

Variability in A level results for schools and colleges 2015-2017



August 2017

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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.
- Differences between the average (mean) percentage of students achieving grades A* or A in 2016/2017 and in 2015/2016 were generally small, indicating that year-on-year results in the subjects analysed have remained relatively stable.
- 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 in England have been relatively stable in recent years, with only very small changes in the overall percentages of students achieving A* or A grades. However, we know that individual schools and colleges may see variation in the proportion of 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.

This summer, new A level qualifications in 13 subjects¹ are being awarded in England for the first time. We have analysed the year-on-year variation in the percentage of students achieving grades A* or A in 12² of these subjects as well as mathematics, as it is the subject with the largest number of A level certifications.³ The evidence suggests that the variation at school/college level has been very similar to that seen in previous years. We have looked only at schools and colleges in England 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.⁴ We have also looked at the variation for students in year 13

¹ Art & design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, sociology

² We have not included computer science as the number of candidates certificating in this subject was small.

³ See <http://www.icq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels>

⁴ 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

only (18-year-old students).⁵ The graphs presented below show the year-on-year variation for all students on the left and for year 13 students on the right.

The graphs also show the year-on-year difference in the average (mean) percentage of students achieving grades A* or A across all schools and colleges, the associated standard deviation (SD), and the number of schools and colleges (number of centres) included in the analyses. If, for example, a 2016/2017 graph shows a mean difference of 1%, this means that the average percentage of all candidates achieving an A* or A across the schools and colleges included in the analyses has increased by 1% in 2017 compared to 2016.

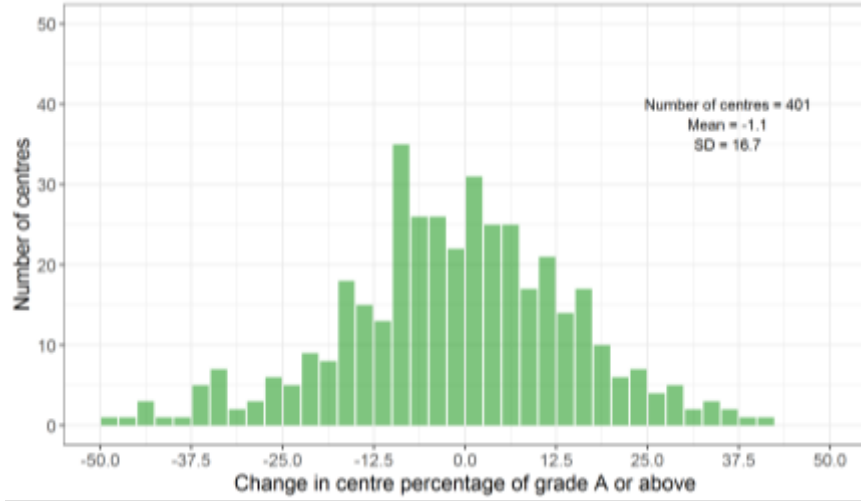
More centre variability graphs can be seen using our online application <http://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk>. Here the graphs are 'interactive' such that users can explore centre variability:

- within different subjects;
- for various sizes of centres; and
- for stable and unstable cohorts.

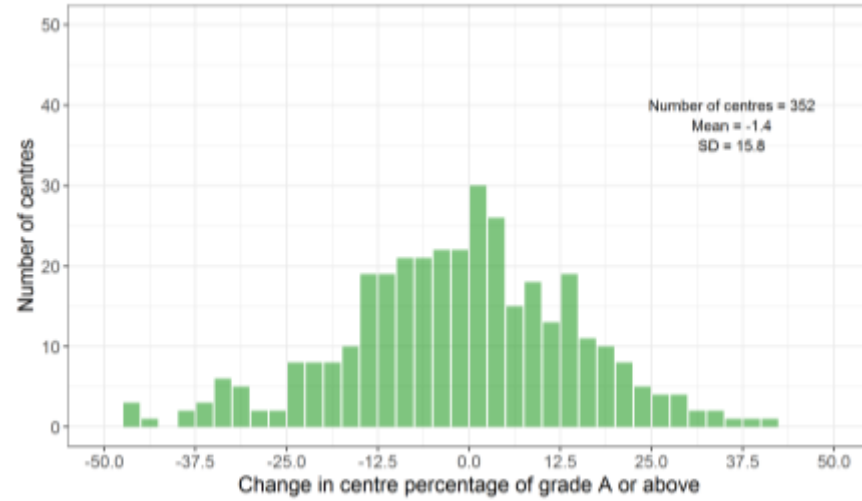
⁵ Note that the number of schools/colleges is slightly lower in the Year 13 only graphs, because we have only included schools and colleges with 20 or more Year 13 students.

A level art & design

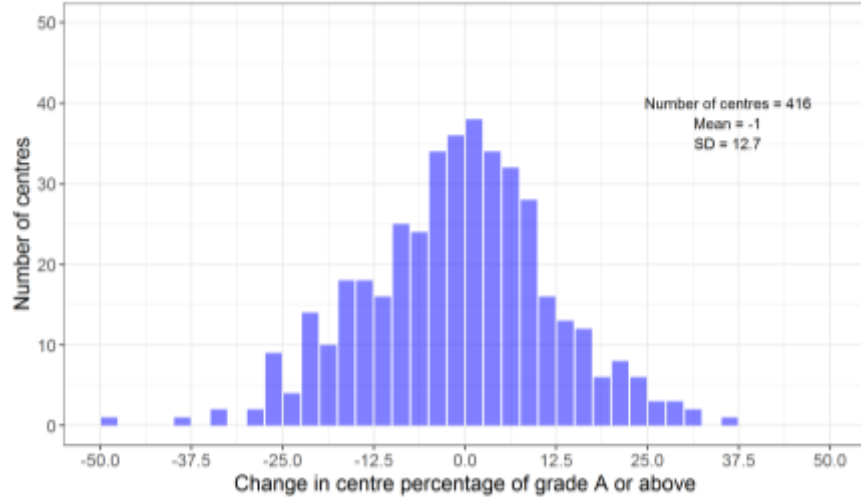
Art & design summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



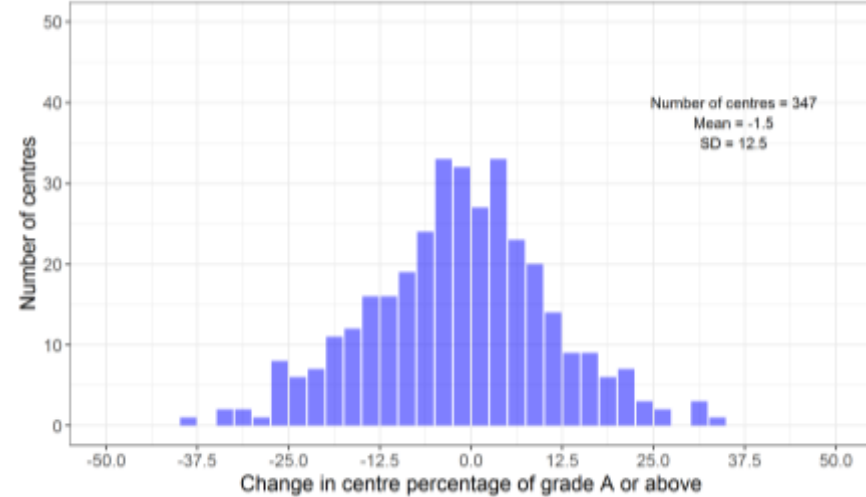
Art & design summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Art & design summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

