

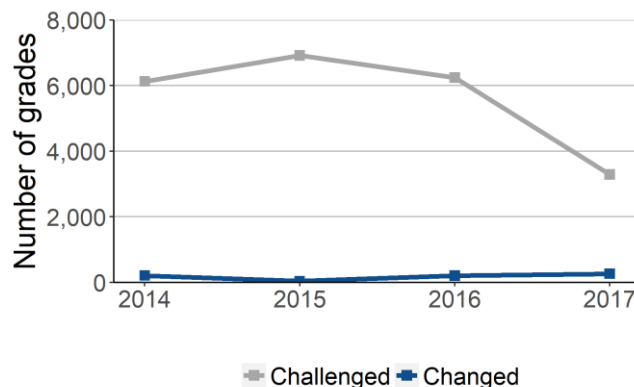
This release presents the number of appeals made following the summer 2017 exam series and the number of qualification grades challenged and changed due to those appeals. A small proportion of grades are challenged at appeal. New grounds for appeal, based on an error in marking in a review of marking or moderation, were introduced for AS and A levels in 2017 resulting in an increase in the number of appeals this year.

### Few grades changed due to appeal

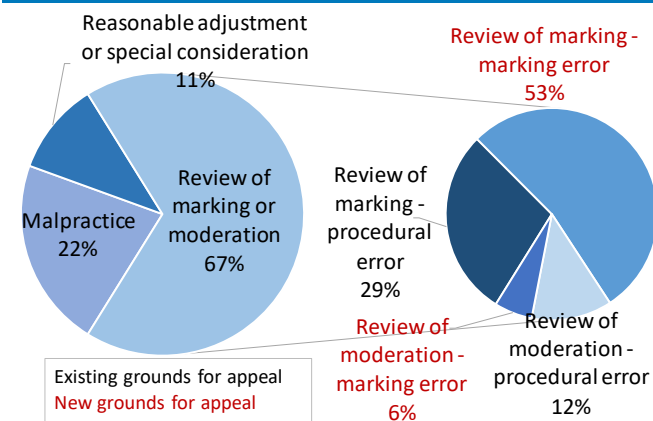
**0.004%**

of the 6.6 million qualification grades certified in summer 2017 were changed as a result of an appeal.

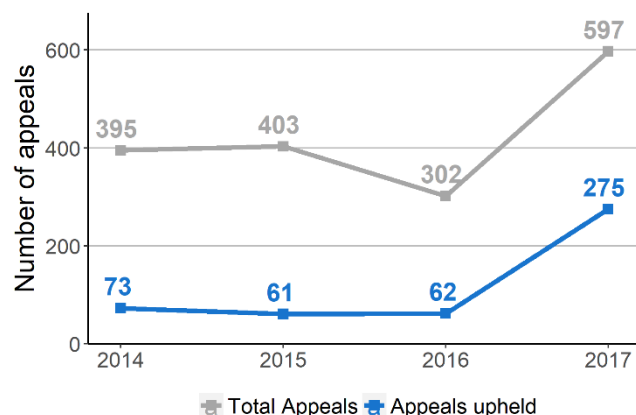
### Fewer grades challenged



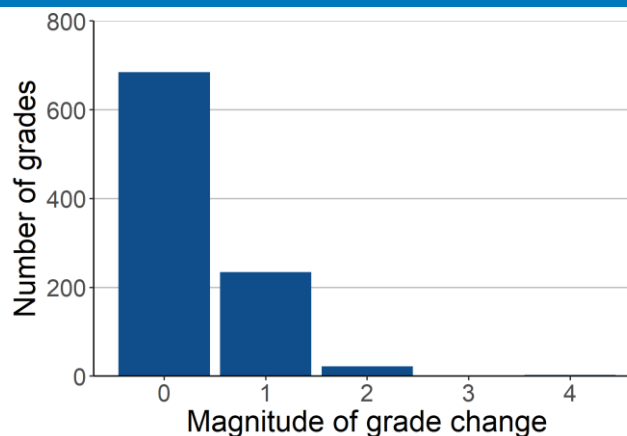
### New grounds for appeal most popular



### Submitted appeals and appeals upheld rise



### Most upheld appeals result in no grade change



### Few appeals go to appeal hearings

**7%**

of preliminary appeals progressed to appeal hearings.

## At a glance

Page

Appeals received, upheld, and leading to a grade change

3

Preliminary appeals and appeal hearings

4

Grades challenged and changed

5

Completion within exam boards' target timescales

6

Grades challenged at appeal

7

Raw mark changes for upheld appeals

8

Grades changed for upheld appeals

9

Nature of appeals

10

Head of profession: Vikas Dhawan  
Email: [statistics@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@ofqual.gov.uk)

Published: 29 March 2018  
Ofqual/18/6357/1

## Appeals

This report presents data on requests for preliminary appeals and appeal hearings made to exam boards for the summer 2017 GCSE and GCE (AS & A level) exam series in England.

