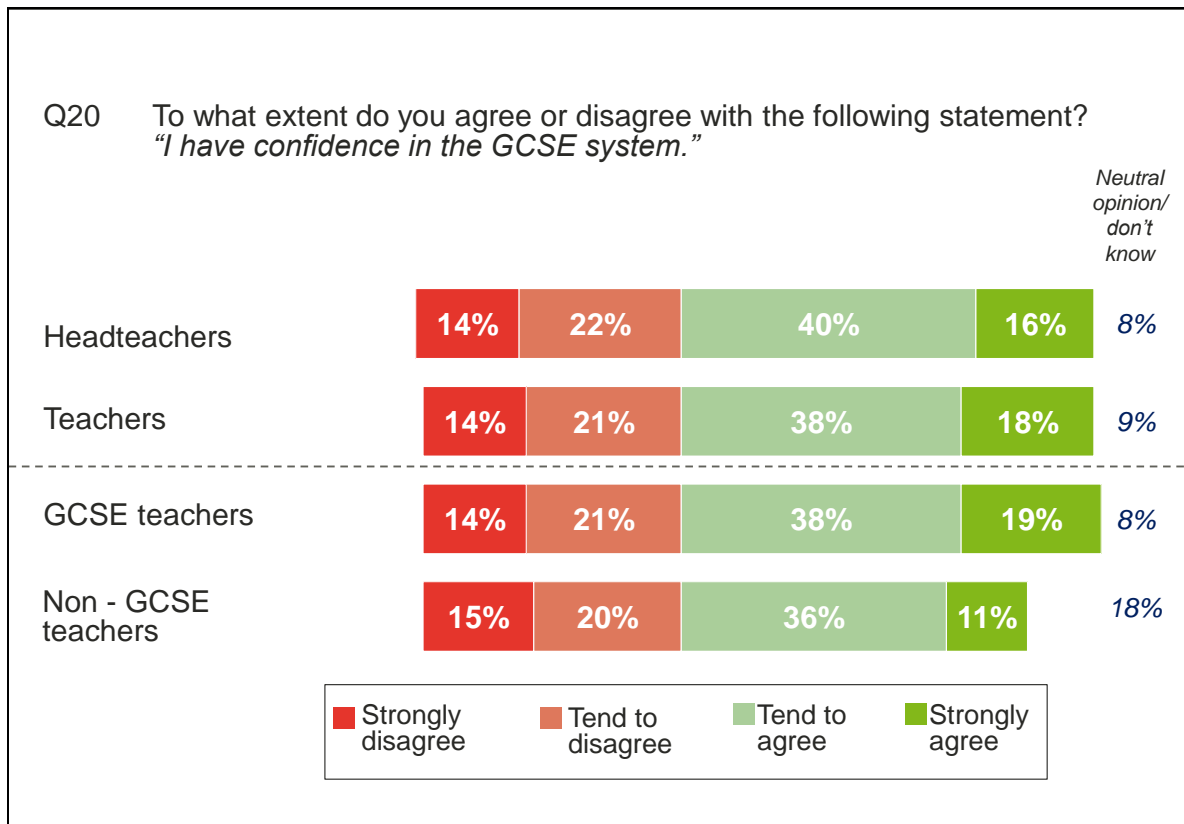
As was the case with A levels, headteachers and teachers were asked a range of questions about their perceptions of the GCSE system including: confidence in the system and their views of specific aspects of the system such as accuracy of marking and grading. The research also examined the impact of the summer 2012 English GCSE controversy on confidence in the GCSE system.

Confidence in the GCSE system

Headteachers', teachers' and GCSE teachers' confidence in the GCSE system was considerably lower than their confidence in the A level system: 56 per cent of headteachers, 55 per cent of teachers and 57 per cent of GCSE teachers were confident in the GCSE system (Figure 9), some 30 percentage points less than confidence in the A level system (Figure 1, page 13). The proportion of headteachers and teachers who strongly agreed (16 per cent and 18 per cent respectively) was just around half that of the A level system.²⁷

²⁷ Given that fewer than 100 teachers in our sample (94) did not teach GCSEs we have not compared non-GCSE with GCSE teachers given this small sample size.

Figure 9. Confidence in the GCSE system



Effective base: 170 headteachers 498 teachers, including 423 who teach GCSEs and 79 who do not teach GCSEs, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (12 Nov-Dec 2012). *Note: small sample size for GCSE teachers.

Low levels of confidence in the GCSE examination system were associated with several factors. For example, teachers who perceived Ofqual as ineffective at regulating the exam system, and in maintaining the standards of qualifications, were less likely to be confident in the GCSE system (38 per cent and 36 per cent respectively had confidence in the GCSE system), as were those who did not have confidence in the accuracy of GCSE marking. Those who teach English or languages were also less confident in the system (21 per cent and 39 per cent respectively).²⁸

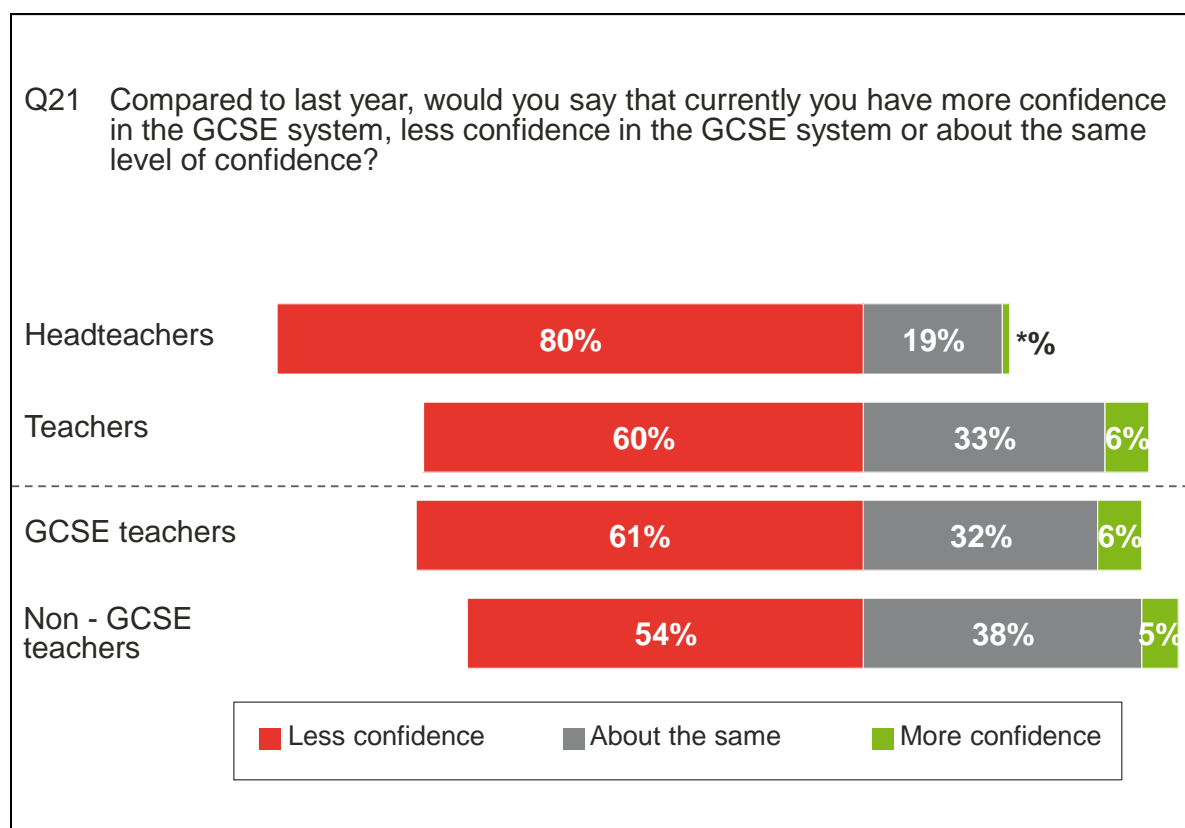
Headteachers and teachers generally reported that they felt much less confidence in the GCSE system than they did the previous year: 80 per cent of headteachers and 60 per cent of teachers felt less confident, while less than one per cent and six per cent respectively felt more confident (Figure 10). This is a stark contrast to their

²⁸ Note low effective base for those who teach English (97) and languages (36).

confidence in the A level system: here just 19 per cent of headteachers and 15 per cent teachers felt less confident in the A level system than the previous year (Figure 2, page 15).

English teachers reported a particularly strong loss of confidence: 92 per cent of English teachers mentioned feeling less confident than the previous year, seven per cent felt much the same as a year ago, and just two per cent felt more confident.

Figure 10. Confidence in the GCSE system compared to last year



Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 423 who teach GCSEs and 79 who do not teach GCSEs, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012). *Note: small sample size for GCSE teachers.

Teachers' concerns about the GCSE system

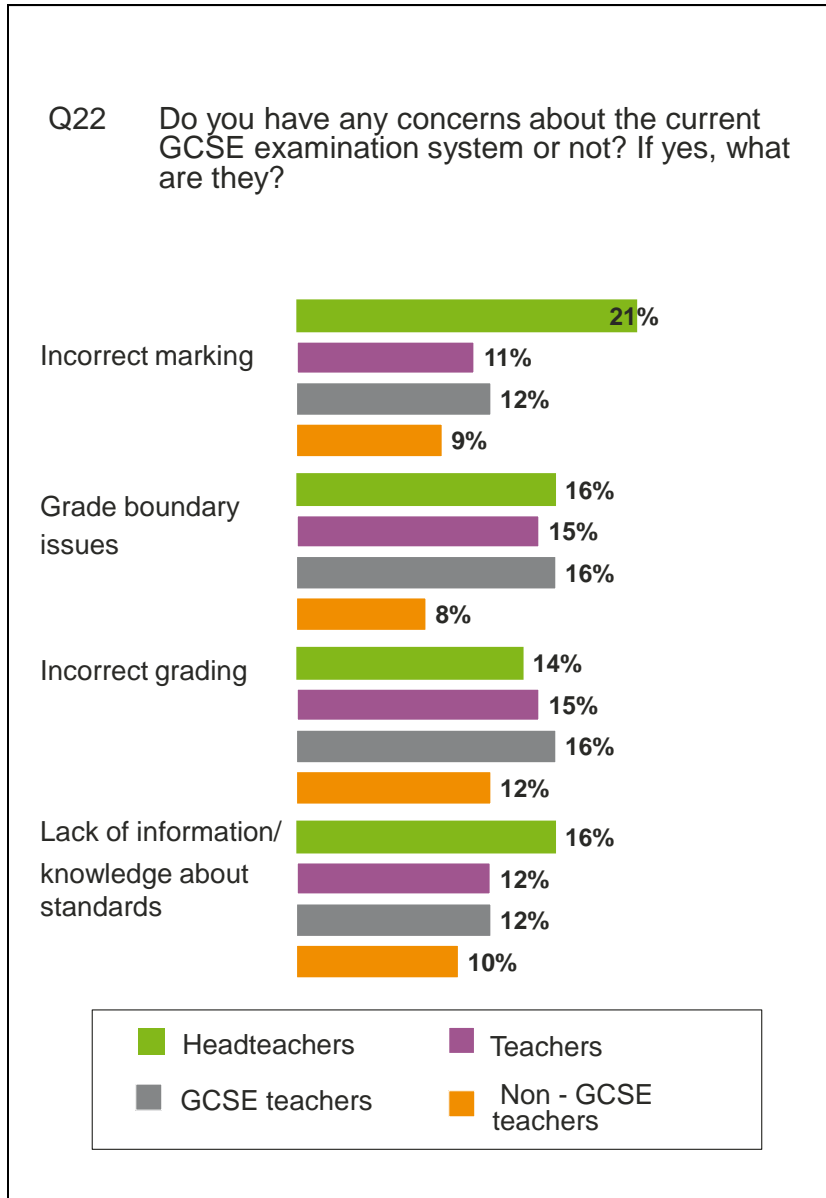
Most headteachers and teachers had concerns with the GCSE system: 89 per cent and 77 per cent respectively; considerably more than those who reported having concerns with the A level system (58 per cent and 52 per cent).

Four concerns were identified by more than ten per cent of both headteachers and teachers (Figure 11):

- incorrect marking of exam papers (by 21 per cent and 11 per cent),

- grade boundary issues (16 per cent and 15 per cent),
- incorrect grading (14 per cent and 15 per cent) and
- lack of information or knowledge about standards (16 per cent and 12 per cent).

Figure 11. Teachers’ concerns about the GCSE system



Note 1: This chart has been prepared to indicate the broad issues of concern to headteachers and teachers. Because of the base sizes, the data should be treated as indicative only.

Note 2: This was a multi-coded question, that is respondents were free to give more than one answer. The top four issues identified by teachers have been included in the chart, as this is the largest

subgroup. Responses identified by less than 6 per cent of teachers have been excluded from this chart. There was not an exact match with the top four issues identified by headteachers.

*Effective base: This question was asked of all respondents - 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 423 who teach GCSEs and 79 who do not teach GCSEs, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012). *Note: small sample size for GCSE teachers.*

Confidence in the accuracy of marking of GCSE papers

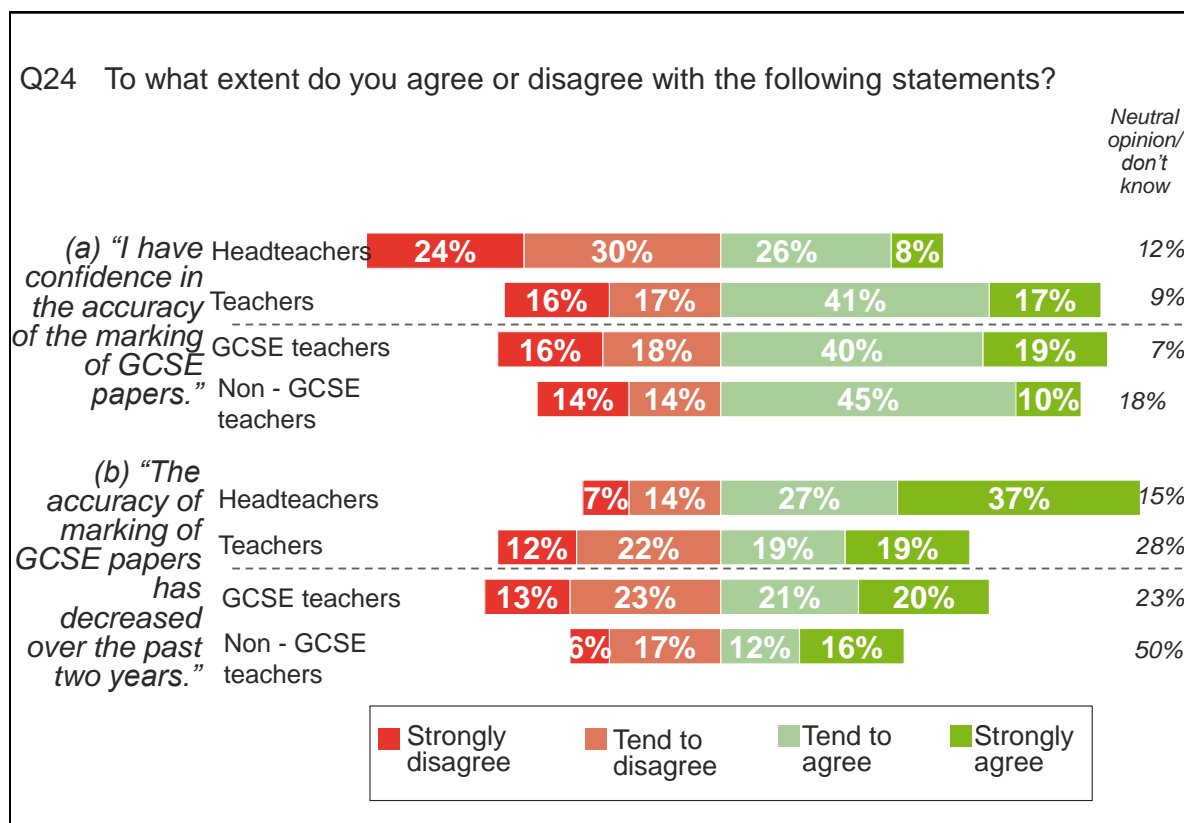
Headteachers were significantly less confident than GCSE teachers in the accuracy of marking of GCSE papers. Just a third of headteachers were confident about the issue (34 per cent) compared with 59 per cent of GCSE teachers (Figure 12).

Headteachers were also considerably more likely than teachers to feel that the accuracy of marking of GCSE papers has declined over the last year (64 per cent of headteachers compared with 40 per cent of GCSE teachers felt this to be the case). As discussed above, this pattern of lower (and declining) confidence on the part of headteachers was also seen in relation to their perception of the accuracy of the marking of A level papers, but to a much lesser degree (Figure 6, page 19).

Teachers who disagree that Ofqual is effective at regulating the examinations system, or at maintaining the standards of qualifications, were less likely to have confidence in the marking of GCSE papers (41 per cent and 40 per cent respectively, compared with 58 per cent for teachers overall), as were teachers of English and modern foreign languages (37 per cent and 36 per cent).²⁹ Similarly, teachers of English and languages were more likely to feel that the accuracy of marking of GCSE papers had declined over the past two years (56 per cent and 65 per cent respectively compared with 38 per cent of teachers overall).

²⁹ The bases for teachers who teach English and languages are 116 and 45 respectively. The data, particularly for language teachers, should be regarded as indicative.

Figure 12. Teachers’ confidence in the accuracy of GCSE marking



Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 423 who teach GCSEs and 79 who do not teach GCSEs, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012). *Note: small sample size for GCSE teachers.

The accuracy of GCSE grades

Most headteachers and teachers felt that most GCSE students get the right grade, but to a notably lesser extent than they feel about A level students’ grades (Figure 7, page 21).

Although less than one per cent of headteachers and four per cent of teachers (5 per cent of GCSE teachers) believed that *all* GCSE students get the right grade, around two-thirds believed that all/at least three-quarters of GCSE students get the right grade: 62 per cent and 63 per cent respectively (and 64 per cent of GCSE teachers) (Figure 13). This compares with around four in five headteachers and teachers (75 per cent and 78 per cent) who believed that all/at least three-quarters of A level students get the right grade.

As with A level students, teachers who are confident in the accuracy of GCSE marking are more confident that students will get the right grade: 81 per cent of those who are confident in the accuracy of GCSE marking felt that all or at least three-

quarters of students get the right grade, compared with 36 per cent of teachers who are not confident in the marking.

English teachers were less confident than other teachers that students get the right grade, just 35 per cent believing at least three-quarters of students do so. Maths teachers, on the other hand, were more confident, 77 per cent believing that at least three-quarters of students get the right grade.

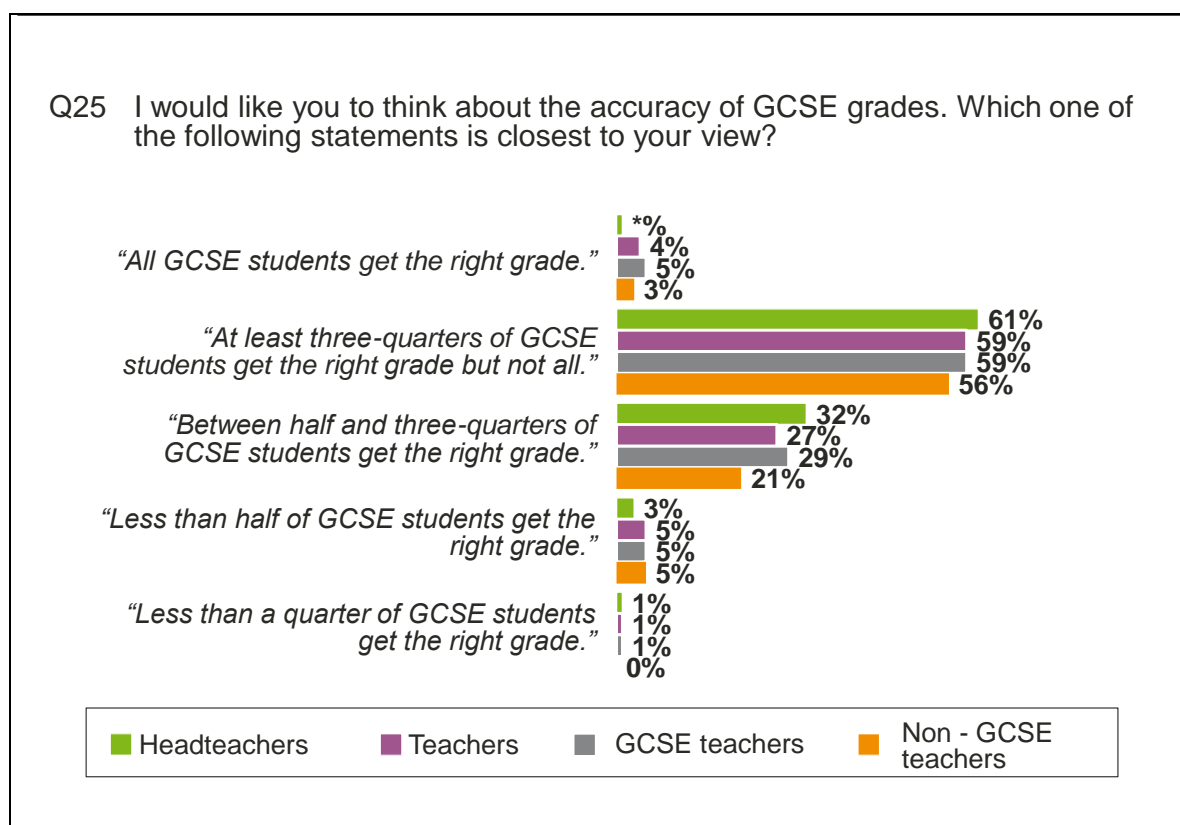
This response is reinforced by answers to an open question asking teachers what factors they think contribute to students not getting the grade they deserve.³⁰ A variety of different factors were mentioned by respondents; however, the top two identified by headteachers and teachers are:

- grade boundaries not being properly set (mentioned by 36 per cent and 34 per cent respectively) and
- inaccurate marking of exam papers (mentioned by 42 per cent and 26 per cent respectively).

This data has not been charted because of low base sizes.

³⁰ This question was only asked of respondents who do not think that all GCSE students get the grades they deserve.

Figure 13. Teachers’ perceptions of the accuracy of GCSE grades



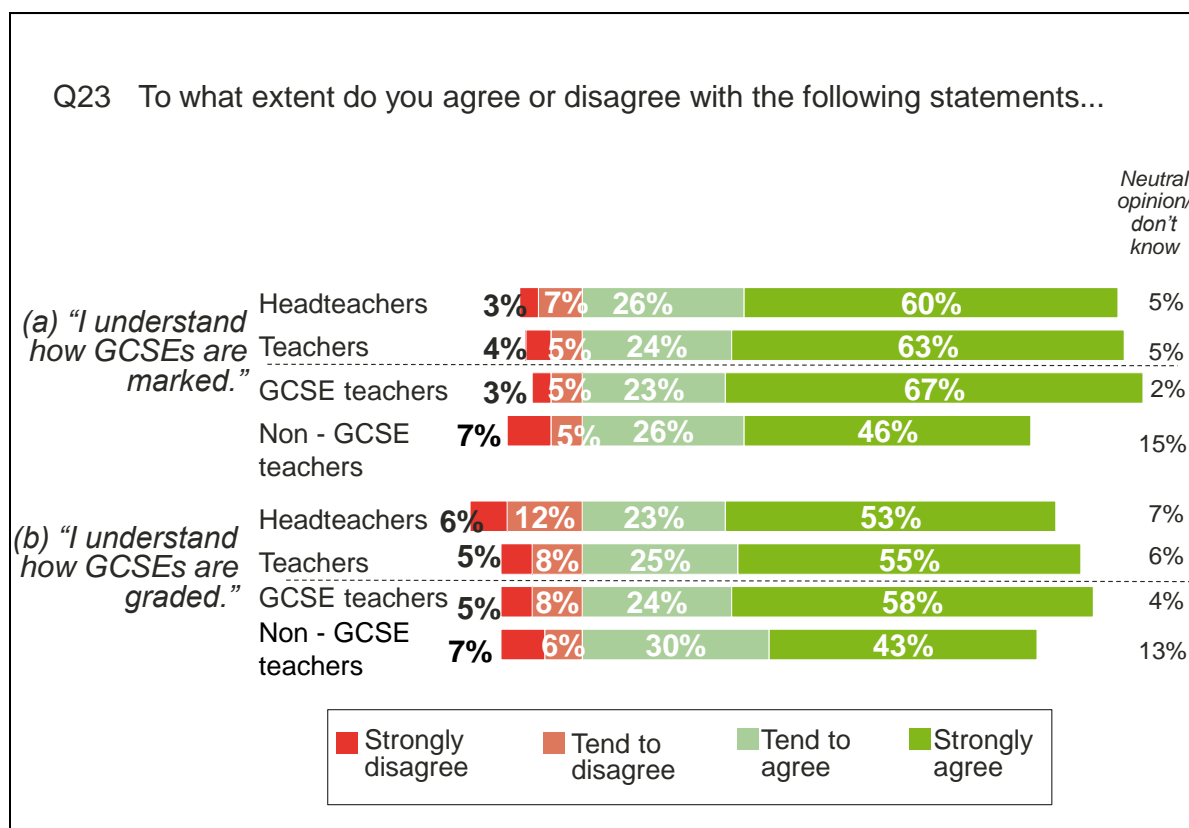
Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 423 who teach GCSEs and 79 who do not teach GCSEs, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012). *Note: small sample size for GCSE teachers.

Understanding how GCSEs are marked and graded

Five in six headteachers and teachers reported they understand how GCSEs are *marked* (86 per cent and 87 per cent) (Figure 14), similar to their strength of understanding reported for A levels (Figure 5, page 18). GCSE teachers' perceived understanding was higher (90 per cent) than non-GCSE teachers (73 per cent).

Headteachers and teachers report rather less understanding of how GCSEs are *graded*: 76 per cent and 81 per cent respectively agreed they understand how GCSEs are graded. This was fewer than the proportion of headteachers and teachers who reported they understand how A levels are graded (84 per cent and 87 per cent).

Figure 14. Teachers’ perceptions of how GCSEs are marked and graded



Note: After statement (a), the following was text was read to respondents: "By marking we mean the process of giving a student credit for their right answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme". After statement (b), the following was read: "By grades we mean the overall performance categories (for instance A, A, B, C, D) into which students are grouped".*

*Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, including 423 who teach GCSEs and 79 who do not teach GCSEs, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012). *Note: small sample size for GCSE teachers.*

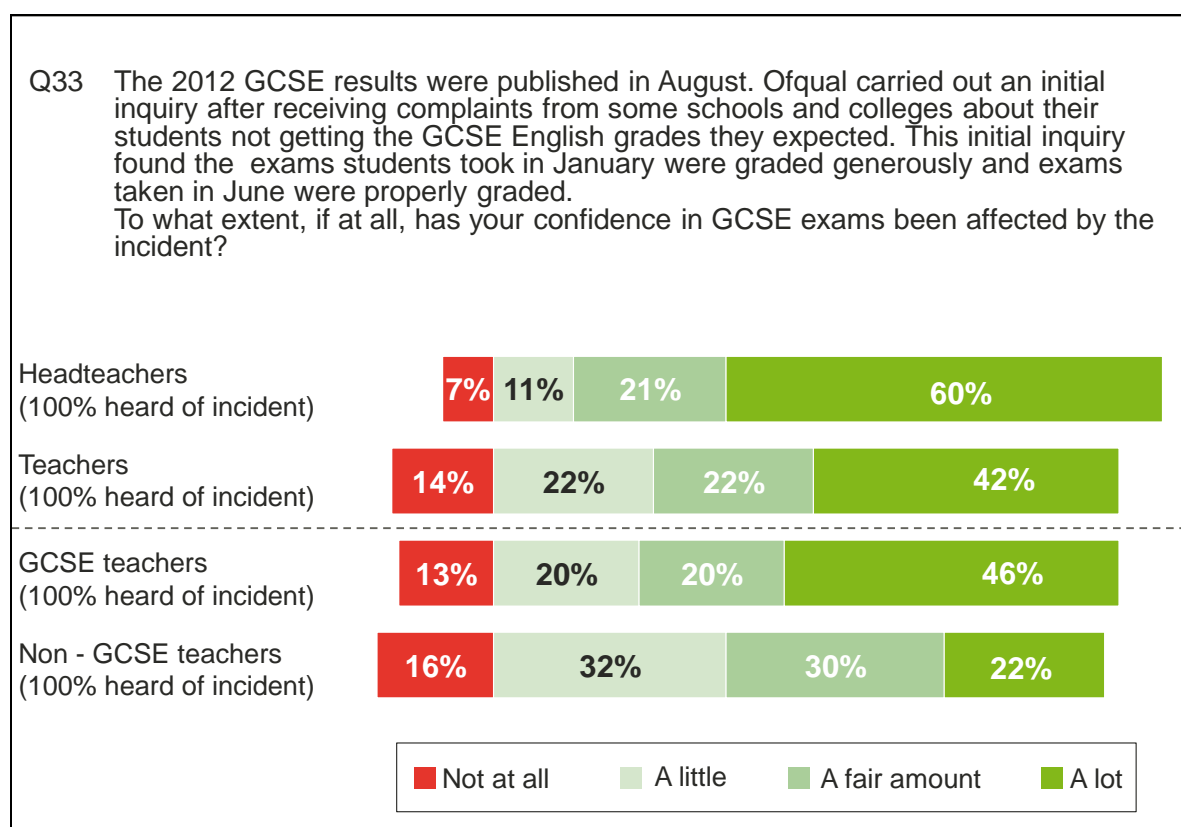
The impact of the GCSE English grading controversy on teachers’ and headteachers’ perceptions of GCSEs

Ofqual’s strategic objectives are to maintain the standard of qualifications and confidence in the system of qualifications. To this end, it was important to determine and isolate the impact of the GCSE English grading controversy on the overall perceptions and confidence in GCSE qualifications. At the end of the survey, to avoid any impact on respondents’ perceptions of other issues, we asked two questions to explore awareness and impact of the 2012 GCSE English grading controversy (Figure 15).

All headteachers and teachers were aware of the grading controversy and it had a significant impact on their confidence in GCSE examinations: 92 per cent of headteachers and 86 per cent of teachers reported that their confidence had been affected by at least “a little”. Four in five headteachers (81 per cent) and two-thirds of teachers (64 per cent) reported that their confidence in GCSE examinations had been affected “a lot” or “a fair amount”. Those who taught GCSEs were more likely to say that their confidence in the GCSE system had been affected “a lot” or a “fair amount” (67 per cent compared with 52 per cent of non-GCSE teachers).

English teachers’ confidence was particularly affected: 94 per cent reported being affected “a lot” or “a fair amount” by the grading controversy.

Figure 15. The GCSE English grading controversy and the Ofqual inquiry: impact on confidence in GCSE examinations



Effective base: 170 headteachers and 496 teachers who have heard of the 2012 GCSE English grading controversy (Q32), including 421 teachers who teach GCSEs and 78 who do not teach GCSEs, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012). *Note: small sample size for GCSE teachers.