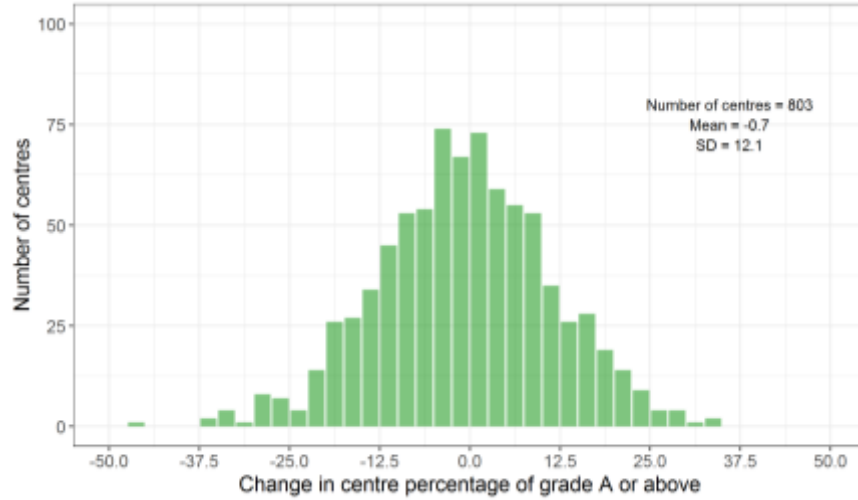


Art & design summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

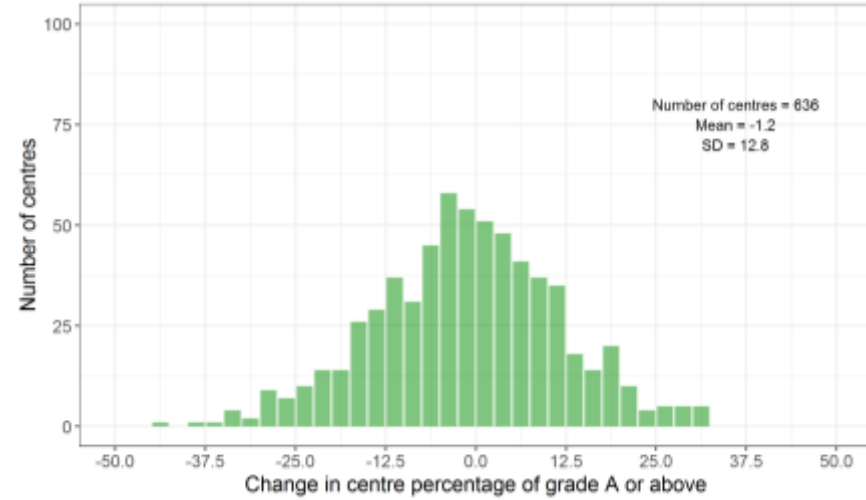


A level biology

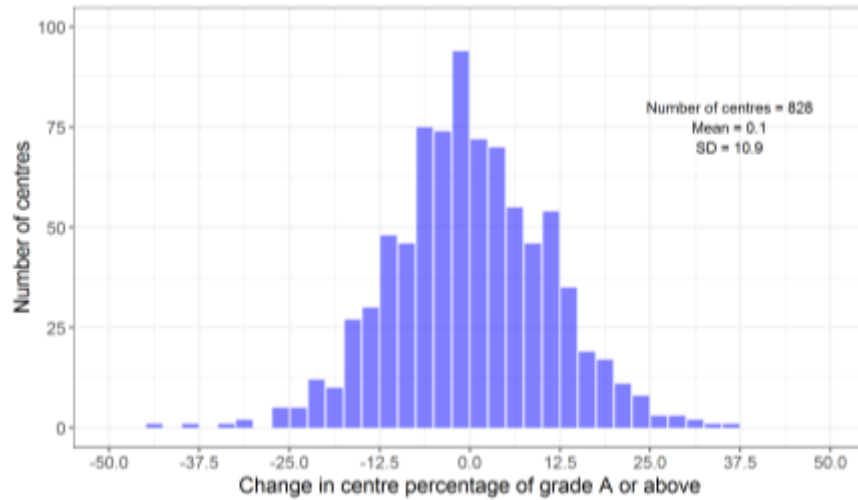
Biology summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



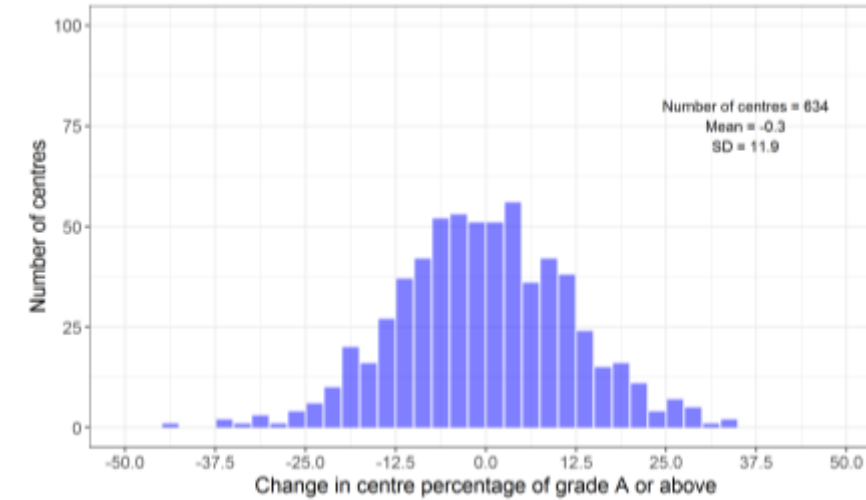
Biology summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Biology summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

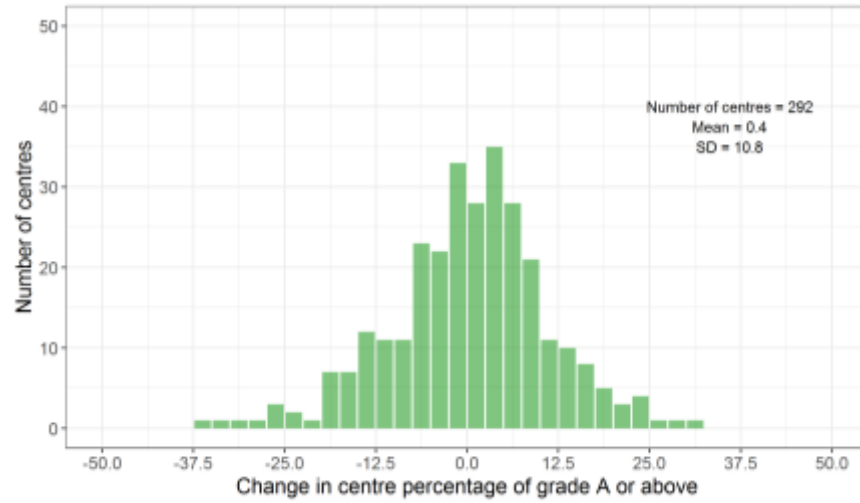


Biology summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

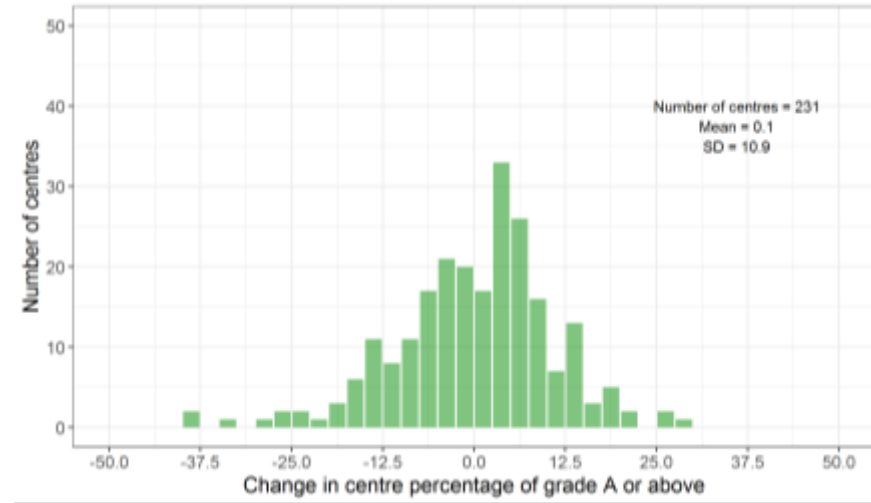


A level business studies

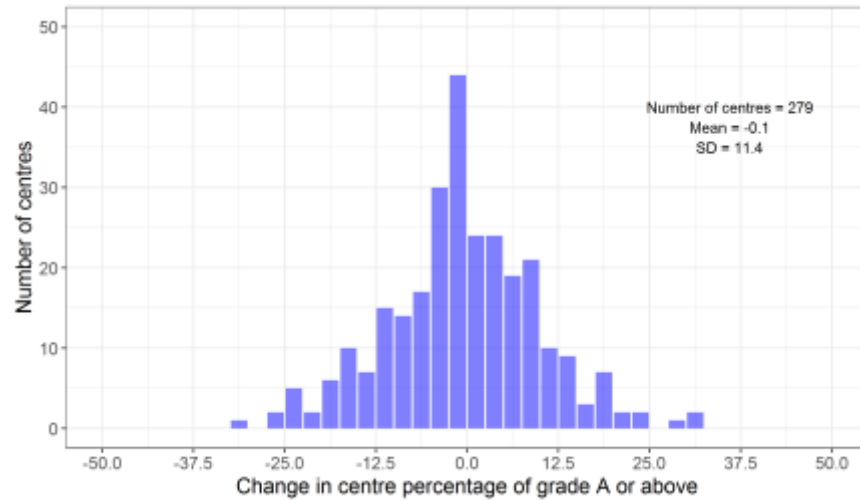
Business studies summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



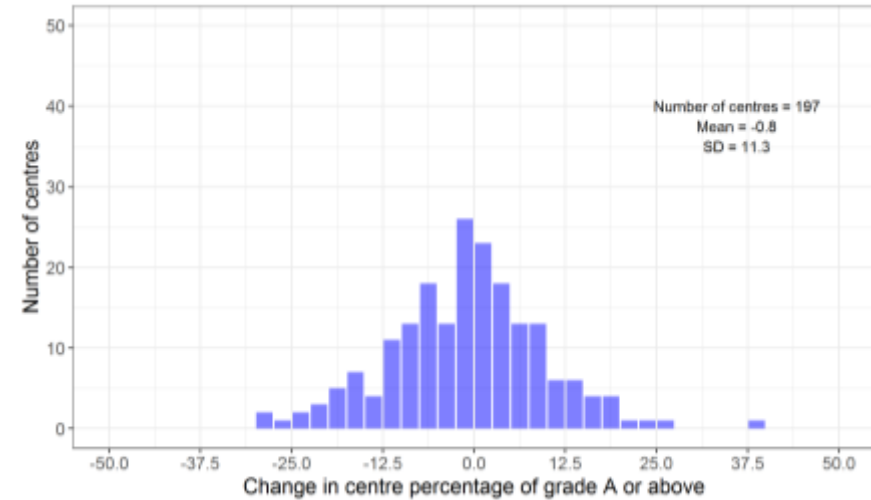
Business studies summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Business studies summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