Appeals can be submitted if a school or college is unsatisfied with the result of a review of marking, review of moderation, a malpractice decision, or the outcome of a reasonable adjustment or special consideration request. Appeals are made at the exam component level and, if related to the same issue, may cover more than one candidate. The [JCO guide](#) to the awarding bodies' appeals process describes two steps for appeals:

- preliminary appeal (previously 'stage 1' appeal): a review by a senior exam board member who has not previously been involved with the particular case.
- appeal hearing (previously 'stage 2' appeal): applicants and awarding bodies present their case to the panel of three or more members, one of which must be independent of the exam board.

In 2017 exam boards changed their target times to complete an appeal to 5 calendar weeks for a preliminary appeal and 10 calendar weeks for an appeal hearing (previously the target was 50 days for either process). Following a pilot in 2016 in GCE geography, physics and religious studies qualifications, [new grounds](#) for appeal were introduced in 2017 for all GCE subjects where the school or college believes there to be a marking error following the review of marking or review of moderation. The pilot found that the additional grounds of appeal provided a better opportunity for errors in marking to be identified and corrected. The introduction of new grounds is likely to have resulted in an increase in the number of appeals at GCE in 2017. The new grounds for appeal are to be extended to GCSEs over the course of the next two years.

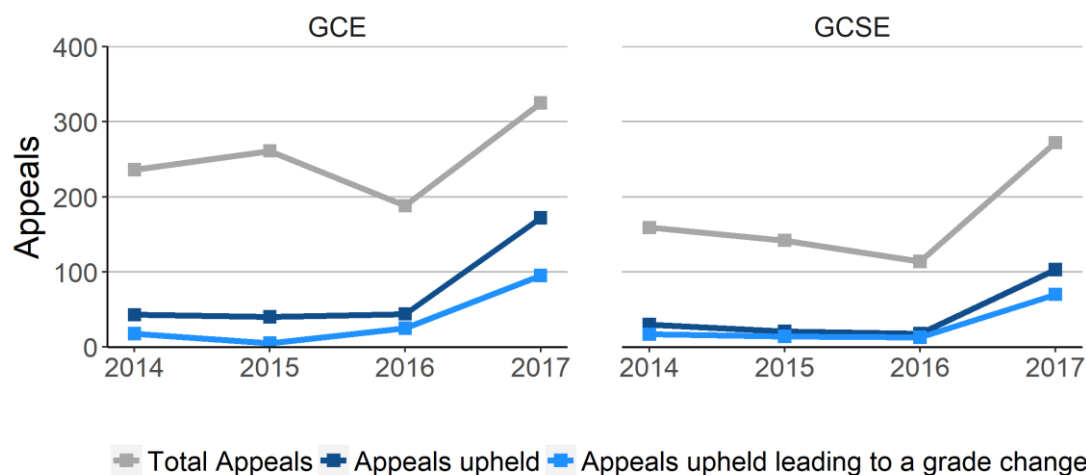
Reports published in previous years included data for students in Wales and Northern Ireland as well. Historical figures in this year's report reflect England only figures and may therefore differ from previously published figures. Following a [transition arrangement](#) with Qualifications Wales (the regulator in Wales) and CCEA (the regulator in Northern Ireland), Ofqual is publishing separate data tables for students in Wales and Northern Ireland without commentary for the academic year 2016/17.

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

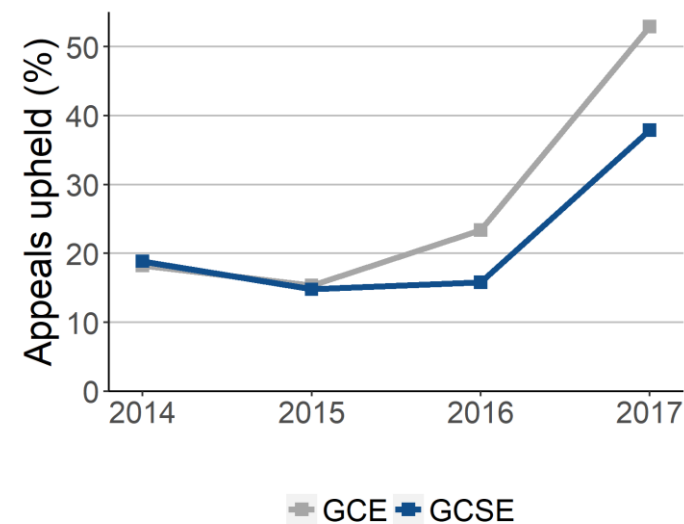
## Appeals received, upheld, and leading to a grade change

An appeal may be submitted by a centre if they are dissatisfied with the result of a review of marking or if they wish to contest the outcome of a reasonable adjustment or special consideration request or a malpractice decision. An appeal can represent one candidate, or several, if related to the same potential issue. The appeal may be upheld at either a preliminary appeal or an appeal hearing, and this may lead to a change in one or more qualification grades involved. If an appeal which progresses to an appeal hearing is not upheld but was upheld as a preliminary appeal, the appeal as a whole is reported as upheld<sup>1</sup>. The data shown below contains appeals of all natures from all exam boards.

