

Variability in A level results for individual schools and colleges: 2013 to 2016



August 2016

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Key Points

- In general, the level of variation in individual school and college results at A* and A is similar to previous years.
- When we look at 18-year-old students only (those in Year 13) the year-on-year variation is either similar or slightly less.
- Even when there are no changes to qualifications, individual schools and colleges will see variation in their year-on-year results: this is normal.

A level results for England, Wales and Northern Ireland have been relatively stable in recent years, with only very small changes in the overall percentages of students achieving A* or A grades. But we know that individual schools and colleges may see variation in the proportion of their students achieving particular grades from one year to the next. This can be due to many different factors, including differences in the mix of the students entered for particular A levels, different teaching approaches, changes in teaching staff or teaching time, and changes to qualifications.

We have analysed the year-on-year variation in the proportion of students achieving grades A* or A in five large-entry A levels in the summer results published by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)¹. The evidence suggests that the variation at school/college level has this year been very similar to that seen in previous years. We have looked only at schools and colleges with 20 or more students in a subject in both years: smaller cohorts are likely to be less stable and to show more variation.

We have plotted the variation seen in each of several hundred schools and colleges. Each bar represents the number of schools and colleges with a particular level of variation, measured in intervals of 2.5 percentage points. For example, the two bars either side of zero represent schools that had either a drop of up to 2.5 percentage points or an increase of up to 2.5 percentage points. The higher the peaks in the middle, the greater the stability from one year to the next.² We have also looked at the variation for students in Year 13 only (18-year old students). The average variation for Year 13 students is either less than or very similar to the variation for all students.³

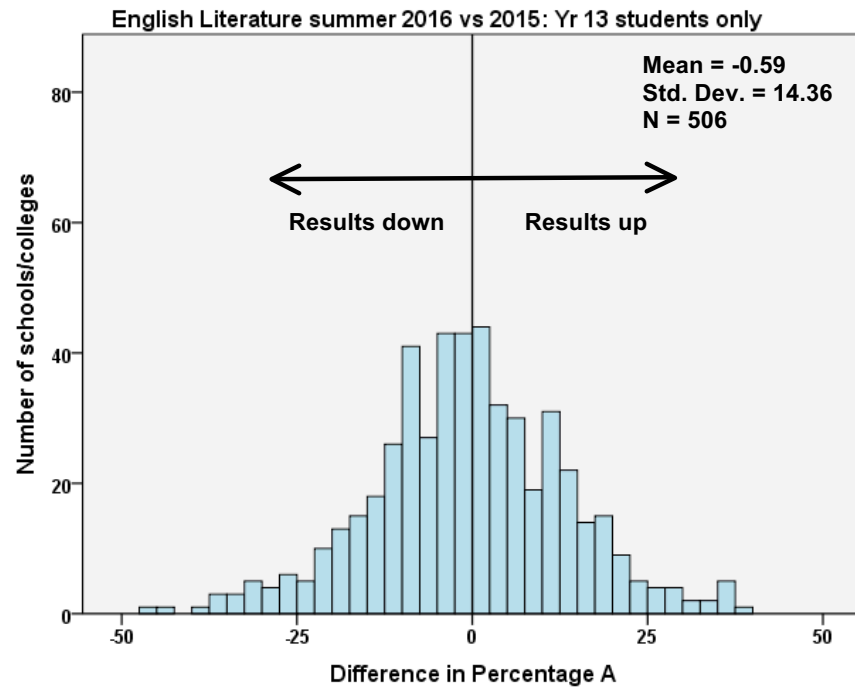
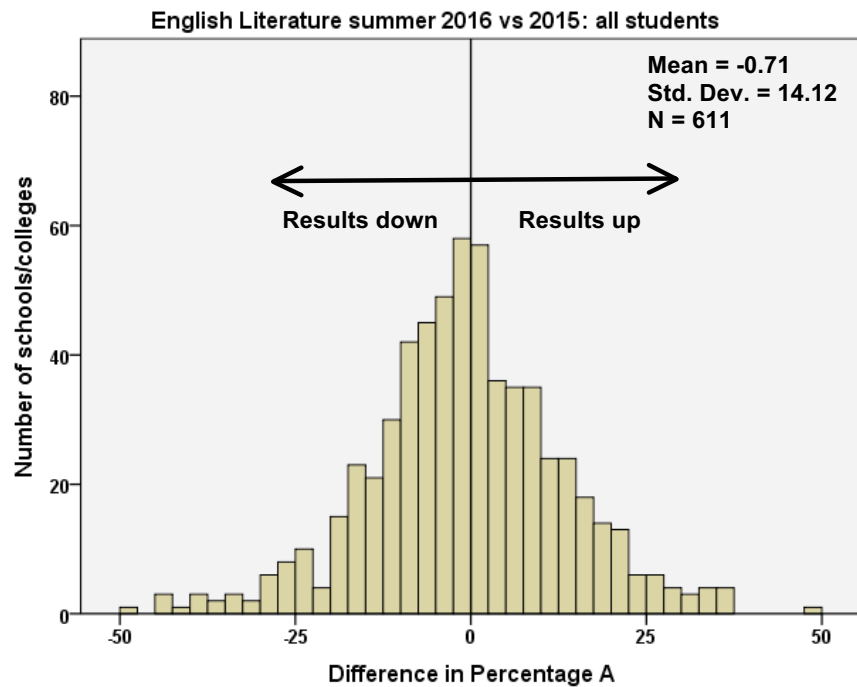
¹ See <http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels>