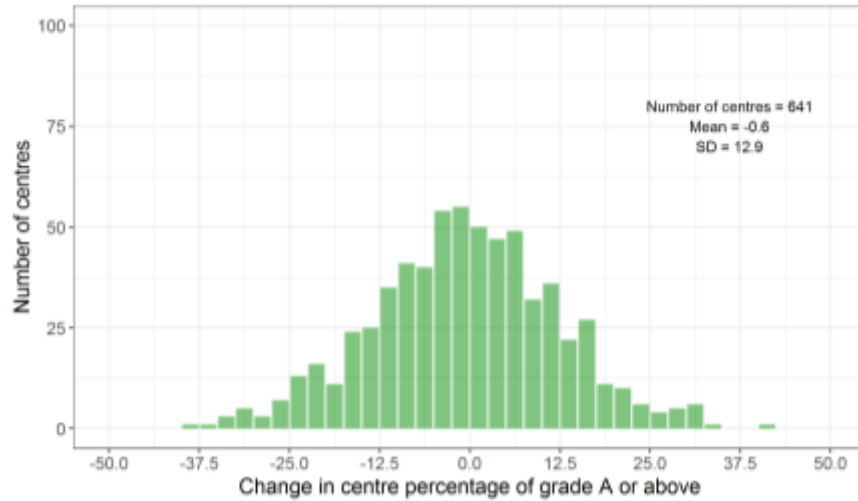


Business studies summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

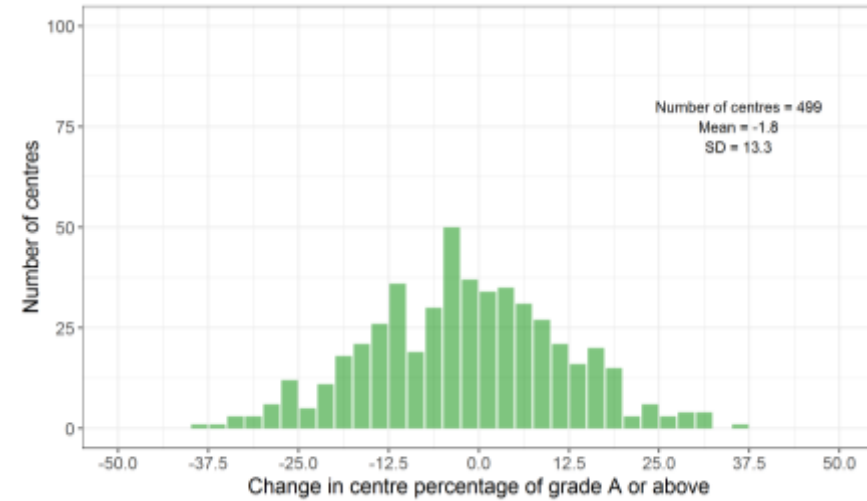


A level chemistry

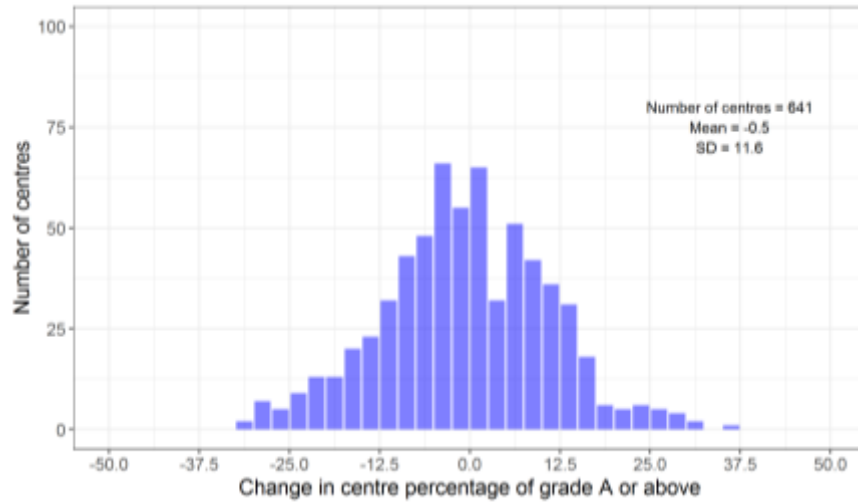
Chemistry summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



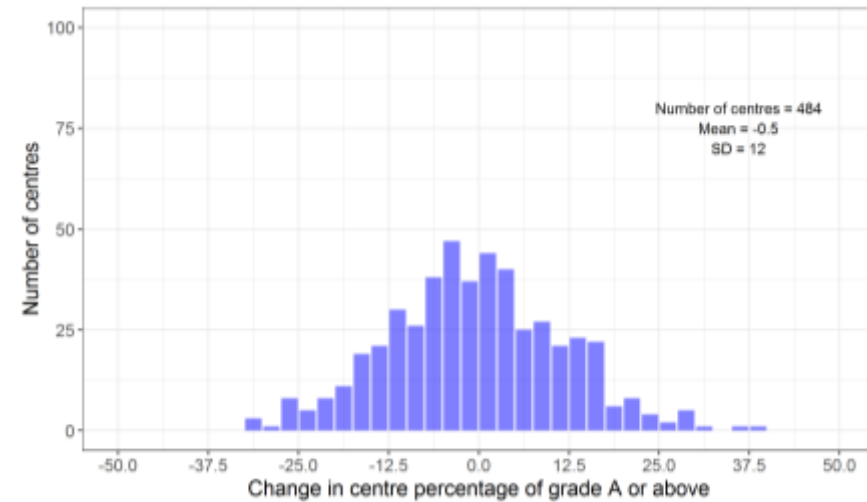
Chemistry summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Chemistry summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

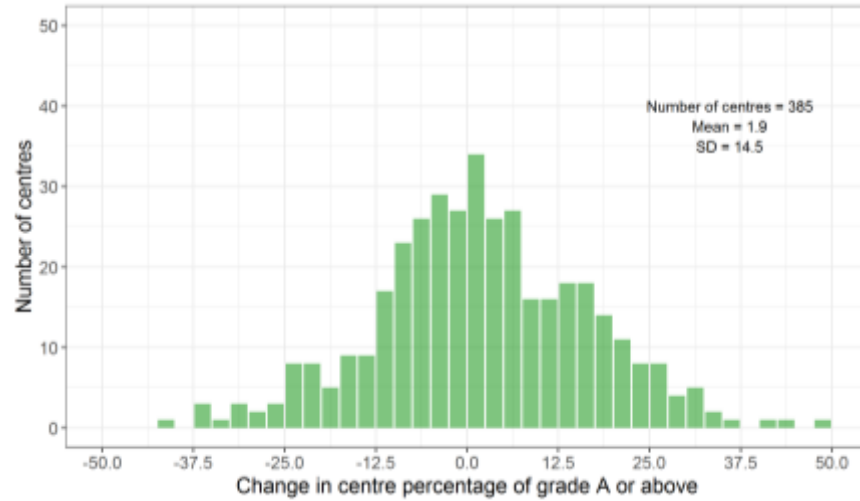


Chemistry summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

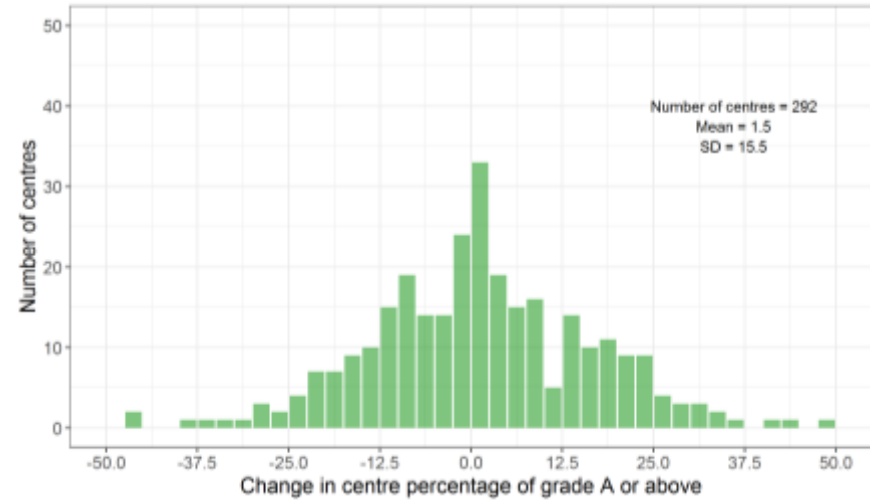


A level economics

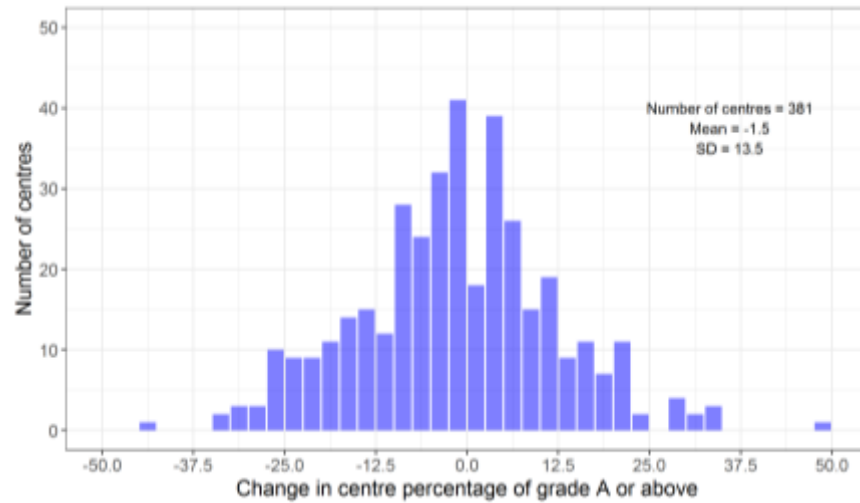
Economics summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