**Total appeals received, upheld and appeals which led to a grade change**



**Proportion of appeals which were upheld**



Note: Comparisons with previous years should be treated with caution. For 2014 to 2016, only WJEC submitted appeals figures including malpractice and reasonable adjustments/special considerations. In 2017 all exam boards included figures for appeals submitted for these reasons for the first time, which is why there is an increase in number of appeals.

### GCE

The number of GCE appeals increased from 188 to 325. This is likely due to the new grounds of appeal available at GCE in addition to the inclusion of appeals related to malpractice or reasonable adjustments/special considerations in the 2017 figure. The proportion of GCE appeals which are upheld has also gone up considerably this year, which again could be due to the new grounds for appeal.

### GCSE

The number of GCSE appeals increased from 114 to 272. This could be due to the inclusion of appeals related to malpractice or reasonable adjustments/special considerations in 2017 (further breakdown given on page 10). Other types of appeals have also increased. The proportion of appeals upheld has been impacted by new appeal reasons, though a greater proportion of existing appeal reasons were also upheld in 2017.

<sup>1</sup> On a few occasions this may include some appeals which were upheld at the preliminary stage, but the centre were not satisfied with the outcome. Underlying figures are reported in tables 1 and 2 in the [accompanying data](#).

## Preliminary appeals and appeal hearings

A preliminary appeal is a review by a senior exam board member who has not been previously involved in the individual case. As a result of a preliminary appeal, the case may or may not be upheld. If the applicant is unsatisfied with the result of the preliminary appeal, they may decide to progress to an appeal hearing, where applicants and exam boards present their case to the panel. An appeal panel consists of 3 or more members, at least one of which is independent (ie has not been an employee, examiner, committee or board member of the exam board in the previous 5 years). In 2017, new grounds for appeal were extended to all GCE subjects. Also appeals reported here include malpractice and reasonable adjustments/special considerations appeals for the first time.

Exam Series	GCE				GCSE			
	Appeals received		Appeals leading to a grade change		Appeals received		Appeals leading to a grade change	
	Preliminary	Hearing	Preliminary	Hearing	Preliminary	Hearing	Preliminary	Hearing
2014	236	18	18	0	159	8	17	0
2015	261	17	5	0	142	13	14	0
2016	188	14	25	0	114	11	13	0
2017	325	21	95	0	272	22	70	0

### GCE

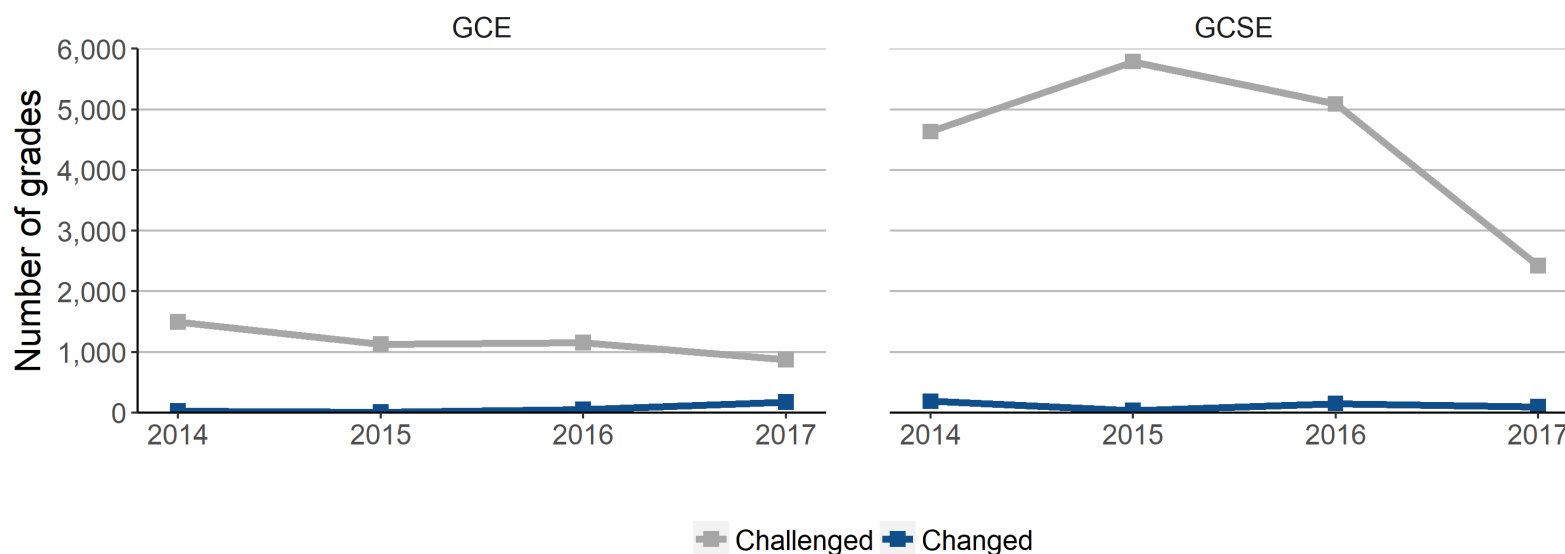
The proportion of GCE preliminary appeals progressing to an appeal hearing has remained fairly stable. However, the proportion of preliminary appeals which led to a change of grade has risen. No appeal hearings have resulted in a change of qualification grade. This has been the case for the last 4 years.