² Note that, although the same scales are used for the y axis on each of the graphs within a subject, the scales do vary between subjects

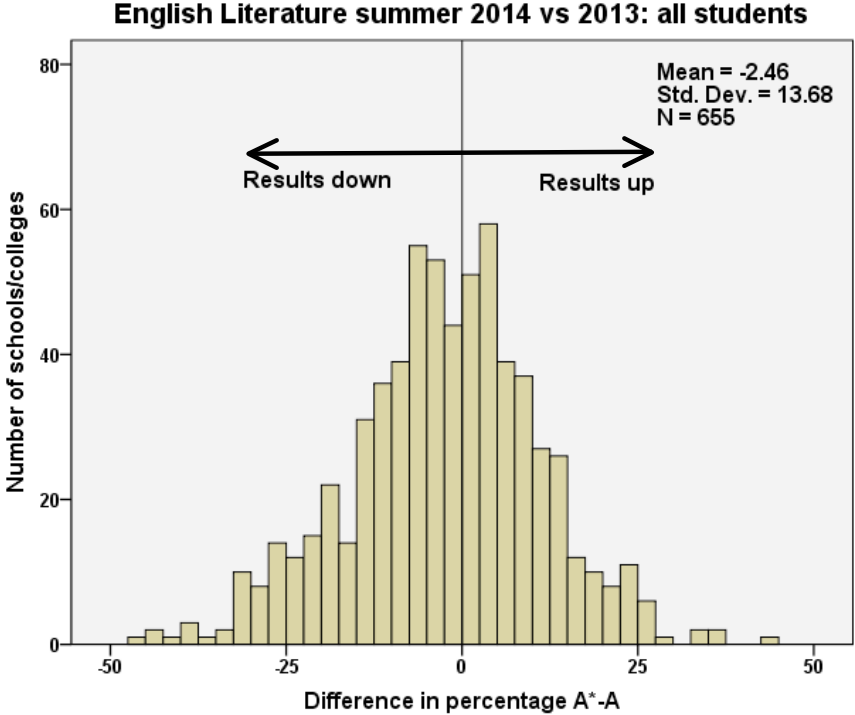
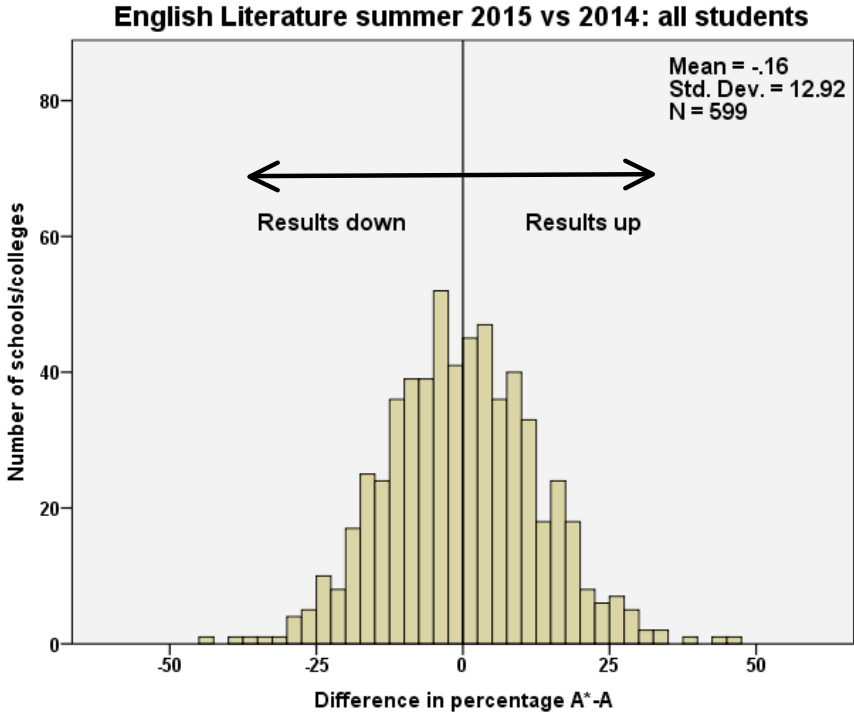
³ Note that the number of schools/colleges is slightly lower in the Year 13 only graphs, because we have only included schools and colleges with 20 or more Year 13 students

A level English literature

For summer 2016 we have looked at the results for all students and also for Year 13 students only (18-year-olds), shown in blue. Since Year 13 students make up most of the A level entry, it is not surprising that the pattern of variation is similar. But it is apparent that there is less variation when we look only at Year 13 students – in the graphs below, the mean (average) change is -0.71 for all students and -0.59 for Year 13 students only.