Awareness and perceptions of Ofqual

Headteachers and teachers were asked about their awareness of Ofqual, perceptions of its effectiveness in regulating the examinations system and maintaining standards and the reasons for these views.

Awareness of Ofqual

Respondents were asked about their knowledge of Ofqual in two ways. First they were asked an “unprompted question” which simply asked how much, if anything, they knew about Ofqual. Second, they were given a short “prompt”, or briefing, about Ofqual³¹ and asked whether they had been aware before that day.

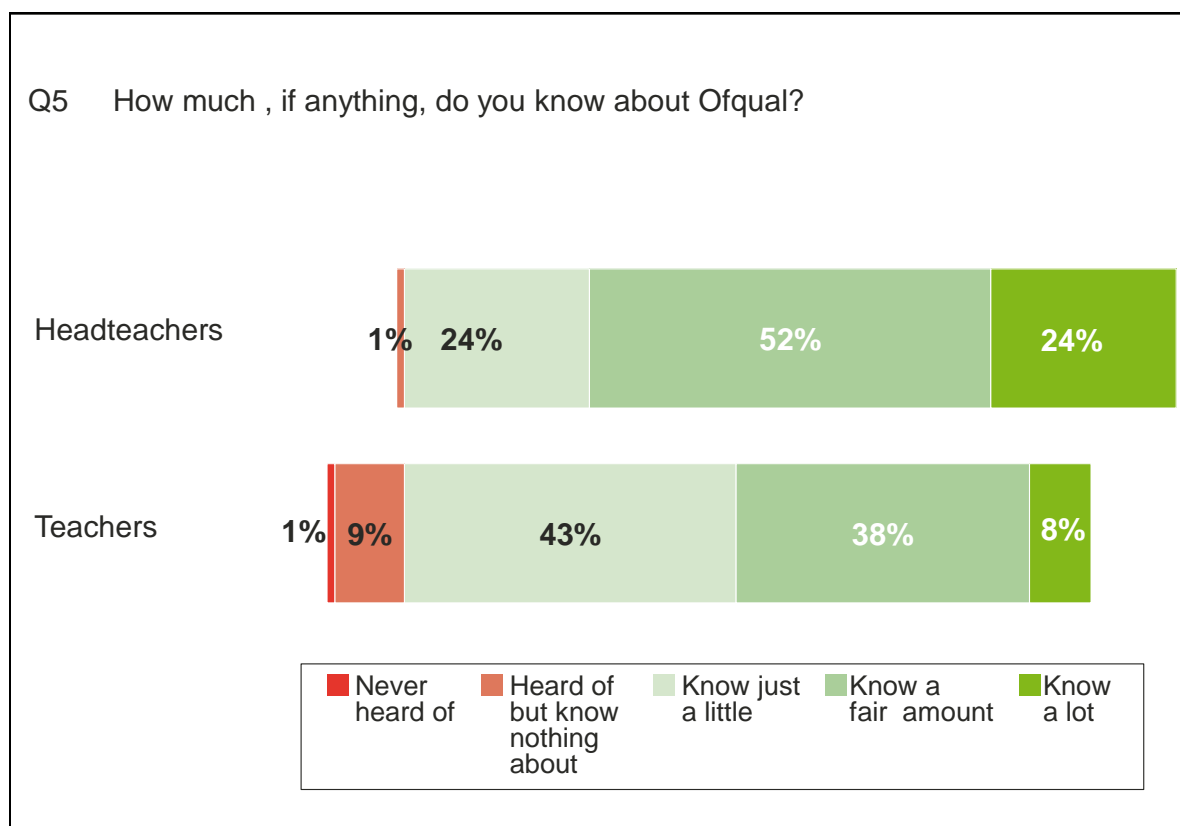
Unprompted awareness of Ofqual among teachers improved steadily from 2008 to 2011. In 2012, almost half of all teachers knew “a lot” or “a fair amount” about Ofqual (46 per cent) – eight per cent knew “a lot” (Figure 16). Headteachers’ unprompted awareness of Ofqual was significantly greater than teachers’: 76 per cent of headteachers knew “a lot” or “a fair amount” about it (24 per cent knew “a lot”).

Just 10 per cent of teachers had either not heard of Ofqual or had heard of it but knew nothing about it.

English teachers were more aware of Ofqual than teachers as a whole (62 per cent knew “a lot” or “a fair amount”).

³¹ The briefing read: “Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Their aim is to ensure that learners get the results they deserve, and that the qualifications they receive count, both now and in the future.”

Figure 16. Teachers’ unprompted awareness of Ofqual



Note: * per cent means between 0 per cent and 0.5 per cent headteachers had heard of, but knew nothing about, the grading controversy. No headteachers had “never heard of” Ofqual.

Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

“Prompted” awareness of Ofqual also increased year-by-year between 2008 and 2011. In 2012, *all* headteachers and teachers were aware of Ofqual’s role once prompted in this way.

Perceived effectiveness of Ofqual

In the year or two after Ofqual was set up, teachers were unwilling to express an opinion about Ofqual’s effectiveness. However, from 2009 to 2011, as awareness of Ofqual increased, teachers became much more prepared to express a view. In 2012, only four per cent of headteachers, and 13 per cent of teachers, did not express a view one way or another (Figures 17 and 18).

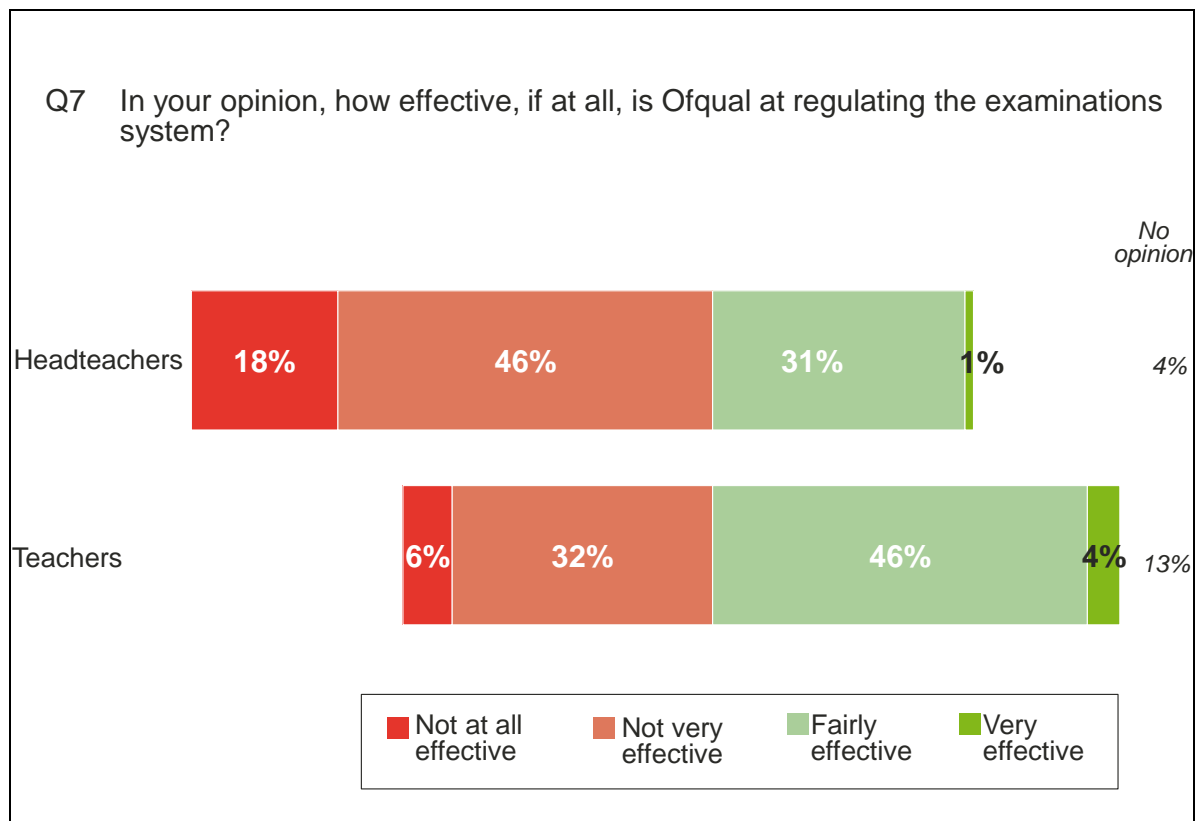
Teachers were more positive than headteachers about Ofqual’s effectiveness. Half of teachers judged Ofqual to be effective at regulating the examinations system (50 per

cent), compared with around a third who think that it is “not very”, or “not at all”, effective (37 per cent). Unlike findings among the general public reported later, there did not appear to be a relationship between knowledge of Ofqual and perceived effectiveness of the regulator.

While base sizes are too small to draw firm conclusions on views among teachers in selective or independent schools, more teachers in such schools overall, and in further education establishments, regarded Ofqual as effective in regulating the examinations system than teachers in maintained schools. English teachers were much less likely to regard Ofqual as effective in this regard (26 per cent).

In contrast, most headteachers judged Ofqual to be “not very”, or “not at all”, effective at regulating the examinations system (64 per cent), compared with just under a third (32 per cent) who thought it *is* effective.

Figure 17. Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at regulating the examinations system



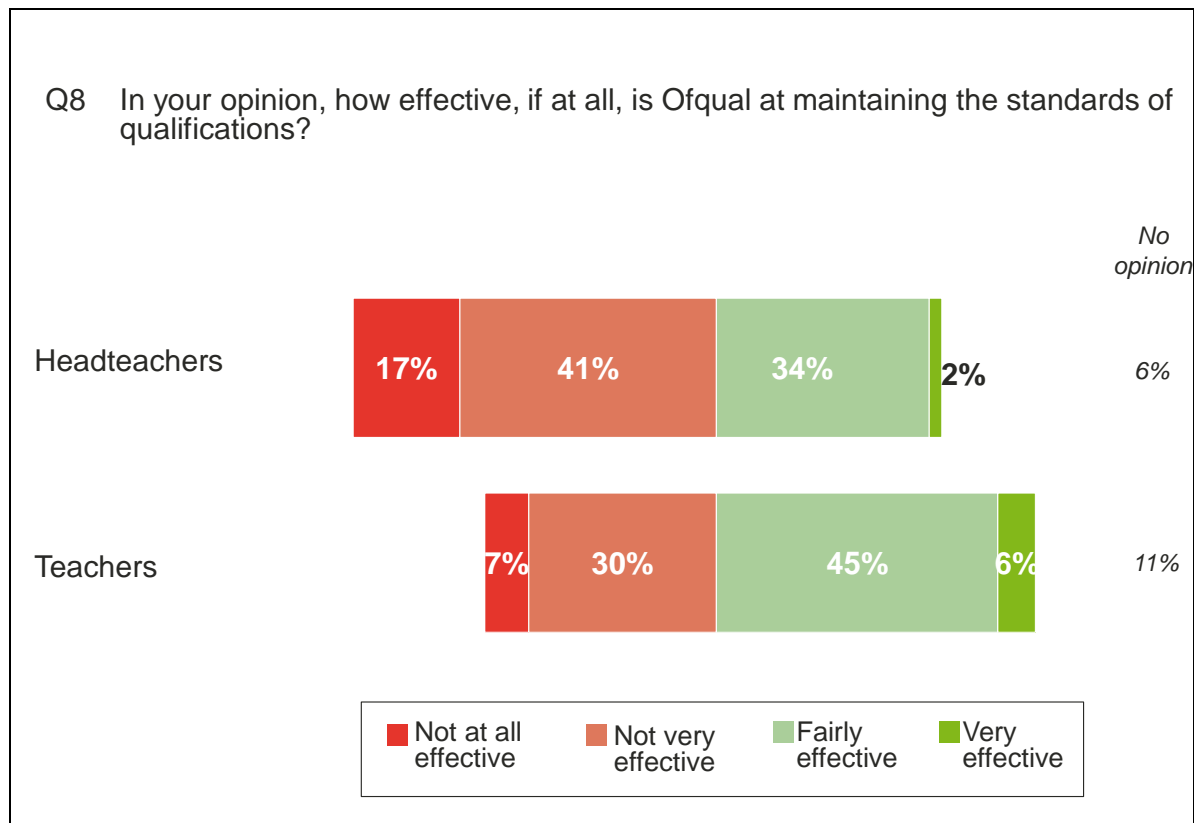
Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

A similar pattern emerged in relation to teachers' perceptions of Ofqual's effectiveness in the **maintenance of the standards of qualifications** (Figure 18).

Half of teachers judged that Ofqual is effective in maintaining the standards of qualifications (52 per cent, compared with 37 per cent who did not regard it as effective). In contrast, just over a third of headteachers (36 per cent) considered Ofqual to be effective in this regard, compared with around six in ten who thought it is ineffective (58 per cent).

English teachers were much less likely to regard Ofqual as effective in maintaining the standards of qualifications (32 per cent).

Figure 18. Perceptions of Ofqual's effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications

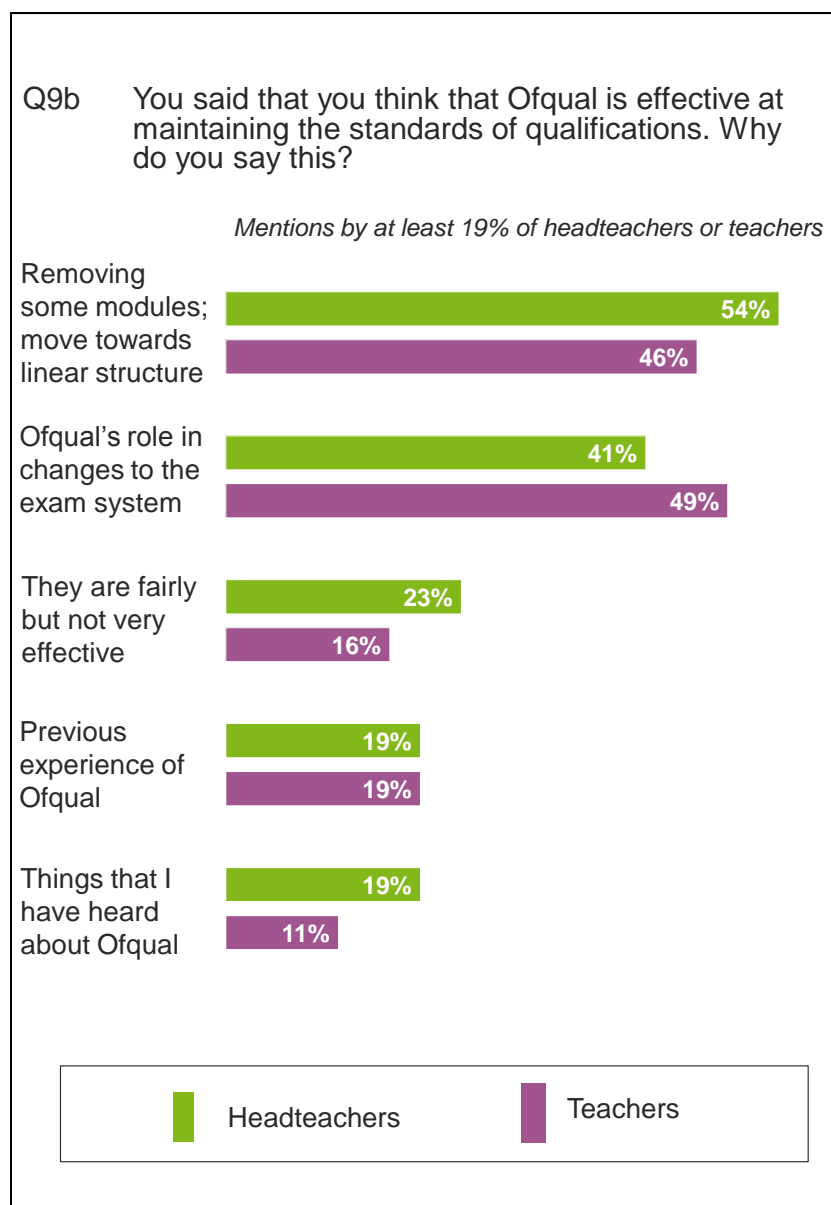


Effective base: 168 headteachers and 498 teachers, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Headteachers and teachers who felt that Ofqual was effective in maintaining standards of qualifications gave a range of reasons as to why they believed this. However, two stand out (Figure 19): the move towards linear structure; and Ofqual's role in changes to the exam system. These were mentioned by around half of headteachers (54 per cent and 43 per cent respectively) and teachers (46 per cent

and 49 per cent). No other factor was mentioned by more than around 20 per cent of headteachers and teachers.

Figure 19. Teachers’ reasons for their perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications



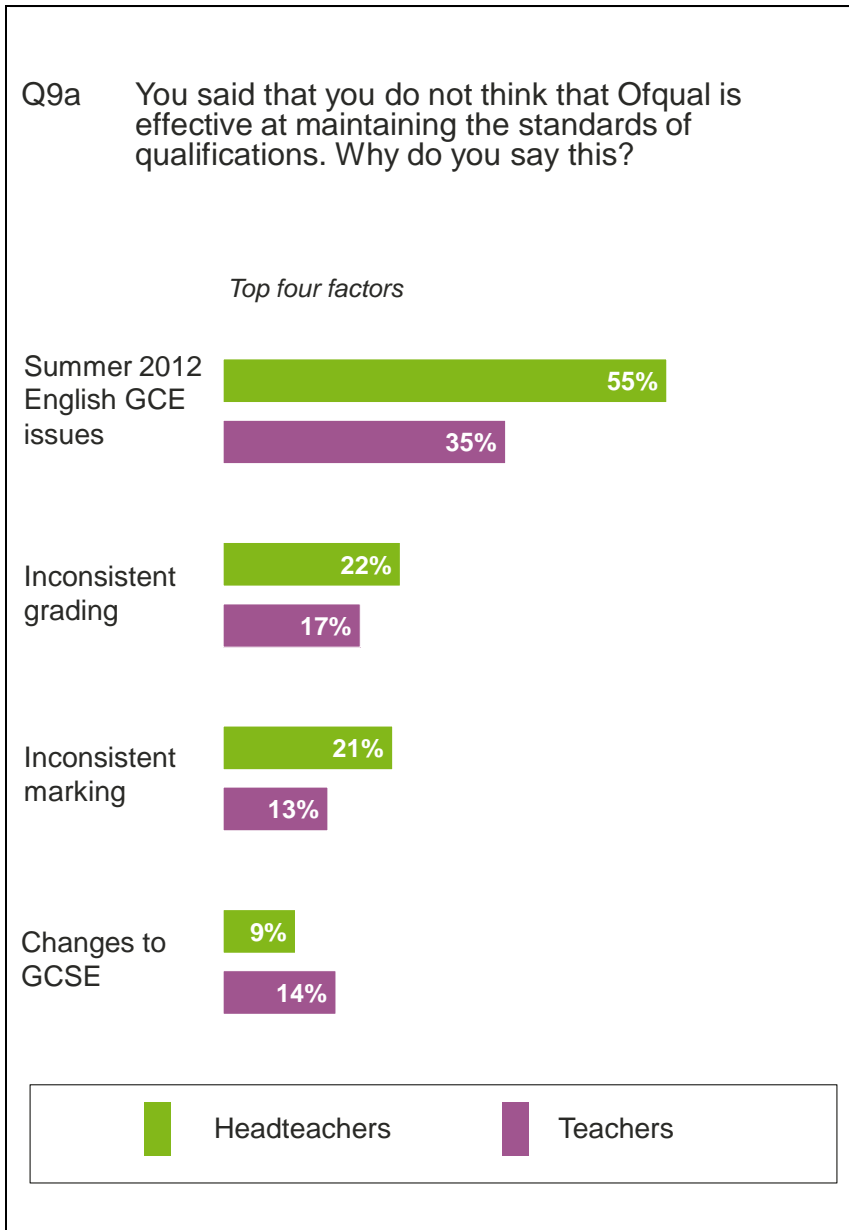
Note : This was an open, unprompted question. Respondents could give any answer and provide as many answers as they wished. Only the top four factors are included as the bases for other factors are small.

Effective base : 65 headteachers and 248 teachers, who think Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications, including 181 who teach A level and 203 who teach GCSEs, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

The summer 2012 English GCSE grading controversy was clearly the most-reported reason given by teachers who judged that Ofqual is not effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications (Figure 20).³² It was identified by 55 per cent of headteachers and around a third (35 per cent) of teachers who feel Ofqual is ineffective at maintaining the standards of qualifications. The next most-reported reasons cited by headteachers and teachers who think Ofqual is ineffective were inconsistent grading (22 per cent and 17 per cent), inconsistent marking (21 per cent and 13 per cent) and changes to the GCSE (nine per cent and 14 per cent).

³² This question was only asked to headteachers and teachers who said that Ofqual is not effective in maintaining the standards of qualifications.

Figure 20. Teachers’ reasons for their perceptions of Ofqual’s ineffectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications



Note : This was an open, unprompted question. Respondents could give any answer and provide as many answers as they wished. Only the top four factors are included as the bases for other factors are small.

Effective base : 96 headteachers and 196 teachers, who do not think Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Information

Headteachers and teachers were asked which were the most trusted sources of information about how examinations are marked and graded.

Trusted sources of information

Teachers most trusted sources of information about how examinations are marked and graded continued the pattern from previous waves of this research.

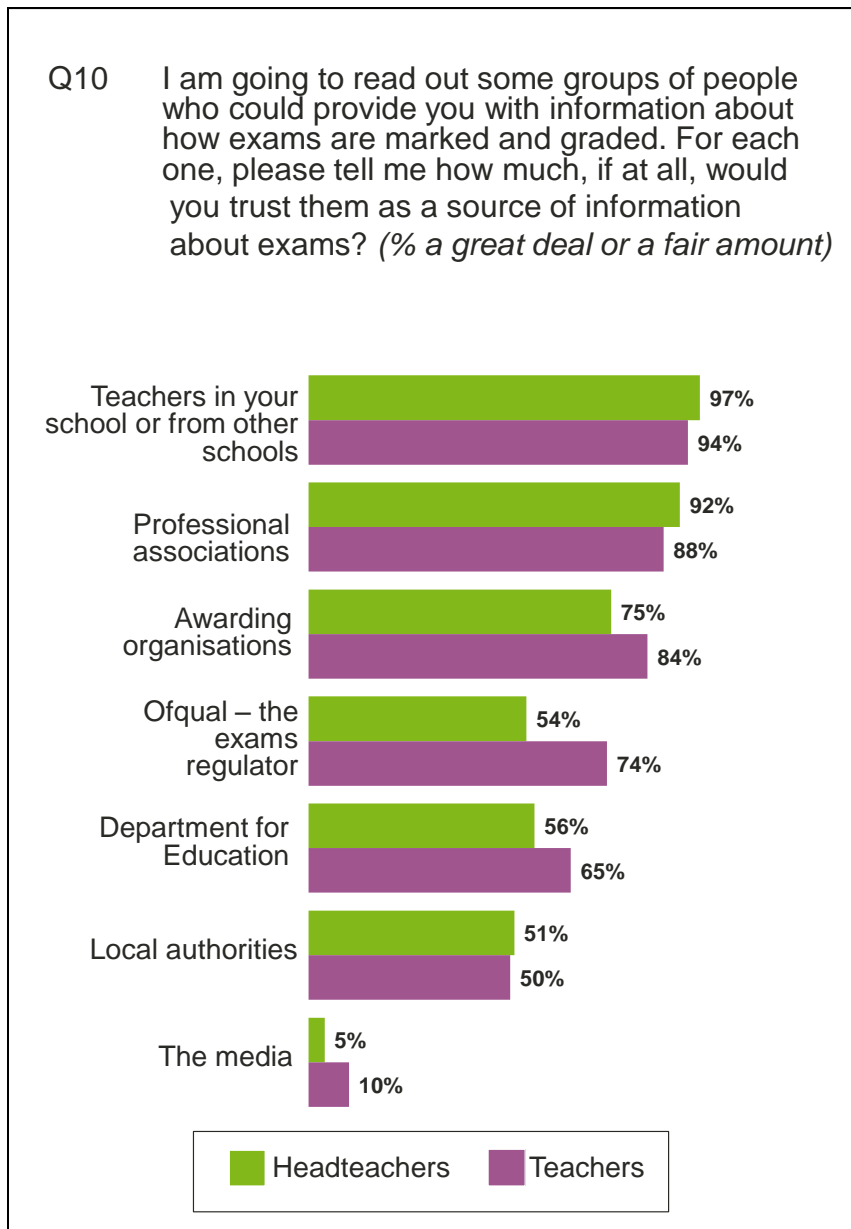
Almost all headteachers and teachers trusted other teachers as a source of information about examinations (97 per cent of headteachers and 94 per cent of teachers trust other teachers a great deal or a fair amount) (Figure 21). Professional associations were identified by around nine in ten headteachers and teachers (92 per cent and 88 per cent respectively). Awarding organisations were trusted by around three quarters of headteachers and four in five teachers (75 per cent and 84 per cent).

More teachers than headteachers tended to trust some official organisations – awarding organisations, Ofqual and the Department for Education. English teachers; however, were an exception to this rule. Notably fewer English teachers trusted those three organisations than headteachers and teachers as whole: 70 per cent of English teachers trusted awarding organisations compared with 84 per cent of teachers generally; 49 per cent trusted Ofqual, compared with 74 per cent of teachers generally; and 50 per cent trusted the Department for Education, compared with 65 per cent generally.

There did not seem to be a relationship between knowledge of Ofqual and trust in the regulator as a source of information about how examinations are marked and graded.

By some margin, the least trusted of all the sources of information tested were the media, as has been found in previous years.

Figure 21. Trusted sources of information – teachers and headteachers



Effective base : 170 headteachers and 498 teachers, in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (13 November-12 December 2012).

Headteachers and teachers who did not trust Ofqual as a source of information about examinations were asked why this was. Three main reasons were identified:

- the summer 2012 English GCSE grading controversy (36 per cent of headteachers and 22 per cent of teachers),
- Ofqual’s perceived lack of independence from the government (22 per cent and 24 per cent), and

- general issues with grading or grade boundaries (14 per cent and 12 per cent).³³

Understanding the difference between traditional and non-traditional academic qualifications

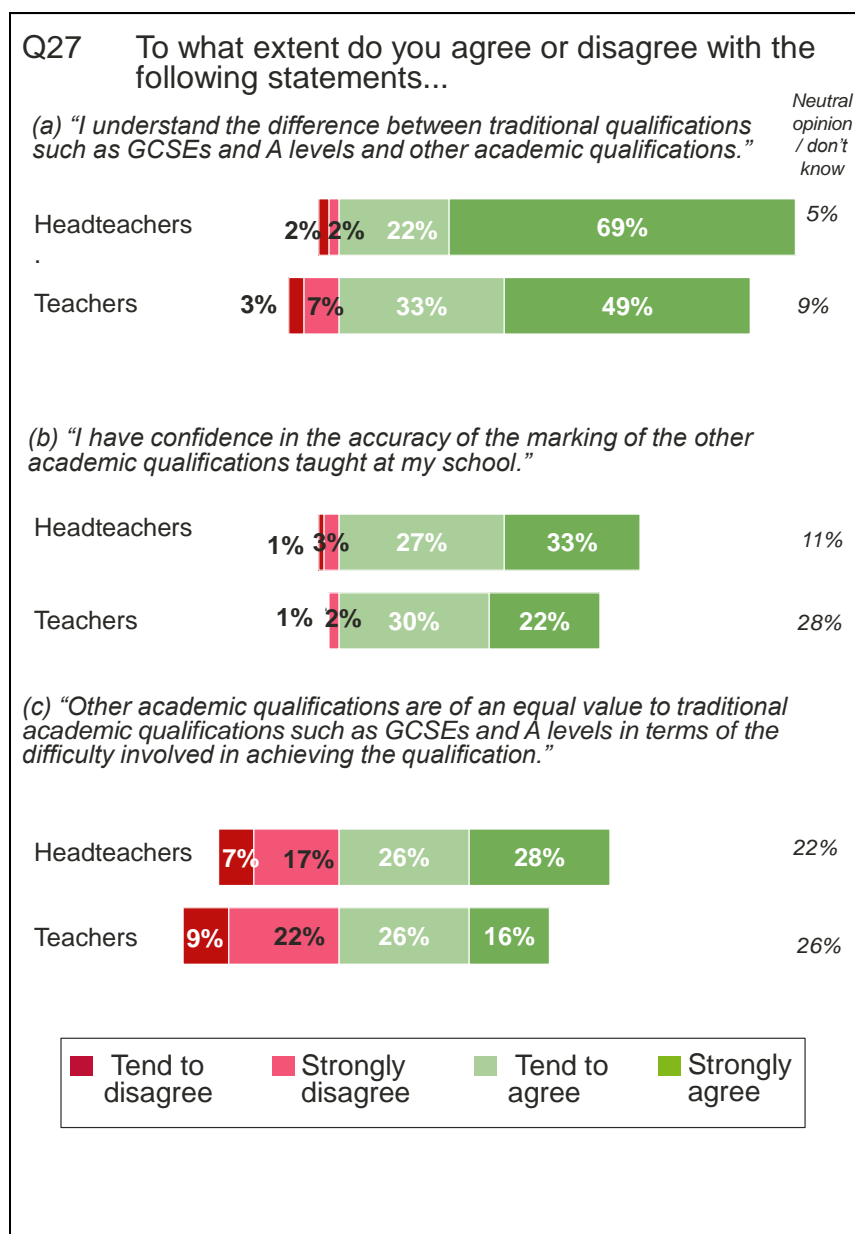
The great majority of headteachers and teachers (91 per cent and 81 per cent) said that they understood the difference between traditional and other academic qualifications such as iGCSEs, Pre-U, EBacc, etc. (Figure 22). Over two-thirds of headteachers (69 per cent) and a half of teachers (49 per cent) agreed strongly that this is the case. Teachers in independent schools were more likely than those from other establishment types to say that this is the case (94 per cent agree compared with 81 per cent of teachers as a whole).

Most headteachers and teachers (60 per cent and 52 per cent) also had confidence in the accuracy of the marking of the other academic qualifications taught in their school. Almost no one disagreed with this statement (just three per cent for both groups) with other headteachers and teachers not expressing a view.

Headteachers were also generally of the view that other academic qualifications are of an equal value to traditional qualifications in terms of the difficulty in achieving the qualification (54 per cent). Teachers' views were more evenly balanced, however, with 43 per cent agreeing that this is the case and 31 per cent disagreeing. Science teachers were less inclined to believe that this is the case (32 per cent agreeing). There was little difference between the views of A level and GCSE teachers.

³³ This data has not been charted because of low bases: 67 headteachers and 117 teachers. The data is worth reporting, however, as the three issues were the main ones to emerge from both groups. In addition, 14 per cent of teachers explained that they do not have much contact with Ofqual, or do not receive information from it.