### GCSE

The proportion of GCSE preliminary appeals progressing to an appeal hearing has declined slightly. In contrast the proportion of preliminary appeals which led to a grade change has risen. No appeal hearings have resulted in a change of qualification grade. This has been the case for the last 4 years.

## Grades challenged and changed

A single appeal may represent one or more qualification grades which are being contested. An upheld appeal may result in all, a subset or none of the associated qualification grades to change. A candidate may be involved in more than one appeal. In 2017, there were 3,212 candidates whose grades were involved in an appeal. Nearly 0.004% of the 6.6 million qualification grades certified in summer 2017 were changed as a result of an appeal.



### GCE

The number of qualification grades challenged at GCE has decreased by 25%, despite the number of appeals increasing. This is because this year, on average, appeals tend to include fewer candidates than they have done previously. The increase in the number of grades which were changed as a result of an appeal (from 53 to 171), indicates that an appeal at GCE was somewhat more likely to be successful this year. The decline in the number of qualification grades contested may in part be due to the new grounds of appeal which allows schools and colleges to appeal where they think there has been an error in marking. This could involve a single candidate rather than a procedural error where all candidates from a centre are often included. This may lead to fewer candidates needing to be included in the appeal.

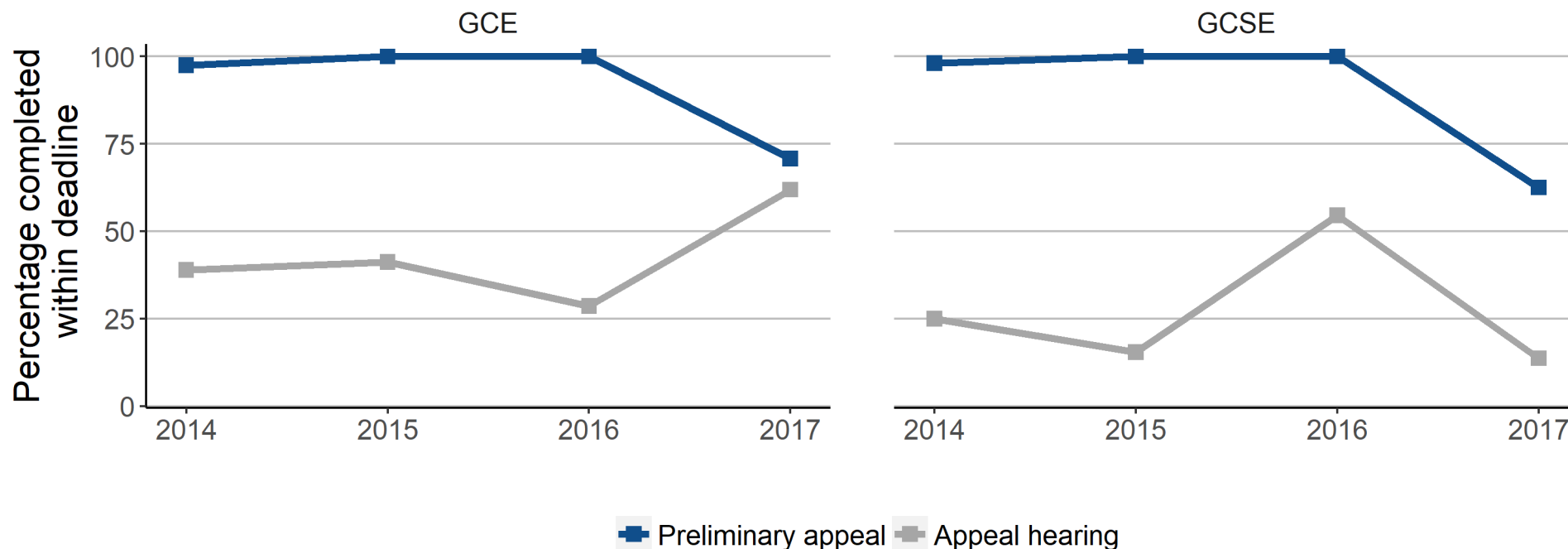
### GCSE

The number of grades challenged for GCSEs has decreased by 52%. This suggests centres are submitting fewer candidates in each appeal, possibly because access to previously unavailable information (such as scripts and/or script marks) allows any appeal submission to be more targeted. The number of GCSE grades changed due to an appeal declined from 150 to 92.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in tables 1 and 2 in the [accompanying data](#).