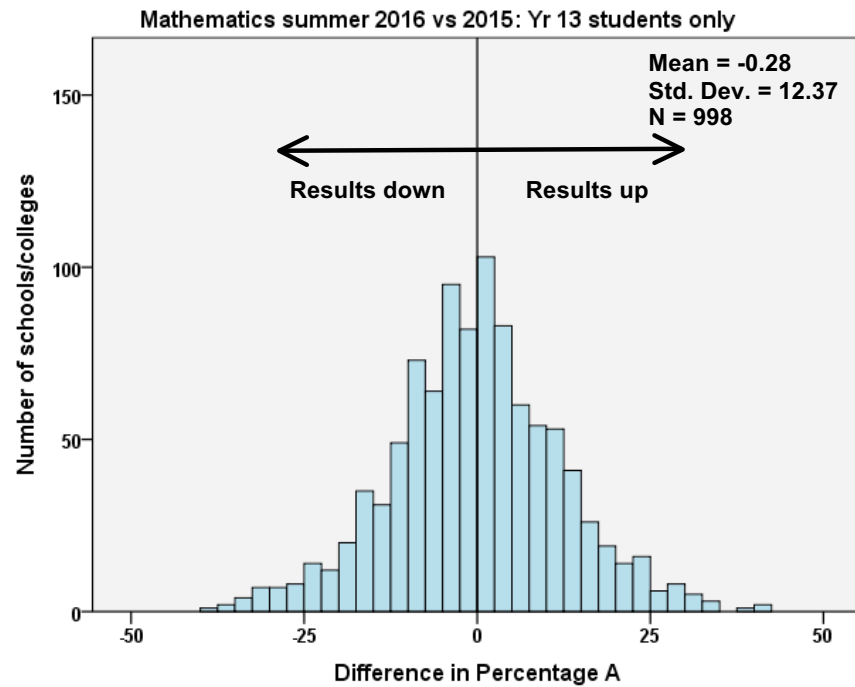
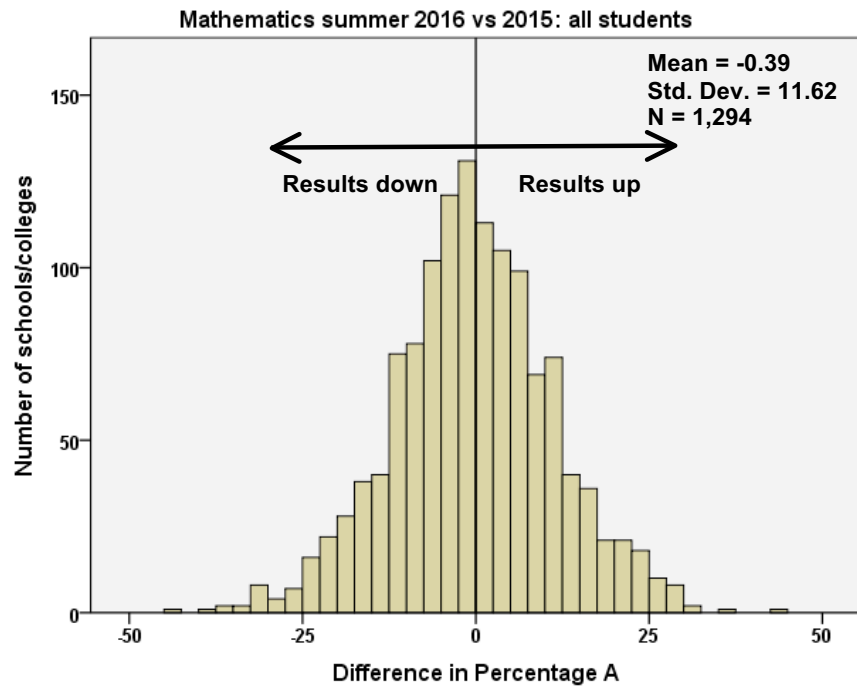


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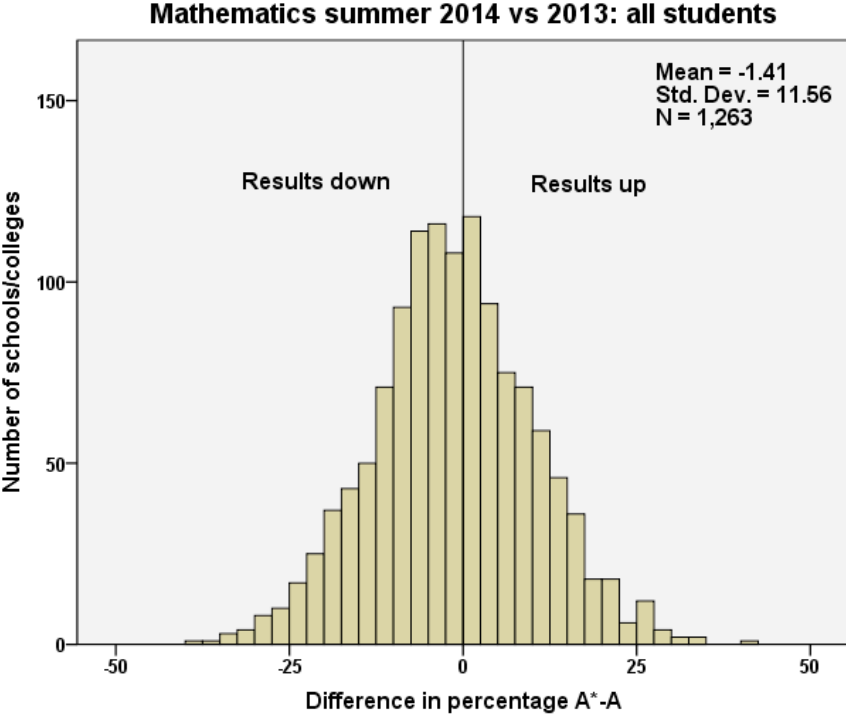
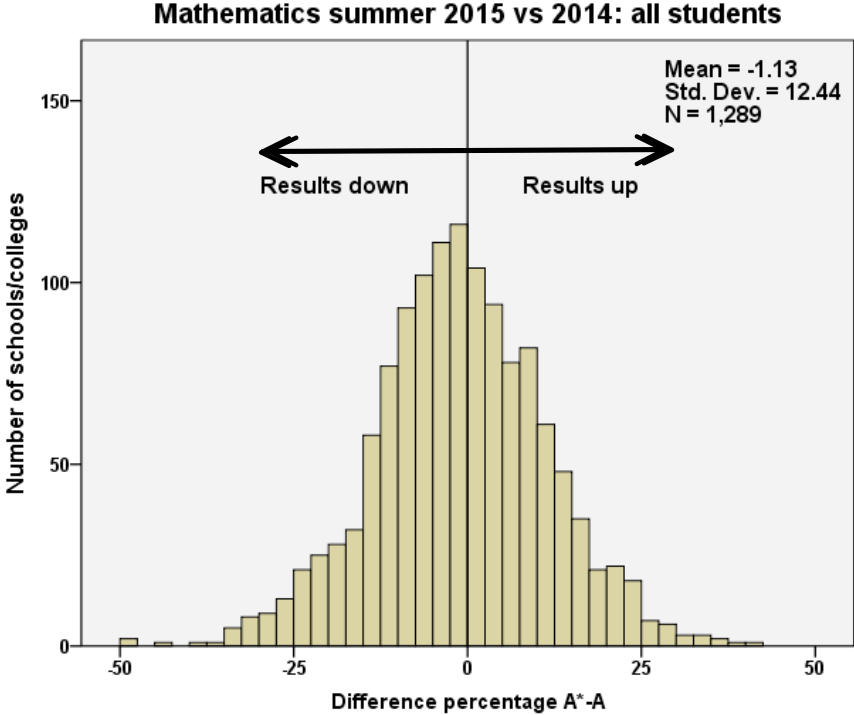