Figure 22. Teachers' views of other qualifications



Note: * per cent is between 0 per cent and 0.5 per cent

Effective base : 170 headteachers and 498 teachers in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Perceptions of vocational and mixed qualifications

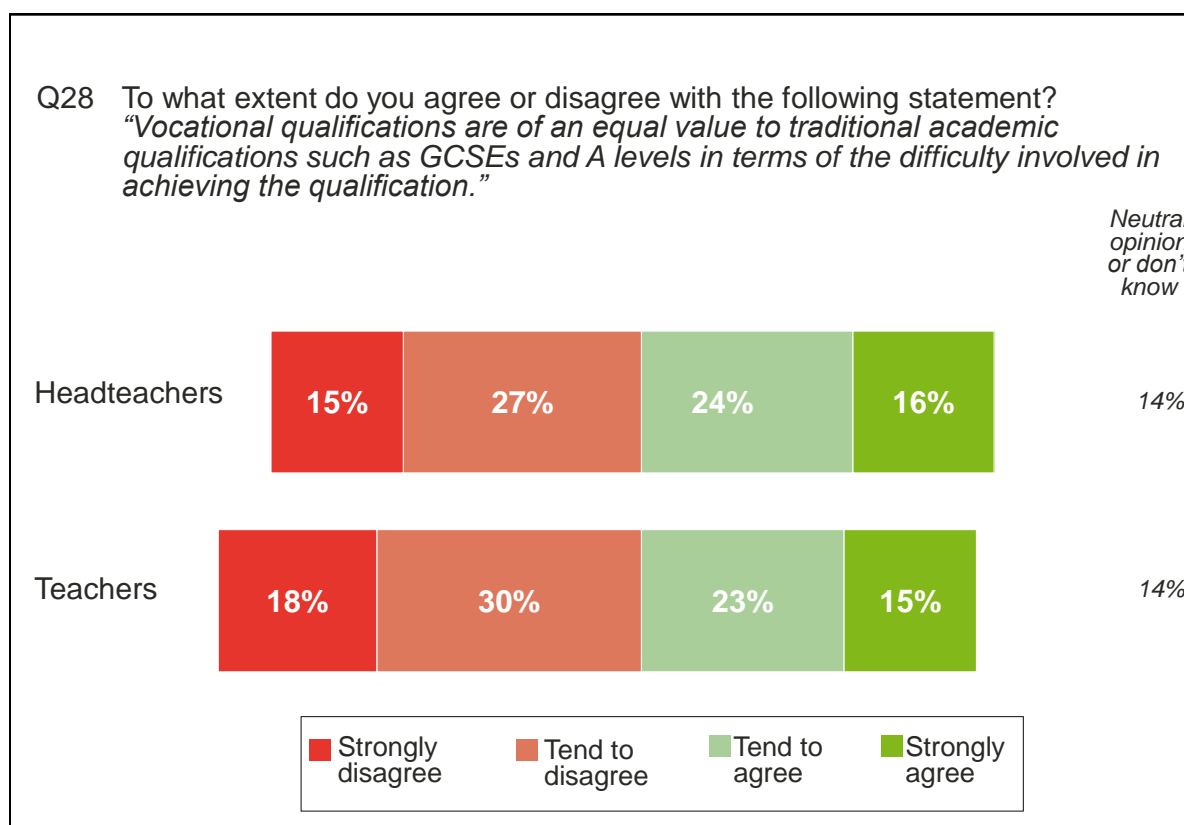
Teachers were asked about their perceptions of vocational qualifications (defined for respondents as qualifications that prepare students for a specific type of job) and, for the first time, mixed qualifications (defined for respondents as those which combine parts of both academic and vocational qualifications) such as BTECs, OCR National and Principal Learning which are mixed in their approach to learning.

As noted in the Introduction, this research was not of a representative sample of all teachers in England. Rather it was of teachers of GCSE and/or AS/A2 level and/or other academic qualifications, for 14-19 year olds. However, the total sample of 600 teachers included 71 who also teach vocational qualifications and 53 who also teach mixed qualifications.

Two-fifths of headteachers (40 per cent) and just over a third of teachers (38 per cent), agreed that 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 (Figure 23).³⁴

³⁴ There are no statistically significant differences with teachers of other academic or vocational subjects.

Figure 23. Perceived value of vocational qualifications

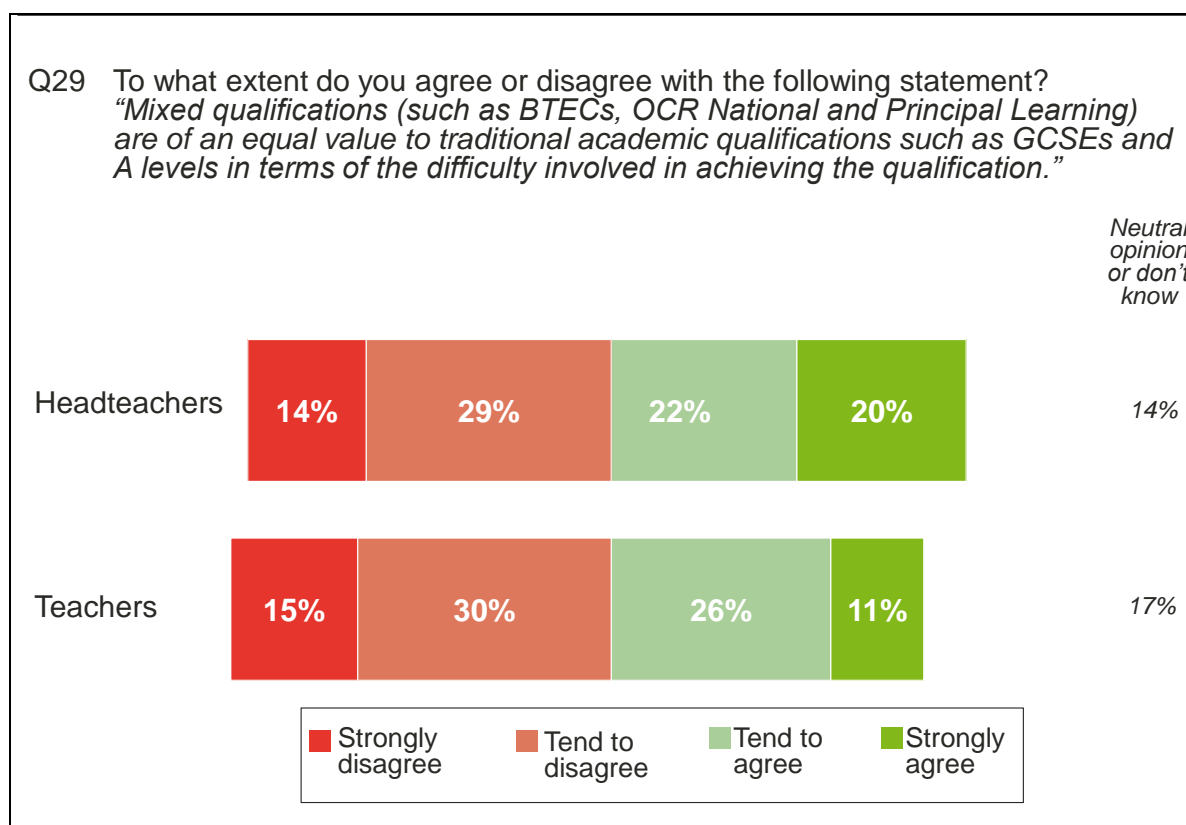


Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

A very similar pattern emerged on perceptions of whether or not mixed qualifications (such as BTECs, OCR National and Principal Learning) are of an equal value to traditional qualifications like A levels and GCSEs in terms of the difficulty in achieving the qualification (Figure 24). Equal proportions of headteachers who expressed a view agreed as disagreed with the proposition (42 per cent and 43 per cent), while most teachers who expressed a view disagreed with the proposition (37 per cent agreed, compared with 45 per cent who disagreed). Teachers of vocational qualifications were more likely to agree (50 per cent compared with 37 per cent of teachers overall)³⁵

³⁵ Please note this is based on just 71 teachers of vocational qualifications therefore this finding should be viewed as indicative.

Figure 24. Perceptions of mixed qualifications

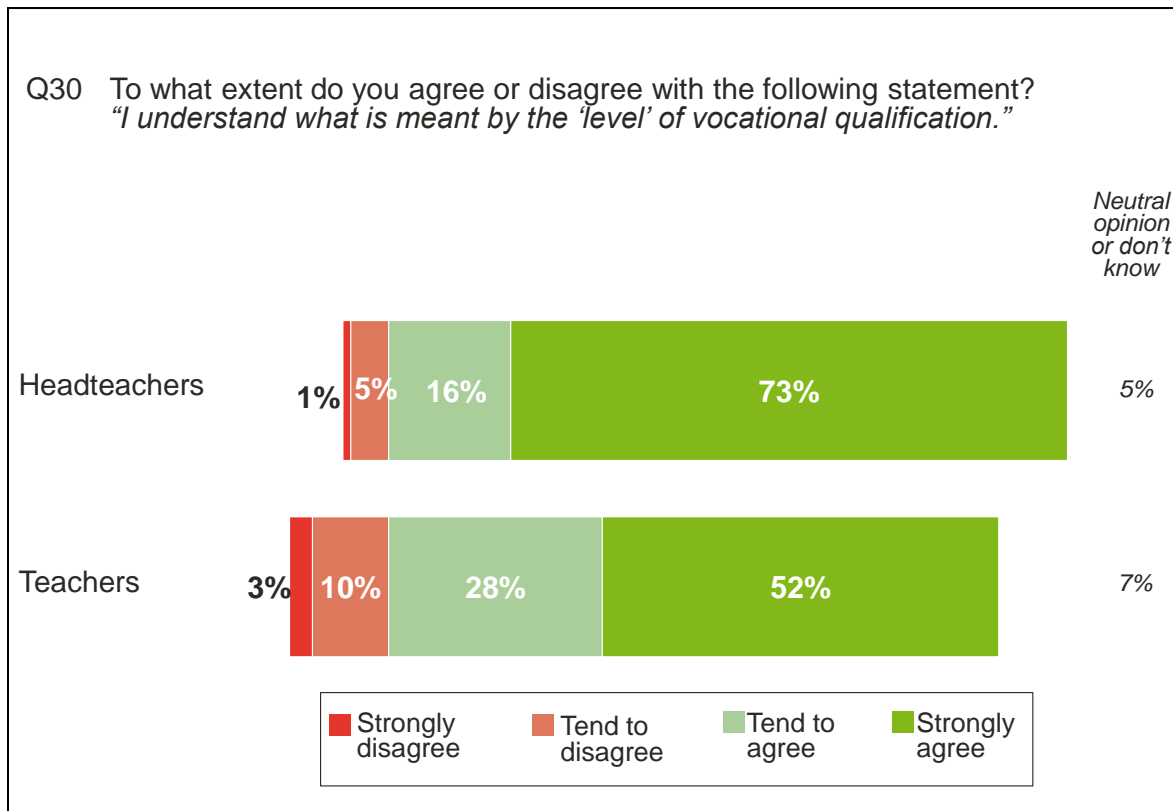


Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

The great majority of headteachers and teachers were clear that they understood the concept of “level” of vocational qualifications (90 per cent of headteachers and 80 per cent of teachers) (Figure 25). Teachers in independent schools were less likely to say they understood what a “level” means (55 per cent) whereas teachers in FE establishments were more likely to understand this than teachers as a whole (89 per cent).

Among teachers who say they understand the “level” of vocational qualification, the great majority reported they understood how the different levels of vocational qualifications related to GCSEs and A levels (96 per cent of headteachers and 94 per cent of teachers) (Figure 26).

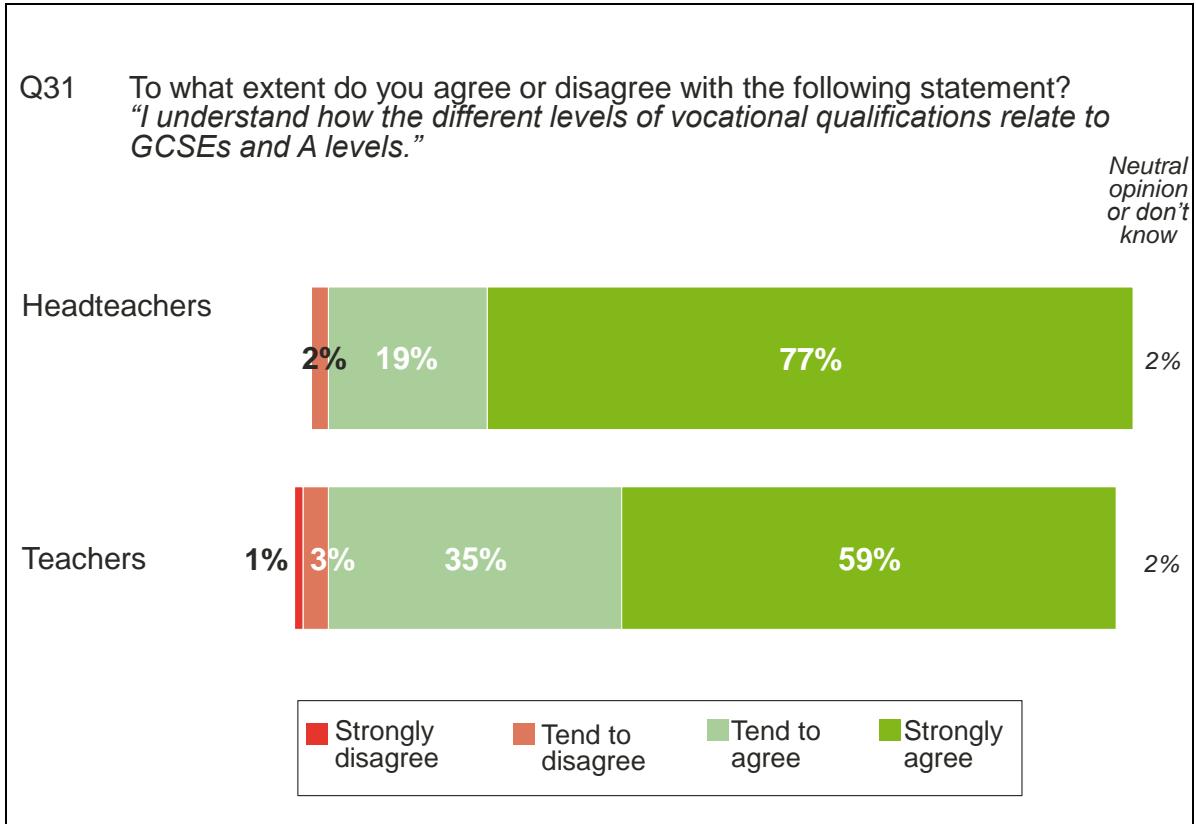
Figure 25. Understanding the ‘level’ of vocational qualification



Note: * per cent means between 0 per cent and 0.5 per cent.

Effective base: 170 headteachers and 498 teachers in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

Figure 26. Perceived relationship between the levels of vocational qualifications and traditional academic qualifications



Note: No headteachers strongly disagreed with the statement.

Effective base: 154 headteachers and 393 teachers who say they understand what is meant by the 'level' of vocational qualification (Q30), in England, by telephone, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2012).

The general public's, students' and parents' perceptions

Summary

Perceptions of A levels and GCSEs: A quarter of the general public reported an increase in their confidence in the A level system compared with a few years ago (25 per cent). This was in contrast to teachers, very few of whom felt more confident than they did last year. Students were particularly positive: two-fifths were more confident in the A level system than a few years ago (43 per cent). The public valued the A level qualification and two-thirds felt that the A* grade is useful for universities to identify top students (66 per cent).

Teachers' loss of confidence in the GCSE system was not shared by the general public. The same proportion of the public had more confidence in the GCSE system than they had a few years ago as had less confidence (27 per cent and 27 per cent respectively).

Most of the general public who expressed a view were quite positive about the accuracy of A level grades and GCSE grades. Indeed students were more positive about the accuracy of GCSE grades (72 per cent felt that all/at least two-thirds of students get the right grade) than about A level grades (67 per cent felt that at all/at least three-quarters of students get the right grade).

Two-thirds of the public and students (64 per cent and 67 per cent respectively) and over three-quarters of parents (79 per cent) had heard of the 2012 English GCSE grading controversy: It had a significant impact on their confidence, although less than the impact on teachers. Two-fifths of parents and over a quarter of students (45 per cent and 29 per cent) reported that their confidence in the system had been affected "a lot" or "a fair amount".

The public's awareness of Ofqual remained low: Just one in six knew at least a little about the regulator (15 per cent). There was a significant increase in prompted awareness of Ofqual, however. A third of parents and almost a quarter of students were aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator (35 per cent and 22 per cent respectively). Unsurprisingly, given the public's lack of awareness of Ofqual, two-thirds had no view on Ofqual's effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications.

Perceptions of other qualifications: After being briefed, almost two-thirds of the public (62 per cent), eight in ten students (81 per cent) and seven in ten parents (72 per cent) understood the difference between traditional qualifications and other academic qualifications. The majority of the general public, parents and students agreed that other academic qualifications, vocational qualifications and mixed qualifications are of equal value to traditional academic qualifications. Overall, the public was more likely than teachers to think that to be the case.

Sources of information: Awarding organisations were the most trusted source of information about examinations for the general public (trusted by 46 per cent). Those organisations apart, parents and students trusted people they personally knew – other parents and students – more than they trusted institutions. Ofqual was the most trusted institution after awarding organisations - trusted by 33 per cent of the general public, 40 per cent of parents and 57 per cent of students.

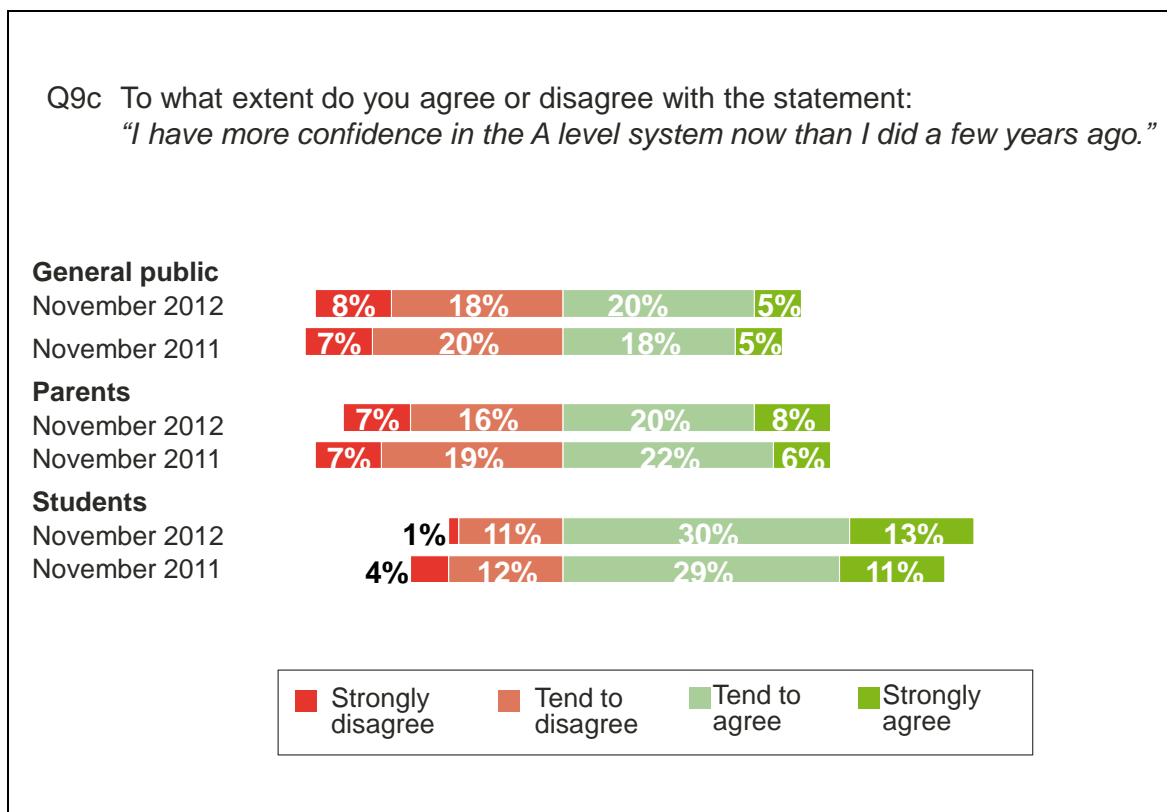
Perceptions of A levels

The general public, students and parents were asked about their confidence in the A level system, concerns with the system, perceived importance of A levels and views towards marking and grading. It is important to bear in mind that students and parents were included in the general public sample and therefore they are not mutually exclusive groups for analysis purposes.

Confidence in the A level system

The general public was neutral when comparing its confidence in the A level system with a few years ago: a quarter were more confident (25 per cent), a quarter less confident (26 per cent), with half not expressing a view one way or the other (Figure 27). Students, however, were more positive, 43 per cent reporting more confidence than a few years ago, compared with 11 per cent who were less confident. A level students' views were similar to those of students as a whole.

Figure 27. The public’s, parents’ and students’ confidence in the A level system compared with a few years ago



Note: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who either “neither agreed or disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013).

Effective base (2011) (Q3b): 1,609 members of the general public; 229 students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs; and 330 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

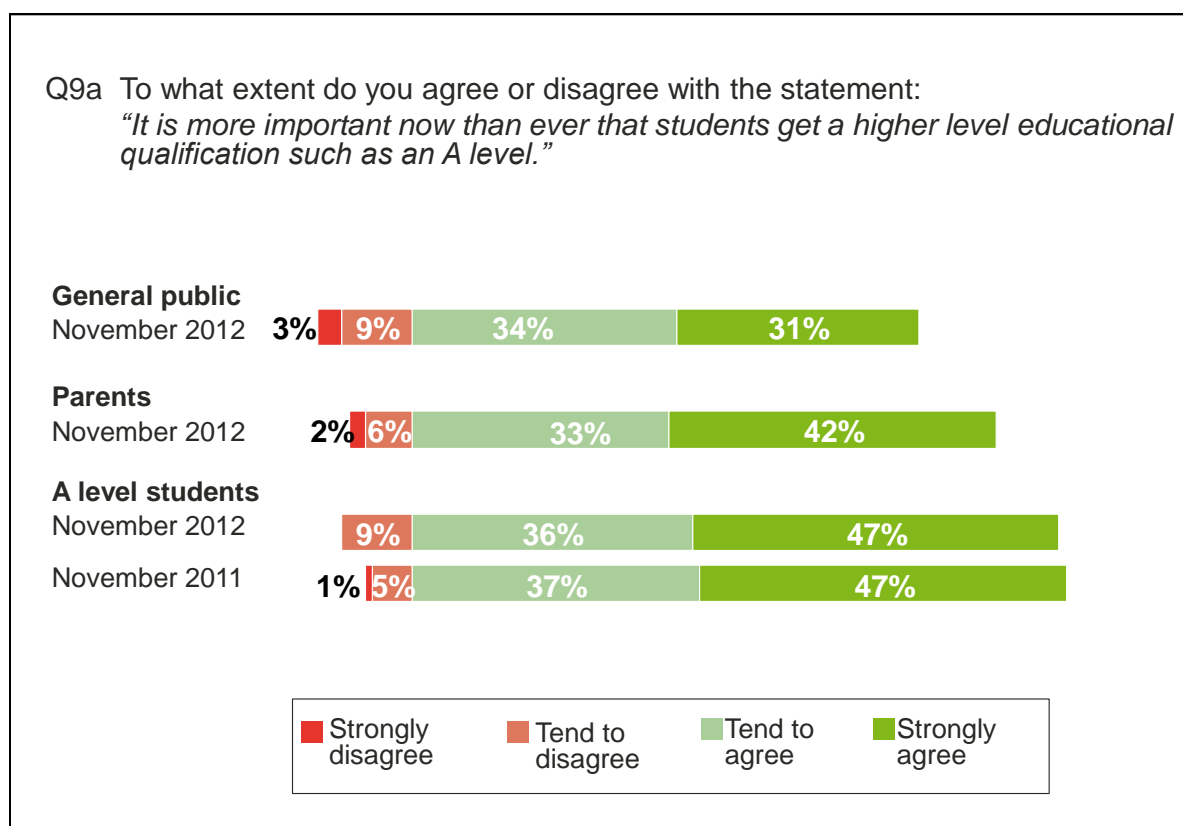
During the ten years of this research, this finding has fluctuated year by year, with no underlying upward or downward trend. There was little change overall between 2011 and 2012.

Perceptions of the importance and value of the A level qualification

The public clearly perceived qualifications like the A level to be more important than ever (Figure 28). Two-thirds of the general public (64 per cent) felt this to be the case, with a higher proportion of parents (75 per cent) and an even higher proportion of A level students³⁶ (84 per cent).

A level students' views compared very closely with those of students as a whole (81 per cent agreed), and were almost identical to A level students' perceptions found in 2011 (84 per cent).

Figure 28. Perceived importance of getting a higher-level qualification



Note: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who either "neither agreed or disagreed" with the statements or "did not know".

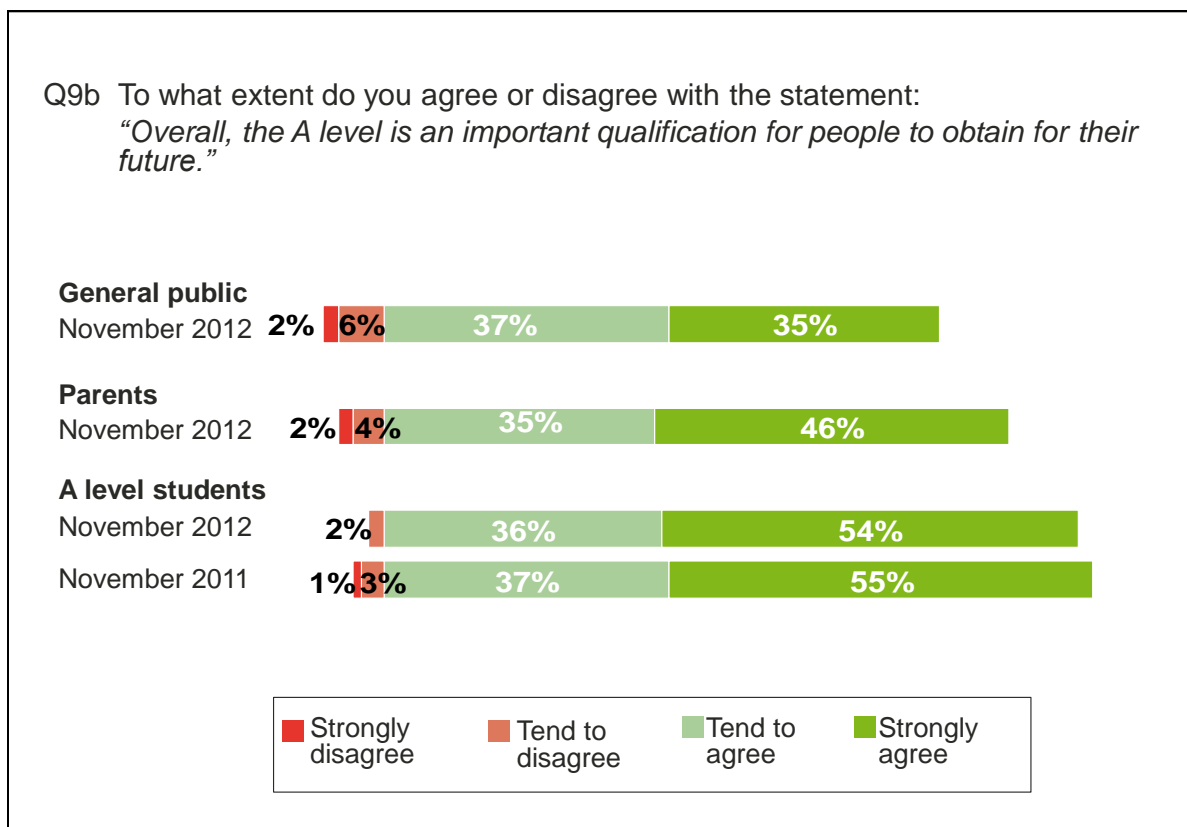
³⁶ In 2011, this question was posed only of actual, aspiring or recent A level students, not other students, or parents or other members of the general public. We have therefore compared like with like in Figure 34.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 149 A level students and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Effective base (2011) (Q9a): 141 students who are taking, have recently taken, intend to take, or are thinking of taking A levels, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

The general public, parents and A level students felt similarly that the A level is an important qualification for people to obtain for their future, 72 per cent, 81 per cent and 90 per cent respectively agreed with the statement (Figure 29). A level students were rather more positive than students as a whole (86 per cent), and were of a similar view to A level students in 2011 (92 per cent).

Figure 29. Perceived importance of getting an A level



Note: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who either “neither agreed nor disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”. No A level students strongly disagreed with the statement in 2012. The clause “for their future” was not in the question in 2011.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 149 students who were taking, had recently taken, intended to take, or were thinking of taking A levels; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Effective base (2011) (Q9b): 141 students who were taking, had recently taken, intended to take, or were thinking of taking A levels, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011).

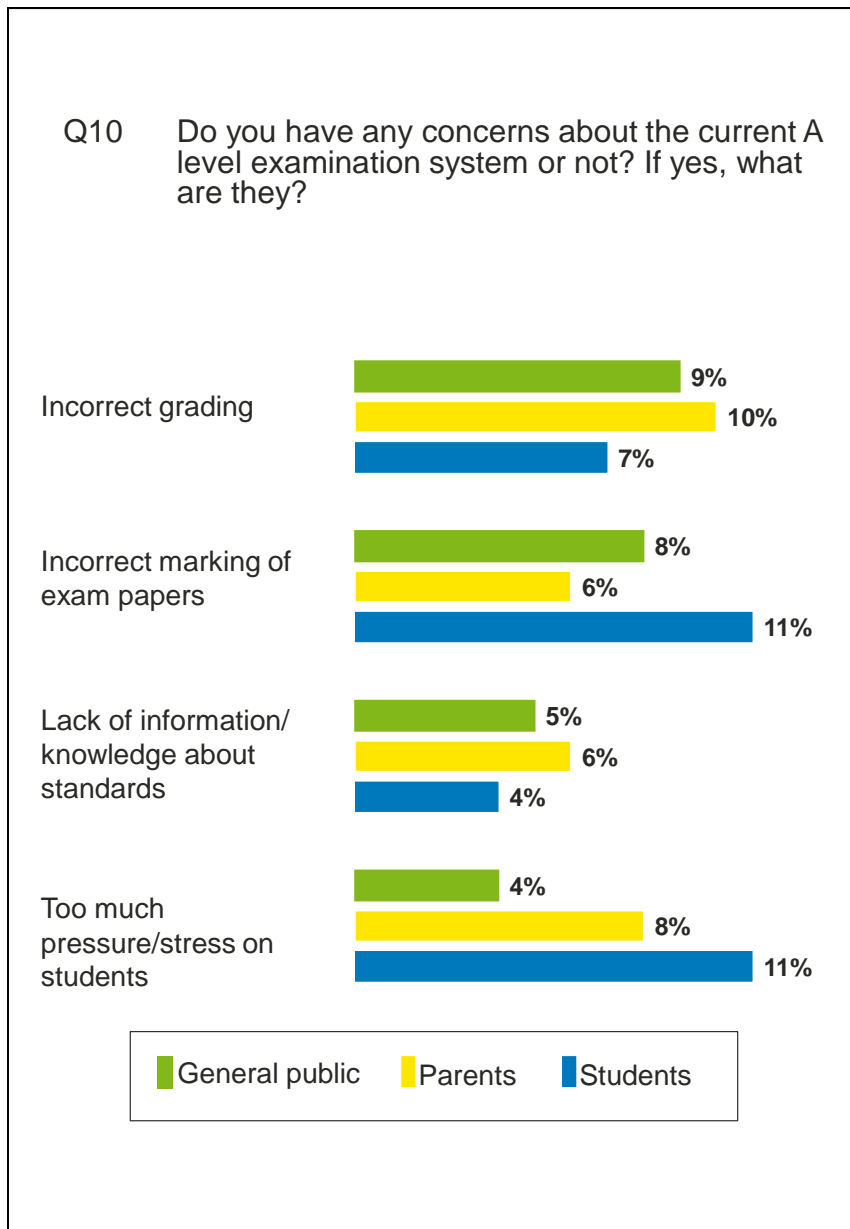
Concerns about the A level examination system

Most respondents did not have any concerns about the current A level system: over half of the general public and parents (55 per cent), and almost two-thirds of students (63 per cent).