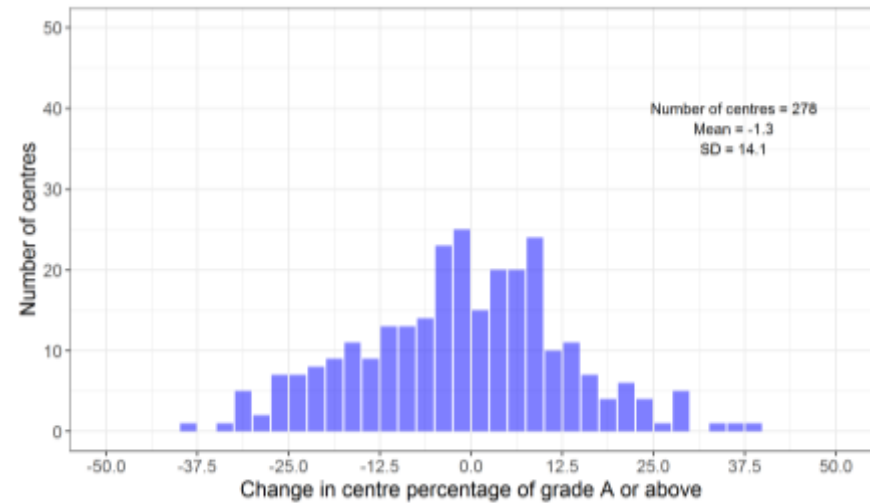
Economics summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Economics summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

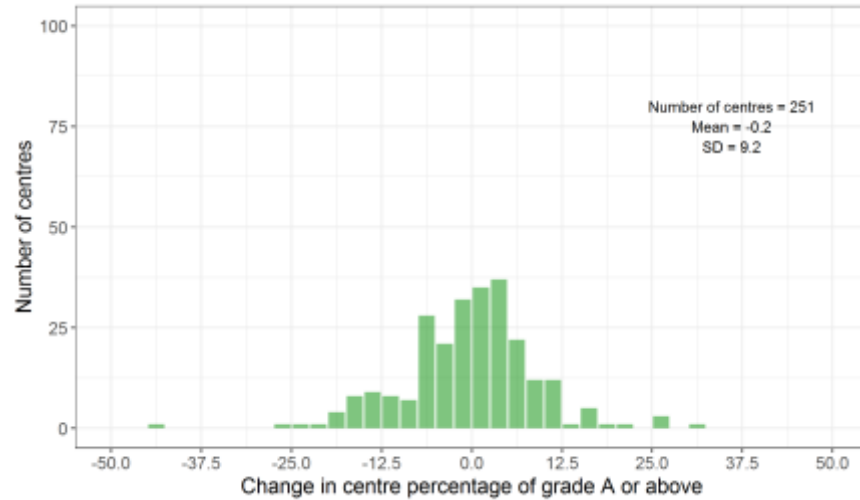


Economics summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

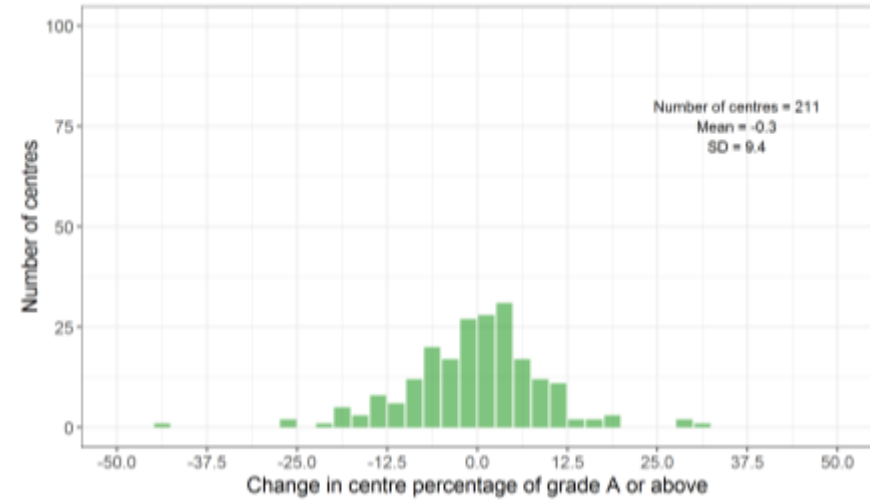


A level English language

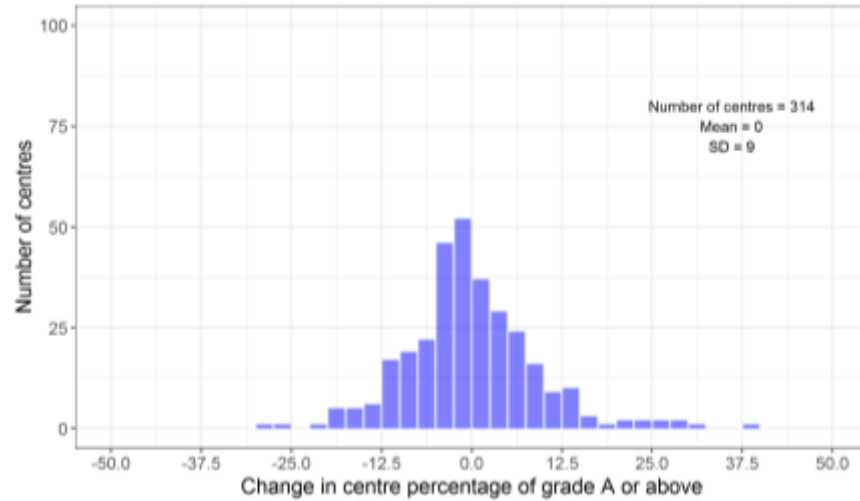
English language summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



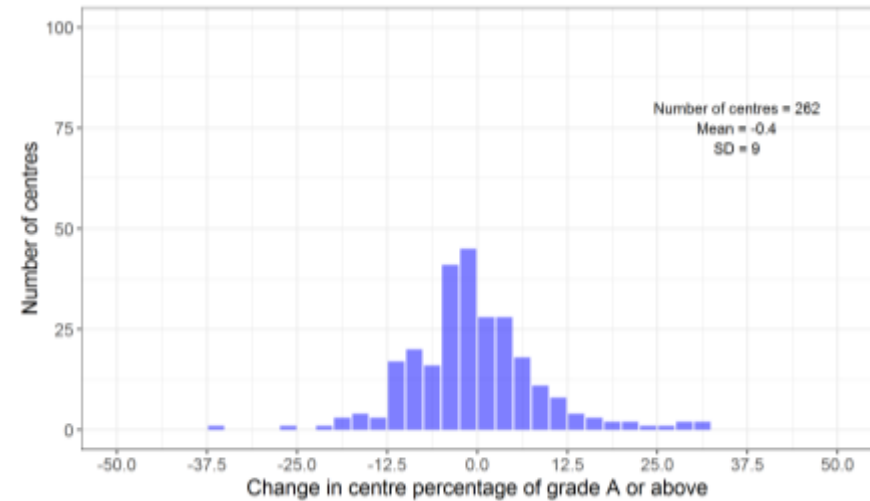
English language summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