A level mathematics

For summer 2016 we have looked at the results for all students and also for Year 13 students only (18-year-olds). As is the case for English literature, there is less variation when we look only at Year 13 students. In the graphs below, the mean (average) change is -0.39 for all students and -0.28 for Year 13 students only.

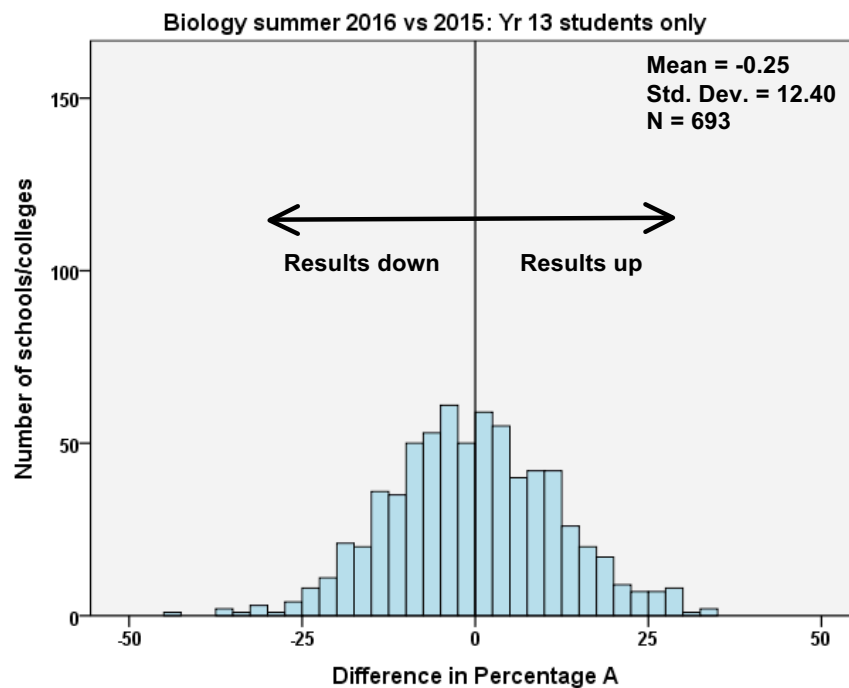
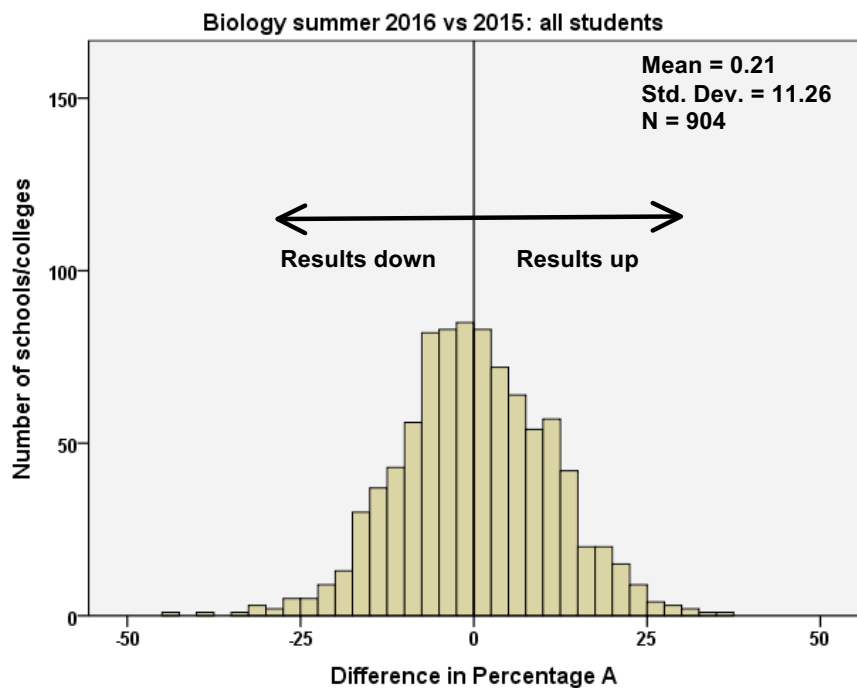