However, a third of the general public, parents and students did have some concerns about the current A level system (37 per cent, 39 per cent and 33 per cent). No single concern was pre-eminent, although “incorrect grading” or “incorrect marking of exam papers” were the two most-reported concerns overall (by nine per cent and eight per cent of the public) (Figure 30).

Among students, incorrect marking of exam papers and too much pressure or stress on students were the biggest concerns (each mentioned by 11 per cent), while incorrect grading was the most-mentioned concern among parents. The views of A level students were very close to those of students as a whole.

Figure 30. Concerns about the A level system



Note 1: This question was not asked in 2011

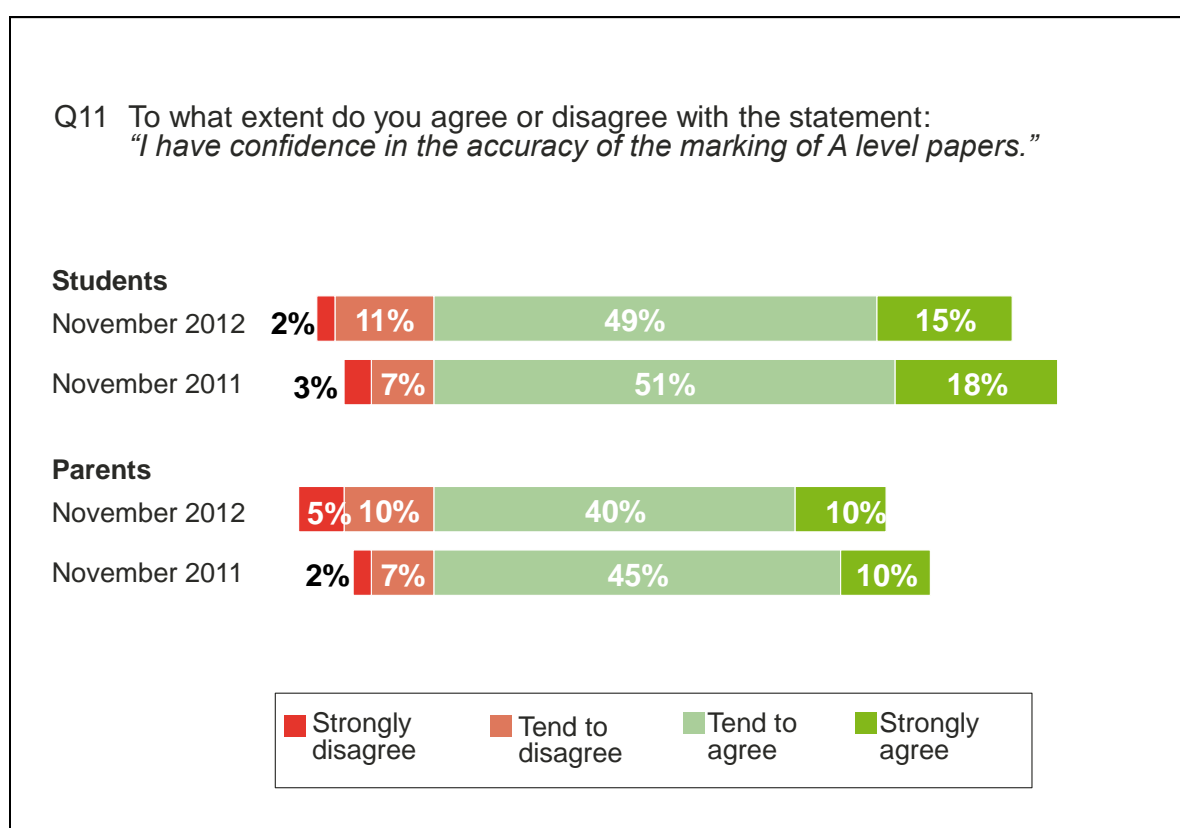
Note 2: This was an unprompted question, that is respondents were free to identify any response. Responses identified by less than 4 per cent of the public have been excluded from this chart.

Effective base: 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

The quality of A level marking

Students had more confidence than parents in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers (Figure 31): two-thirds of students agreed that they were confident in the accuracy of A level paper marking (64 per cent) compared with half of parents (50 per cent). Students' and parents' views were broadly similar to those found in 2011, although there were minor modifications in question wording and bases, noted in the chart.

Figure 31. Parents' and students' confidence in the accuracy of A level marking



Note 1: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of students and/or parents who either "neither agreed or disagreed" with the statements or "did not know".

Note 2: This question was asked of parents and students (but not of the public more generally): A level and GCSEs in 2011; and A levels, GCSEs and other academic qualifications in 2012.

Note 3: In 2011, the statement was: 'I have confidence in the accuracy and quality of the marking of A level papers'.

Effective base (2012): 221 students who are taking, have recently taken, intend to take, or are thinking about taking A levels or GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of such students, in

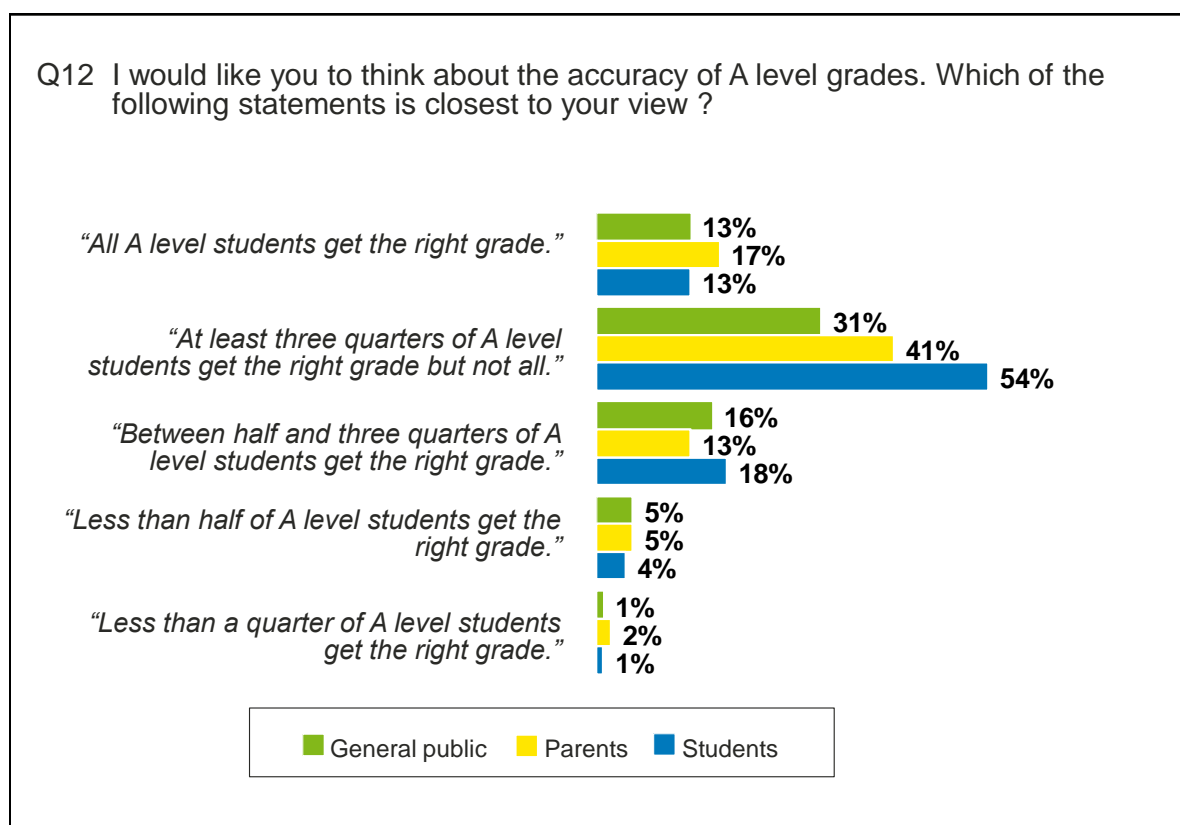
England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013). Effective base (2011) (Q16b): 229 students who are taking, have recently taken, intend to take, or are thinking of taking A levels or GCSEs, and 330 parents of such students, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

The accuracy of A level grades

Most people who expressed a view were quite positive about the accuracy of A level grades (Figure 32). A third of the general public (35 per cent) did not express a view, but 44 per cent felt that at least three-quarters of A level students get the right grade (that is, 66 per cent of people who expressed a view).

Parents and students were more likely than the public generally to express a view about accuracy of A level grades. Fifty eight per cent of parents considered that at either all or least three-quarters of A level students get the right grade (75 per cent of those who expressed a view), as did 67 per cent of students (74 per cent of those who expressed a view). In the region of one in six (13 per cent of the general public and students and 17 per cent of parents) were *very* positive, considering that *all* such students get the right grade.

Figure 32. Perceptions of the accuracy of A level grades



Note 1: The chart excludes respondents who ‘did not know’: 35 per cent of the general public, 23 per cent of parents and 10 per cent of students

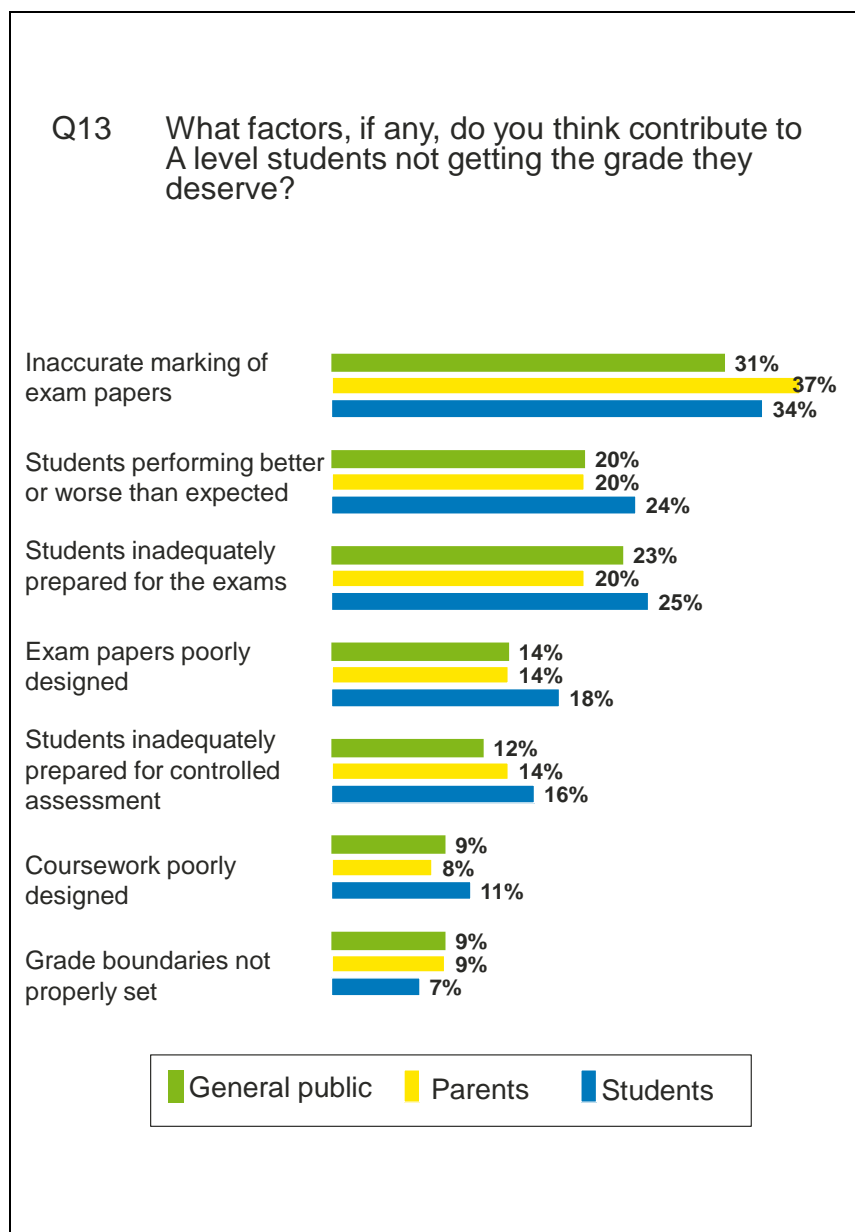
Note 2: This question was not asked in 2011.

Effective base : 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Factors identified as contributing to students not getting the A level grade they deserved followed a similar pattern for the general public, parents and students (Figure 33). The most-reported perception, identified by around a third of people who do not think that all students get the right grade, was that examination papers were inaccurately marked (31 per cent of the general public, 37 per cent of parents and 34 per cent of students). This finding is consistent with the views expressed by teachers and headteachers. A fifth reported that students perform better or worse than expected (20 per cent of the general public, 20 per cent of parents and 24 per cent of students), or that students were inadequately prepared for the examinations (23 per cent, 20 per cent and 25 per cent). The next most-reported factors were students being inadequately prepared for controlled assessment (cited by 12 per cent of the

general public, 14 per cent of parents and 16 per cent of students), the coursework is poorly designed (nine per cent, eight per cent and 11 per cent) and grade boundaries are not properly set (nine per cent, nine per cent and seven per cent).

Figure 33. Factors contributing to A level students not getting the grade they deserve



Note 1: This question was not asked in 2011

Note 2: This was an unprompted question, that is respondents were free to identify any response. Responses identified by 3 per cent or less of the public have been excluded from this chart.

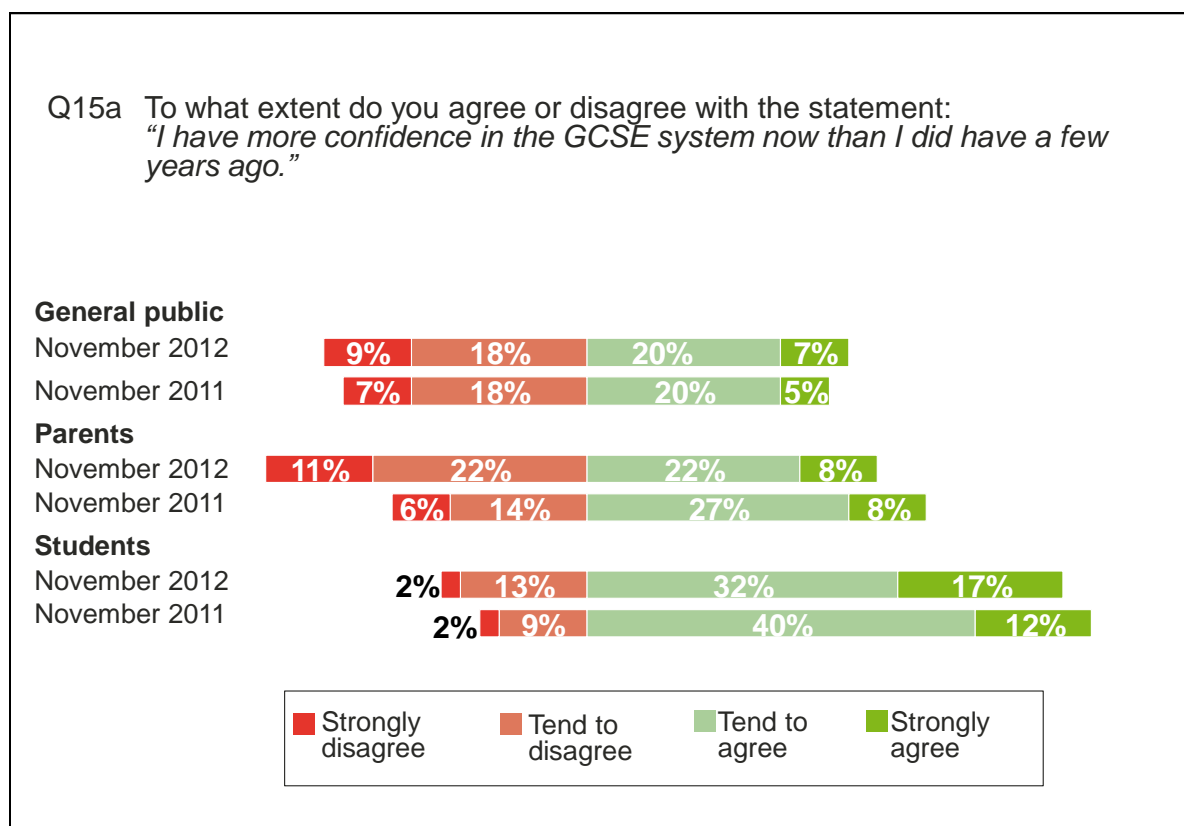
Note 3: This was a multi-coded question, that is respondents were free to give more than one answer.

Effective base: 1,344 members of the general public who did not think that all A level students get the grades they deserve at Q18; 167 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 218 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Perceptions of the A* grade

Over two-thirds of the public believed that the A* grade for A levels should help universities identify top students (66 per cent), with just one in ten disagreeing (10 per cent) (Figure 34). Sixty nine per cent of parents and 76 per cent of students agreed that the A* grade should help universities to identify top students (not statistically significantly different from 2011). There was much greater confidence among headteachers and teachers than among members of the public that A* grades help universities, five in six of headteachers and teachers believing this to be the case, as discussed earlier [Figure 8, page 22].

Figure 34. Perceptions of the usefulness of the A* grade at A level



Note 1: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who either “neither agreed or disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”: 12 per cent of the public in 2012, 7 per cent of parents and 3 per cent of students.

Note 2: This question was only asked of parents and students in 2011.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Effective base (2011) (Q9e): 229 students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs; and 330 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

Perceptions of GCSEs

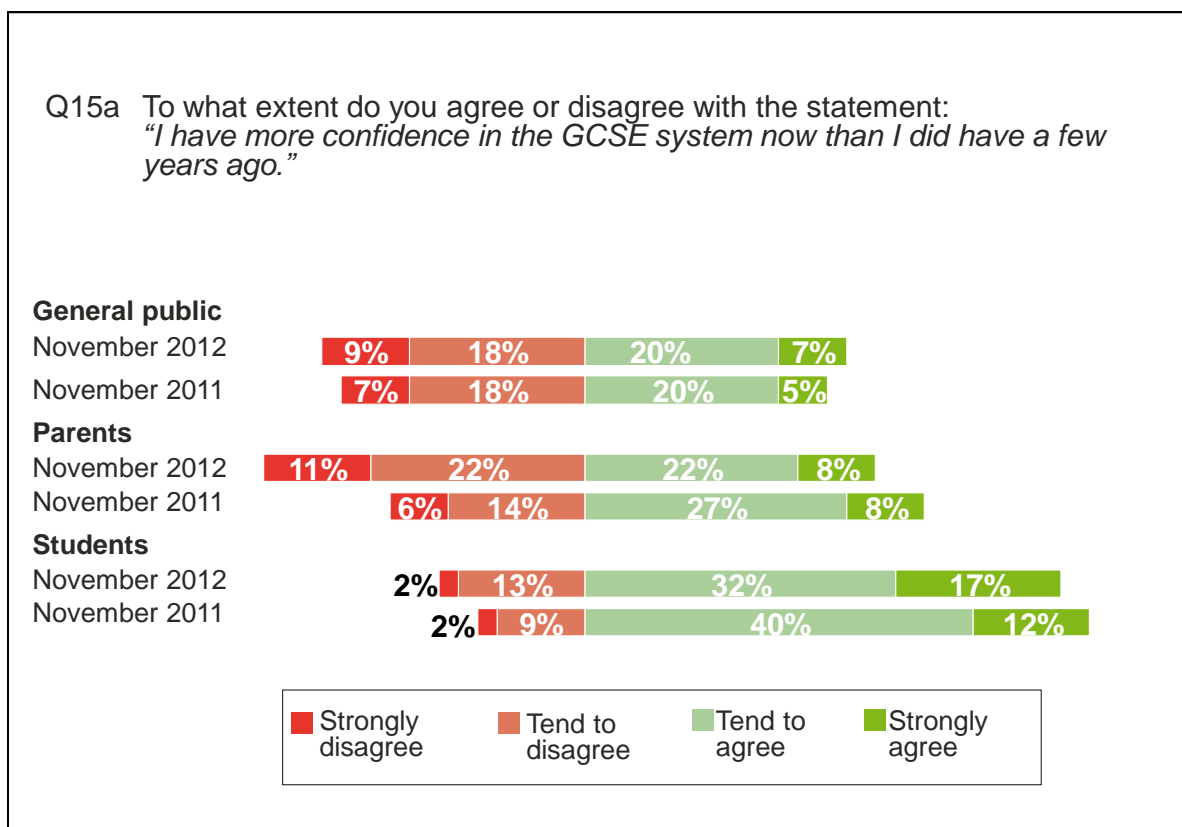
The general public, students and parents were asked about their confidence in the GCSE system, concerns with the system and views towards marking and grading. The research also asked about awareness of the 2012 GCSE English grading controversy and the impact of this on confidence in the GCSE system.

Confidence in the GCSE system

As with perceptions of the A level system, the general public overall was neutral when comparing its confidence in the GCSE system with a few years ago: just over a quarter (27 per cent) were more confident and the same proportion were less confident (Figure 35). This was in a marked contrast to the views of headteachers and teachers, who were generally much more negative about the GCSE system compared with how they felt a year ago (60 per cent of teachers and 80 per cent of headteachers felt *less* confident in the GCSE system compared with a year ago) (Figure 10, page 25).

Parents were similarly neutral overall about the GCSE system but students were more positive. Around half of students (49 per cent) reported that they felt more confident in the GCSE system than a few years ago, compared with 15 per cent who felt less confident. This was a similar pattern to that found in relation to A levels (Figure 27, page 52), although more students felt more confident than a few years ago in the GCSE system than in the A level system (49 per cent compared with 43 per cent).

Figure 35. The public’s, parents’ and students’ confidence in the GCSE system compared with a few years ago



Note: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who either “neither agreed or disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”.

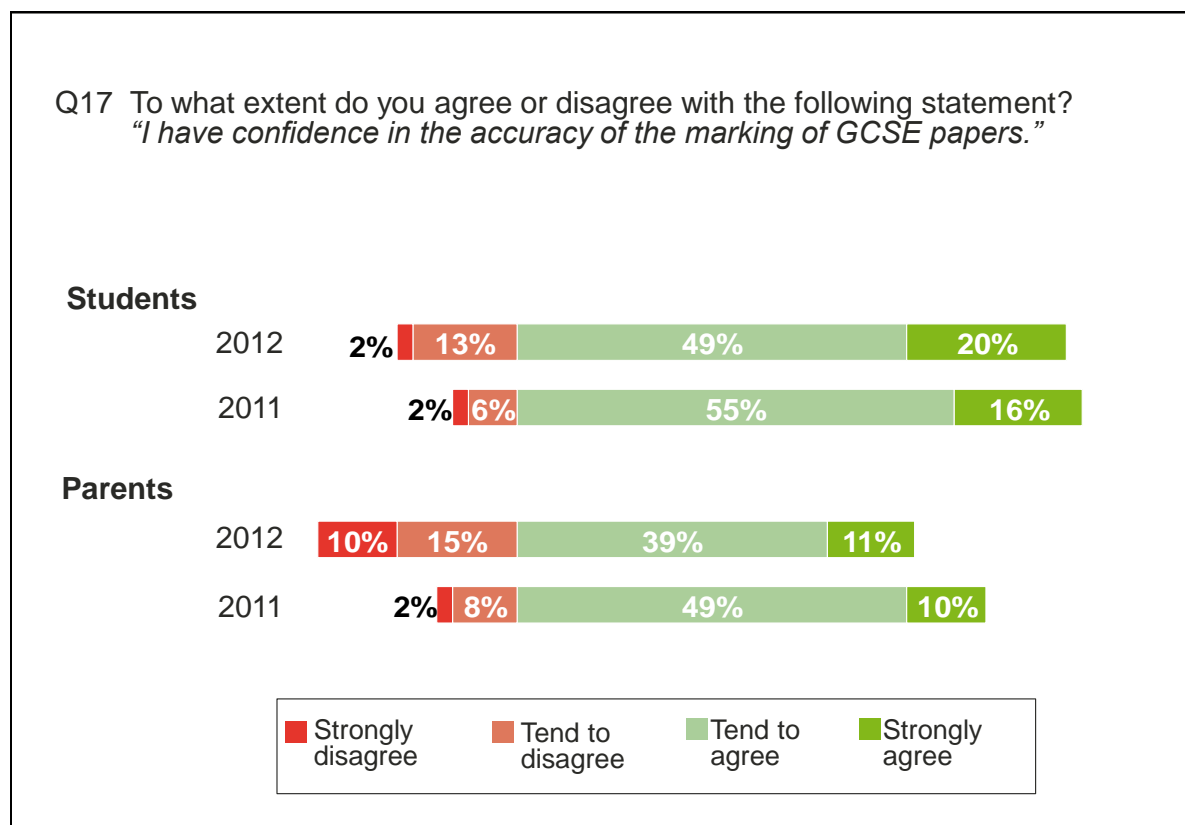
Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Effective base (2011) (Q10): 1,609 members of the general public; 229 students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs; and 330 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

Confidence in the accuracy and quality of marking of GCSE papers

The proportion of parents who were confident in the accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers declined from 59 per cent in 2011 to 50 per cent in 2012; students' confidence has not changed.³⁷

Figure 36. Parents' and students' confidence in the accuracy of GCSE marking



Note 1: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of students and or parents who either "neither agreed or disagreed" with the statements or "did not know".

Note 2: This question was asked of parents and students (but not of the public more generally): A level and GCSEs in 2011; and A levels, GCSEs and other academic qualifications in 2012.

Note 3: In 2011, the statement was: 'I have confidence in the accuracy and quality of the marking of GCSE papers'.

³⁷ Some caution should be applied in the light of the slight modification in the question wording in 2012. In 2011, the statement read: "I have confidence in the accuracy and quality of the marking of GCSE papers". In 2012, the words "and quality" were excluded from the statement.

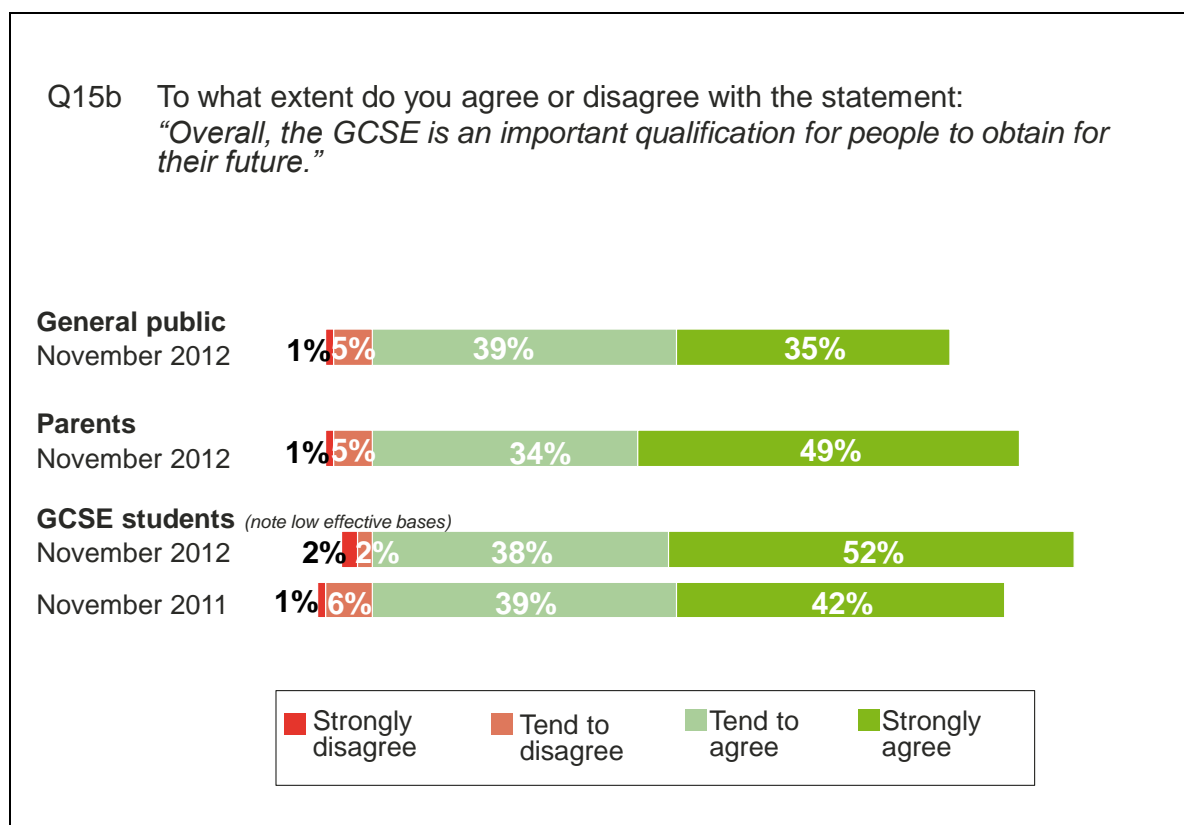
Effective base (2012): 221 students who are taking, have recently taken, intend to take, or are thinking about taking A levels or GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of such students, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Effective base (2011) (Q16a): 229 students who are taking, have recently taken, intend to take, or are thinking of taking A levels or GCSEs, and 330 parents of such students, in England, for Ofqual (Nov - Dec2011).

Perceptions of the importance and value of GCSEs

The public's strong perception that the GCSE is an important qualification for people to obtain for their future was almost identical to their view of the importance of the A level qualification. Three-quarters of the public considered that the GCSE is an important qualification for people to obtain (75 per cent) (Figure 37). Five in six parents agreed this is the case (83 per cent). Agreement among GCSE students was even higher (90 per cent).

Figure 37. Perceived importance of obtaining the GCSE qualification



Note 1: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who either “neither agreed or disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”.

Note 2: In 2011 the statement excluded the clause “for their future”.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; 152 students taking or intending to take GCSEs, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013).

Effective base (2011) (Q15): 97 students “with experience or knowledge of GCSEs”, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

Accuracy of GCSE grades

The general public’s view of the accuracy of GCSE grades was very similar to its view of the accuracy of A level grades.