## Completion within exam boards' target timescales

In 2017 exam boards set a target timescale of 5 weeks to complete a preliminary appeal from the receipt of the application, and 10 weeks to complete an appeal hearing from the receipt of a request for an appeal hearing. In previous years, the target timescale for completion was 50 days for either a preliminary appeal or an appeal hearing. Due to the change in the target timescale to complete appeals from previous years, conclusions regarding comparisons over time should be treated with caution. Note, for 2017, there are 6 GCE and 9 GCSE appeals which are still in progress, which may or may not be completed within the target timescale.



### GCE

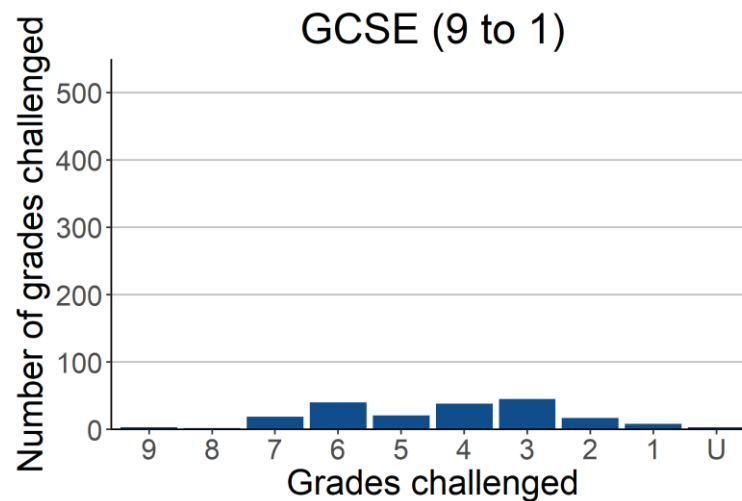
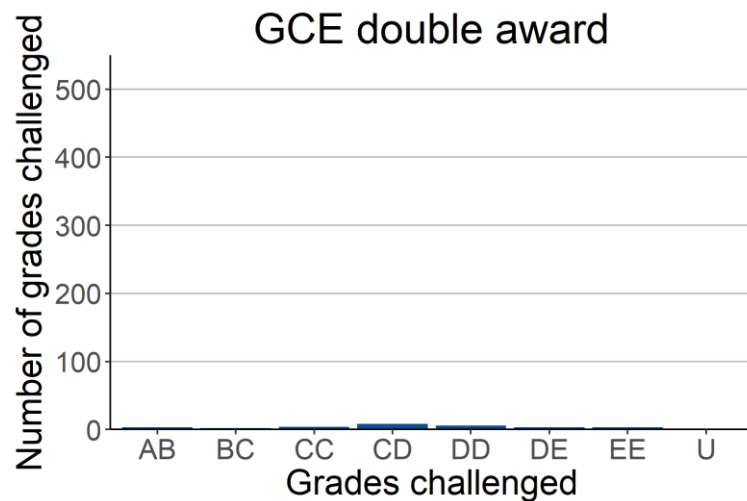
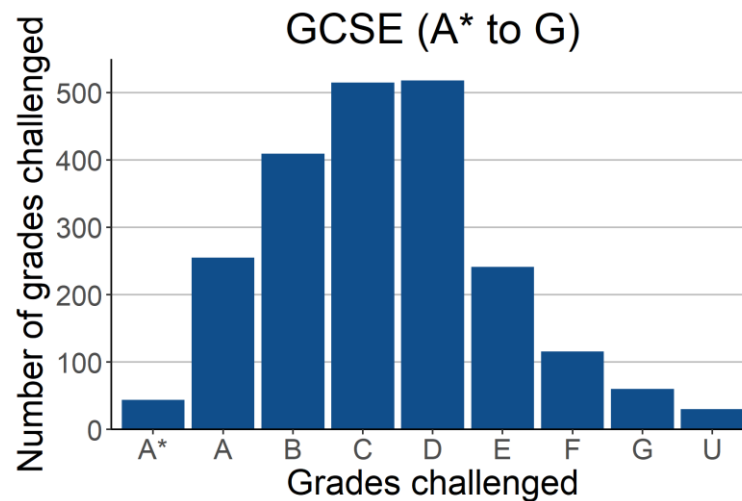
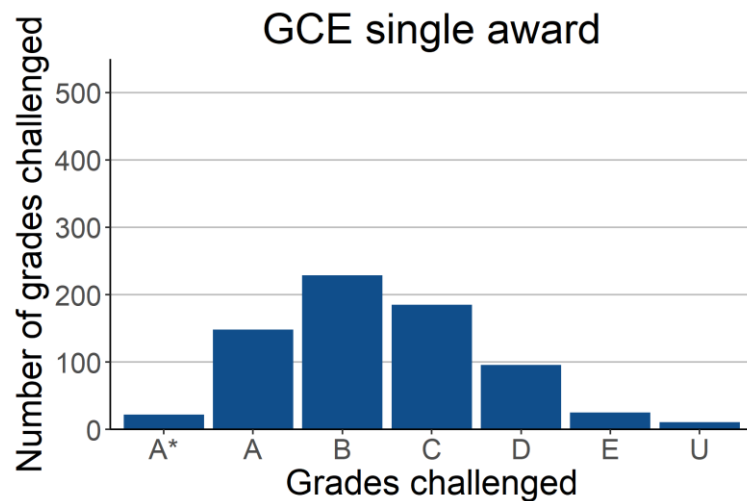
The proportion of GCE preliminary appeals completed within the target timescale has declined by 29 percentage points, while the proportion of appeal hearings completed within the deadline has increased by 33 percentage points. This may be explained by the shorter target for preliminary appeals and longer target timescale for appeal hearings in 2017 in addition to the greater number of appeals submitted in 2017. The median number of days to complete a GCE appeal was 23 days.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 3 in the [accompanying data](#).