English language summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

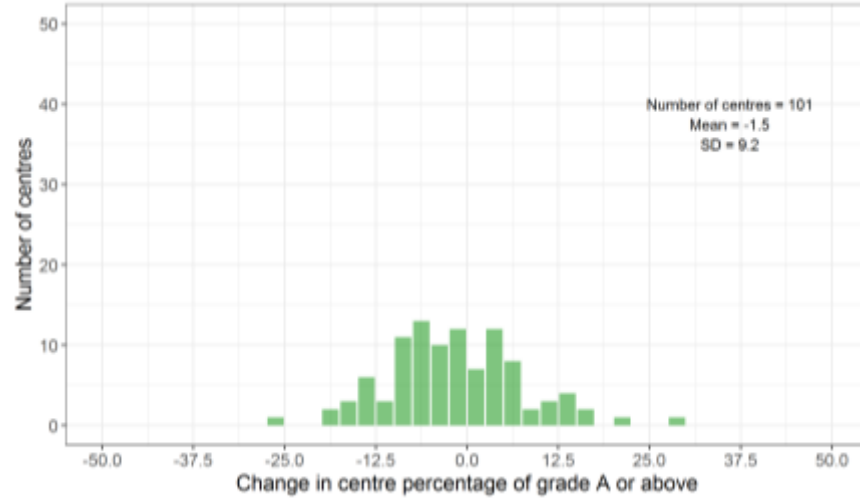


English language summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

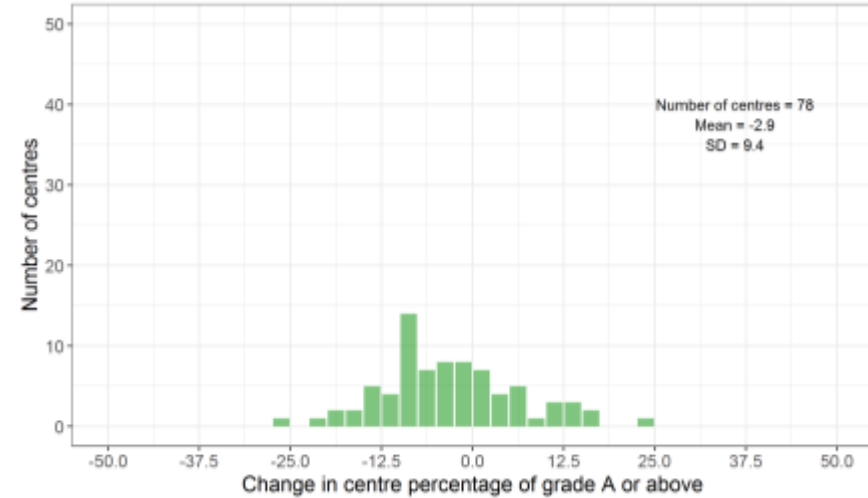


A level English language and literature

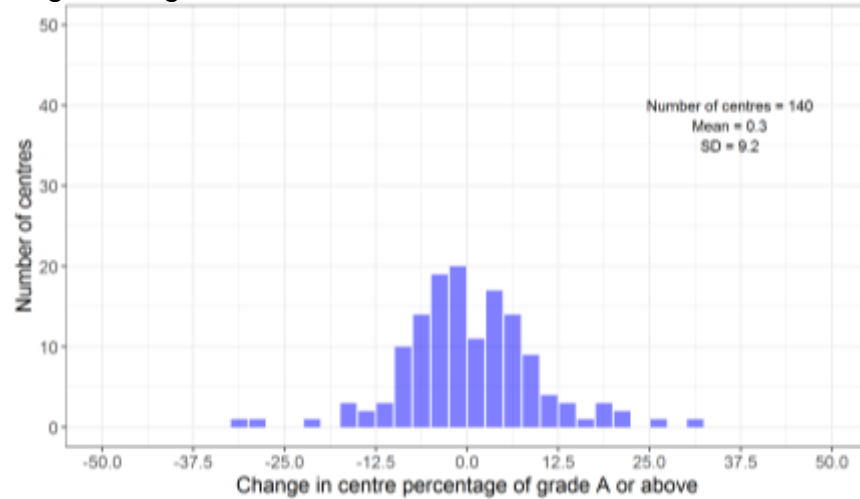
English lang & lit summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



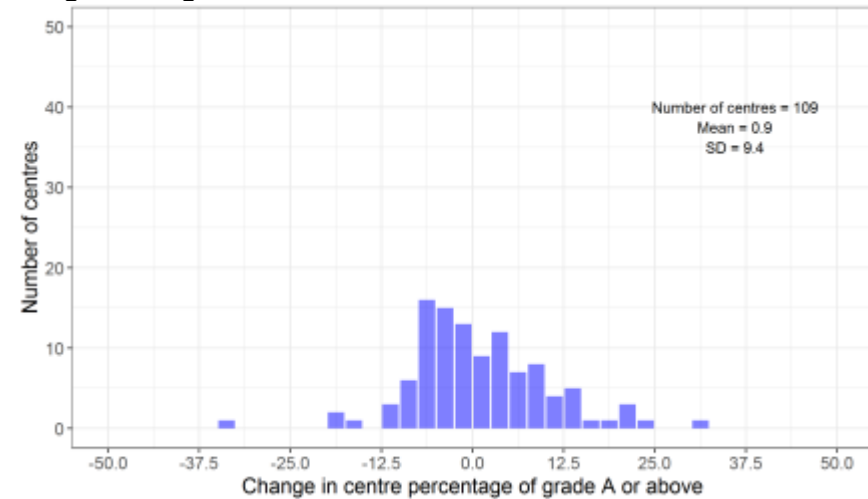
English lang & lit summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



English lang & lit summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

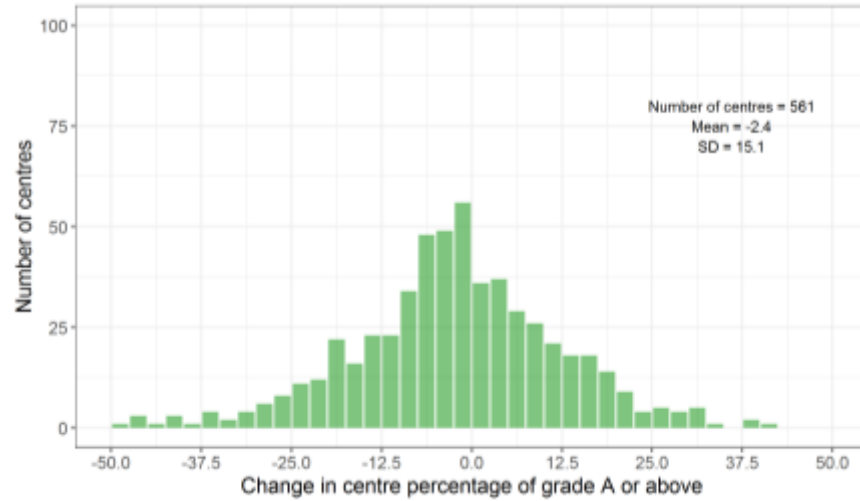


English lang & lit summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

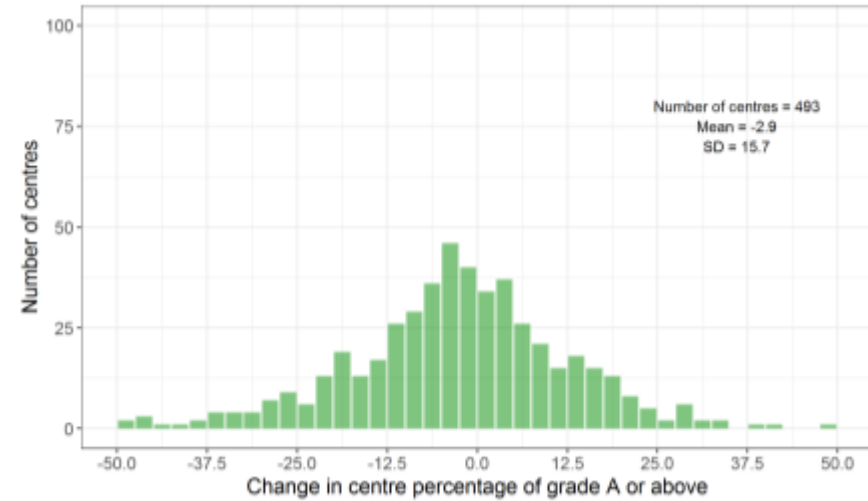


A level English literature

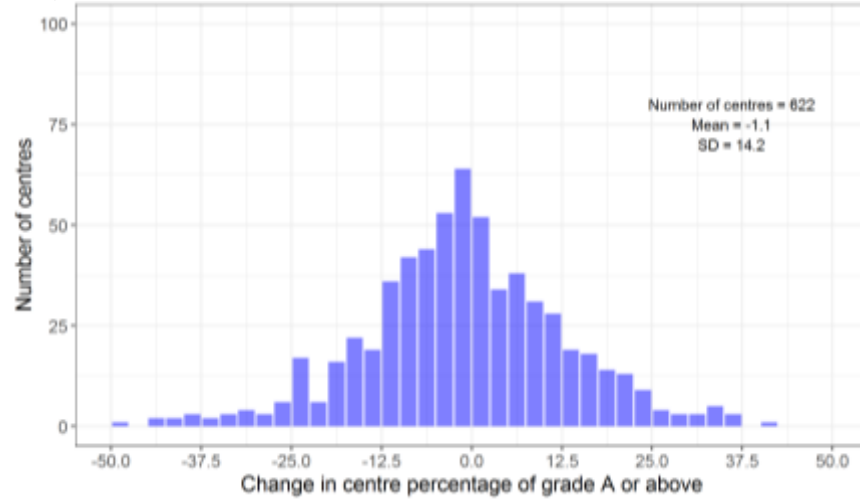
English literature summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



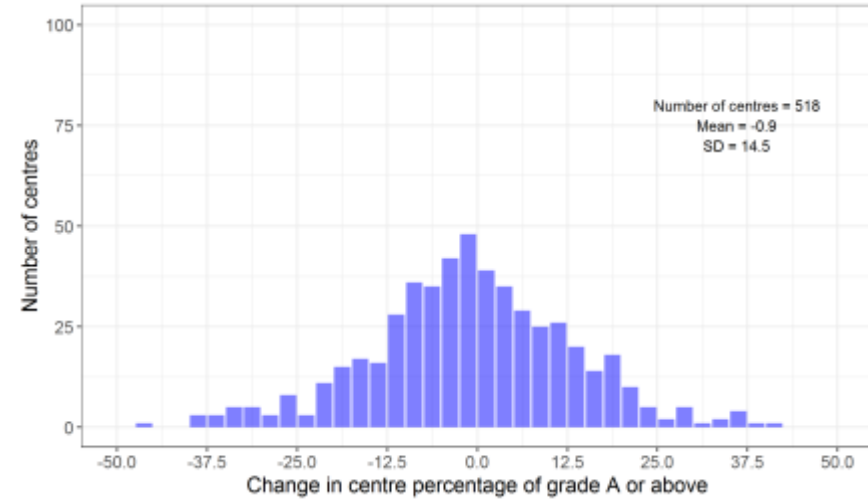
English literature summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