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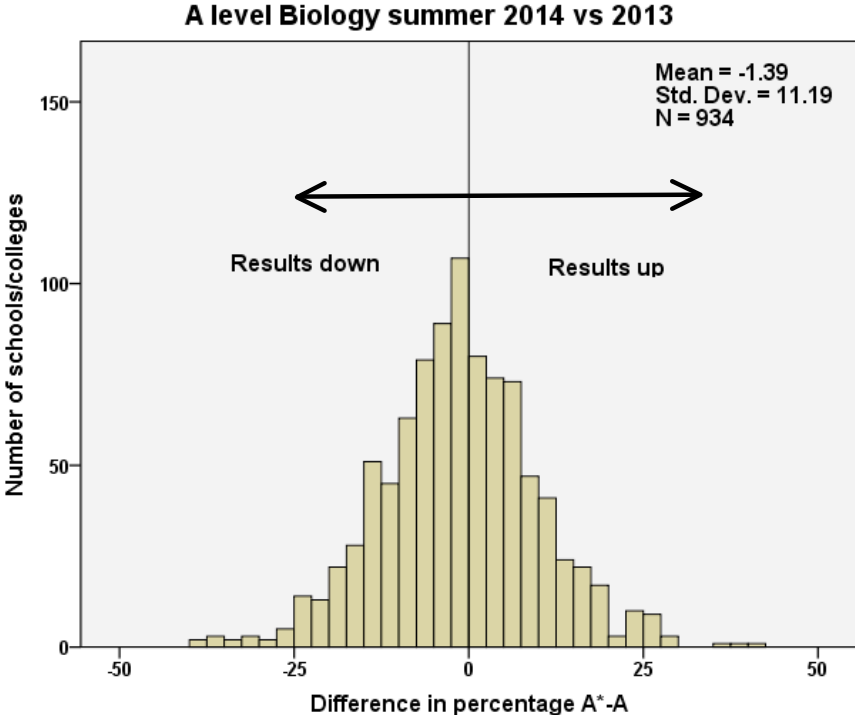
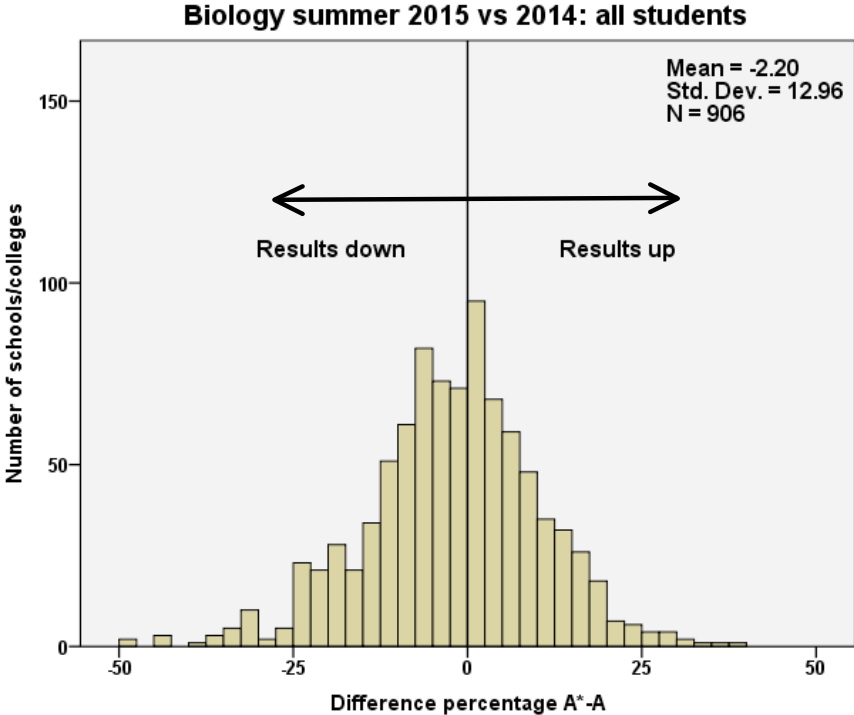


A level biology

For summer 2016 we have looked at the results for all students and also for Year 13 students only (18-year-olds). The variation is small and similar for both groups. In the graphs below, the mean (average) change is 0.21 for all students and -0.25 for Year 13 students only.