### GCSE

The proportion of GCSE preliminary appeals and appeal hearings completed within the target timescale declined by 38 and 41 percentage points respectively. The decrease for preliminary appeals may be due to the shorter target for completion in 2017. The median number of days to complete a GCSE appeal was 28 days.

## Grades challenged at appeal



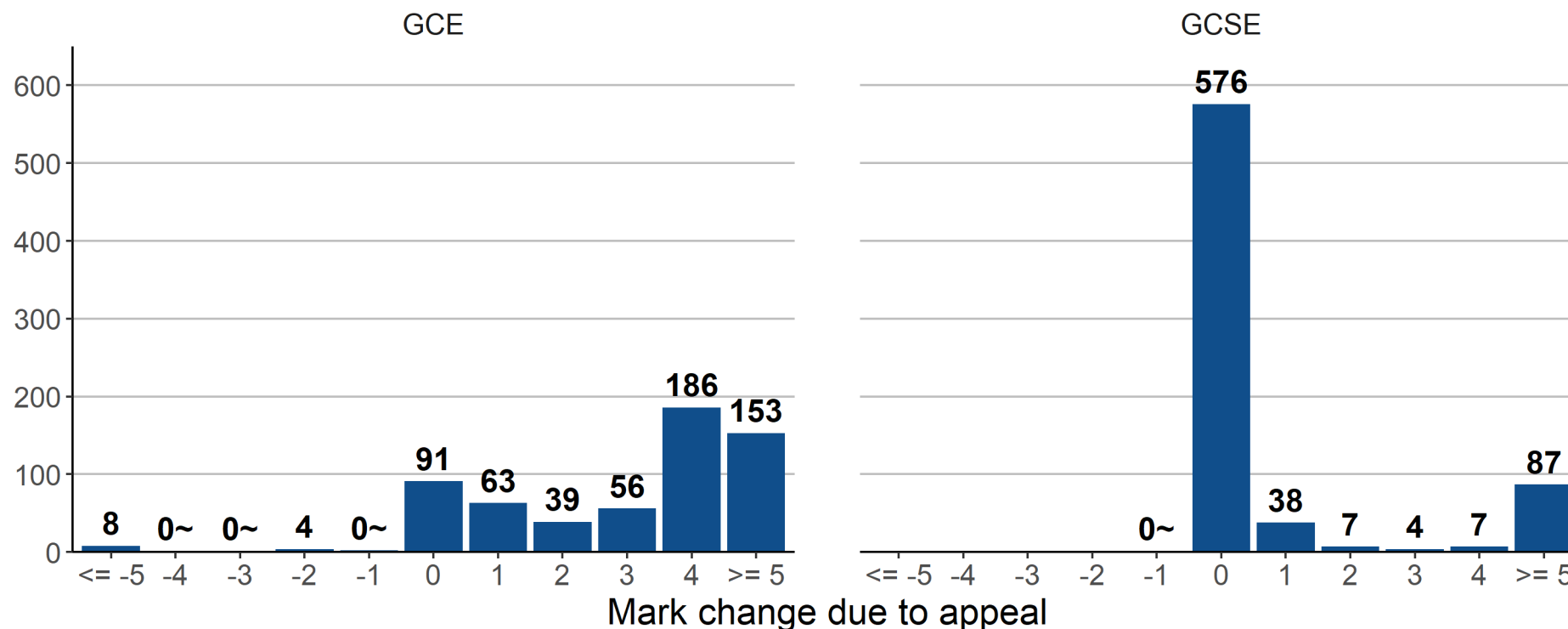
For GCE qualifications grade B was most contested grade. For GCSE qualifications the most contested grade was grade D, followed by grade C.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 6 in the [accompanying data](#).