English literature summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

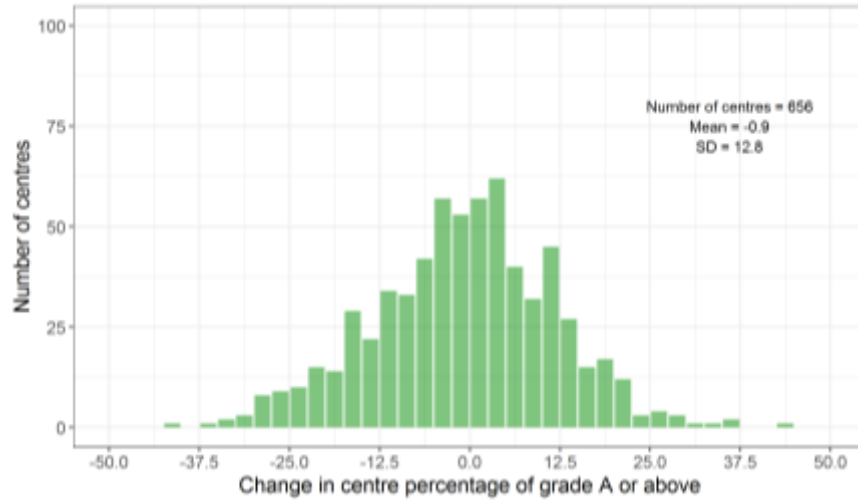


English literature summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

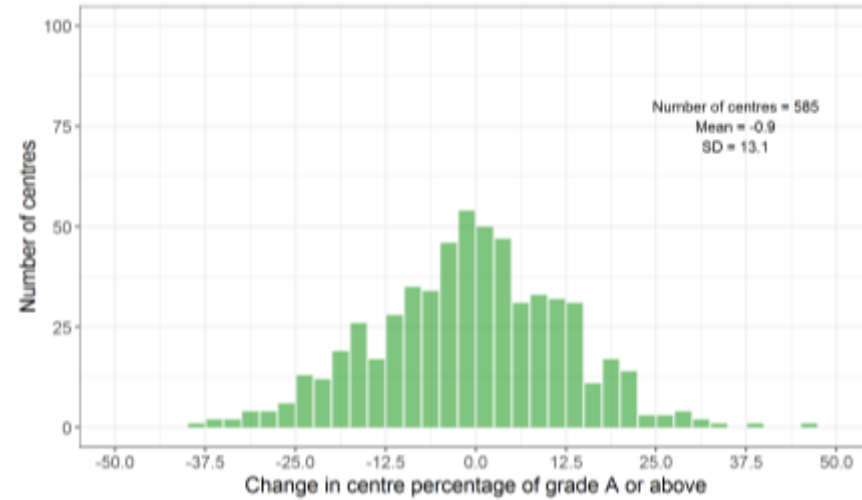


A level history

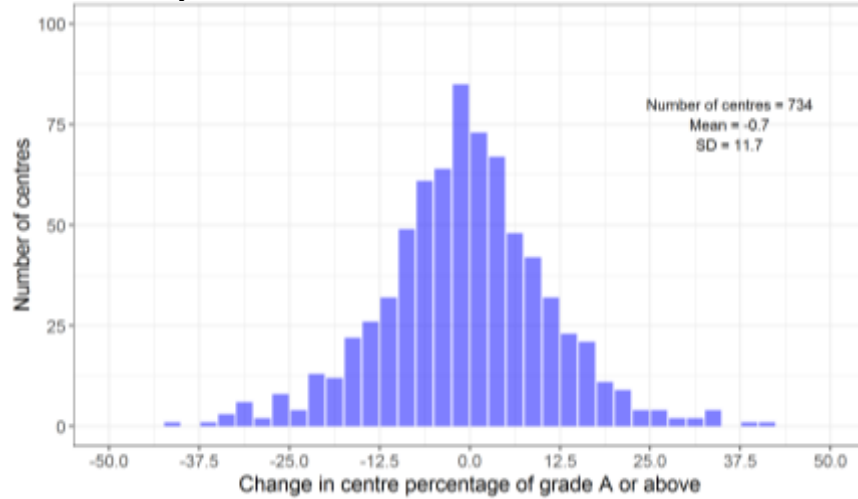
History summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



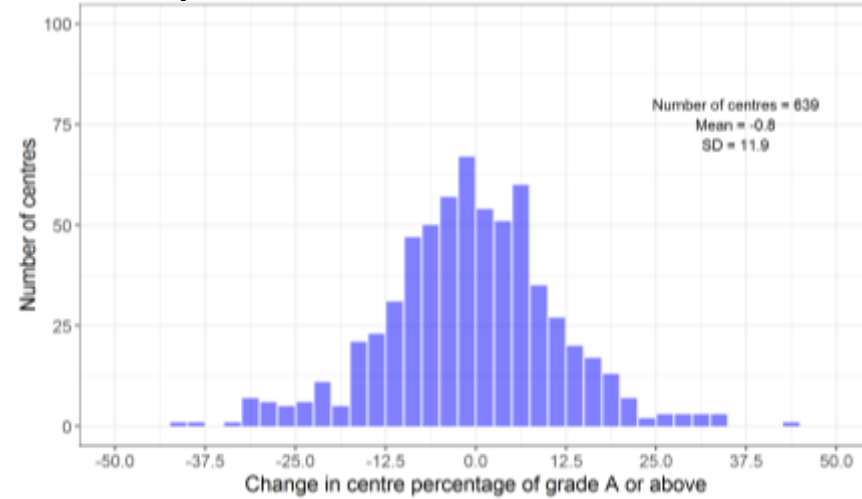
History summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



History summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

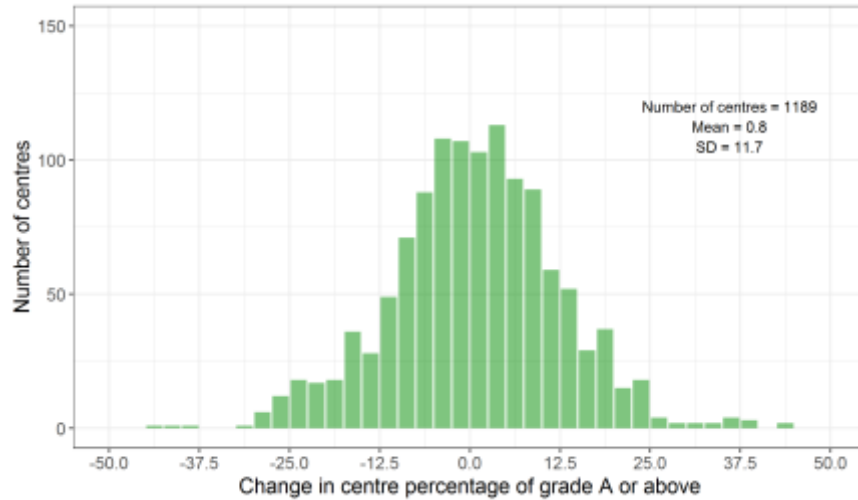


History summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

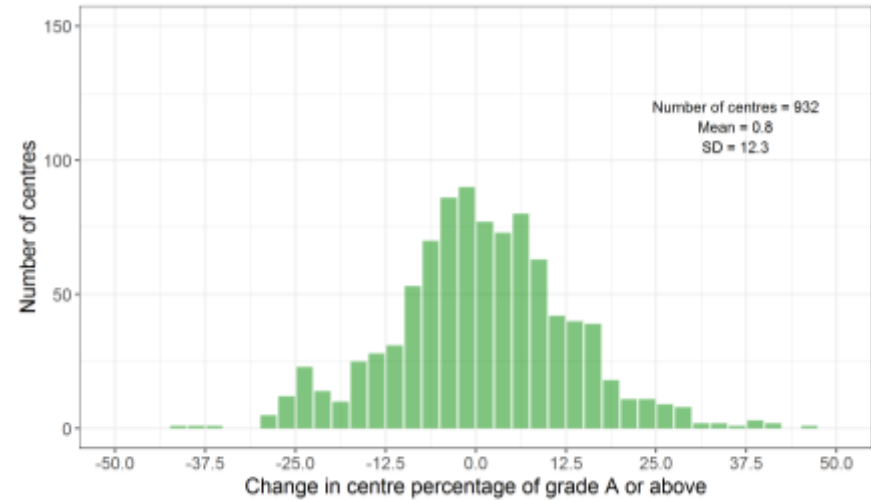


A level mathematics

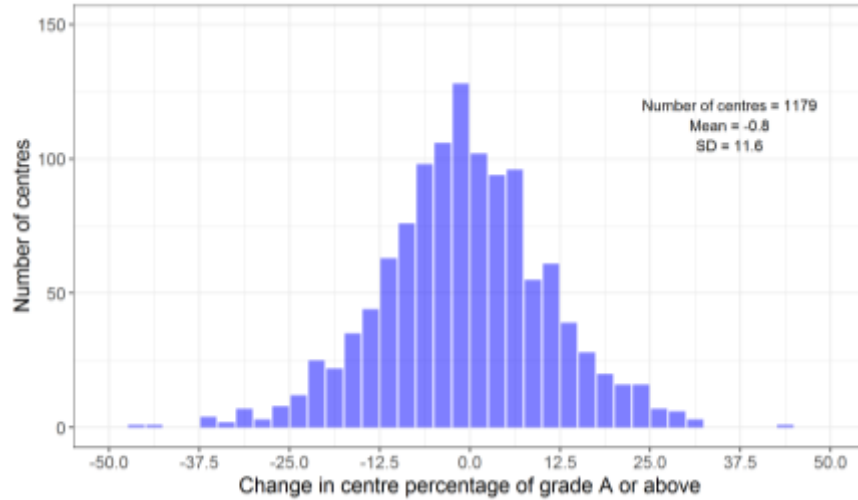
Mathematics summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