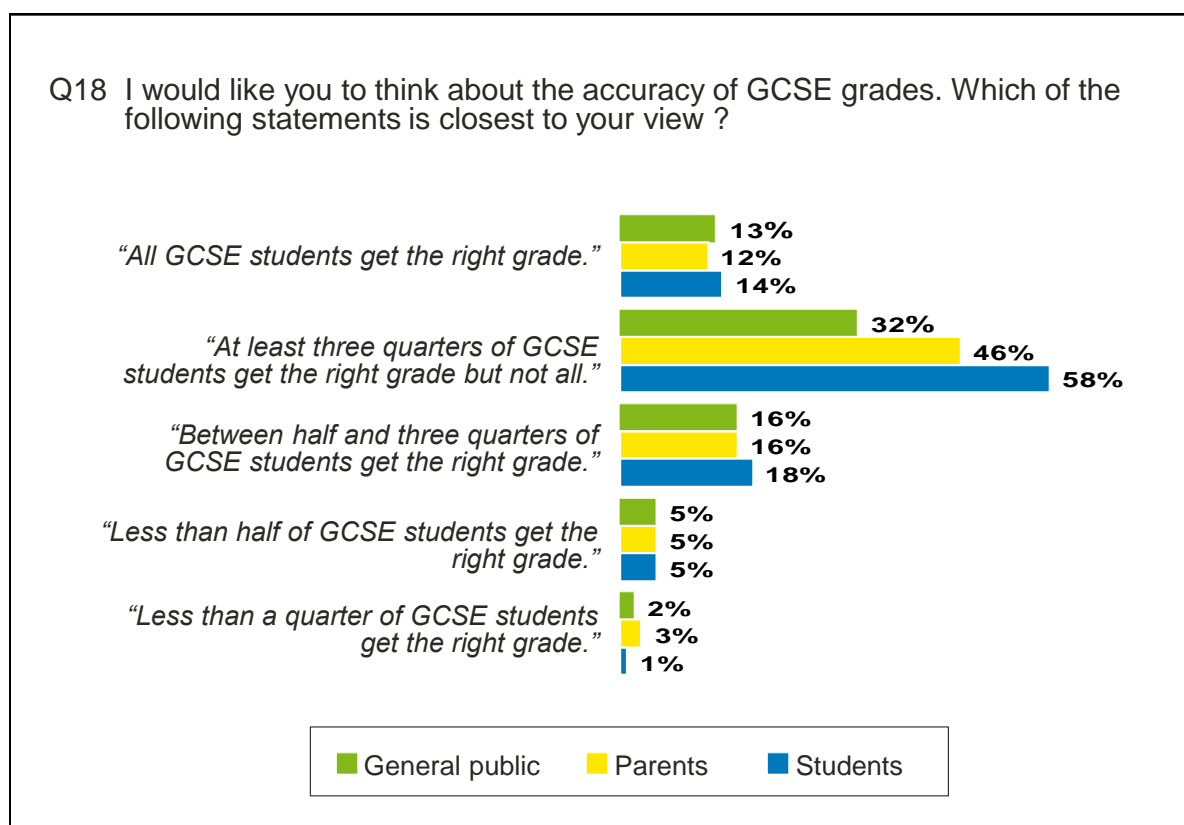
Most people who expressed a view were quite positive about the accuracy of GCSE grades (Figure 38). While a third of the general public (32 per cent) did not express a view, 45 per cent felt that at least three-quarters of GCSE students get the right grade (that is, 66 per cent of people who expressed a view – identical to the proportion of the public who felt the same about A level grades).

Parents and students were more likely to express a view. Fifty eight per cent of parents considered that at least three-quarters of GCSE students get the right grade (71 per cent of those who expressed a view), as did 72 per cent of students (77 per cent of those who expressed a view).

In the region of one in six (13 per cent) of the general public, 12 per cent of parents and 14 per cent of students were very positive, judging that *all* GCSE students get the right grade.³⁸

³⁸ In 2011, when asked to think about the “reliability” of GCSE grades (they were asked about their “accuracy” in 2012), fewer felt that all GCSE students get the right grades: 7 per cent, 6 per cent and 9 per cent respectively.

Figure 38. Perceptions of the accuracy of GCSE grades



Note 1: The chart excludes respondents who 'did not know': 32 per cent of the general public, 18 per cent of parents and 4 per cent of students.

Note 2: This question was asked in a different way in 2011 so the findings cannot be directly compared.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

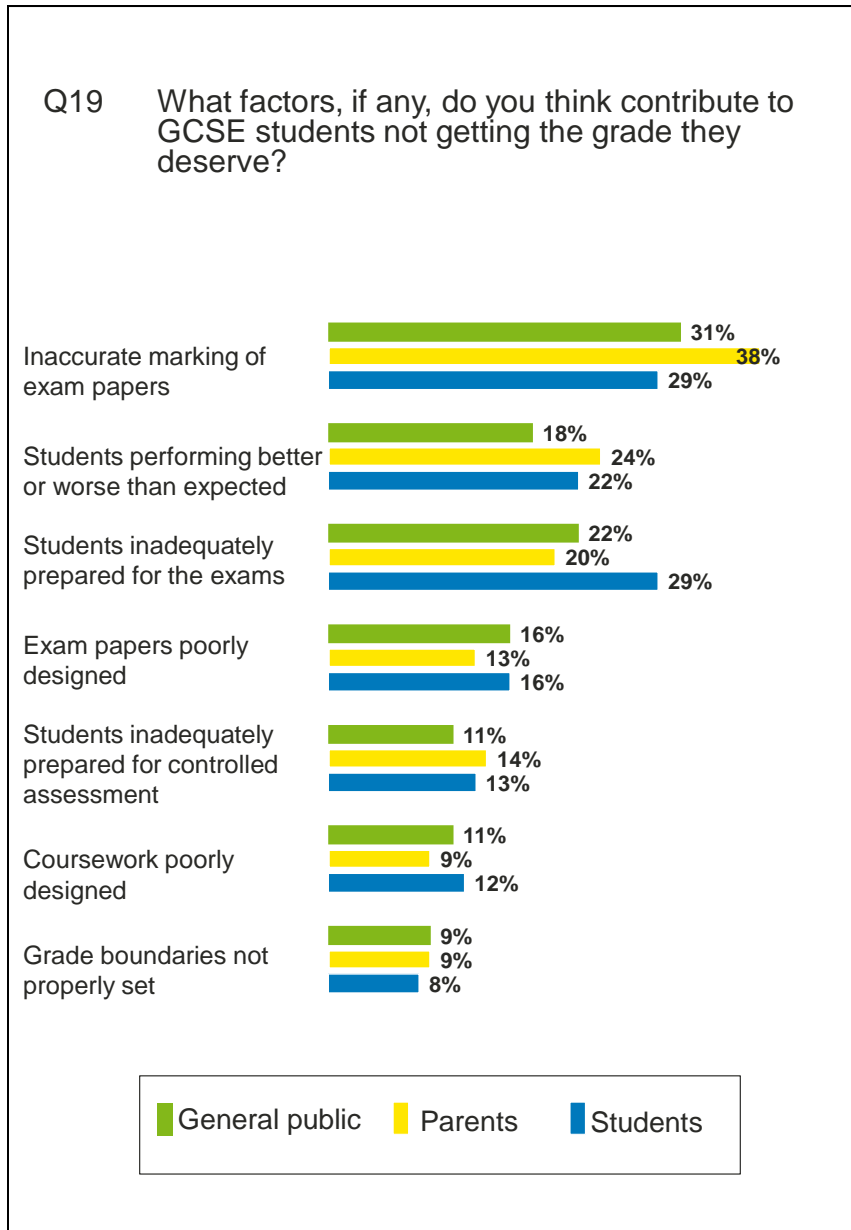
Factors identified as contributing to students not getting the GCSE grade they deserved (Figure 39) followed a broadly similar pattern among the general public as with A level grades (discussed above, Figure 33, page 60).³⁹

The most-reported perception, identified by around a third of people who did not think that all students get the right grade, was that examination papers were inaccurately

³⁹ This question was asked of respondents who believed that not all GCSE students get the right grade.

marked (31 per cent of the general public, 38 per cent of parents and 29 per cent of students). This is consistent with findings obtained from teachers and headteachers. Between a fifth and a quarter judged that students perform better or worse than expected (18 per cent of the general public, 24 per cent of parents and 22 per cent of students) or that students were inadequately prepared for the examinations (22 per cent, 20 per cent and 29 per cent). The other most-cited factors were exam papers being poorly designed (16 per cent, 13 per cent and 16 per cent), students being inadequately prepared for controlled assessment (11 per cent, 14 per cent and 13 per cent), coursework poorly designed (11 per cent, nine per cent and 12 per cent) and grade boundaries not being properly set (nine per cent, nine per cent and eight per cent).

Figure 39. Factors contributing to GCSE students not getting the grade they deserve



Note 1: This question was not asked in 2011

Note 2: This was an unprompted question, that is respondents were free to identify any response. Responses identified by 3 per cent or less of the public have been excluded from this chart. Differences from A level data is indicative only, because of small base sizes.

Note 3: This was a multi-coded question, that is respondents were free to give more than one answer.

Effective base: 1,422 members of the general public who did not think that all GCSE students get the grades they deserve at Q18; 179 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other

academic qualifications; and 253 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Concerns with the GCSE examination system

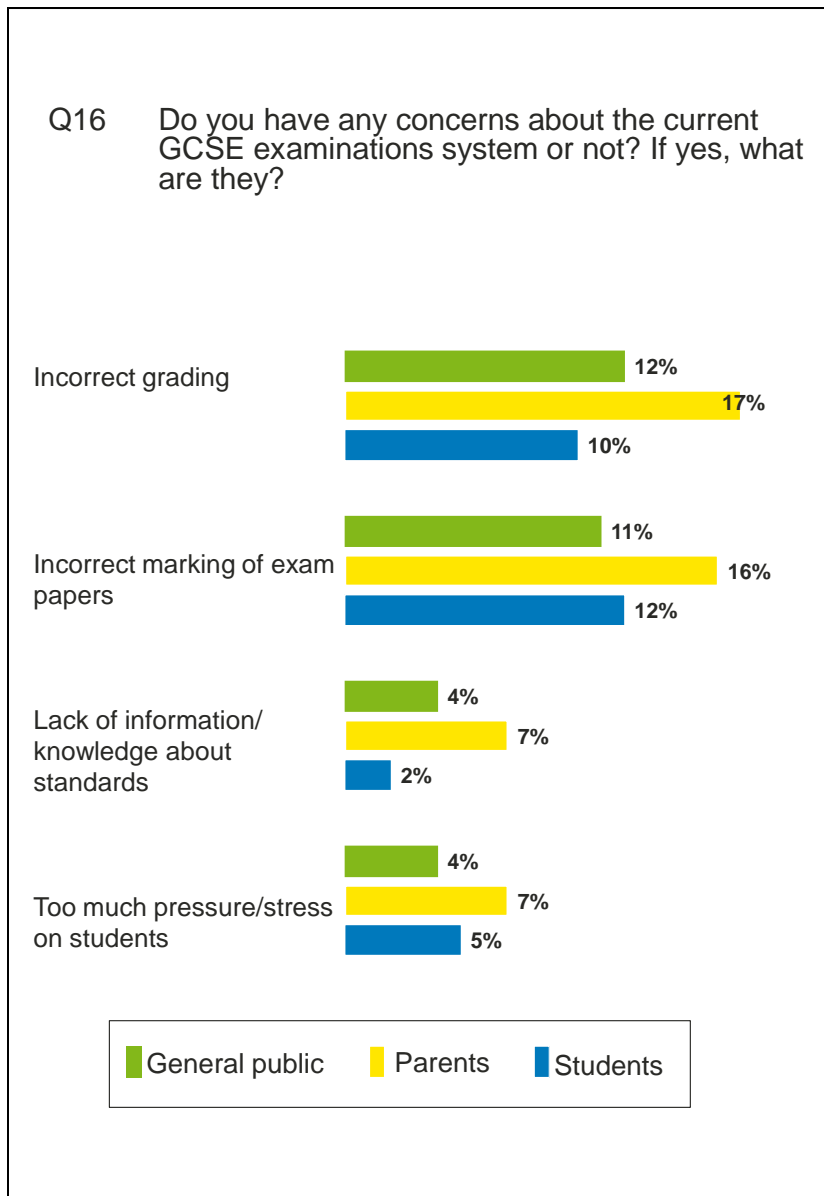
Around half of the public and parents did not have any concerns with the current GCSE system: 51 per cent and 46 per cent respectively. Over two-thirds of students and GCSE students did not have any concerns (68 per cent and 70 per cent).

Two-fifths of the general public had some concerns about the GCSE system (40 per cent), half of parents (51 per cent) and less than a third of students (30 per cent) (Figure 40).

No single concern was pre-eminent: only two concerns were reported by more than one in ten of the general public: “incorrect grading” (12 per cent) and “incorrect marking of exam papers” (11 per cent). These were also the most-reported concerns of parents and students.

The concerns of GCSE students were comparable to those of students as a whole. Overall, similar concerns are raised with the A level and GCSE systems.

Figure 40. Concerns about the GCSE exam system



Note 1: This question was not asked in 2011

Note 2: This was an unprompted question, that is respondents were free to identify any response. Responses identified by less than 3 per cent of the public have been excluded from this chart. Some bases are low and the comparison with A level findings is indicative only.

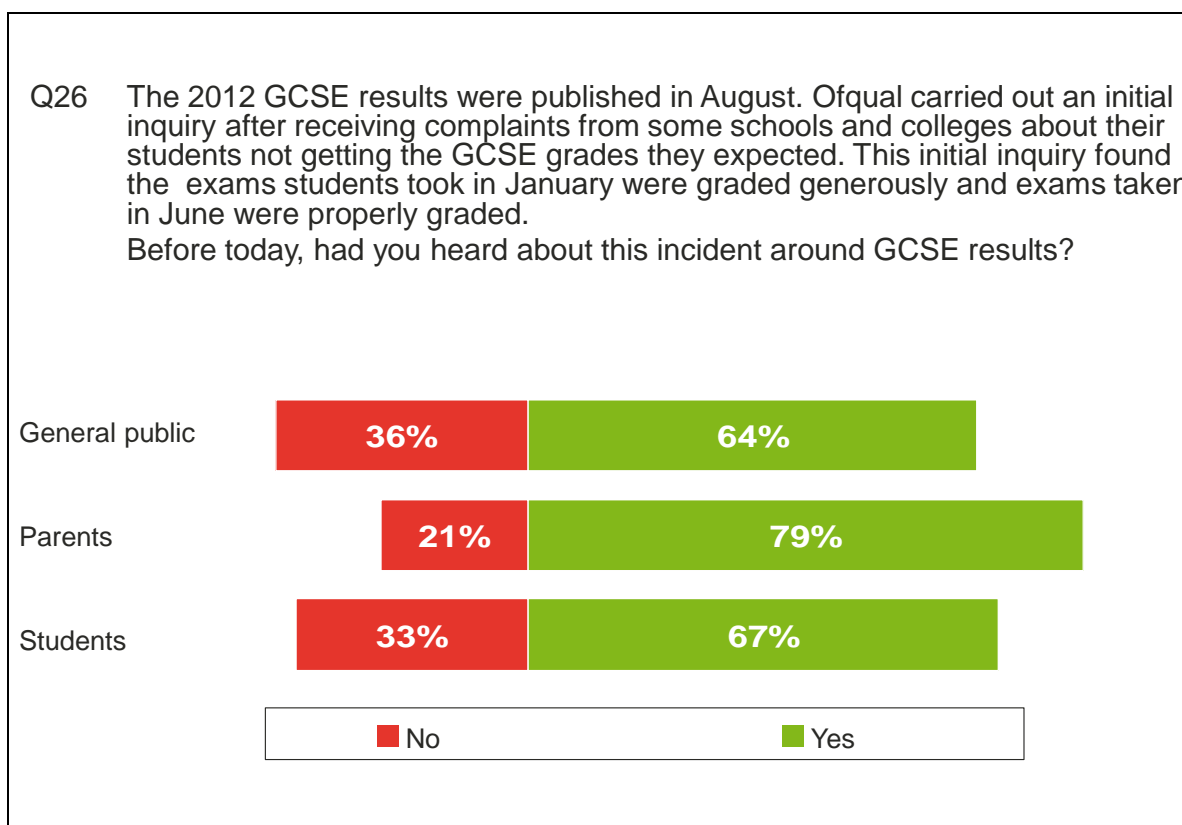
Note 3: * per cent means between 0 per cent and 0.5 per cent.

Effective base: 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

The impact of the GCSE English grading controversy on perceptions of GCSEs

As noted above, Ofqual’s strategic objectives are to maintain qualifications’ standards and confidence in the qualification’s system. It was therefore important to Ofqual to identify the impact of the GCSE English grading controversy on perceptions of the GCSE qualification. At the end of the questionnaire, to avoid any effect on respondents’ attitudes on other issues, we asked two questions to explore respondents’ awareness of this controversy and its perceived impact on their levels of confidence in the GCSE examination system. Two-thirds of the public (64 per cent) and students (67 per cent), and over three-quarters of parents (79 per cent) had heard of the controversy (Figure 41). This compares with *all* headteachers and teachers who had heard of the controversy.

Figure 41. Awareness of the GCSE English grading controversy and Ofqual inquiry



Effective base: 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

The impact of the controversy on the confidence of those members of the public and parents who were aware of it was significant (Figure 42). Three-quarters reported that it had had some impact (72 per cent and 76 per cent respectively) and two-fifths

reported that their confidence in GCSE examinations had been affected “a lot” or “a fair amount” (40 per cent and 45 per cent respectively). Less than a quarter of the public and parents were not at all affected by the controversy (23 per cent and 22 per cent respectively).

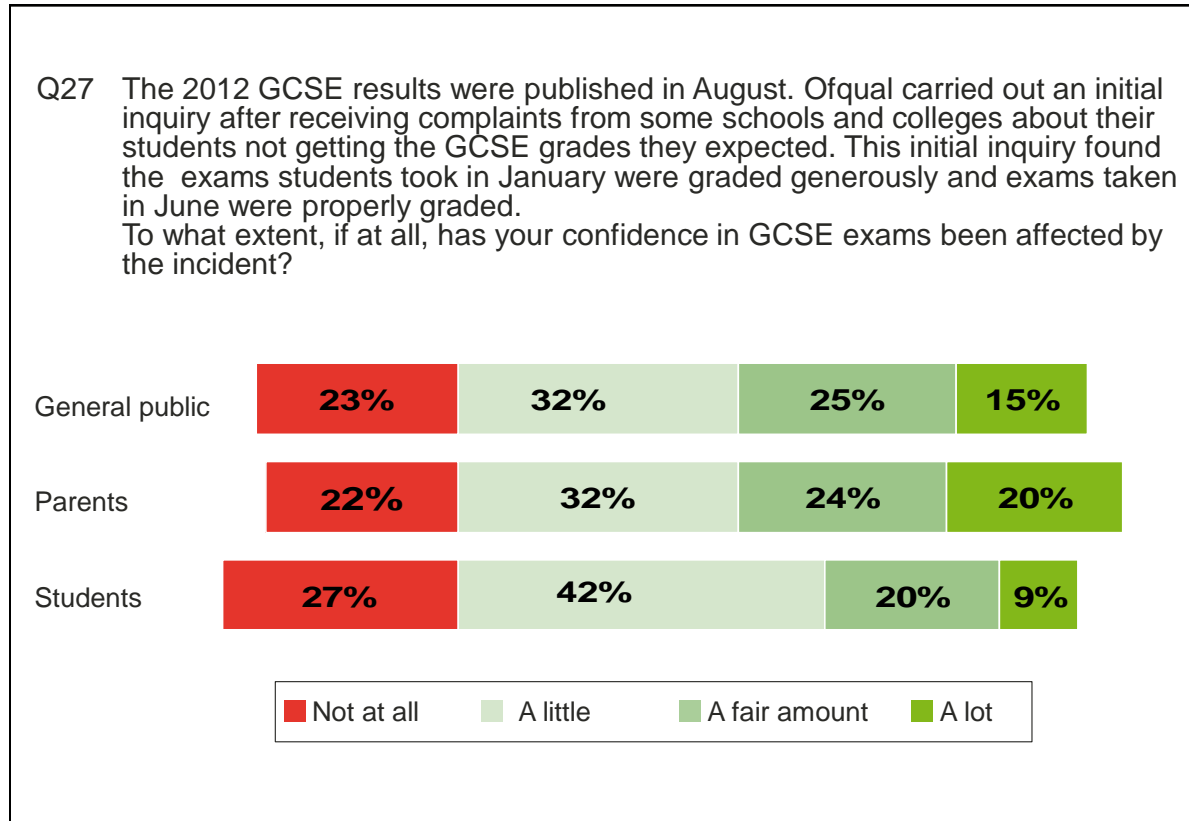
Students were less affected: although 71 per cent reported that the controversy had had some impact, just 29 per cent saying that they had been affected “a lot” or “a fair amount”.

Overall, the public’s, parents’ and students’ confidence in GCSE examinations was influenced by the GCSE English grading controversy, but much less than teachers’ confidence. As discussed earlier, 92 per cent of headteachers and 86 per cent of teachers reported some impact on their confidence (81 per cent and 64 per cent “a lot” or “a fair amount”) (Figure 15, page 32).

The findings suggest a relationship between reported levels of confidence in the GCSE system and the perceived impact of the GCSE controversy, although we cannot say there is a causal relationship. For example, those respondents who had agreed earlier in the survey that they had more confidence in the GCSE system than they had a few years ago were less likely to be affected by the controversy: 34 per cent reported that they had been affected “a lot” or “a fair amount” by the controversy (compared with 56 per cent of people who had *less confidence* in the system).

Similarly, those respondents who had reported earlier in the survey that they considered that *at least three-quarters of GCSE students get the right grade* were less likely to be affected by the controversy: 36 per cent reported that they had been affected a lot or a fair amount by the controversy, compared with 54 per cent of those who had previously reported that they judged that *less than three-quarters of GCSE students* get the right grade.

Figure 42. The GCSE English grading controversy and the Ofqual inquiry: impact on confidence in GCSE examinations



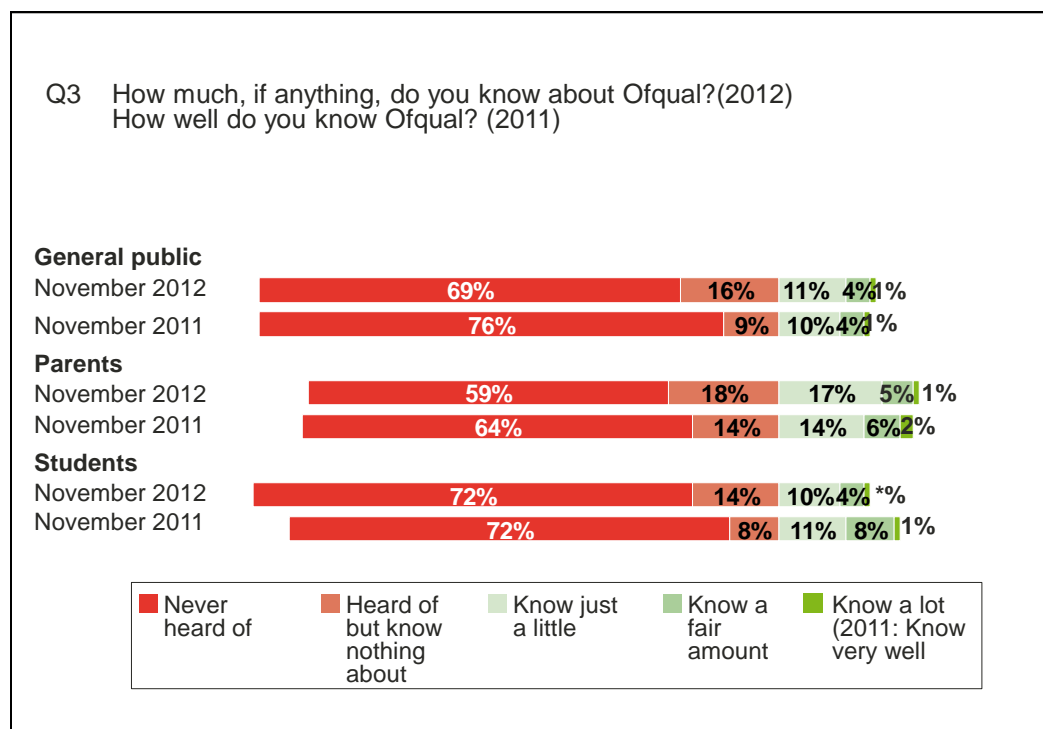
Note: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who “did not know”: 5 per cent of the public, 2 per cent of parents and 2 per cent of students.

Effective base: 1,613 members of the general public who were aware of the 2012 GCSE English grading controversy (Q26), 146 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 278 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Awareness and perceptions of Ofqual

Familiarity with Ofqual among the general public overall remained low: just 15 per cent knew at least a little about the regulator (four per cent knew a lot or a fair amount), with similar lack of awareness among parents and students, six per cent and four per cent of whom knew a lot or a fair amount, respectively (Figure 43).

Figure 43. Knowledge of Ofqual (unprompted)



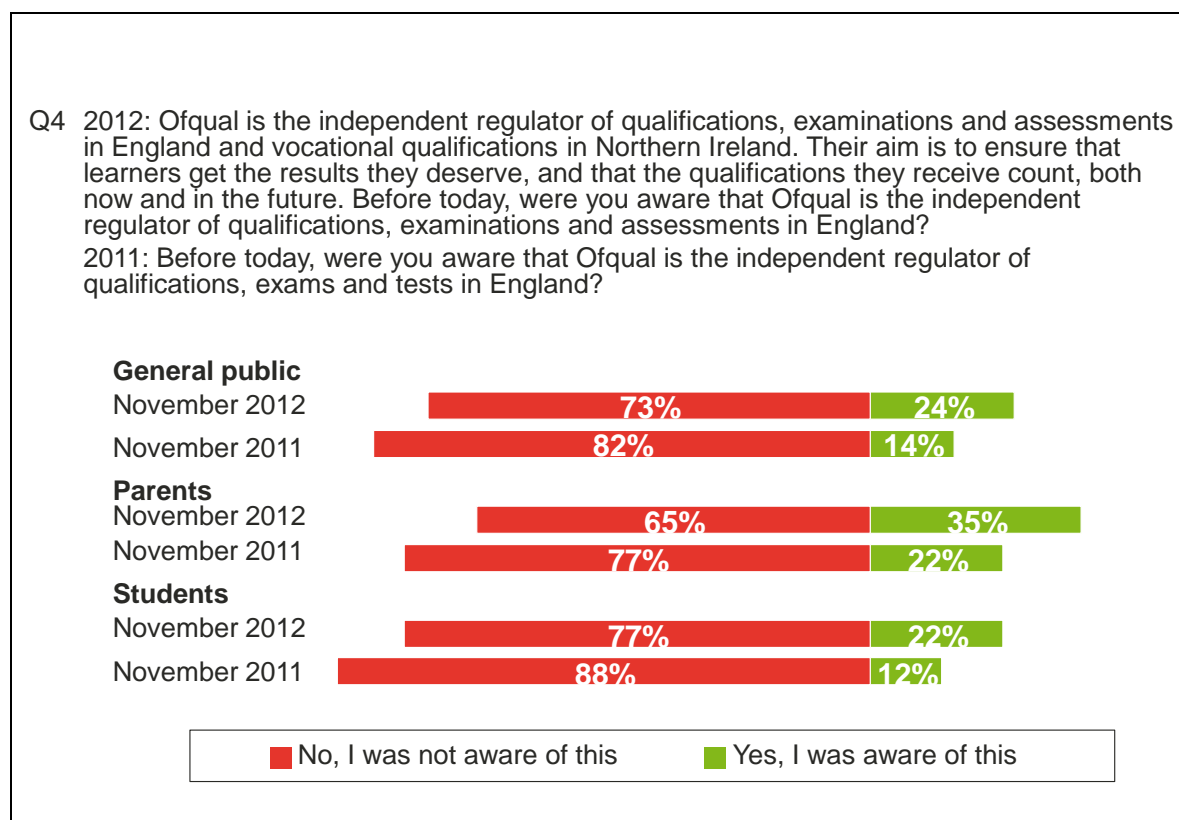
Note: * means between 0 per cent and 0.5 per cent students knew a lot about Ofqual in 2012.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Effective base (2011) (Q5): 1,609 members of the general public; 229 students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs; and 330 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

There was a significant increase in *prompted* awareness of Ofqual (Figure 44). After being read a description of Ofqual’s role⁴⁰, 24 per cent of the general public said that they were aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England, compared with 14 per cent in 2011. Awareness particularly rose among parents (35 per cent) and students (22 per cent). As discussed earlier, teachers’ awareness had also increased significantly year-by-year since Ofqual was established.

Figure 44. Knowledge of Ofqual (prompted)



Note : Different question wording and scale means that comparisons between 2011 and 2012 should be treated as indicative.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

⁴⁰ After being asked about how much they know about Ofqual unprompted (Figure 43), respondents were told: “Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Their aim is to ensure that learners get the result they deserve, and that the qualifications they receive count, both now and in the future”. They were then asked: “Before today, were you aware that Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications examinations and assessments in England?”

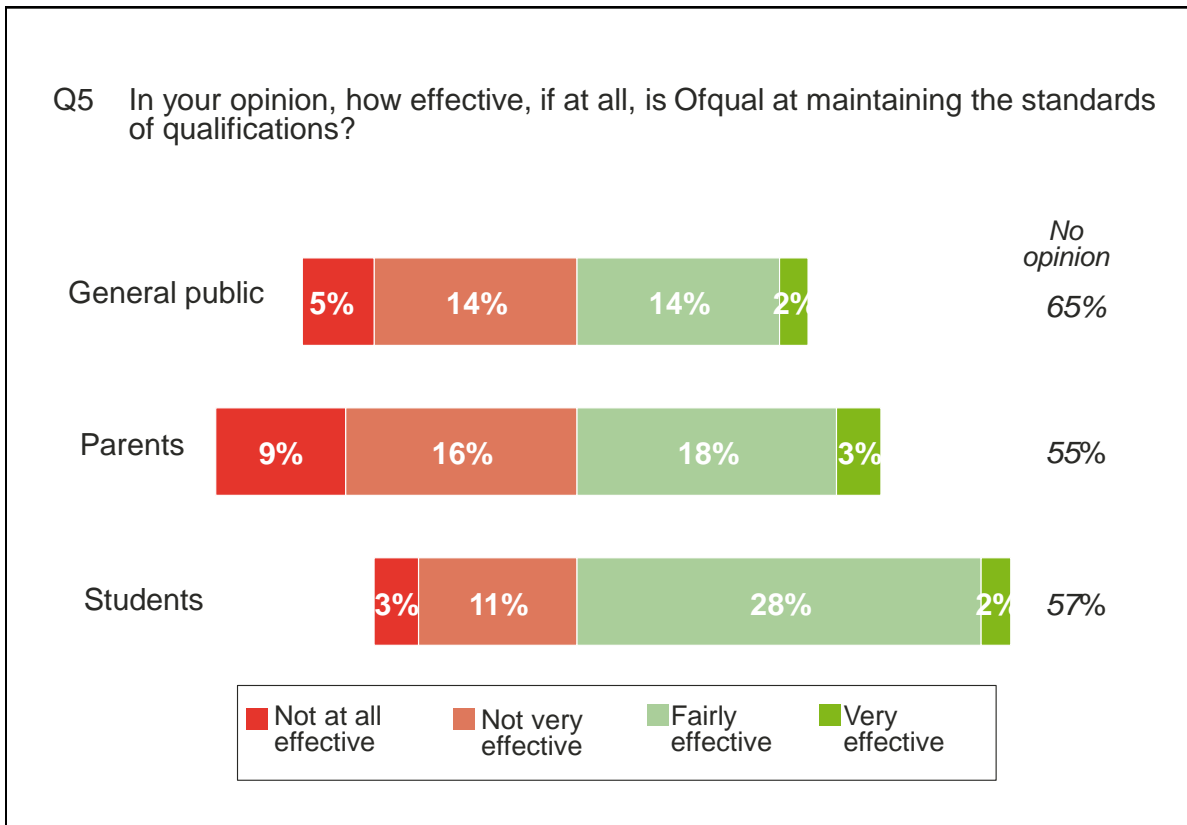
Effective base (2011) (Q6): 1,609 members of the general public; 229 students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs; and 330 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

Perceived effectiveness of Ofqual

In wave 11, the general public was asked for the first time about its opinion of Ofqual's effectiveness at maintaining the standards of qualifications, as had been asked of teachers in previous waves. Unsurprisingly, given the public's low level of awareness of Ofqual, two-thirds of the public (65 per cent) had no opinion, while those who expressed an opinion were balanced in their views (16 per cent judging Ofqual to be effective and 19 per cent ineffective) (Figure 45). However, findings suggest there is a relationship between knowledge about Ofqual and perceived effectiveness of the regulator. Among those members of the public who know "a lot" or "a fair" amount about the regulator, perceived effectiveness increased to 53 per cent.