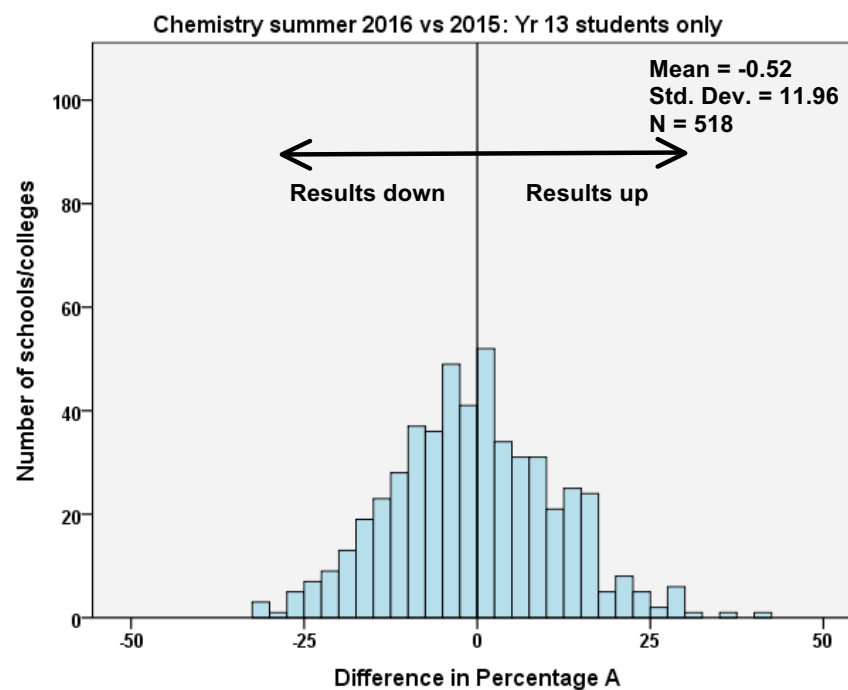
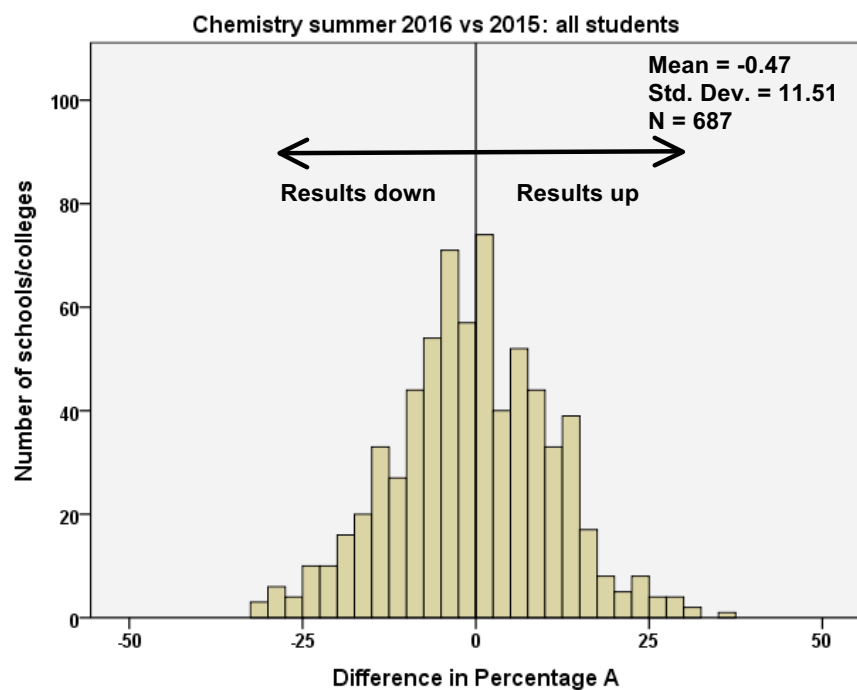