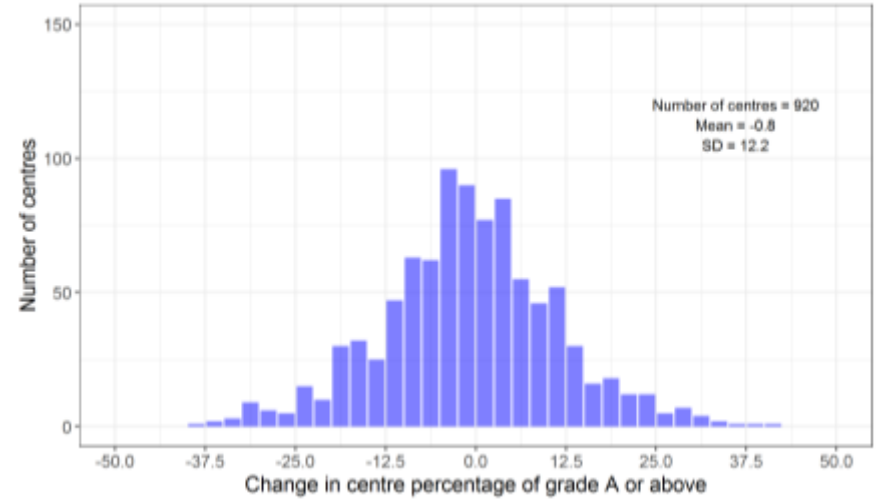
Mathematics summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Mathematics summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

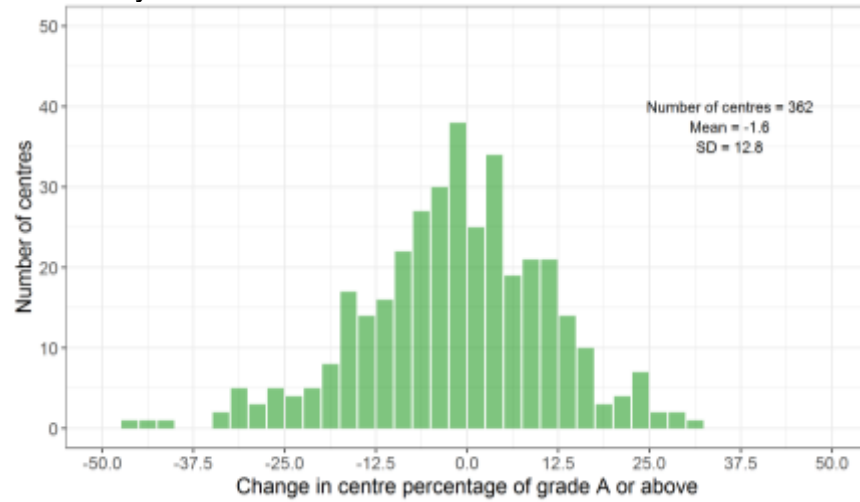


Mathematics summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

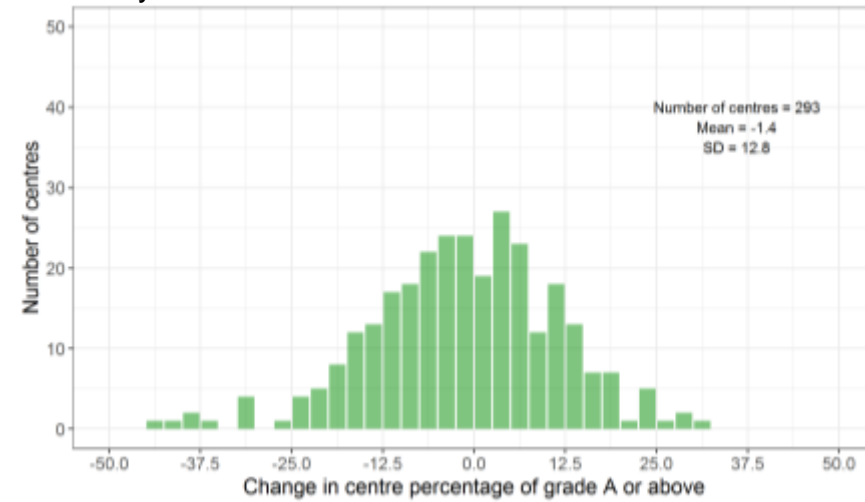


A level physics

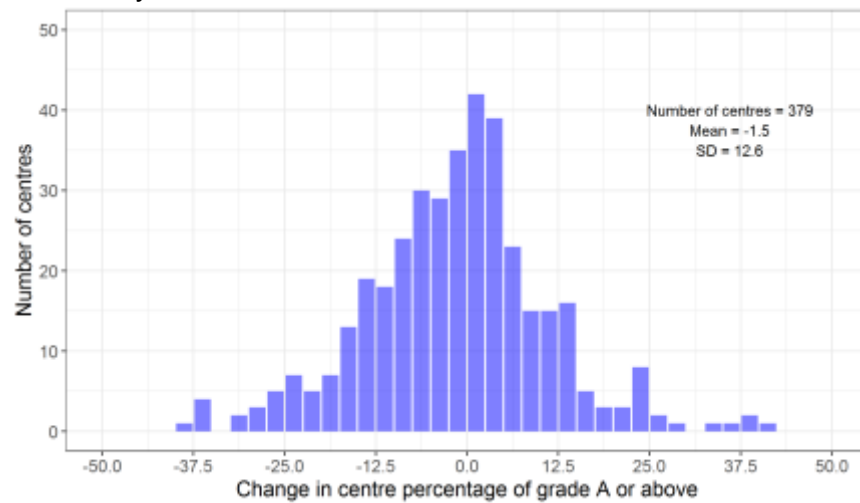
Physics summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



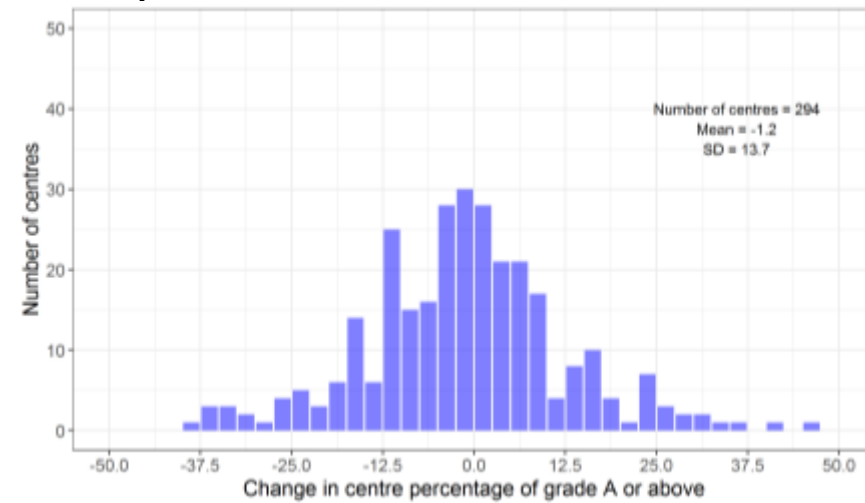
Physics summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Physics summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