Parents were also balanced in their views although students were more positive about Ofqual's effectiveness: 30 per cent judging Ofqual to be effective and 13 per cent ineffective.

Figure 45. Perceptions of Ofqual’s effectiveness



Effective base: 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Trusted sources of information

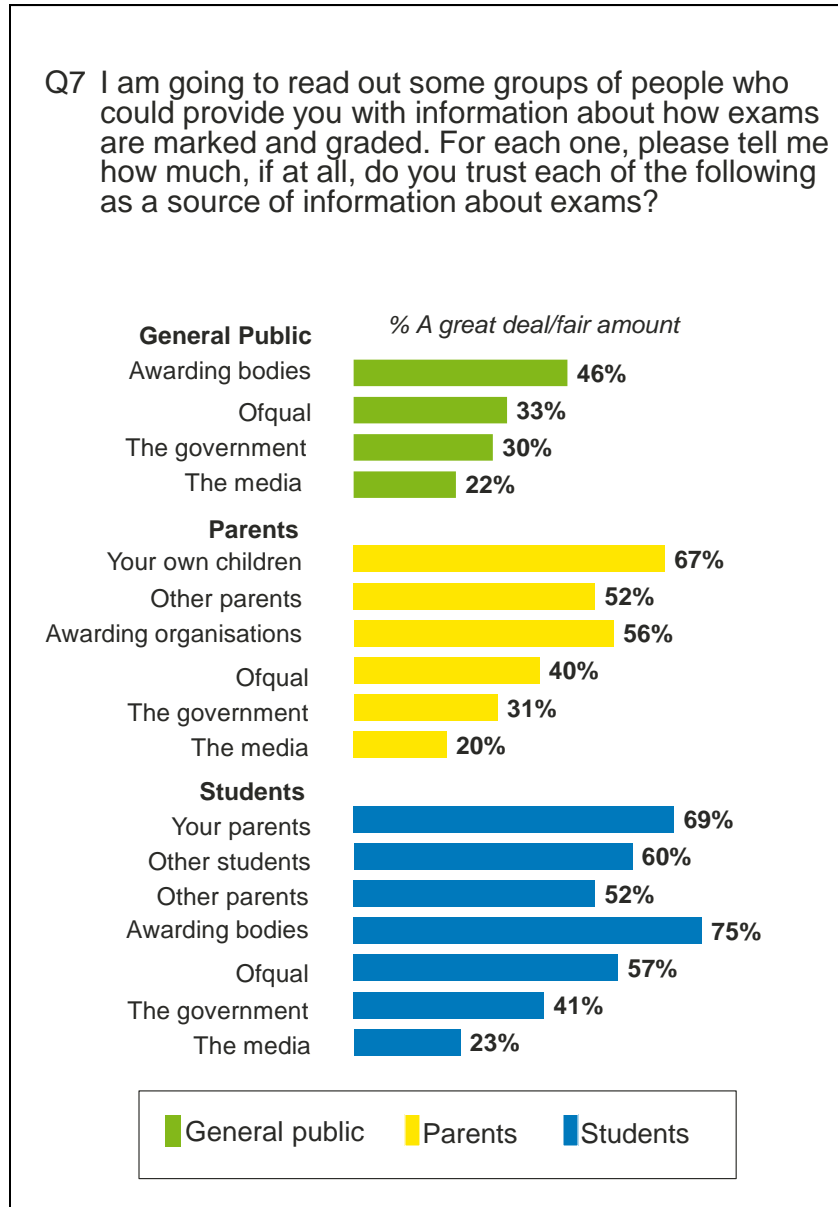
The general public, parents and students were asked which organisations they would trust as a source of information about examinations. Awarding organisations were the most trusted source of information about examinations for the general public and also for students (trusted by 46 per cent and 75 per cent respectively) (Figure 46).

Awarding organisations apart, parents and students trusted people they personally know more than they trusted institutions. Parents' most trusted sources of information about examinations were their own children (trusted by 67 per cent of parents) and other parents (52 per cent), while students most trusted sources, after awarding organisations, were their own parents (69 per cent), other students (60 per cent) and other parents (52 per cent).

Ofqual was the most trusted institution after awarding organisations, being trusted by a third of the general public for information about examinations (33 per cent), two-fifths of parents (40 per cent) and over half of students (57 per cent). Trust in Ofqual was higher among members of the public who claimed to know "a lot" or "a fair amount" about the regulator (66 per cent).

The government was the third most-trusted of the institutions tested (by a third of the public and parents and by two-fifths of students). As found with teachers, the media remained the least trusted source of information about examinations, trusted only by a fifth of the public (22 per cent), parents (20 per cent) and students (23 per cent), though this represented a much less sceptical view of the media than emerged from headteachers and teachers (Figure 21, page 41).

Figure 46. Trusted sources of information: the general public, students and parents



Note: The most trusted source of information among parents and children in 2011 was schools/teachers (trusted by 82 per cent and 85 per cent respectively). This was not an option given to respondents in 2012.

Effective base: 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

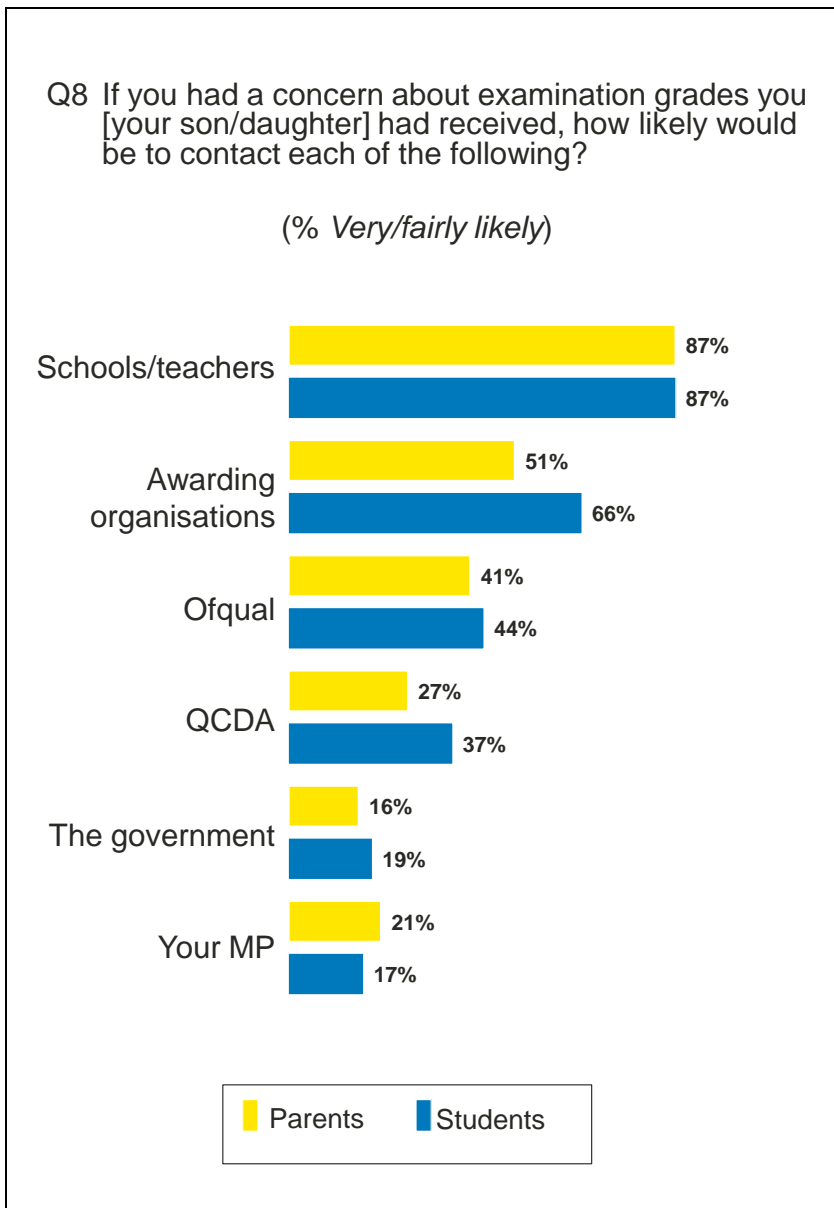
Organisations most likely to be contacted in instances where there are concerns about the fairness of the examination grades

Parents and students were asked what organisations they would be most likely to contact should they have concerns about the examination grades they/their children receive (Figure 47)⁴¹. Both parents and students were most likely to contact schools or teachers (87 per cent of both parents and students) and awarding organisations (51 per cent and 66 per cent respectively).

Over two-fifths of parents and students would contact Ofqual if they had a concern about examination grades (41 per cent and 44 per cent respectively). Around a third said that they would contact the defunct QCDA (27 per cent and 37 per cent), indicating the continued confusion (particularly among students) about that organisation. The Government and MPs continue to be the least likely to be contacted of the sources tested, each at around a fifth.

⁴¹ This question was not asked of the general public.

Figure 47: Organisations most likely to be contacted in instances where there are concerns about the fairness of the examination grades



Effective base: 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Perceptions of other academic qualifications

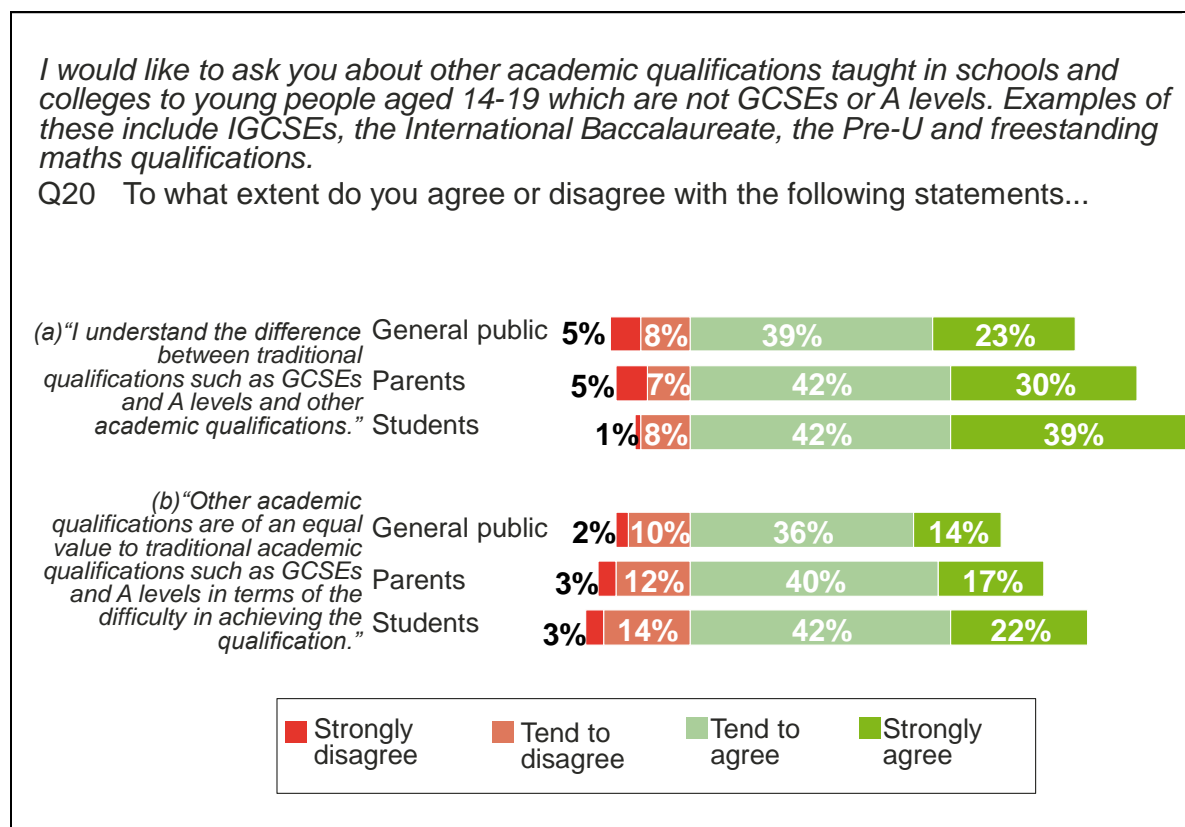
The general public, students and parents were asked whether they understood the difference between other academic qualifications and traditional qualifications and their perceptions of whether these qualifications were of an equal value to traditional qualifications.

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

When asked about their understanding of the difference between traditional qualifications and other academic qualifications, respondents were first briefed as follows: *“I would like to ask you about other 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, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths qualifications”*. After this briefing, 62 per cent of the general public said that they understood the difference, with just 13 per cent disagreeing (Figure 48). Just under three-quarters of parents (72 per cent) and over three-quarters of students (81 per cent) said they understood the difference.

Similarly, a clear majority of those who expressed a view agreed that other academic qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications. Overall, 50 per cent of the general public perceived this to be the case (just 13 per cent disagreed), 57 per cent of parents and 64 per cent of students.

Figure 48. General publics’ students’ and parents’ understanding of other qualifications



Note 1: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of teachers and headteachers who either “neither agreed nor disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”.

Note 2: These questions were asked in a different way in 2011 and the comparisons are therefore not charted.

Effective base: 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

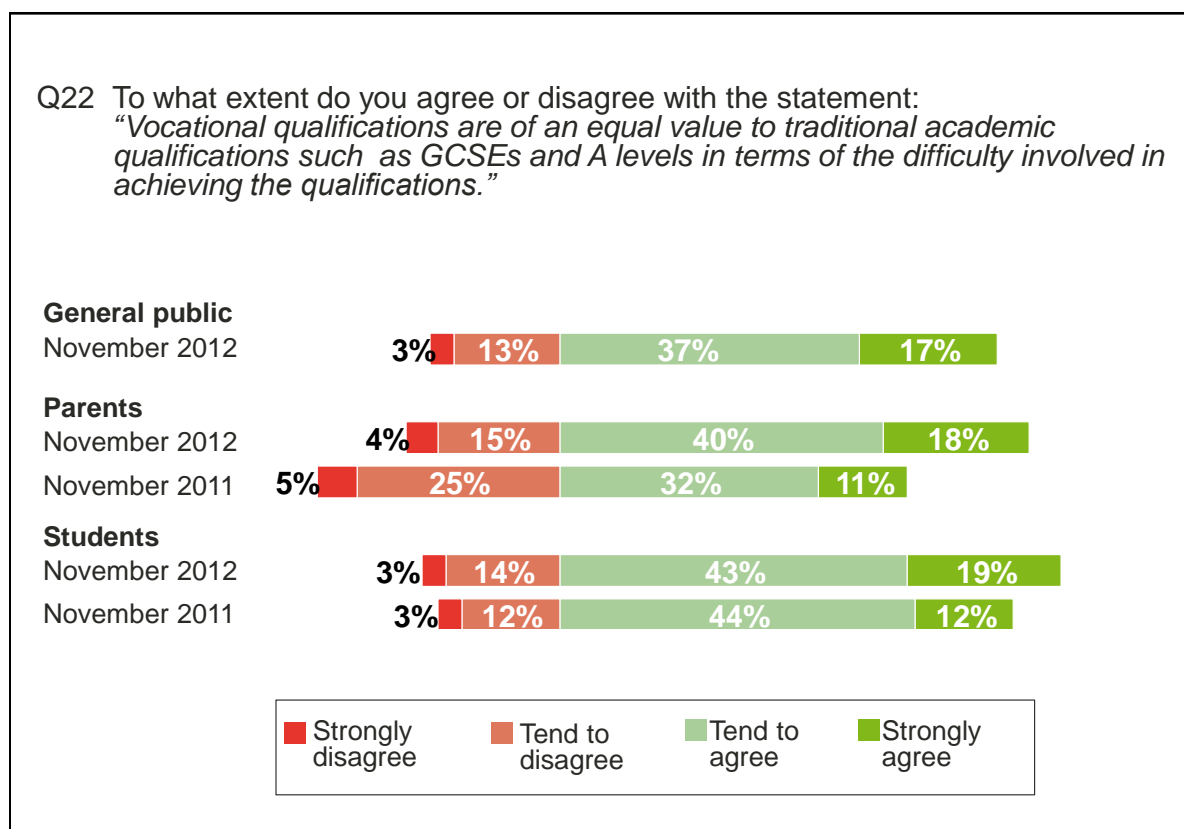
Perceptions of vocational and mixed qualifications

Four distinct perceptions about vocational and mixed qualifications were explored.

First, we asked whether respondents perceive vocational qualifications to have the same value as traditional qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels. Over half of the general public believed that vocational qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications (54 per cent), with only 16 per cent disagreeing (Figure 49).⁴² Around three in five parents (58 per cent) and students (61 per cent) believed this, both increasing from 2011 (by fifteen and six percentage points respectively). The public was more likely to perceive vocational qualifications as being on equal terms with traditional qualifications than teachers, of whom just 38 per cent judged this to be the case (Figure 23, page 45).

⁴² This question was not asked of the general public in 2011, just of parents and students.

Figure 49. Perceived value of vocational qualifications



Note 1: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who “neither agreed or disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”.

Note 2: In 2011, the statement read: “Vocational qualifications are of an equal status to traditional academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in terms of the difficulty and level of skill required to achieve the qualification”. The question was not asked of the general public in 2011.

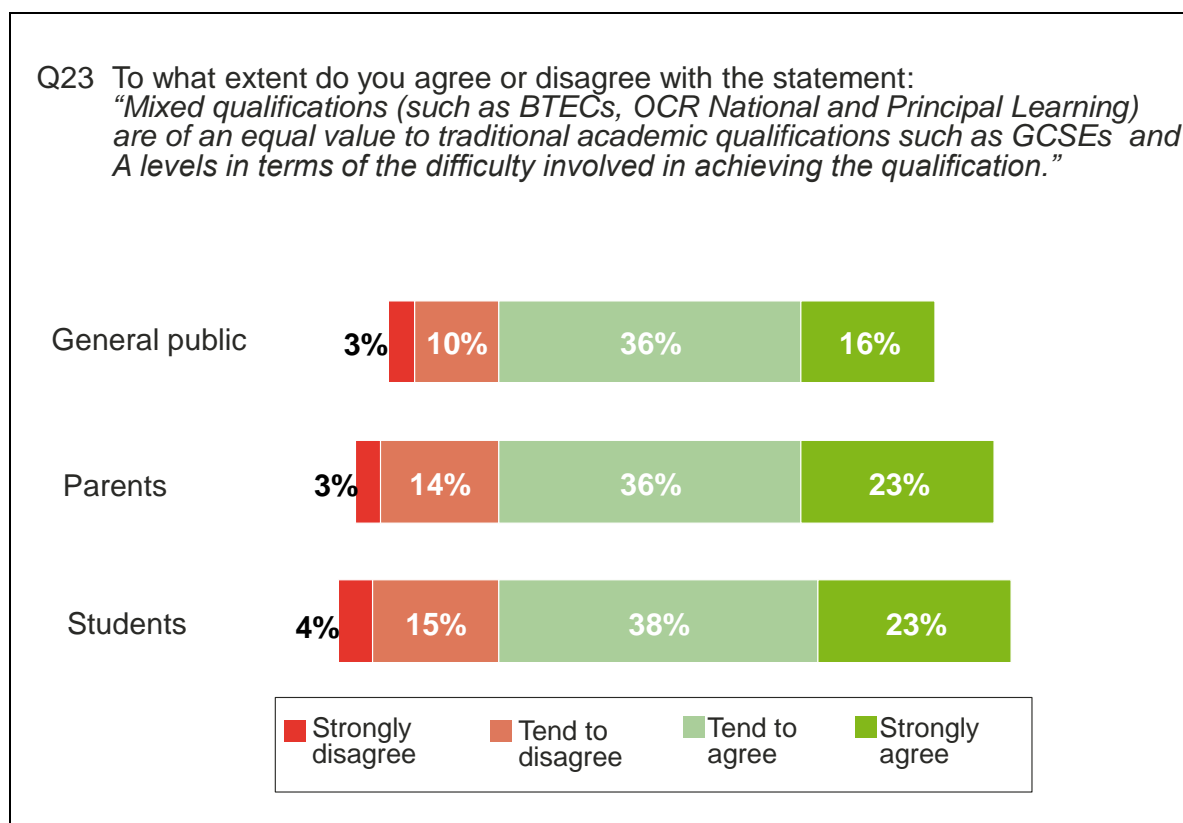
Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Effective base (2011) (Q19a): 229 students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs; and 330 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels or GCSEs, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011)

Second, we asked about perceived differences between traditional and mixed qualifications. An almost identical pattern emerged as when comparing with traditional qualifications: over half of the general public believed that mixed

qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications (52 per cent), with only 13 per cent disagreeing (Figure 50).⁴³ Parents and students are again more likely to believe this (59 per cent and 62 per cent respectively). Again, the public was more likely to judge that mixed qualifications are of an equal value to traditional academic qualifications than teachers, of whom just 37 per cent considered this to be the case (Figure 24, page 46).

Figure 50. Perceptions of mixed qualifications



Note 1: This question was not asked in 2011.

Note 2: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who “neither agreed or disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”.

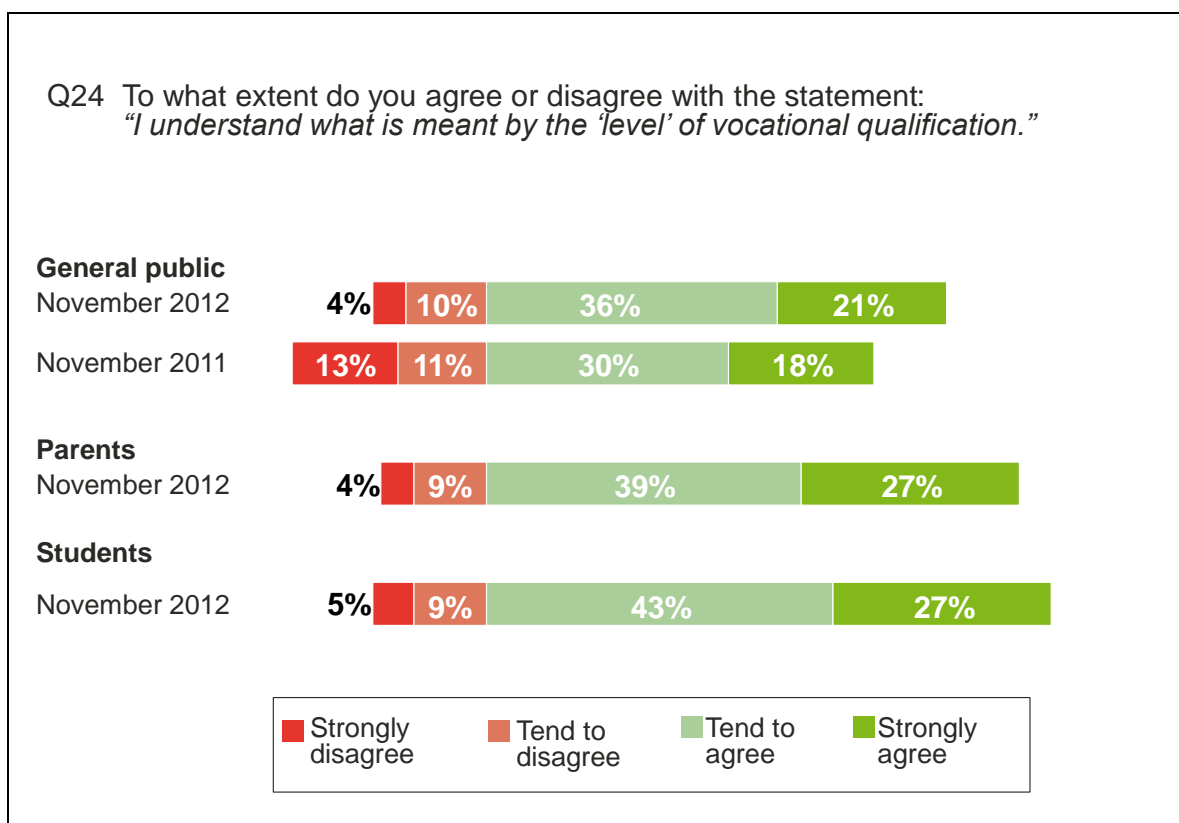
Effective base : 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

⁴³ This question was not asked in 2011.

Third, we explored respondents’ understanding of what “level” of vocational qualifications mean. Over half of the public understood what is meant by the “level” of vocational qualifications (57 per cent, compared with just 14 per cent who did not claim to understand it) an increase from 48 per cent in 2011 (Figure 51). The term was understood by two-thirds of parents and students (67 per cent and 70 per cent respectively).⁴⁴

Overall, the term was understood more by those who feel that other academic, vocational and mixed qualifications are of equal value to traditional academic qualifications. For example, 77 per cent of those who feel other vocational qualifications are of equal value to traditional academic qualifications (Question 22) understood what is meant by the “level” of vocational qualifications, compared with 58 per cent of those who do not feel that to be the case.

Figure 51. Understanding the ‘level’ of vocational qualifications



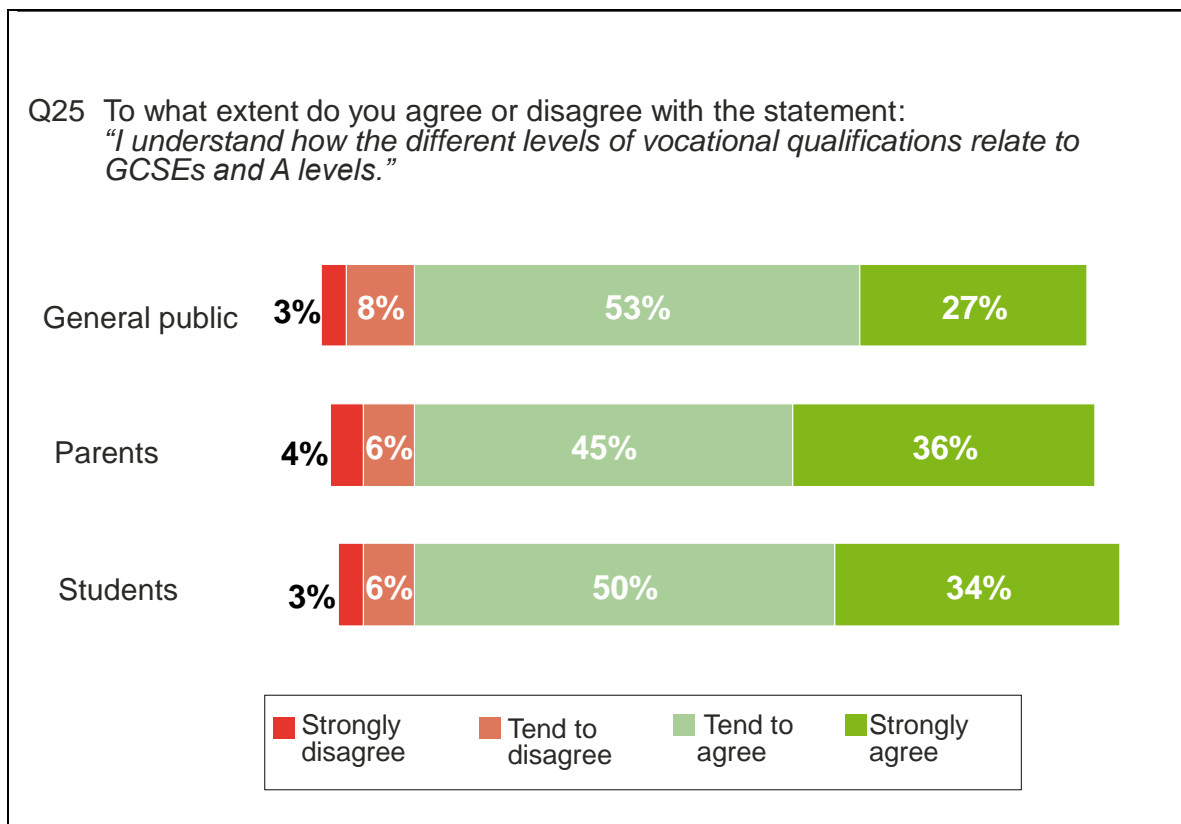
Note: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who “neither agreed or disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”.

⁴⁴ There are no comparable figures for parents and students available for 2011 as the bases that year were too low.

Effective base (2012): 2,563 members of the general public; 221 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 367 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013). Effective base (2011) (Q20a): 1,393 members of the general public, in England, for Ofqual (Nov-Dec 2011). Bases for parents and students were too small for analysis.

Finally, respondents who agreed that they understood what was meant by ‘level’ of vocational qualification were then asked whether they understood how the different levels of vocational qualifications relate to traditional qualifications such as A levels and GCSEs. Over three-quarters of the public, parents and students reported that they understood this: 80 per cent, 81 per cent and 84 per cent respectively (Figure 52).

Figure 52. Perceived relationship between the levels of vocational qualifications and traditional academic qualifications



Note 1: This question was not asked in 2011.

Note 2: The difference between the total shown and 100 is made up of people who “neither agreed or disagreed” with the statements or “did not know”.

Effective base : 1,444 members of the general public who agree that they know what is meant by the “level” of vocational qualifications (Q24); 152 students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications; and 242 parents of students taking or intending to take A levels, GCSEs or other academic qualifications, in England, for Ofqual (Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Conclusions

Findings from this research provide insights into a range of issues which have been widely debated over the past year.