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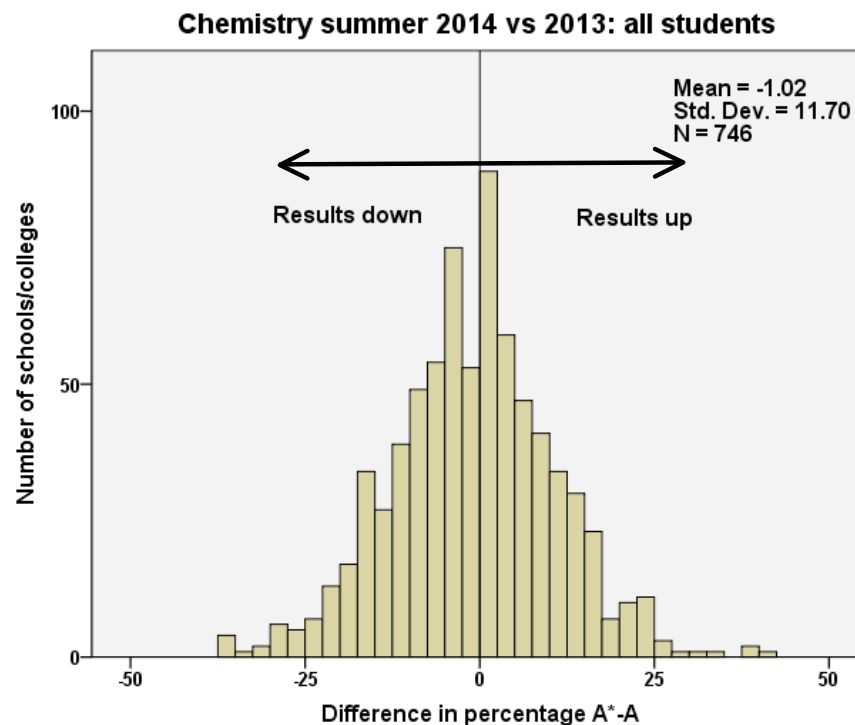
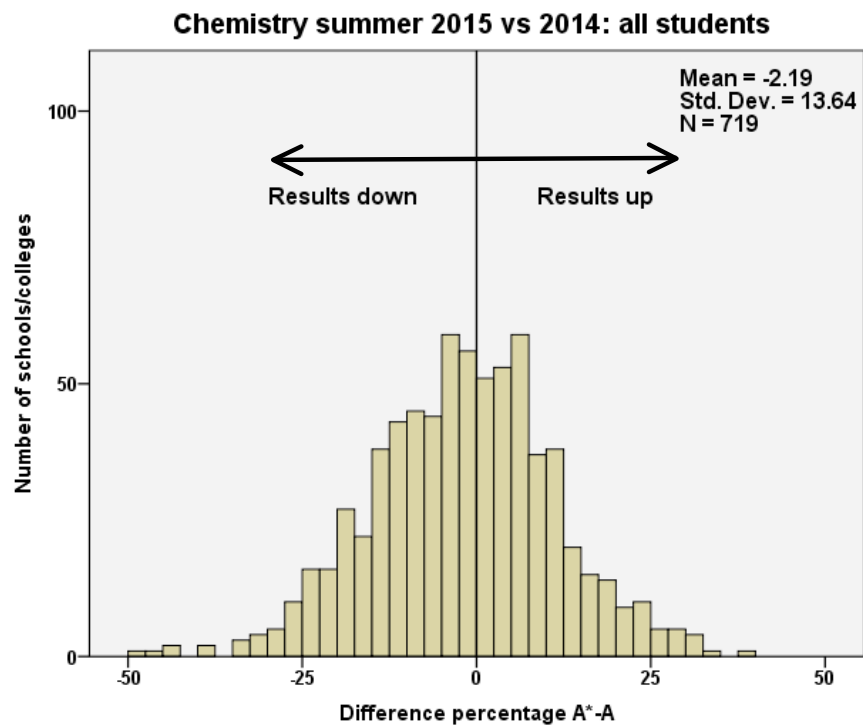


A level chemistry

For summer 2016 we have looked at the results for all students and also for Year 13 students only (18-year-olds). The variation is small and similar for both groups. In the graphs below, the mean (average) change is -0.47 for all students and -0.52 for Year 13 students only.

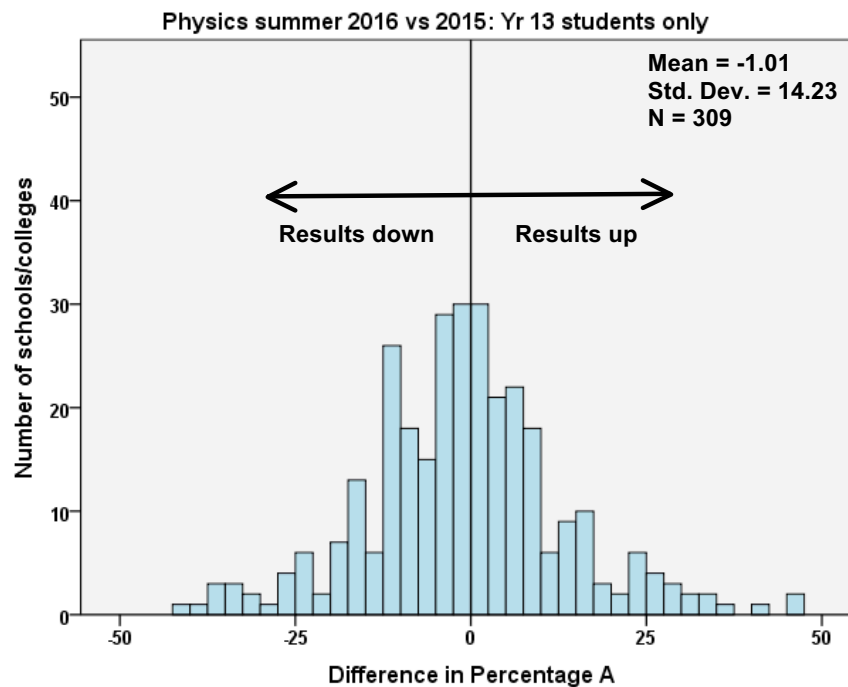
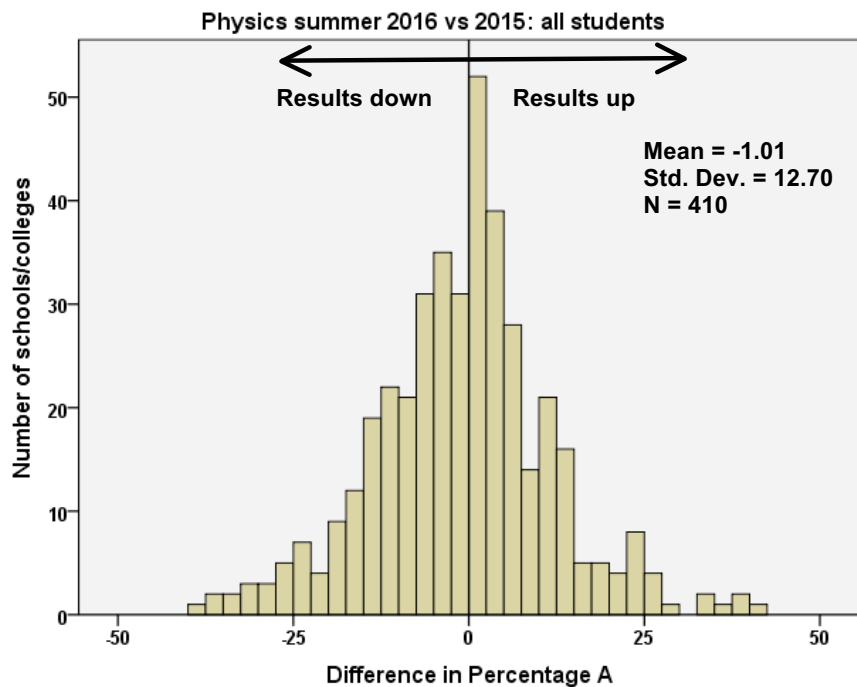