## Raw mark changes for upheld appeals

The charts below show the distribution of changes to the raw marks due to appeals that were upheld.

Note that all mark changes which were worth 5 marks or more have been combined into a single category ( $\geq 5$ ) in the charts given below.



### GCE

82% of upheld appeals resulted in an additional marks given. The single largest category was an increase of 4 marks. Some appeals also lead to a decrease in the marks. Mark changes of 5 or more marks were predominantly from appeals on the grounds of mark errors in reviews of marking or moderation, or to contest a malpractice decision.

### GCSE

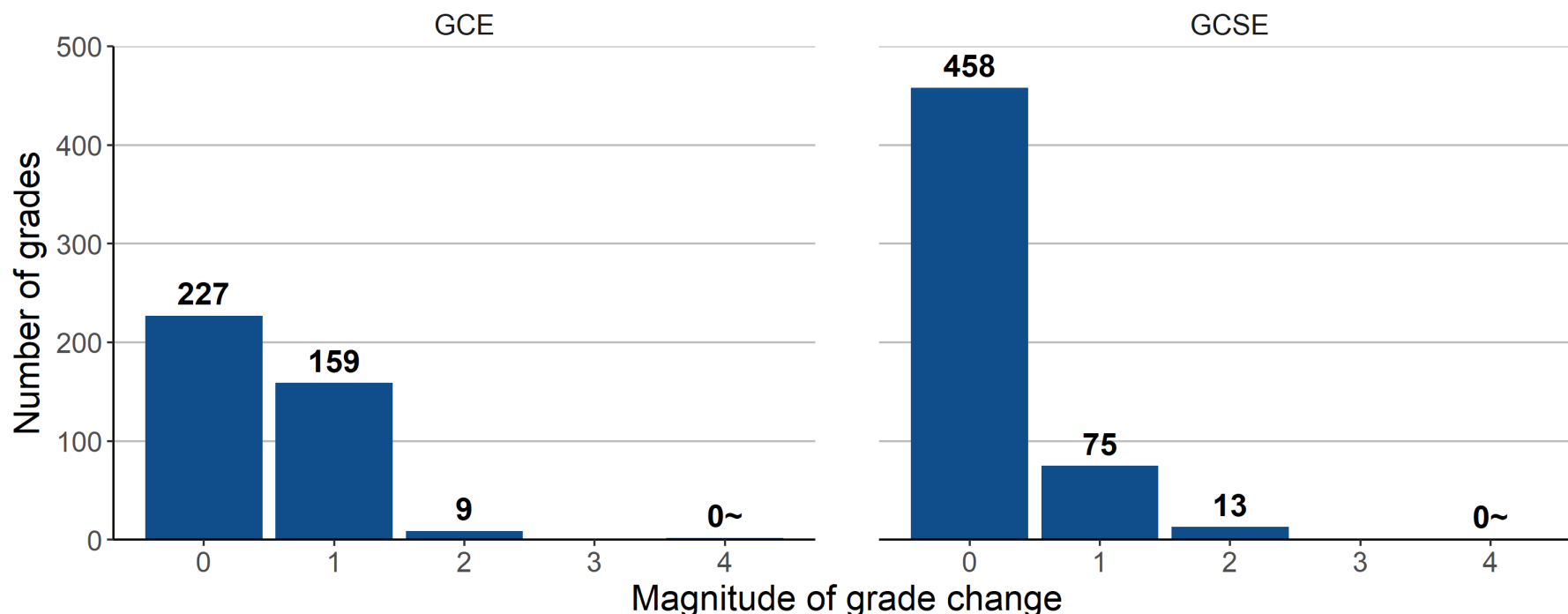
20% of upheld appeals resulted in additional marks given. The most common mark change was an addition of 5 or more marks to the pre-appeal mark. Mark changes of 5 or more marks were predominantly from appeals on the grounds of a review of moderation procedural error (43%) or to contest a malpractice decision (39%).

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 7 in the [accompanying data](#). Figures between 1 and 3 are denoted as 0~.