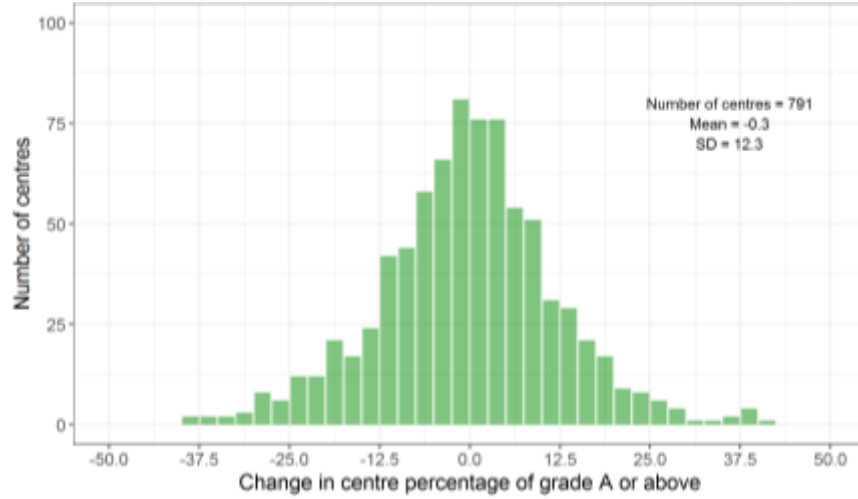


Physics summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

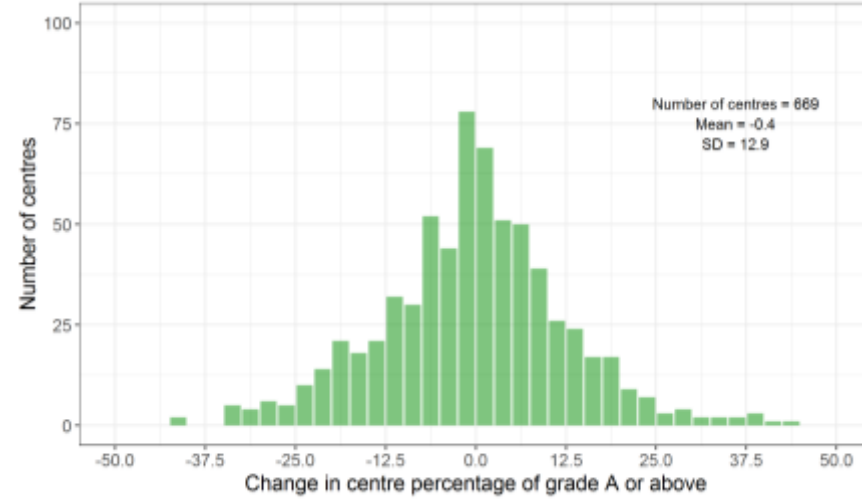


A level psychology

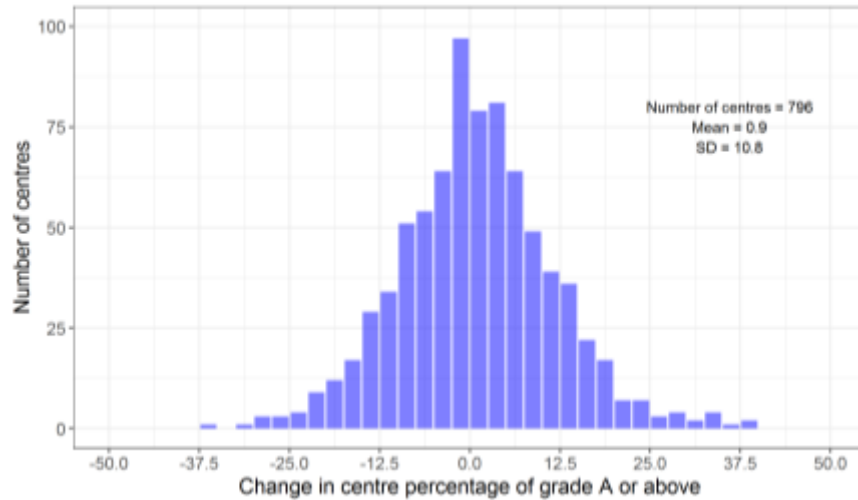
Psychology summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



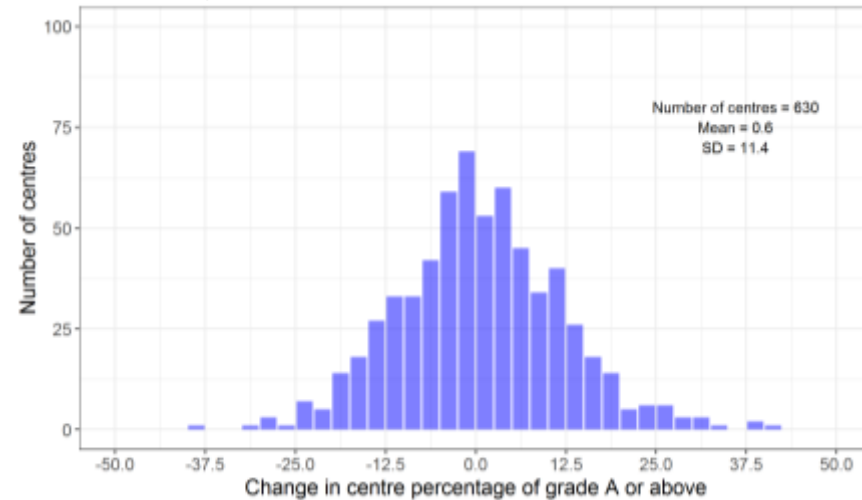
Psychology summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Psychology summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students

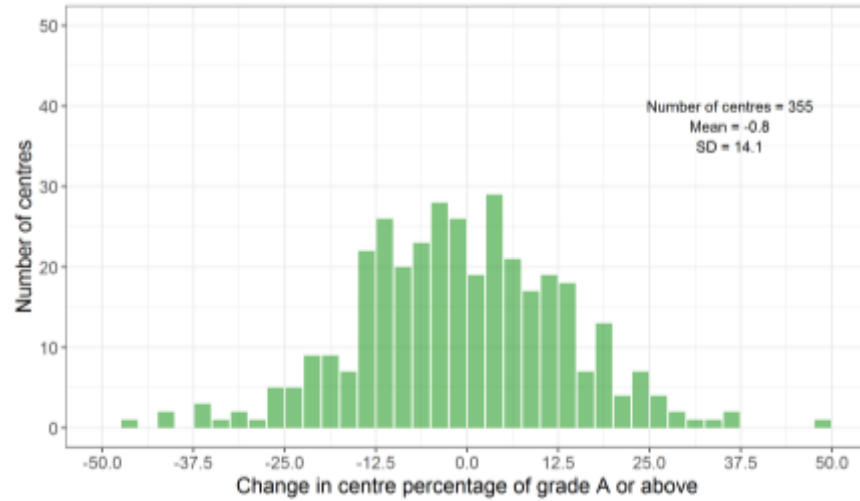


Psychology summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students

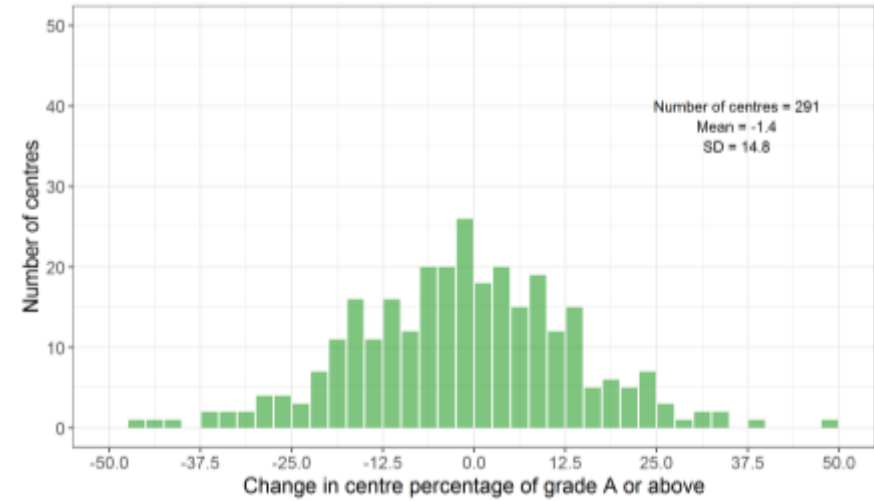


A level sociology

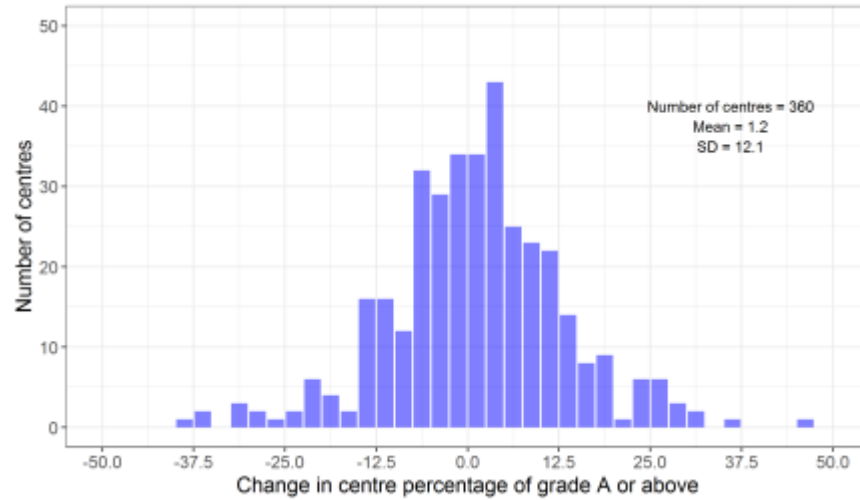
Sociology summer 2016 vs summer 2017: all students



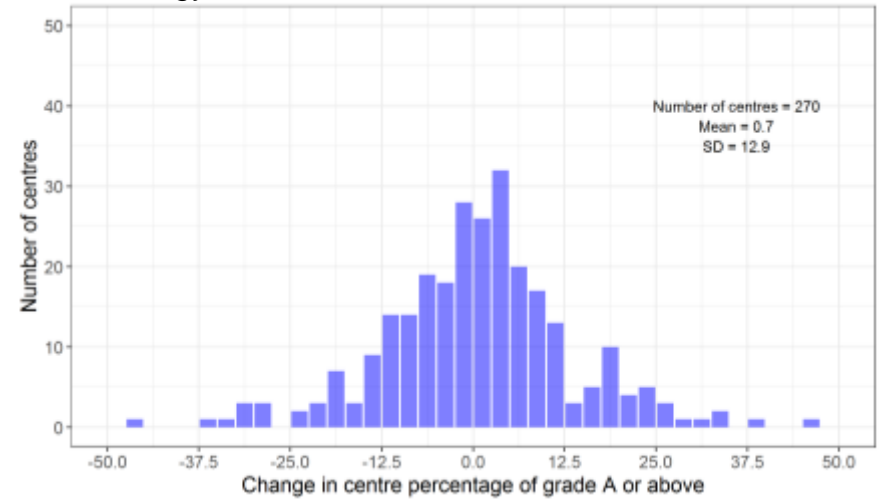
Sociology summer 2016 vs summer 2017: Yr 13 students



Sociology summer 2015 vs summer 2016: all students



Sociology summer 2015 vs summer 2016: Yr 13 students



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