Confidence in A levels remains high

While there has been much discussion in recent years about the quality and future of the A level qualification and the way that it is delivered, this research revealed considerable confidence in A levels, both among teaching professionals and the general public, parents and students. Confidence has in fact been increasing among teachers since the start of this annual research programme ten years ago. In this wave headteachers and teachers reported being overwhelmingly confident in the A level system. The public was more likely than teachers to report an *increase* in their confidence, and students were particularly positive about the system. There was a very strong feeling from teachers and headteachers and the general public, parents and learners alike about the value and importance of the A level qualification.

Although universities still rely on A levels as the primary form of assessment for entry, there has been widespread concern about the effectiveness of the system as a means of helping universities choose the right candidates. However, findings showed that headteachers and teachers overwhelmingly valued the A* grade as being useful for universities to identify top students, as did clear majorities of the public, especially parents and students.

Headteachers and teachers report less confidence in GCSEs

A different picture emerges with perceptions of the GCSE system, where confidence has historically always been lower than in the A level system. A large majority of headteachers and teachers reported having less confidence in the GCSE system than they had the previous year, particularly English teachers. This almost certainly reflects the impact of the 2012 GCSE grading controversy. *All* headteachers and teachers were aware of the 2012 English GCSE grading controversy and it had a significant impact on their confidence in GCSE examinations. Four in five headteachers and two-thirds of teachers reported that their confidence in GCSE examinations had been affected by at least a “fair amount”.

While most parents and students had heard of the GCSE controversy, its impact, though still significant, seems to be less than on teachers. Two-fifths of students and parents who had heard of the controversy, reported that their confidence in the system had been affected by at least “a fair amount”. Indeed the reduced confidence reported by most headteachers and teachers was not translated to the public. Most

parents and students who expressed a view said they felt more confident about the GCSE system than they did a few years ago.

Understanding of other academic qualifications is improving

While alternative qualifications for 14-19 year olds appear increasingly to play a role in the education system, the previous wave of this research programme (November 2011) found that the majority of the general public, parents and students did not feel that they understood the difference between traditional qualifications (A levels and GCSEs) and other academic qualifications. This has changed. Two-thirds of the public understood the difference in our most recent wave and around three-quarters of parents and students. The great majority of headteachers and teachers (91 per cent and 81 per cent) said that they understood the difference.

The general public seem to be more positive that vocational and mixed qualifications have equal status with traditional qualifications than school staff

The findings of our wave 10 (November 2011) research supported the need for increased rigour in aspects of the vocational qualification system as the majority of A level and GCSE teachers did not consider vocational qualifications to be of an equal status to traditional academic qualifications (in terms of difficulty and level of skill required to achieve the qualification). The findings in the 2012 survey show that while headteachers are more positive that other academic qualifications have equal status than teachers, views are similar between these two groups about the status of vocational and mixed qualifications. The general public, parents and students are, however, more positive than school staff that vocational and mixed qualifications are of equal value to traditional qualifications.

Attitudes to qualifications are not always consistent

We often find that people have seemingly contradictory views about certain topics, which underlines the complexity of public attitudes towards qualifications. For example, headteachers' and teachers' confidence in A levels is high, but more said they feel less confident than a year ago than said they feel more confident. However, this does not mean that their confidence in the A level system is actually declining. The same pattern emerged from our wave 10 research (November 2011) when three times as many A level teachers said they were less confident that the previous year. Yet confidence held up in 2012. Rather, it is a common perceptual characteristic to feel more pessimistic about the current state of affairs. In order to measure confidence in qualifications it will be important to track findings in this research over future years on a consistent basis.

The research also shows that people are willing to change their attitudes to qualifications based on their experience. Thus it appears that there is an increasing

acceptance of non-traditional academic, as well as vocational and mixed qualifications. We cannot be sure about this because of methodological changes since the last survey, but future studies will be able to track whether this is indeed the case.

Recognition of Ofqual appears to be increasing

Awareness and knowledge of Ofqual has steadily increased since it was set up in 2008 and in our 2012 research, almost half of teachers, and three-quarters of headteachers, knew at least a fair amount about Ofqual's role without being prompted. All headteachers and teachers were aware of Ofqual's role once reminded about it. In the year or two after Ofqual was set up in 2008, many teachers were unwilling to express a view about Ofqual's effectiveness. In 2012, however, the a third of headteachers and half of teachers judged that Ofqual is effective at regulating the exam system. Over half of headteachers and three quarters of teachers trust Ofqual as a source of information about examinations although they trust other teachers, professional organisations and awarding organisations more.

Familiarity with Ofqual among the general public overall remained low, just one in ten claiming to know at least a little about the regulator, although there was a significant increase in awareness of Ofqual, once reminded about its role. Ofqual is the public's second most-trusted institution for information about the exam system, after awarding organisations; although they would tend to look for people they know (such as other parents or students).

It will be of interest to Ofqual that headteachers and teachers who did not trust Ofqual as a source of information about examinations identified two main reasons: the summer 2012 GCSE English grading controversy and a concern that Ofqual is not independent of the government. Considering the amount of space given by the media to qualifications, examinations and matters relating to Ofqual over the last year, it is of some concern that the media is not more trusted to provide information about the exam system. A tenth of headteachers and less than a quarter of the public trusted the media as a source of information about examinations.

Appendix A: Technical details

All 11 waves of the research have been carried out using Ipsos MORI's general public face-to-face omnibus survey, together with a telephone survey of teachers. This year, a survey of headteachers was also conducted by telephone. The methodology used for each audience is summarised below.

Survey of teachers and headteachers

A telephone survey was conducted among:

- 600 teachers of GCSE and/or AS/A2 level and/or other academic qualifications, for 14-19 year olds selected from a sample of schools and colleges across England; and
- 203 headteachers selected from a sample of schools and colleges across England.

The fieldwork was conducted between 13th November 2012 and 12th December 2012.

Sampling

This year, the sampling approach for the survey of teachers and headteachers was modified to enhance the representativeness of the sample. In previous waves of the research, the sample issued for fieldwork had been a sample of schools (so there would only ever be one teacher per school selected for interview). However this year, whilst 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, this would entail selecting multiple teachers working at the larger establishments. This meant that, for the first time, the sampling design for the teacher survey took account of the number of teachers working in each school/establishment. The implications of this for the sampling approach are discussed in more detail below.

The sampling approach was designed to capture the views of a representative sample of headteachers and teachers of A levels, GCSEs and other academic qualifications in England. For the purpose of this survey, "other academic qualifications" were defined as iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths. The sample was representative by school type, school size, and geographical location.

To make sure that the survey was representative of establishments teaching qualifications for 14-19 year olds, only certain types of schools/colleges were eligible for the survey. Eligible types of schools and colleges matched the definition used in previous years of the survey, that is 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. For the purpose of sampling and fieldwork monitoring, the following categories of establishment were included:

- maintained secondary schools for 11-16 year olds;
- maintained academies for 11-16 year olds;
- maintained secondary schools for 11-18 year olds ;
- maintained academies for 11-18 year olds;
- selective schools;
- further education colleges; and
- independent schools.

Drawing the sample

The headteacher sample and teacher sample were treated as two separate samples. This meant that if a school was selected for the headteacher sample it would be excluded from the teacher sample. This approach aimed to reduce burden on schools participating in the research.

Both samples were drawn from the same sampling frame of schools using EduBase⁴⁵ data taking the following steps.

- The sampling frame was split into seven sampling frames by type of establishment: maintained secondary 11-16; maintained academy 11-16; maintained secondary 11-18; maintained academy 11-18; selective; FE colleges; and independent schools.
- Within each establishment type, the samples were stratified by Government Office Region and size of establishment (defined by the number of pupils as a proxy if teacher figures or, in the case of FE establishments, the number of

⁴⁵ EduBase is a register of all educational establishments in England and Wales, maintained by the Department for Education.

contracts were unavailable). This stratification helps to generate an interview sample that is representative on these variables.

- A '1 in N' selection of schools and colleges was made for the headteacher sample (this approach was taken assuming one headteacher per school).
- Once the headteacher sample was drawn, from the remaining establishments on the frame, a '1 in N' selection of teachers was made. Rather than being a sample of eligible schools and colleges like the headteacher sample, the teacher sample was a sample of teachers at eligible schools and colleges in England. The teacher sample was therefore drawn taking into account teacher numbers per establishment (to represent the fact that there is more than one teacher per school and that different schools have different numbers of teachers). For all schools⁴⁶ in the sample the number of pupils per school⁴⁷ was used as a proxy for teacher numbers. This approach assumed that within each establishment type the ratio of pupils to teachers was similar but, as samples were drawn separately by school type, it allowed for different pupil/teacher ratios across school types.⁴⁸ It was therefore still possible to see approximate relative teacher numbers (based on pupil number proxy) for each school within each type of establishment.
- For FE institutions, Learning and Skills Improvement Service data on the number of contracts per FE institution was used as a proxy for teacher numbers. This is not a perfect indicator of the number of teachers or employees, as teachers may hold more than one contract. However, in the absence of data relating to the number of pupils per FE institution, the number of contracts was used as an indicator of the relative size of the teaching workforce per institution for sampling purposes.
- Once a list of all teachers was created using the different methods for the schools and FE institutions as described above, this was then linked to their school number from EduBase and a random '1 in N' sample of teachers was

⁴⁶ Maintained schools (including academies), independent schools and selective schools.

⁴⁷ This information is available on Edubase.

⁴⁸ The Schools Workforce Census contains teacher numbers for maintained schools, selective schools and academies and the ideal would have been to use this as the sampling frame for maintained schools, selective schools and academies, enhanced with school contact information from EduBase. However, there were inconsistencies in this data when compared to EduBase which made it impossible to merge the two datasets and as a result pupil data from EduBase was used instead as the contact details on this dataset were required. There is no data on teacher numbers for independent schools and so the pupil – teacher ratio proxy would always have been required for this establishment type. Therefore, taking this approach for all schools was beneficial as it allowed for a consistent approach across all school types.

drawn, and then the teachers selected were linked back to the school list on the sample frame. As Edubase only includes school-level details the 'teacher' list was based on the number of teachers, rather than actual teacher details for each individual teacher. For instance, the teacher list ran from 1 to 14,329 for maintained academies teaching 11-16s. If the first academy on the school list had 10 teaching staff, then numbers 1-10 on the teacher list would belong to school 1. If we sampled any teacher with the number 1-10, we would select school 1 for the sample. During fieldwork, a teacher at this school would be randomly selected to complete the survey. In some cases, two or three teachers were sampled at the same school, reflecting establishments with a higher number of teaching staff (based on the number of pupils for schools and number of contracts for FE colleges). This was because where it was assumed that schools had a greater number of teachers, teachers that school would appear in the sample more times and therefore there was a greater likelihood that more than one teacher at the school would be selected when the sample was drawn).

Overall, we drew a sample of 879 schools for the headteacher sample. From the remaining 2,414 schools we drew a sample of 3,012 teachers for the teacher survey (598 schools had two or three teacher selections rather than one, as they had a larger number of teachers).

We stratified the sample disproportionately by type of establishment to make sure that the overall sample represented a range of establishments and that we interviewed a sufficient number of teachers and headteachers in different types of schools and colleges for analysis. Quotas were set on the number of interviews we aimed to achieve with teachers and headteachers working in each type of establishment. The benefit of this in achieving higher numbers for analysis in some establishment types compared to a proportionate sample⁴⁹ is highlighted in figures A1 and A2 below.

⁴⁹ For example, where the proportion of each establishment type in the sample would reflect the actual number of each type of establishment or the number of teachers in each type of establishment.

Figure A1: Sample and quota design for the teacher survey

Type of establishment	Number of establishments	Teacher population per type of establishment	Proportion of teacher population per type of establishment	Number of interviews (per sample) if proportionate sample design had been used	Actual interview targets /quotas	Proportion of interviews per establishment with actual sample and quota design
Maintained academy 11-16 ⁵⁰	250	14,329	4%	25	50	8%
Maintained academy 11-18	693	59,947	17%	103	100	17%
Maintained secondary 11-16	1,024	53,961	15%	92	100	17%
Maintained secondary 11-18	1,118	90,826	26%	155	110	18%
Selective schools (any academy/maintained, any 11-18)	153	10,854	3%	19	40	7%
FE colleges ⁵¹	344	89,497 ⁵²	26%	153	100	17%
Independent (11-18)	1,147 ⁵³	31,115 ⁵⁴	9%	53	100	17%
Total	4,729	350,529	100%	600	600	100%

Source: Ipsos MORI

⁵⁰ Figures are based on November 2012 School Workforce Statistics available on the DfE website; although pupil numbers from Edubase were used as a proxy for teacher numbers in actual sample selection as discussed earlier in this section.

⁵¹ There are 336 FE institutions in the data used from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, plus an additional 8 post-16 institutions listed on Edubase. These figures are slightly lower than the 357 recorded in the 2009-10 Further Education College Workforce Data for England, although they are more up to date. http://www.lluklegacy.org/cms/uploads/SIR_Report_200910_FINAL.pdf, p.4

⁵² Taken from 2010-11 data provided by Learning and Skills Improvement Service. We subtracted from the total number of FE teachers those based in subjects that are exclusively vocational (construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy, land-based provision, retailing, customer service and transportation) as teachers delivering exclusively vocational qualifications were not eligible for the survey.

⁵³ This is the number of independent schools listed in Edubase that have pupils aged 11+. Edubase lists 1,895 independent schools in total, while the 2012 Independent School Census lists 1,221 independent schools in England in total, but does not cover all types of independent school (e.g. does not cover international schools).

⁵⁴ This figure is estimated from a combination of the number of independent schools with pupils aged 11+ (from Edubase), and the average pupil -teacher ratio in independent schools as noted in the Independent Schools Census (9.4).

Figure A2: Sample and quota design for the headteacher survey

Type of establishment	Population profile: total number of headteachers	Population of headteacher population by type of establishment	Number of interviews (per sample) if proportionate sample design had been used	Actual interview targets /quotas	Proportion of interviews per establishment with actual sample and quota design
Maintained academy 11-16	250	5%	11	15	8%
Maintained academy 11-18	693	15%	29	30	15%
Maintained secondary 11-16	1,024	22%	43	30	15%
Maintained secondary 11-18	1,118	24%	47	35	18%
Selective schools (any academy/ maintained, any 11-18)	153	3%	7	20	10%
FE colleges	344	7%	15	35	18%
Independents (11-18)	1,147	24%	49	35	18%
Total	4,729	100%	200	200	100%

Source: Ipsos MORI

Fieldwork

Letters were sent to headteachers of all schools selected on the sample in week commencing 6th November 2012 explaining the study and highlighting that an interviewer would contact the school to speak either to the headteacher or a member of the teaching staff (depending on whether the school was allocated to the teacher or headteacher sample) from 13th November.

With the exception of a quota on establishment type, no other quotas were set for fieldwork. For the teacher sample, any teacher who taught any of the eligible qualifications (A levels, GCSEs, iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths) at the school was interviewed; we did not have a list of named individuals prior to calling. If schools had been selected on the sample for more than one teacher interview, at the end of the initial interview respondents were asked to suggest a colleague who may also take part. Alternatively, the school was contacted again and we requested to speak to another teacher. For the headteacher sample, in a minority of instances where the headteacher was unavailable to participate in the survey an interview was conducted with the acting or deputy headteacher instead.

In total 802 interviews were achieved from 3,891 issued sample. Given that a quota survey was used the response or co-operation rate was lower than if a random probability survey was conducted as the main purpose was to fill quota cells rather than fully work each piece of sample.

Figure A3: Sample breakdown

	Overall sample (3,891)	Headteachers sample (879)	Teachers sample (3,012)
Completes	802	202	600
Hard appointments	69	31	35
Soft appointments	1,169	329	840
Sample not dialled	599	6	593
No answer/busy	675	106	569
Unusable ⁵⁵	577	202	375

Source: Ipsos MORI

⁵⁵ Refused, incorrect telephone number, stopped interview

The table below shows the profile of the achieved interviews

Figure A4: Achieved sample characteristics (numbers based on unweighted sample)

Characteristic	Teachers (N)	Headteachers (N)
School type		
Maintained academy 11-16	50	15
Maintained academy 11-18	100	30
Maintained secondary 11-16	100	30
Maintained secondary 11-18	110	35
Selective schools (any academy/ maintained, any 11-18)	40	20
FE colleges	100	35
Independents (11-18)	100	38
Teaching experience (time teaching)		
NQT/first year of teaching	4	-
1-3 years	31	2
4-15 years	299	25
16 years and over	266	176
Qualifications taught		
GCSEs	506	94
A level	402	75
Other academic qualifications for 14-19 year olds, specifically iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths	81	23
Vocational qualifications	71	23
Mixed qualifications that include both an academic and vocational component	53	18
Do not teach	-	53
Subjects taught		
English	115	-
Maths	128	-
Science	100	-
EBacc humanities	85	-
Non-EBacc humanities	92	-
Languages	42	-
Art, music or drama	57	-
Design technology	23	-
IT	34	-

Source: Ipsos MORI

Weighting

In previous waves, the data was weighted only by Government Office Region. In this wave of the survey, we used a different weighting approach by applying:

- *Design weights* to remove the sampling bias which results from use of varying selection probabilities (that is, the fact we deliberately over-sampled some groups, such as teachers in independent schools, compared with the population as highlighted in figures A1 and A2);
- *Non-response weights* which have been calculated in an effort to reduce the level of non-response bias caused by varying response rates among sub-groups of the population.

Design weights

The design weights have been applied to adjust for unequal probabilities of school selection. As highlighted in figures A1 and A2, the probability of school selection at the sampling stage varied by establishment type – for example, independent and selective schools have a greater chance of selection because we deliberately over-sampled them and set disproportionate quotas in order to allow a greater number of interviews to be achieved in these schools for analysis.

Figures A5 and A6 below show the design weights that were applied to the final teacher and headteacher data taking into account selection probability and therefore correcting for the distribution of teachers across the different establishment types in the sample not reflecting the known profile.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ As this looks across establishment types rather than within establishment types, we have used School Workforce Data on actual teacher numbers where it exists (for maintained and selective schools). This is preferable at this point as we do not know how the ratio of pupils to teachers differs across different establishment types and therefore this is less accurate when looking at the whole sample. We can use School Workforce Data at this point as weighting does not require merging this dataset onto the EduBase dataset (whereas sample selection did as we needed the contact details from EduBase); therefore, the lack of correlation between the two is not an issue.

Figures A5 and A6 illustrates the design weights for the teacher and headteacher surveys.

Figure A5: Design weights for the teacher survey

Type of establishment	Population profile: total number of teachers	Population profile: % of teachers	Proportionate sample	Sample targets used	Weight	Weighted sample profile	Weighted sample profile
Maintained academy 11-16	14,329	4%	25	50	0.50	25	4%
Maintained academy 11-18	59,947	17%	103	100	1.03	103	17%
Maintained secondary 11-16	53,961	15%	92	100	0.92	92	15%
Maintained secondary 11-18	90,826	26%	155	110	1.41	155	26%
Selective schools (any academy/ maintained, any 11-18)	10,854	3%	19	40	0.48	19	3%
FE colleges	89,497	26%	153	100	1.53	153	26%
Independents (11-18)	31,115	9%	53	100	0.53	53	9%
Total	350,529	100%	600	600		600	100%

Source: Ipsos MORI

Figure A6: Design weights for the headteacher survey

Type of establishment	Population profile: total number of headteachers	Population profile: % of headteachers	Proportionate sample	Sample targets used	Weight	Weighted sample profile	Weighted sample profile
Maintained academy 11-16	250	5%	11	15	0.70	11	5%
Maintained academy 11-18	693	15%	29	30	0.98	29	15%
Maintained secondary 11-16	1,024	22%	43	30	1.44	43	22%
Maintained secondary 11-18	1,118	24%	47	35	1.35	47	24%
Selective schools (any academy/ maintained, any 11-18)	153	3%	7	20	0.43	7	3%
FE colleges	344	7%	15	35	0.42	15	7%
Independents (11-18)	1,147	24%	49	35	1.39	49	24%
Total	4,729	100	200	200		200	100%

Source: Ipsos MORI

Non response weights

Non-response weights can help to minimise bias caused by differential response rates among sub-groups of a sample. For example, teachers with certain characteristics or from different types of schools may be more likely to participate in the survey. If teachers' and Ofqual's views of qualifications differ depending on these characteristics, then this skew in our sample could bias the survey results.

We reviewed the profile of the achieved sample against the population profile for some key variables: the size of school, the proportion of pupils eligible to receive free school meals, and region. We found that, within each establishment type, the distribution of large, medium and small schools was slightly different than the population profile.⁵⁷ We therefore created non-response weights for 'size within establishment type' and applied these to the data. The profiles for the achieved sample were closely aligned with the population profile for free school meal and region and no non-response weights were applied for these variables.

Final weights

The final weights were calculated as the product of the design and non-response weights. The tables below shows the final sample profile following design and non-response weighting for the teacher and headteacher surveys.

⁵⁷ We had also intended to check whether weights could be applied for the proportion of a school's pupils achieving A*-C grades at GCSE (and similar metrics for FE establishments), but we found that these data could not be matched to a large proportion of establishments and therefore could not use these data for weighting.

Figure A7: Profile of achieved interviews – teachers

Characteristic	Unweighted %	Weighted %
School type		
Maintained academy 11-16	8	6
Maintained academy 11-18	17	21
Maintained secondary 11-16	17	13
Maintained secondary 11-18	18	22
Selective schools (any academy/ maintained, any 11-18)	7	3
FE colleges	17	26
Independents (11-18)	17	9
Teaching experience (time teaching)		
NQT/first year of teaching	1	1
1-3 years	5	6
4-15 years	50	50
16 years and over	44	44
Qualifications taught		
GCSEs	84	81
A level	67	70
Other academic qualifications for 14-19 year olds, specifically iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths	14	11
Vocational qualifications	12	13
Mixed qualifications that include both an academic and vocational component	9	9
Do not teach	-	-
Subjects taught		
English	19	19
Maths	21	21
Science	19	17
EBacc humanities	15	14
Non-EBacc humanities	13	15
Languages	8	7
Art, music or drama	9	9
Design technology	4	4
IT	6	6

Source: Ipsos MORI

Figure A8: Profile of achieved interviews – headteachers

Characteristic	Unweighted %	Weighted %
School type		
Maintained academy 11-16	15	5
Maintained academy 11-18	17	15
Maintained secondary 11-16	7	22
Maintained secondary 11-18	15	24
Selective schools (any academy/ maintained, any 11-18)	10	3
FE colleges	17	7
Independents (11-18)	19	24
Teaching experience (time teaching)		
NQT/first year of teaching	-	-
1-3 years	1	1
4-15 years	12	11
16 years and over	87	87
Qualifications taught		
GCSEs	46	52
AS level	37	35
Other academic qualifications for 14- 19 year olds, specifically iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths	11	10
Vocational qualifications	11	11
Mixed qualifications that include both an academic and vocational component	9	10
Do not teach	26	24

Source: Ipsos MORI

Effective bases

Weighting data, whilst important in making sure that results are representative, can also introduce a “design effect” and results in an “effective base” that differs from the unweighted and weighted sample size. It is possible to recalculate the *effective* base by taking this distorting effect into account. The effective base is the figure which is used for statistical analysis and shown in the figures and tables throughout the report. The overall effective base is 498 teachers and 170 headteachers.

Comparability between waves

No data from previous teacher surveys has been included in this report as the data are not comparable because of the different sampling approaches taken in 2011 and 2012. For instance, as discussed in the sampling section, in 2012 a sample of *teachers* was selected whereas in 2011 a sample of *schools* was selected, with only one teacher per school able to participate.

In addition, the teaching population has changed between the two surveys. Firstly, in 2012 the eligibility criteria was extended to allow teachers of other academic qualifications to participate in the survey regardless of whether they also teach A levels or GCSEs, whereas in 2011 teachers had to teach A levels or GCSEs to be eligible.

Furthermore, in 2011 quotas were set on the numbers of achieved interviews by teaching experience and qualification taught. These did not necessarily represent the actual teacher population in England eligible for the survey (as we did not have the necessary profile information to for this) but they were set in order to make sure a sufficient number of respondents for subgroup analysis. In 2012, given the absence of profile information to enable us to set quotas (or create design weights) to make the final data representative by qualification taught, subject and teaching experience, these characteristics were allowed to fall out naturally in the survey data. For this reason, we cannot make reliable comparisons with previous years’ data in this report.

General public, parents and students

A survey of the following groups was carried out between 16th November 2012 and 17th January 2013.

- **3,213 members of the general public**
- **254 students**, defined as those aged 15 to 19 who are studying/ have studied/ will study A levels and/or GCSEs and/or another academic qualification. The other academic qualifications included here are: iGCSEs, the IB, the PRE-U and Freestanding Maths. Those studying vocational qualifications, including mixed qualifications such as OCR Nationals and BTECs, were not eligible to take part unless they are also studying one of the eligible academic qualifications. This is different from past waves of the survey when students were only eligible if they studied GCSEs and/or A levels.
- **416 parents/carers** of students who are taking or have just taken A levels, GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications (as outlined above). In this case, this will be parents/carers who are still legally responsible for the students in question, that is predominantly those aged 15 to 19 to match the student sample. As with students, this represents a change from the approach taken in previous waves where only parents of students taking A levels and/or GCSEs were eligible.

As in previous waves, our face-to-face omnibus survey (known as 'Capibus') was used to interview all three audiences, with 'booster' waves used for parents and students.

Sampling approach

The Capibus omnibus survey uses a two-stage random-location design to select respondents to make sure the design is as robust as possible. In summary, the sampling method is as follows:

- (i) Stage one – selection of primary sampling units: The first stage is to define primary sampling units which will be fixed for at least one year. Up to 180 local authorities are randomly selected from our stratified groupings with probability of selection proportional to size. This makes sure that the most populated areas in England are always represented in the sample.
- (ii) Stage two – selection of secondary sampling units: the second stage of sampling happens every week on Capibus. At this stage, one output area (OA) is randomly selected from each local authority and this then becomes the secondary sampling unit.

An output area (OA) is a very small area made up of between 60 to 100 addresses. Although the OAs are chosen each week completely at random and interviewer quotas are set on sex, age, working status and social grade – a common approach for making sure a sample is nationally representative – Ipsos MORI uses the MOSAIC geo-demographic system in the selection process. Adopting this approach helps to eliminate possible bias in the sample caused by interviewing people all from the same background. Using MOSAIC allows OAs to be selected with differing profiles such that we can be sure a broad cross-section of the public is interviewed; since clearly even people of the same age and working status may have a different viewpoint depending on their background.

Defining the target populations and weighting data

In order to make sure that data is representative of the general public, weighting was applied. Initially, for each wave, the data collected was weighted to make sure that it represented the population of England. Capibus uses a ‘rim weighting’ system which weights to National Readership Survey⁵⁸ defined profiles for age, social grade, region, tenure, ethnicity and working status - within sex. For waves where we only surveyed parents and students, the data was weighted as a general public dataset. (Although the Ofqual section in these waves was only asked of students and parents, the Capibus survey was in fact conducted amongst the general population but those who did not count as ‘students’ or ‘parents’ were screened out of the section).

Once weighting was applied, design weights were required to account for the fact that several boost waves were run with students and parents in addition to waves that included a representative sample of the general public. This meant that, when the data for each wave was combined there was a higher proportion of students and parents than would be found in a representative sample of the general public. Whilst useful for increasing the numbers in these groups for analysis, this had to be addressed through weighting to allow reporting at a ‘general public’ level where results were representative of the general public in England. In order to do this, assumptions had to be made about the actual penetration of those counted as eligible students or parents in England. As the Ipsos MORI Capibus surveys a representative population in England, we used the figures we derived from screener questions as an estimate of the size and profile of the target population. By comparing responses to screener questions⁵⁹ to establish whether a respondent

⁵⁸ The National Readership Survey (NRS) is a large scale continuous survey of 36,000+ adults a year. The NRS uses population estimates provided by the Joint Industry Committee for Population Standards (<http://www.jicpops.co.uk/>).

⁵⁹ The approach of basing population assumptions on the Capibus screener questions was taken for students as well as parents as although population statistics are available from DfE they are less suitable for this purpose as they relate to the full student population rather than the survey target group (15-19 year olds) and the data included overlap in students taking GCSEs and A levels.

counted as a 'student' or 'parent' using the survey eligibility definition,⁶⁰ in weighted data⁶¹ from a wave of the Capibus where all the general public were interviewed (e.g. the first wave used for the survey), it was possible to see the extent to which the responses of parents and students needed to be down-weighted to make the total sample representative by accounting for the disproportionate incidence of parents and students in the final data as a result of the booster interviews.

The design weights are shown in Figure A9.

⁶⁰ The screeners asked the type of qualification studied by 15-19 year olds (either currently, or in the recent past and future) and if a respondent was a parent, whether their child studies the qualifications of interest.

⁶¹ Data had already been weighted for non-response by Government Office Region, social grade, age, work status, ethnicity and housing tenure.

Figure A9: Design weights for the Capibus survey

Audience type	Numbers in a represent-ative wave (once non-response weighting applied)	% in a representative wave	Numbers included as result of boosts overall	% of total sample without design weighting	Numbers that should be included overall if proportionate to population	Weight	Weighted sample profile
General public	2,000	100	3,213	100	3,213	1	3,213
Students	60	3	254	8	96	0.4	96
Parents	140	7	416	13	225	0.5	224

Source: Ipsos MORI

As a result of weighting the effective bases for the capibus survey were 2,563 general public, 149 students and 367 parents.

The table below shows the profile of the achieved interviews.

Figure A10: Achieved interviews breakdown

Sample profile – Omnibus General Public	Unweighted		Proportion after weighting
	N	%	%
Total	3,213	100	100
Gender			
Male	1,627	51	49
Female	1,586	49	51
Age			
15-24	665	21	16
25-34	442	14	16
35-44	456	14	16
45-54	530	16	17
55-64	447	14	14
65+	673	21	21
Social class			
AB	617	19	27
C1	1,107	34	27
C2	741	23	22
DE	748	23	24
Work status			
Working (full or part-time)	1,439	45	55
Not working	1,774	55	45
Region			
North East	165	5	5
North West	506	16	13
Yorks & Humber	368	11	10
East Midlands	258	8	9
West Midlands	266	8	10
South West	294	9	10
Eastern	300	9	11
London	501	16	15
South East	555	17	16

Source: Ipsos MORI

Sample profile – Omnibus parents	Unweighted		Proportion after weighting
	N	%	%
Total	416	100	100
Parental status			
Parent with child who intends to take/currently studying/recently taken A levels	201	48	49
Parent with child who intends to take/currently studying/recently taken GCSEs	353	85	87
Parent with child who intends to take/currently studying/recently taken an other academic qualification	26	6	7
Sample profile – Omnibus 15-19 year olds			
Total	254	100	100
Student status			
Student who intends to take/currently studying/recently taken A levels	173	68	68
Student who intends to take/currently studying/recently taken GCSEs	170	67	68
Student who intends to take/currently studying/recently taken an other academic qualification	18	7	8

Source: Ipsos MORI

Comparability with previous waves

Capibus data from 2011 has been re-weighted taking the same weighting approach as that used in 2012. This means that, when analysed at a 'general public' level where question wording has not changed, data is comparable across waves. We have therefore discussed differences in findings at a general public level where they are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level (further details of statistical significance can be found below).