## Grades changed for upheld appeals

The charts below show the distribution of grade changes made following an upheld appeal in 2017. An upheld appeal may lead to a change of marks awarded to a candidate, which in turn may lead to a change of the qualification grade awarded to that candidate. A small number of upheld appeals were in respect of candidates who were not originally given a grade. This might happen, for example, due to a malpractice investigation resulting in disqualification which was then appealed and upheld. Those cases do not appear in these graphs.



### GCE

The majority (57%) of upheld appeals for GCE did not result in a qualification grade change. 40% saw their grade increase by one grade, with a minority of grades increasing by 2 or more grades. There were no grade decreases as the result of an appeal.

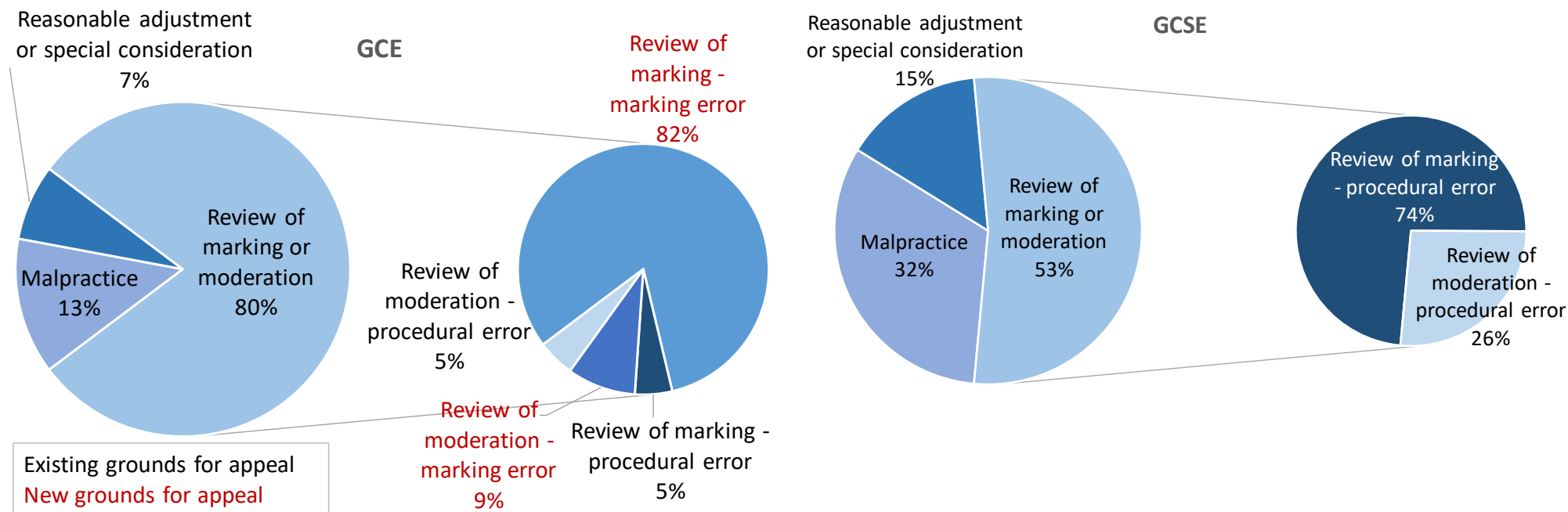
### GCSE

The majority (84%) of upheld appeals for GCSE did not result in a qualification grade change. Some qualification grades increased by one grade and a minority of cases resulted in an increase of multiple grades.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 8 in the [accompanying data](#). Figures between 1 and 3 are denoted as 0~.

## Nature of appeals

An appeal can be made for a range of reasons: to contest the result of a review of marking, a review of moderation, a malpractice decision or a decision on reasonable adjustments or special considerations. In 2016, new grounds for appeals were piloted for 3 GCE subjects (geography, physics and religious studies) where an appeal could be made on the grounds of a marking error. For 2017, these grounds were extended to all GCE subjects. At GCE, 16 appeals, representing 132 grades challenged, were submitted for more than one reason, for example to contest both a marking error and a procedural error in a review of marking – all such instances are counted separately in the figures below.



### GCE

The largest single category for GCE appeals was against a marking error from a review of marking. This is a newly available ground for appeal, piloted in 2016. Consequently there has been a decline in the number of appeals related to a procedural error in a review of marking.

### GCSE

An appeal on the grounds of a procedural error from a review of marking was the single largest appeal category at GCSE.

In 2018, the recently introduced grounds for appeal in GCE will be extended to English language, English literature and Maths GCSEs and then to all subjects in 2019.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 5 in the [accompanying data](#).

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at [publications@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:publications@ofqual.gov.uk) if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



© Crown copyright 2018

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [publications@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:publications@ofqual.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/ofqual](http://www.gov.uk/ofqual).

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

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

Spring Place  
Coventry Business Park  
Herald Avenue  
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344

Textphone 0300 303 3345

Helpline 0300 303 3346