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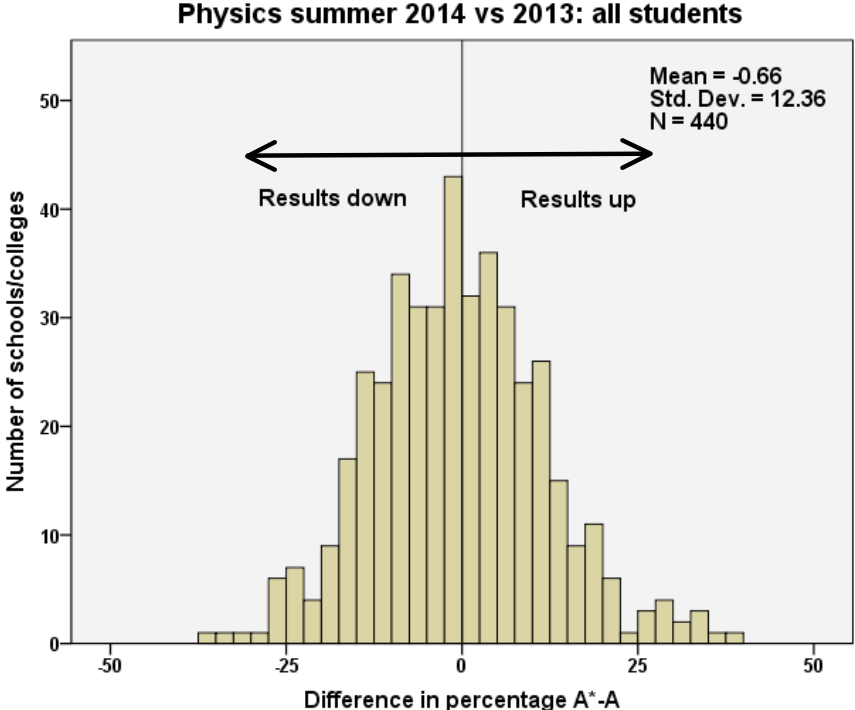
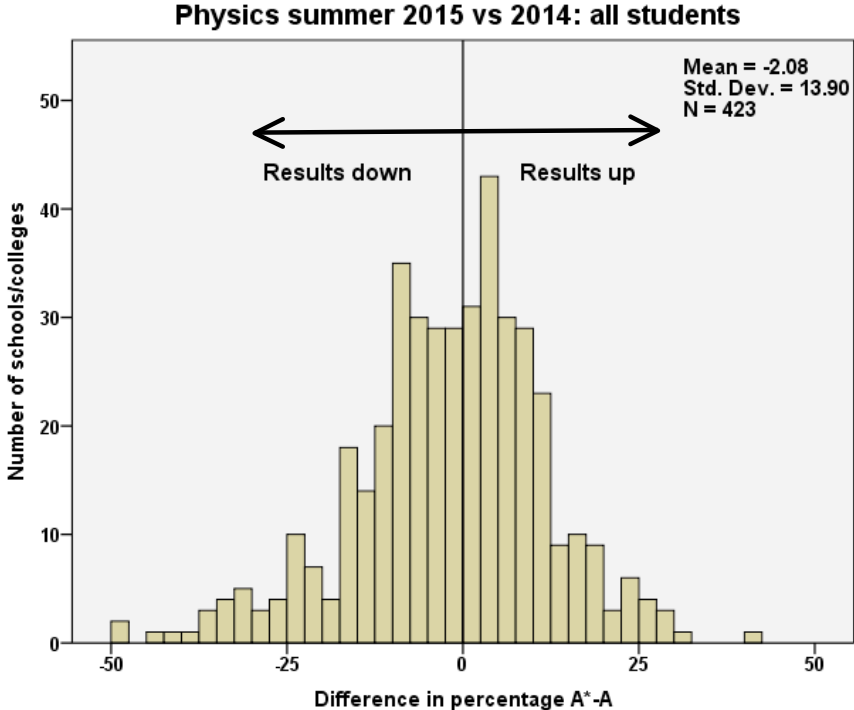


A level physics

For summer 2016 we have looked at the results for all students and also for Year 13 students only (18-year-olds). The variation in the two groups is the same. In the graphs below, the mean (average) change is -1.01 for all students and for Year 13 students only.



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