As discussed above, in 2012 the eligibility criteria was extended to allow students studying/parents of student studying other academic qualifications to participate in the survey regardless of whether they also study A levels or GCSEs, whereas in 2011 they or their children needed to have studied or be studying A levels or GCSEs to be eligible. This means that the 'student' and 'parent' samples are not directly comparable between years. However, there was a low proportion of respondents in 2012 who only study/ whose children only study other academic qualifications and do not also study A levels and GCSEs. The impact on comparability across waves of extending eligibility in 2012 to include those who only study/whose children only study other academic qualifications is therefore small. In 2011 the survey included more questions asked only of A level students or parents or only of GCSE students or parents, whereas this year more questions have been asked of all respondents in England. In order to compare like-for-like at these questions when comparisons are made to 2011 data we have analysed both datasets looking at the audience of whom the question was asked in 2011 (if this is a more specific audience than in 2012).

Statistical reliability

Because a sample, rather than the entire population, was interviewed the percentage results are subject to sampling tolerances – which vary with the size of the sample and the percentage figure concerned. For example, for a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 2,563 (where results are then weighted) respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary more than two percentage points, plus or minus, from the result that would have been obtained from a census of the entire population (using the same procedures). However, these assume that a perfect random sample has been achieved, (although an analysis of design factors between quota and random samples reveals that quota samples offer a good design). The tolerances that may apply in this report are given in the table below.

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

used for statistical analysis. The tolerances presented below are based on the effective sample size.

Figure A11: Statistical reliability

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels (at the 95% confidence level)			
Size of sample or sub-group on which survey result is based	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	+/-	+/-	+/-
221 (i.e. all students)	4	6	7
367 (i.e. all parents)	3	5	5
498 (i.e. all teachers)	3	4	4
170 (i.e. all headteachers)	4	7	8
2,563 (i.e. respondents in England)	1	2	2

Source: Ipsos MORI

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

As discussed above, for wave 11 comparisons were made between 2011 and 2012 data for the survey of the general public, parents and students, but not for teachers. The table below shows an approximate guide to the difference required between waves 10 and 11 of the research to show significant changes.

Figure A12: Statistical reliability when comparing wave 10 and wave 11

Differences required for significance at the 95% confidence level at or near these percentages					
Effective sample size			10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Wave 10 sample	Vs.	Wave 11 sample			
All students (229)		All students (221)	6	8	9
All parents (330)		All parents (367)	5	7	8
All general public respondents (1,609)		All general public respondents (2,563)	2	3	3

Source: Ipsos MORI

Appendix B: Questionnaires

Teachers' and headteachers questionnaire

IF HEAD TEACHER SAMPLE

CALL SCHOOL SWITCHBOARD AND ASK TO SPEAK TO THE HEAD TEACHER/COLLEGE PRINCIPAL. IF THE HEADTEACHER IS NOT AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW WE CAN SPEAK TO THE ACTING HEADTEACHER OR DEPUTY HEADTEACHER. ONCE THROUGH TO RESPONDENT, SAY:

Good morning/afternoon. My name is ... and I'm calling on behalf of Ipsos MORI, the social research company. We are carrying out a survey for Ofqual on headteachers' perceptions of GCSEs, A levels and other qualifications. A letter was recently sent to you with information about the research, and to let you know when we would be calling. The survey will take around 15 minutes of your time.

Before we start, I would like to assure you that your answers will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, and used for research purposes only. It will not be possible to identify any particular individual or school/college in the results.

IF 'TEACHER' SAMPLE

CALL SCHOOL SWITCHBOARD AND ASK TO SPEAK TO A MEMBER OF STAFF WHO TEACHES GCSE, AS LEVEL, A2 LEVEL OR OTHER ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS FOR 14-19 YEAR OLDS, SPECIFICALLY iGCSEs, THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE, THE PRE-U AND FREESTANDING MATHS. ONCE THROUGH TO RESPONDENT, SAY:

Good morning/afternoon. My name is ... and I'm calling on behalf of Ipsos MORI, the social research company. We are carrying out a survey for Ofqual on teachers' perceptions of GCSEs, A levels and other qualifications. A letter was recently sent to the headteacher of your school or college with information about the research, and to let them know when we would be calling. The survey will take around 15 minutes of your time.

IF SCHOOL MARKED AS MORE THAN ONE TEACHER TO INTERVIEW [XX] ON THE SAMPLE ADD IN THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTION:

INTERVIEWER: WE ARE AIMING TO INTERVIEW MORE THAN ONE TEACHER AT THIS SCHOOL. IF TEACHER MENTIONS THAT AN INTERVIEW HAS ALREADY BEEN CONDUCTED BY THE SCHOOL PLEASE EXPLAIN THAT IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT THE SURVEY PROPERLY REPRESENTS A WIDE RANGE OF TEACHERS, WE MAY BE CARRYING OUT MORE THAN ONE INTERVIEW PER TEACHER DEPENDING ON THE SIZE OF THE SCHOOL.

IF THEY MENTION THAT AN INTERVIEW HAS ALREADY BEEN CONDUCTED CHECK THAT THE MEMBER OF STAFF YOU ARE ABOUT TO INTERVIEW HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN INTERVIEWED. IF THEY HAVE ATTEMPT TO ARRANGE AN INTERVIEW WITH ANOTHER TEACHER

Before we start, I would like to assure you that your answers will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, and used for research purposes only. It will not be possible to identify any particular individual or school/college in the results.

ASK ALL

Q1. Which of the following qualifications do you personally currently teach?
READ OUT. MULTICODE OK

GCSEs	CONTINUE
AS level	
A2 Level	
Other academic qualifications for 14-19 year olds, specifically iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Maths	
Vocational qualifications	CLOSE UNLESS ALSO TEACH CODES 1-4
Mixed qualifications that include both an academic and vocational component	CLOSE UNLESS ALSO TEACH CODES 1-4
None of these	IF TEACHER SAMPLE CLOSE. IF HEADTEACHER SAMPLE CONTINUE

Do not teach	IF TEACHER SAMPLE CLOSE. IF HEADTEACHER SAMPLE CONTINUE
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ASK ALL

Q2. What is your current, most senior level of responsibility? READ OUT CATEGORIES IF NECESSARY SINGLE CODE ONLY

Headteacher/Principal	IF TEACHER SAMPLE CLOSE. IF HEADTEACHER SAMPLE CONTINUE
Acting Headteacher/ Principal or Deputy Headteacher/Principal	
Classroom or subject teacher/ lecturer	IF HEADTEACHER SAMPLE CLOSE. IF TEACHER SAMPLE CONTINUE
Course leader	
Curriculum co-ordinator	
Head of year	
Member of the senior management or leadership team	
Programme manager	
Subject manager	
Other (please specify)	

ASK ALL

Q3. How many years' teaching experience do you have? SINGLE CODE ONLY INTERVIEWER CODE INTO CATEGORY

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

ASK TEACHER SAMPLE

Q4. Which, if any, of the following categories of subjects do you teach? READ OUT AND RANDOMISE CODES 1-9. MULTICODE OK.

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT SAYS 'EBACC HUMANITIES' PLEASE CHECK THAT INCLUDES EITHER: HISTORY OR GEOGRAPHY. ALL OTHER HUMANITIES SHOULD BE CODED AS 'NON-EBACC HUMANITIES'

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

This survey is about your views of GCSEs, A levels and other qualifications taught in schools or colleges to 14-19 year olds, so please focus only on these qualifications as you answer the questions.

I would like to begin by asking you some questions about Ofqual.

ASK ALL

Q5. How much, if anything, do you know about Ofqual?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

Know a lot
Know a fair amount
Know just a little
Heard of but know nothing about
Never heard of

Q6. Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Their aim is to ensure 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?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

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

Don't know

Q7. In your opinion, how effective, if at all, is Ofqual at regulating the examinations system?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

Very effective

Fairly effective

Not very effective

Not at all effective

No opinion

Q8. In your opinion, how effective, if at all, is Ofqual at maintaining the standards of qualifications?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

Very effective

Fairly effective

Not very effective

Not at all effective

No opinion

ASK ALL WHO SAY NOT VERY/ NOT AT ALL EFFECTIVE AT Q8

Q9a. You said that you do not think that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications. Why do you say this?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT. PROBE FULLY

Changes to GCSE

Changes to A levels

Introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) certificate

A level results -students getting higher grades than they deserve

A level results - A level grades continuing to rise

GCSE results -students getting higher grades than they deserve
--

GCSE results - GCSE grades continuing to rise

Changes to performance tables

Moving floor targets (e.g. the level under which schools are considered to be underperforming)
Inconsistent marking
Inconsistent grading
Summer 2012 English GCSE issues
Other SPECIFY
Don't know
None of these

ASK ALL WHO SAY VERY/ FAIRLY EFFECTIVE AT Q8

Q9b. You said that you think that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications. Why do you say this?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT. PROBE FULLY

Previous experience of Ofqual
Things that I have heard about Ofqual / read in the media about Ofqual/ things other teachers have told me
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 around A levels
Measures taken by Ofqual to ensure that marking is consistent/reliable
Improving students' performance
Other SPECIFY
Don't know
None of these

ASK ALL

Q10. I am going to read out some groups of people that could provide you with information about how exams are marked and graded. For each one, please tell me how much, if at all, you would trust them as a source of information about exams: a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or not at all.

SINGLE CODE

READ OUT & ROTATE a) to g):

a) Teachers in your school or from other schools

b) The Department for Education (DfE)

c) Ofqual - the exams regulator

d) Exam boards/ awarding organisations

e) Local Authorities (LAs)

f) The media

g) Professional associations

A great deal
A fair amount
Not very much
Not at all
Don't know

ASK ALL WHO SAY NOT VERY MUCH/ NOT AT ALL AT Q11c

Q11. You said that you don't trust Ofqual as a source of information about exams, why is that? MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT

Ofqual is not independent of the government
Ofqual is too new an organisation to have my trust
Don't have much contact with/ receive information from Ofqual
Would go to the exam board first/ use other sources of information
Other (PLEASE WRITE IN)
Don't know

I'd now like you to think about the A level exam system in its broadest sense.

ASK ALL

Q12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

SINGLE CODE. READ OUT & ROTATE a&b:

a) “It is more important now than ever that students get a higher level educational qualification such as an A level”

b) “Overall, the A level is an important qualification for people to obtain for their future”

c) The A* grade at A level should help universities identify top students

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

ASK ALL

Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

SINGLE CODE ONLY FOR EACH READ OUT

“I have confidence in the A level system”

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

ASK ALL

Q14. Compared to last year, would you say that currently you have more confidence in the A level system, less confidence in the A level system or about the same level of confidence?

SINGLE CODE ONLY. REPEAT RESPONSES IF NECESSARY. IF RESPONDENT MENTIONS SLIGHTLY MORE CONFIDENCE, PROBE THEM WITH 'Is that more confidence or about the same?'

More
Less
About the same
Don't know

Q15. Do you have any concerns about the current A level examinations system or not? If yes, what are they? MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT.

Yes:

- 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
- Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
- Too much pressure/ stress on students
- Too much pressure/ stress on teachers
- Uncertainty over awarding of A* grade
- Other (PLEASE WRITE IN)

No concerns
Don't know

SINGLE CODE

ASK ALL

Q16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

SINGLE CODE ONLY FOR EACH READ OUT & DO NOT ROTATE

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE WHAT IS MEANT BY MARKING:
By marking we mean the process of giving a student credit for their right answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme.

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ABOUT WHAT IS MEANT BY GRADING, READ OUT: By grades we mean the overall performance categories (for instance A*, A, B, C, D) into which students are grouped.

- a) "I understand how A levels are marked".
- b) "I understand how A levels are graded".

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

ASK ALL

Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- a) 'I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of A level papers'
- b) 'The accuracy of marking of A level papers has decreased over the past two years'

SINGLE CODE ONLY FOR EACH READ OUT

ASK ALL

Q18. I would like you to think about the accuracy of A level grades. Which one of the following statements is closest to your view?

SINGLE CODE ONLY. READ OUT

SHOWCARD F (R)

All A level students get the right grade
--

At least three-quarters of A level students get the right grade, but not all
Between half and three quarters of A level students get the right grade
Less than half of A level students get the right grade
Less than a quarter of A level students get the right grade
Don't know

ASK ALL EXCEPT THOSE WHO SAY A (ALL STUDENTS GET THE RIGHT GRADE) AT Q18.

Q19. What factors, if any, do you think contribute to A level students not getting the grade they deserve?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT. PROBE FULLY

Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers or coursework
Inaccurate marking of examination papers
Exam papers poorly designed
Coursework 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 SPECIFY
Don't know
None of these

I'd now like you to think about GCSEs.

ASK ALL

Q20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

SINGLE CODE ONLY READ OUT SCALE AND STATEMENT

"I have confidence in the GCSE system"

Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree

Don't know

ASK ALL

Q21. Compared to last year, would you say that currently you have more confidence in the GCSE system, less confidence in the GCSE system or about the same level of confidence?

SINGLE CODE ONLY. REPEAT RESPONSES IF NECESSARY. IF RESPONDENT MENTIONS SLIGHTLY MORE CONFIDENCE, PROBE THEM WITH 'Is that more confidence or about the same?'

More

Less

About the same

Don't know

ASK ALL

Q22. Do you have any concerns about the current GCSE examinations system or not? If yes, what are they?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT READ OUT

Yes (TEACHERS ARE NOT PROMPTED WITH THIS LIST):

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
--

Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
--

Too much pressure/ stress on teachers

Too much pressure/ stress on students

Other (PLEASE WRITE IN)

No concerns

Don't know

ASK ALL

Q23. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

SINGLE CODE ONLY FOR EACH READ OUT & DO NOT ROTATE

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE WHAT IS MEANT BY MARKING:
By marking we mean the process of giving a student credit for their right answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme.

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ABOUT WHAT IS MEANT BY GRADING, READ OUT: By grades we mean the overall performance categories (for instance A*, A, B, C, D) into which students are grouped.

a) "I understand how GCSEs are marked"

b) "I understand how GCSEs are graded"

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

Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

a) 'I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers'

b) 'The accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers has decreased over the past two years'

SINGLE CODE ONLY FOR EACH READ OUT

Strongly agree
Tend to agree

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

ASK ALL

Q25. I would like you to think about the accuracy of GCSE grades. Which one of the following statements is closest to your view?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

All GCSE students get the right grade

At least three-quarters of GCSE students get the right grade, but not all

Between half and three quarters of GCSE students get the right grade

Less than half of GCSE students get the right grade

Less than a quarter of GCSE students get the right grade

Don't know

ASK ALL EXCEPT THOSE WHO SAY A (ALL STUDENTS GET THE RIGHT GRADE) AT Q25.

Q26. What factors, if any, do you think contribute to GCSE students not getting the grade they deserve?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT. PROBE FULLY

Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers or controlled assessment
Inaccurate marking of examination papers
Exam papers poorly designed
Coursework 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 SPECIFY

Don't know

None of these

ASK ALL

I would now like to ask you some further questions about qualifications

FIRSTLY, I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU ABOUT OTHER 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, THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE, THE PRE-U AND FREESTANDING MATHS QUALIFICATIONS.

Q27. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE

I understand the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels and other academic qualifications.

I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of the other academic qualifications taught in my school.

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.

Strongly agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Not read out: at Q27b. allow option for 'no other academic qualifications are taught at my school'

INTERVIEWER READ OUT

NOW THINKING ABOUT VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS WHICH ARE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS AND SIXTH FORM COLLEGES; BY 'VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS' WE MEAN QUALIFICATIONS THAT PREPARE STUDENTS FOR A SPECIFIC TYPE OF JOB.

Q28. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

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

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

THERE ARE OTHER QUALIFICATIONS SUCH AS BTECS, OCR NATIONALS AND PRINCIPAL LEARNING, WHICH ARE MIXED IN THEIR APPROACH TO LEARNING. THESE COMBINE PARTS OF BOTH ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS.

Q29. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

Mixed qualifications (such as BTECs, OCR National and Principal Learning) 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

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

Q30. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE

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

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

ASK THOSE WHO STRONG AGREE/TEND TO AGREE WITH Q30

Q31. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE

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

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

Q32. The 2012 GCSE results were published in August. Ofqual carried out an initial inquiry after receiving complaints from some schools and colleges about their students not getting the GCSE English grades they expected. This initial inquiry found the exams students took in January were graded generously and exams taken in June were properly graded. Before today, had you heard about this incident around GCSE results? SINGLE CODE

SINGLE CODE ONLY

Yes
No

IF YES AT Q32

Q33. To what extent, if at all, has your confidence in GCSE exams been affected by this incident? SINGLE CODE ONLY. READ OUT

A lot
A fair amount
A little
Not at all
Don't know

Q34. And finally, would you be willing to be re-contacted by Ipsos MORI to take part in future research on the A level or GCSE system or other qualifications? SINGLE CODE ONLY

Yes
No

If yes, check contact details and ask for school landline, mobile and e-mail address.

IF SCHOOL WHERE AIMING TO SPEAK TO MULTIPLE TEACHERS (FIELD XX ON THE SAMPLE) COLLECT TEACHER NAME. THE NAME IS NOT TO BE READ OUT WHEN THE SCHOOL IS NEXT CONTACTED BUT USED FOR THE INTERVIEWER TO CHECK THAT THEY ARE NOT INTERVIEWING A TEACHER WHO HAS ALREADY TAKEN PART.

THANK AND CLOSE

General public's, parents' and students' questionnaire

ASK ALL PARENTS IN ENGLAND

Q1. Can I just check, do you have a child ...? READ OUT EACH STATEMENT. MULTICODE OK EXCEPT 'NO' AND 'DON'T KNOW'. IF YES, INTERVIEWER RECORD WHICH QUALIFICATION(S)

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...

who is currently in their first or second year of studying any of the following qualifications...

who has taken any of the following qualifications in the last two years...

SHOWCARD A (R)

A level
GCSE
iGCSE
The International Baccalaureate / IBacc /IB
The PRE-U
Freestanding Maths

Yes; A level
Yes; GCSE
Yes; iGCSE
Yes: The International Baccalaureate/IBacc/IB
Yes; the PRE-U
Yes; Freestanding Maths

No
Don't know

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND AGED 15-19

Q2. Which of the following, if any, applies to you? READ OUT EACH STATEMENT AND CODE WHICH QUALIFICATIONS. MULTICODE OK EXCEPT 'NO' AND 'DON'T KNOW'. IF YES, INTERVIEWER RECORD WHICH QUALIFICATION(S)

I am currently in Key Stage 4 at school (years 10-11) and have decided to take at least one of the following qualifications when I am older

b) I am currently studying for at least one of the following qualifications

c) I completed at least one of the following qualifications within the last two years

SHOWCARD A (R)

A level
GCSE
iGCSE
The International Baccalaureate / IBacc /IB
The PRE-U
Freestanding Maths

Yes; A level
Yes; GCSE
Yes; iGCSE
Yes; The International Baccalaureate/IBacc/IB
Yes; the PRE-U
Yes; Freestanding Maths

No
Don't know

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q3. How much, if anything, do you know about Ofqual?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

SHOWCARD B (R)

Know a lot
Know a fair amount
Know just a little
Heard of but know nothing about
Never heard of

Q4. Ofqual is the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Their aim is to ensure 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?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

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

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q5. In your opinion, how effective, if at all, is Ofqual at maintaining the standards of qualifications?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

SHOWCARD C (R)

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

ASK ALL WHO SAY NOT VERY/ NOT AT ALL EFFECTIVE AT Q5

Q6a. You said that you do not think that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications. Why do you say this?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT. PROBE FULLY

Changes to GCSE
Changes to A levels
Introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) certificate
A level results -students getting higher grades than they deserve
A level results - A level grades continuing to rise
GCSE results -students getting higher grades than they deserve
GCSE results - GCSE grades continuing to rise
Changes to performance tables
Moving floor targets (e.g. the level under which schools are considered to be underperforming)
Inconsistent marking
Inconsistent grading
Summer 2012 English GCSE issues
Other SPECIFY
Don't know
None of these

ASK ALL WHO SAY VERY OR FAIRLY EFFECTIVE AT Q5

Q6b. You said that you think that Ofqual is effective at maintaining the standards of qualifications. Why do you say this?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT. PROBE FULLY

Previous experience of Ofqual

Things that I have heard about Ofqual / read in the media about Ofqual/ [IF YES AT ANY Q2] things my teacher has told me about Ofqual [IF YES AT ANY Q1] my child's school has told me

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 around A levels
Measures taken by Ofqual to ensure that marking is consistent/reliable
Improving students' performance

Other SPECIFY
Don't know
None of these

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q7. I am going to read out some groups of people that could provide you with information about how exams are marked and graded. For each one, please tell me how much, if at all, you would trust them as a source of information about exams? SINGLE CODE

READ OUT & ROTATE a)-h):

- a) Ofqual – the exams regulator
- b) Exam boards /Awarding Organisations
- c) The media
- d) The government
- e) Your own children (IF CODES YES AT Q1A-Q1C, UNLESS CODES AT ANY Q2A-Q2C)
- f) Your parents/guardians (IF CODES YES AT Q2A-Q2C, REGARDLESS OF ANSWER AT Q1A-Q1C)
- g) Other parents/guardians
- h) Other students (IF CODES YES AT Q2A-Q2C, REGARDLESS OF ANSWER AT Q1A-Q1C)

SHOWCARD D (R):

A great deal
A fair amount
Not very much
Not at all
Don't know

ASK ALL PARENTS AND/OR ALL STUDENTS. PARENTS = IF CODES YES AT Q1A-Q1C, UNLESS CODES AT ANY Q2A-Q2C. STUDENTS = IF CODES YES AT ANY Q2A-C

Q8. If you had a concern about the examination grades [you (TEXT SUB IF PARENT AT Q1A-C EXCEPT IF YES AT Q2A-C: your son/daughter)] had received, how likely or unlikely would you be to contact each of the following? SINGLE CODE FOR EACH

READ OUT & ROTATE a)-f):

- a) Schools/teachers
- b) The government
- c) Your MP
- d) Ofqual – the exams regulator
- e) QCDA – the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (formerly QCA)
- f) Exam boards/awarding organisations

SHOWCARD E (R):

Very likely
Fairly likely
Not very likely
Not at all likely
Don't know

I would like you to think about A levels, a qualification that is usually taken by young people in a sixth form or at college

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? SINGLE CODE FOR EACH STATEMENT

READ OUT & ROTATE a)-c):

a) “It is more important now than ever that students get a higher level educational qualification such as an A level”

b) “Overall, the A level is an important qualification for people to obtain for their future”

c) “I have more confidence in the A level system now than I did have a few years ago.”

SHOWCARD F (R):

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

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q10. Do you have any concerns about the current A level examinations system or not? If yes, what are they? MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT.

Yes:

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

Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers

Too much pressure/ stress on students

Too much pressure/ stress on teachers

Uncertainty over awarding of A* grade

Other (PLEASE WRITE IN)

No concerns

SINGLE CODE

Don't know

ASK ALL PARENTS OR STUDENTS

PARENTS = IF CODES YES AT Q1A-Q1C, UNLESS CODES AT ANY Q2A-Q2C.
STUDENTS = IF CODES YES AT ANY Q2A-C EVERYONE ELSE SHOULD GO TO Q12

The next question is about A level marking. After that we will ask you some questions about grading of the A level qualification.

Q11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

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

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE WHAT IS MEANT BY MARKING:
By marking we mean the process of giving a student credit for their right answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme.

SHOWCARD F (R)

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

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q12. I would like you to think about the accuracy of A level grades. Which one of the following statements is closest to your view?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ABOUT WHAT IS MEANT BY GRADING, READ OUT: By grades we mean the overall performance categories (for instance A*, A, B, C, D) into which students are grouped.

SHOWCARD G (R)

All A level students get the right grade
--

At least three-quarters of A level students get the right grade, but not all
Between half and three quarters of A level students get the right grade
Less than half of A level students get the right grade
Less than a quarter of A level students get the right grade
Don't know

ASK ALL EXCEPT THOSE WHO SAY A (ALL STUDENTS GET THE RIGHT GRADE) AT Q12.

Q13. What factors, if any, do you think contribute to A level students not getting the grade they deserve?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT. PROBE FULLY

Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers or coursework
Inaccurate marking of examination papers
Exam papers poorly designed
Coursework 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 SPECIFY
Don't know
None of these

ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

The A* grade at A level should help universities identify top students

SHOWCARD F (R):

Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

Now I would like you to think about GCSEs, a qualification that is usually taken by young people in their last two years of secondary school

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
SINGLE CODE.

READ OUT. ROTATE a&b.

“I have more confidence in the GCSE system now than I did have a few years ago.”

“Overall, the GCSE is an important qualification for people to obtain for their future”

SHOWCARD F (R):

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

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q16. Do you have any concerns about the current GCSE examinations system or not? If yes, what are they?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT READ OUT

Yes (RESPONDENTS ARE NOT PROMPTED WITH THIS LIST):

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
 Ability of the system to cope with large numbers of papers
 Too much pressure/ stress on students
 Too much pressure/ stress on teachers
 Other (PLEASE WRITE IN)

No concerns SINGLE CODE
 Don't know

ASK ALL PARENTS AND STUDENTS. PARENTS = IF CODES YES AT Q1A-Q1C, UNLESS CODES AT ANY Q2A-Q2C. STUDENTS = IF CODES YES AT ANY Q2A-C EVERYONE ELSE SHOULD GO TO Q18.

The next question is about GCSE marking. After that we will ask you some questions about grading of the GCSE qualification.

Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
 READ OUT AND ROTATE. SINGLE CODE ONLY FOR EACH

I have confidence in the accuracy of the marking of GCSE papers

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE WHAT IS MEANT BY MARKING:
 By marking we mean the process of giving a student credit for their right answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme.

SHOWCARD F (R)

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

ASK ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q18. I would like you to think about the accuracy of GCSE grades. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

SINGLE CODE ONLY

INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT IS UNSURE ABOUT WHAT IS MEANT BY GRADING, READ OUT: By grades we mean the overall performance categories (for instance A*, A, B, C, D) into which students are grouped.

SHOWCARD H (R)

All GCSE students get the right grade
At least three-quarters of GCSE students get the right grade, but not all
Between half and three quarters of GCSE students get the right grade
Less than half of GCSE students get the right grade
Less than a quarter of GCSE students get the right grade
Don't know

ASK ALL EXCEPT THOSE WHO SAY THAT ALL STUDENTS GET THE RIGHT GRADE AT Q18

Q19. What factors, if any, do you think contribute to GCSE students not getting the grade they deserve?

MULTICODE OK. DO NOT PROMPT. PROBE FULLY

Students performing better or worse than expected in examination papers or controlled assessment
Inaccurate marking of examination papers
Exam papers poorly designed
Coursework 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 SPECIFY
Don't know
None of these

ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

INTERVIEWER READ OUT:

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME FURTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT QUALIFICATIONS.

FIRSTLY, I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU ABOUT OTHER 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, THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE, THE PRE-U AND FREESTANDING MATHS QUALIFICATIONS.

ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.
READ OUT. SINGLE CODE. DO NOT ROTATE

I understand the difference between traditional qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels and other academic qualifications.

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.

SHOWCARD F (R)

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

ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

INTERVIEWER READ OUT

NOW THINKING ABOUT VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS WHICH ARE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS AND SIXTH FORM COLLEGES; BY 'VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS' WE MEAN QUALIFICATIONS THAT PREPARE STUDENTS FOR A SPECIFIC TYPE OF JOB

ALL 15-19 YEAR OLDS IN ENGLAND

Q21. Are you currently studying or have you recently studied (within the last two years) any vocational qualification at a school or sixth form college?

SINGLE CODE

Yes
No
Don't know

ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement.

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

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

SHOWCARD F (R)

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

THERE ARE OTHER QUALIFICATIONS SUCH AS BTECS, OCR NATIONALS AND PRINCIPAL LEARNING, WHICH ARE MIXED IN THEIR APPROACH TO LEARNING. THESE COMBINE PARTS OF BOTH ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS.

Q23. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement.

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

Mixed qualifications (such as BTECs, OCR National and Principal Learning) 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

SHOWCARD F (R)

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

ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE

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

SHOWCARD F (R)

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

ASK THOSE WHO STRONGLY AGREE/TEND TO AGREE WITH Q24

Q25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE

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

SHOWCARD F (R)

Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

ALL RESPONDENTS IN ENGLAND

Q26. The 2012 GCSE results were published in August. Ofqual carried out an initial inquiry after receiving complaints from some schools and colleges about their students not getting the GCSE English grades they expected. This initial inquiry found the exams students took in January were graded generously and exams taken in June were properly graded. Before today, had you heard about this incident around GCSE results? SINGLE CODE

Yes

No

IF YES AT Q26

Q27. To what extent, if at all, has your confidence in GCSE exams been affected by this incident? READ OUT. SINGLE CODE

A lot

A fair amount

A little

Not at all

Don't know

THANK AND CLOSE

Appendix C: 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.

Effective base: When sampling is undertaken, it creates a 'design effect' which 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 mathematics a year early. For the purposes of this survey, these are included as part of the grouping termed other academic qualifications.

General Qualifications: GCSE, and GCE AS and A level.

Grading: The process of grouping students into overall performance categories (for instance A*, A, B, C, D, E, F, G).

IB: International Baccalaureate – A qualification studied by 16 – 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.

iGCSE: International General Certificate of Secondary Education – An unregulated qualification studied by 14 – 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 vocational qualification: Qualifications are assigned a level from Entry then Level 1 through to Level 8. Further details may be found at:

<http://ofqual.gov.uk/popups/explaining-qualifications/>

- Entry: this includes entry level certificates and foundation learning tier pathways

- Level 1: includes GCSEs graded D - G, the Foundation Diploma, and level 1 NVQs, Key Skills, Functional Skills and BTEC awards
- Level 2: includes GCSEs graded A* - 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 Diploma and level 3 NVQs, Key Skills and BTEC awards
- Level 4: includes Certificates of higher education, level 4 NVQs and Key Skills and the BTEC Professional Awards
- Level 5: includes Diplomas of higher education, Foundation degrees, Higher National Diplomas 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 Masters degrees, postgraduate certificates and BTEC Advanced Professional Awards
- Level 8: includes Doctorate

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 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 iGCSEs, the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and Freestanding Mathematics. They are defined as qualifications which are taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14-19, which are not GCSEs or A levels and include academic content.

Pre-U: The Pre-U is a qualification for 16 – 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 standalone 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 which has been divided into sub-groups, for example regions or type of institution. These sub-groups may consist of equal numbers across all or some might be higher or lower than others.

Vocational Qualifications: Qualifications which are designed to allow learners to learn in a way that suits them, and give learners the skills that employers are looking for.

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.

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This publication is also available on our website at www.ofqual.gov.uk

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation	
Spring Place	2nd Floor
Coventry Business Park	Glendinning House
Herald Avenue	6 Murray Street
Coventry CV5 6UB	Belfast BT1 6DN

Telephone 0300 303 3344

Textphone 0300 303 3345

Helpline 0300 303 3346

Alison Fisher – Head of Statistics

Angela Deavall – Interim Head of Research